Pots of Gold?

The representation of identity in contemporary South African art at the end of the Rainbow Nation.

KEITH PAUL GODFREY

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

PhD Thesis

2005
ABSTRACT

South Africa faced a major challenge to produce an inclusive national identity from the ruins of common community that apartheid had left in its wake. Achieving a new national identity involved a massive project of nationalist reinvention, the ‘rainbow’ nation. Existence of a national consciousness was limited to the imagined anti-apartheid state ‘reverse’ nation. South Africans, including artists, initially supported the dynamic process of the formation of the new inclusive state and national community. However, disenchantment with the ‘rainbowist’ vision has led South Africans to recongregate around apartheid constituencies and tensions between competing nationalisms.

Johannesburg and Cape Town act as catalyzers in the development of a post-apartheid society. Art produced there, and its (re-)presentation, provides an empirical base on which to analyze the negotiation of identities and the contested ‘location of culture’ in the societal architecture of the ‘new’ South Africa. Artists were a vital component in the construction of nationalism in the post-apartheid state. Tensions between the competing nationalist visions of how South Africa should culturally represent itself, both domestically and abroad, manifested themselves in the major exhibitions held since 1994. Internally, tensions between nationalisms clearly manifested themselves in the Johannesburg biennales. Outside the country, exhibitions played on the euphoria of transformation to propose a cultural unity that was illusory, but that fulfilled audience expectations and supported a national ‘rainbowist’ branding.

Representation of the post-apartheid nation has divided artists between those identifying with the project to promote a South African nationalism and those preferring to be considered solely on the basis on their own artistic output. The framing of artistic debates in identity terms has led to an exodus of some artists to Europe. Other artists have remained to engage with the quest to achieve a post-apartheid national identity.
Acknowledgements

There have been many people who have helped me in being able to produce this thesis. Most will remain unacknowledged but I would like to mention Patrick Chabal and Giles Tillotson, who influenced the development of my analytical thinking, and, especially my supervisor, John Picton who has remained an unfailingly unorthodox fount of wisdom and inspiration throughout my time studying African art. In South Africa, Warren Siebrits and Mary-Jane Darroll gave me the benefit of both their immense knowledge and extensive network of contacts. Joey Alexander and Jo Burger at the libraries of the South African National Gallery and the Johannesburg Art Gallery respectively, provided all sorts of obscure articles and texts that I requested with unfailing good humour.

Most of all I would like to thank my family for their interest and support. In particular, I would like to thank my wife, Emma, for her love, patience and intellectual sustenance over the past years.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Keith and Margaret, with love, gratitude and respect.

Paul Godfrey
London
2005
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

p. 5 List of Images

p. 8 List of Abbreviations

p. 9 Introduction: The Luggage is Still Labelled

p. 18 Chapter One: Identity Construction in South Africa – Past, Present, Future

p. 20 Black Identity Constructions

p. 22 White Identity Constructions

p. 26 Coloured Identity Constructions

p. 28 Asian Identity Constructions

p. 28 Segregation and the road to Apartheid

p. 32 The Apartheid era

p. 41 Non-racialism

p. 42 (De-)Constructing the Rainbow

p. 48 Asserting difference – Africanism and its implications

p. 56 Regional Precedents

p. 60 Conclusion

p. 62 Chapter Two: Imagin(in)g the Rainbow

p. 65 ‘Preparing Ourselves for Freedom’

p. 68 (Re-)presenting South Africa

p. 73 The 1st Johannesburd biennale

p. 83 Between the biennales

p. 91 The 2nd Johannesburg biennale

p. 107 Speaking for the Other

p. 115 Liberated Voices?

p. 122 Conclusion

p. 124 Chapter Three: Locating the Nation – Place and subjectivity in the ‘new’ South Africa (Johannesburg)

p. 126 Johannesburg

p. 128 William Kentridge

p. 164 Kendell Geers

p. 181 David Koloane

p. 188 Moshekwa Langa

p. 204 Tracey Rose

p. 219 Usha Seejaram

p. 223 Conclusion

p. 225 Chapter Four: Locating the Nation – Place and subjectivity in the ‘new’ South Africa (Cape Town)

p. 226 A Bitter Almond Hedge

p. 230 Robben Island versus District Six

p. 243 Jane Alexander

p. 278 Willie Bester

p. 308 Berni Searle
LIST OF IMAGES

p. 20  1. Map of South Africa
p. 30  2. Map showing ‘Native’ allocation under the Land Acts
p. 35  3. Map of the Homelands
p. 41  4. Nature of Group Identities among different racial groups 1995 (table)

p. 70  5. Paul Stopforth – *The Interrogators* (1979), graphite and floor wax on canvas, SANG Collection
p. 71  6. Sam Nhlengethwa – *It left him cold* (1990), collage, pencil and charcoal, Standard Bank Collection at University of Witswatersrand Art Gallery, Johannesburg
p. 77  7. Willem Boshoff – *Blind Alphabet* (1993 onwards), wood, steel, aluminium, SANG Collection
p. 86  8. David Goldblatt – *Family on Trek in the Karoo* (1986), black and white photograph, University of Witswatersrand, Johannesburg
p. 119 12. Thomas Kgope – *Africa* (c.1986), gouache on cardboard, University of Witswatersrand Art Gallery, Johannesburg
p. 171  18. Kendell Geers – *Title Withheld (Brick)* (1988), brick, text, JAG Collection
p. 211  27. Tracey Rose – *Span II* (1997), installation view from SANG
p. 221  30. Usha Seejaram – *Motherland* (1999), Hessian, dyed string, wax, and pigment, SANG Collection
p. 252  34. Jane Alexander – *By the end of today you’re going to need us* (1986), silver print on fibre based paper, Collection of the artist

37. Jane Alexander – *African Adventure* (1999), installation view from The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town, Collection of the artist


40. Willie Bester – *Semikazi’s Bench* (1993), mixed media, SANG

41. Willie Bester – *Head North* (1997), mixed media, SANG

42. Willie Bester – *P.W. Botha’s dog* (1998), mixed media installation view, Billiton Collection, Johannesburg


44. Berni Searle – *Julle Moet Nou Trek* (1999), installation view, Oudtshoorn, Western Cape


Further details concerning these images, including dimensions (where not variable), are available in most instances from the web sites of the host institution.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACDP</td>
<td>African Christian Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azapo</td>
<td>Azanian Peoples' Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Community Arts Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT</td>
<td>Computerized Axial Tomography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSATU</td>
<td>Congress of South African Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Democratic Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DP</td>
<td>Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRELIMO</td>
<td>Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAG</td>
<td>Johannesburg Art Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOMA</td>
<td>Museum of Modern Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPLA</td>
<td>Movimento para a Libertacao de Angola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEPAD</td>
<td>New Partnership for African Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)NP</td>
<td>(New) National Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organisation of African Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUP</td>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Pan-Africanist Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RENAMO</td>
<td>Resistencia Nacional Mozambicano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SABC</td>
<td>South African Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACP</td>
<td>South African Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANG</td>
<td>South African National Gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOAS</td>
<td>School of Oriental and African Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCDP</td>
<td>United Christian Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDM</td>
<td>United Democratic Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDF</td>
<td>United Democratic Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITA</td>
<td>Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Totale de Angola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZANU-PF</td>
<td>Zimbabwean African National Union – Patriotic Front</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Luggage is Still Labelled – an Introduction

Why write a thesis on the representation of identity in contemporary South African art? My intention – in so much as it can be recovered – when I undertook this thesis was to analyze the relationship between taste, value and identity in the context of South African contemporary art.

Using Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of distinction as a basis, I wanted to understand how value, and especially value in respect of identity was established, maintained, and manipulated. Rather than employ Bourdieu’s class and educational categorization, I wanted to contextualize the variables by using race, as constructed by apartheid, and education.

Early on in my research, it became evident that the market involved in establishing South African art market levels was so small and narrow that it concerned the value judgements, or taste, of a small number of collectors and individuals representing corporate companies. Though there was some interest, and perhaps merit, in understanding the artificiality of the market – and I considered a more sociological analysis of art-buying amongst the wider population – it became clear to me that my primary interest was in the producers of the work rather then the collectors. Being in South Africa and immersing myself in the literature to date, it was clear that – with some notable exceptions – the critical analysis of South African contemporary culture, and art in particular was relatively unsophisticated in comparison to the rest of the world – something that could not be said for the artistic practice itself. The difference between work that was perceived to be valuable in South Africa and abroad was a secondary avenue of enquiry. This manifested itself in the significant and substantial differences in critical and financial value that existed in, for instance, the work of William Kentridge and Willie Bester. Rather than undertake a market-driven analysis, I decided that the analysis of the construction and negotiation of identity in the dynamic and fluid context of the post-apartheid era presented a more wholesome and interesting subject for analysis. This was motivated, at least in part, by the desire to

1 The title of this introduction is taken from a video made for South African television in 2003 by Vuyile Voiyiya and Julie McGee, exploring issues related to being a practicing Black artist in South Africa today.
understand how South Africa might present a new face to the region and negotiate its evident status as the regional hegemonic power with countries for whom avoiding dependency on South Africa had been, in many cases, the defining goal of the post-independence period.

To understand the process of identity flux and formation, and given the constraints of a thesis, I elected to focus on the art and artists of Johannesburg and Cape Town. This was partly because of their situation as the long-standing commercial and cultural poles of the nation, but also because I felt that if the process of transformation were to truly take place anywhere, it would be in the urban conglomeration of Johannesburg – a location that acts as a magnet for people from all over the country and the continent – that it would be catalyzed. And it would be in Cape Town that the official sanction for this representation would be displayed – given the location of parliament and the major national museums, including the South African National Gallery (SANG).

My interest in the southern African region derived initially from growing up in Zimbabwe during the course of the second Chimurenga or Zimbabwean War of Independence. I lived and worked in Zimbabwe again after I left school before undertaking an undergraduate degree in History of Art at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and University College, London (UCL). I then completed a Masters degree at SOAS. My dissertation analyzed the invention of tradition in Zimbabwean sculpture, including fieldwork in that country. During the course of writing this thesis, I worked initially as a tutor, and then as a lecturer at SOAS, where I established – for the first time – and taught a course dedicated to the study of the southern African region. For the last four years I have worked for the British Department of International Development (DFID). During the last decade, I have lived and worked for considerable periods in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and South Africa.

I had the opportunity to spend a year in South Africa – divided between Johannesburg and Cape Town. This included working on the Gencor Collection and working as a freelance critic for the Mail&Guardian amongst others. I also met and interviewed many of the significant figures in the South African art world. Although I did not use many of these interviews directly in the body of the thesis, they were vital in
developing my understanding of South African art and the societal context in which it exists. I would like to thank all of those who gave up their time to discuss the situation with me. They bear no responsibility for the arguments and conclusions advanced herein.

With any text relating to ‘contemporary art’ there is always a danger that any analysis will be outdated, or overtaken by the course of events. With the particular period I have centred the work on, there is a definite advantage to a small distance of time in understanding how events have moved on – for example in the now widespread understanding and notion that the era of the ‘rainbow’ nation has come to an end. The recent spate of exhibitions and cultural events to commemorate ten years of democracy in South Africa provided an ideal opportunity to examine how issues and representations had evolved since the main body of my research was completed. I visited the New Identities exhibition which commenced in Bochum, Germany in September 2004 before moving to South Africa, the Personal Affects (Power and Poetics in Contemporary South African Art) at the Museum of African Art and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York and the South African component of the Africa Remix exhibition which began in Dusseldorf before being scheduled to show in London, Paris and Tokyo as well as smaller shows such X at the Stephen Lawrence Gallery in Greenwich. In addition there has been the Democracy X exhibition at the Castle in Cape Town and Decade of Democracy at SANG (of which I have seen the catalogues though not the shows themselves). After the artistic dynamism of the struggle years and the immediate post-apartheid period that is the prime focus of this thesis, it appears that momentum has been lost when viewed from a Western avant-gardist perspective of continual challenge and reinvention.

This perspective sets out the primary dilemma that South African art faces, and indeed as a nation as a whole. Namely to what extent should the nation move away from the Eurocentric model that the colonial and apartheid era privileged in favour of an increased Afrocentric engagement with the region and the continent as a whole, but

---

also more pertinently with those parts and people in the country itself that had been clearly marginalized by the old orders. The historical moment when this was and is being attempted is important. Although it is clear that Africa has always been part of trans-continental trading networks, there is no doubt that we are living in a time of increasing globalization, catalyzed by the demands of capital and the connectivities provided by technology. The dreams of the generation of Africans who fought for independence have, with some notable exceptions, turned into nightmare realities. ‘Africanization’ of the state and society has been a complete and unmitigated disaster in all the countries where it has been attempted whether we consider Guinea, Zaire, or Zimbabwe. Undoubtedly, in all these cases, Africanization has been a euphemism for the collapse of the distinction between rulers and state and the construction of the elite as the similitude rather than the representative of the people.

For many artists and cultural practitioners, the end of apartheid presented an opportunity to stand in the global gaze of a world marveling in the transformation that was taking place. This period has provided many opportunities for South African artists, far beyond those afforded to the artist of many other nations located outside the artistic centres. Many young artists have made the most of their opportunity to join the zeitgeist of international artists seen in the major Biennales and ‘cutting-edge’ periodicals, whilst others have been exposed to international audiences by remaining ‘true’ to the apartheid era practice and the themes of that epoch.

In that sense, the demise of the apartheid system has sanctioned South Africans, individually, to take their place as global citizens in the way that is afforded to people of the necessary means in the vast majority of countries. On an individual basis, South Africans are able culturally to articulate subjective views and positionalities that engage with global and local dynamics in an informed and engaged manner. What remains deeply problematic is a negotiation of the collective self – what it means to be a South African and how that should be mediated in an internal and external context. Naturally, cultural representations demonstrate that uncertainty. The euphoric state that South Africa continues to represent in the West, particularly for the Black.

3 Throughout the thesis I have capitalized racial terms to indicate their imagined, constructed nature and their, continuing, service in political interests both in South Africa and outside. I do not intend to devalue the right of any person to claim a racial label as an enabling one.
diaspora and the left-leaning Whites, means that criticism is generally articulated in
the context of the legacies of the old order that continue to manifest themselves in the
present. External criticism of the current order is limited to thematic issues – such as
HIV/AIDS and Zimbabwe. In South Africa itself, political criticism is far more
vitiolic. This comes from a range of interests excluded from the exercise of political
power or whose influence in the new order is on the wane. Most obviously, this
includes the White population – both the Afrikaans community and the Anglophone
sections – elements of the Coloured community, and those traditional Black elites
who feel unrecognized and unrewarded by the new order. There are also many Black
South Africans who feel that the post-apartheid order is too similar in its economic
complexion to the apartheid order and that the transformation has failed to deliver its
promised benefits to whose who suffered most under the old regime.

In artistic terms, the rainbow as a cultural signifier remains the dominant filter
through which South African art is understood by the global art world. Nowhere was
this more in evidence than the series of ten-year commemorative exhibitions
mentioned above. The slippage between the rainbow, the South African flag (an
understandably ubiquitous signifier of the ‘new’ nation) and the preferred Western
construction of Africa as a bright and colourful place full of bright and colourful
people making bright and colourful art is as tired as it is problematic. The market
propensity for ‘le look africain’ remains insatiable. Although the level of cultural
criticism has improved since the end of isolation, it remains primarily the part-time
activity of artists or gallery owners who, inevitably, are as criticized for favouring
their own positions as for the standard and accuracy of their analysis.

New identities presented itself in rainbow and identity terms with the title appearing
on the publicity material and catalogue in rainbow signage, with each letter shown in
a different colour. The spine was marked with a representation of an Ndebele wall-
painting that definitively represented the constructed colourfulness of the constructed
‘Africa’. Attention was further stimulated by a still from Berni Searle’s Snow White
performance that shows the artist naked and covered in flour. Decontextualized from

4 ‘Le look africain’ refers to the bright and colourful art mentioned in the previous sentence. It is
particularly associated with French collectors and curators, such as Jean Pigozzi and Jean-Hubert
Martin, but continues to have a productive market throughout the West.
the artist’s work and the holistic performance, there is an intimate accessibility about
the image that could be read as confirming the intimate knowing felt by the
international audience in its understanding of South Africa.

The New York exhibition, which is viewed as the most prestigious due to its location
in the art world capital, maintained the rainbow and identity filter seen in the
*Liberated Voices* exhibition at the same institution in 1999, while seeking to fulfil
local expectations of South Africa as a multi-racial utopia situated at the end of a now
non-stop flight from an airport near you. The sponsorship of the exhibition by ‘Brand
South Africa’ (the International Marketing Council of South Africa) was revealing, as
was the introductory text from their Chief Executive Officer, Yvonne Johnston,

The *Season South Africa* initiative presents an ideal opportunity for South
Africa to showcase her achievements in the arts, and her success in
working with the raw talent and latent ability of her people and
transforming them into globally acclaimed artists and performers. *Season
South Africa* is perfectly aligned with the International Marketing
Council’s mission of promoting South Africa as one of the world’s
leading, and most admired emerging markets. It also highlights one of the
Brand South Africa’s key messages – that South Africans are ordinary
people who, through their ‘can do’ attitude and tenacity, achieve
extraordinary successes, and, through this, inspire the world to a new way
of doing things.5

This euphoric nationalism has its audience amongst those New Yorkers who visit
African Art exhibitions and who are looking for the margin to reinvigorate the
mainstream – and not solely in the field of culture.

The curators of *Personal Affects* stated that

---

Despite the continuing prevalence of identity issues in South African art, the curators felt compelled from the start to look for a critical departure point beyond this over-worked theme.\(^6\)

Yet this statement of intent was at odds with both the work displayed, an understanding of the relationship between the artists' and their works and the publicity of the exhibition itself which advertised that

After ten years of democracy, the personal narratives reflected in the work of South African artists today are complex and multi-layered, challenging audiences to recognize the subtle nuances and slippages of history, culture, economics, religion and personal experience that form artists' identities.\(^7\)

The currency of the identity division along racial lines may be unwelcome to those who long for a multi-cultural meritocracy, but in reality it will be generations before South Africa has purged itself of the legacy of apartheid and the socio-economic and cultural legacy it engendered. As I write this, there is a continuing controversy over the racial 'quotas' that exist in the sports teams that represent the country, whilst the analysis in the next chapter clarifies the racial division of identity along political lines.

In artistic terms, debates remain very binary in their framing and there is a widespread practice of resorting to name-calling and insults when unhappy with the state of affairs. A recent film ‘The Luggage is still Labelled’ discussed the differences in reception and expectation of Black and White artists. Critic Lloyd Pollack described the Black artist as being

A special category, a curiosity, and in the South African mind, a step down from being a white artist.\(^8\)

Moshekwana Langa (whose work is discussed in Chapter Four) is quoted as saying

---

\(^7\) Publicity for Personal Affects.
\(^8\) Quoted in Gurney K. 2004: 'In Black and White', available at [www.artthrob.co.za](http://www.artthrob.co.za)
Most people are looking for hackneyed forms of blackness so when they don't get it, it's a problem. I explore things I'm uncomfortable with and if that is not being black, I suppose I am not black!\textsuperscript{9}

In September 2004, in a lecture in Cape Town, artist and theorist Thembinkosi Goniwe referenced the perpetuation of apartheid into a system that continued to further White interests. Goniwe believes that

We need to rupture white privilege and open up a two-way dialogue.

We must all speak to and against each other.\textsuperscript{10}

Goniwe highlighted that reductive practices like ‘tribal’ classification, non-individualisation of artists, construction of a craft categorisation for Black artists, were all common in South Africa and had been seen in the recent exhibition at the National Gallery of beadwork from the Eastern Cape.

One of the pervasive ironies was that the audience for the lecture were almost exclusively White – a dilemma that perhaps reflects the legacy of low education funding under apartheid and the continued economic hierarchies that impact on the availability of leisure time and educational choices.

This thesis represents and reflects my own analysis of post-apartheid South Africa, its politics and its art. The selection of artists analyzed represents my own entry to the discourse that surrounds inclusion and exclusion in a South African context. An adaptation of Kendell Geers’ Title Withheld (Score) would make the perfect cover. Unless explicitly stated, the discussion, analysis and argument is my own (I dislike generally writing in the first person singular for stylistic reasons). The same is true of the images I have included. I have drawn on Brian Keith Axel’s separation of competing nationalisms for the basis of the division used to highlight the distinction between artists’ approaches. Annie Coombes’ recent text History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa helped frame my thinking on the role of cultural institutions in the service of political discourses.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
Artists’ monographs on William Kentridge by Christov-Bakgariev and on Moshekwa Langa by Hamza Walker were useful resources and www.artthrob.co.za remains an excellent source for current news and images.
CHAPTER ONE

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN SOUTH AFRICA – – Past, Present, Future

Culture is more often not what people share, but what they choose to fight over.\textsuperscript{11}

On the 24 September 1998, the then South African deputy President, Thabo Mbeki met in Midrand, Gauteng with conference delegates representing various ‘ethnic’ affiliations to discuss the establishment of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities. The significance of the gathering lay, at least in part, in the fact that it took place on Heritage Day, which is defined by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology as celebrating

Those aspects of culture, tradition, and history that are given value in the present and are passed on from generation to generation.\textsuperscript{12}

The problem for most South Africans in the ‘new’ South Africa is that their relationships to and understandings of culture, tradition, and history are not shared in value and in many cases they are diametrically opposed.\textsuperscript{13} These oppositions are predicated around a range of distinct social barriers such as region, gender, class, sexual orientation and age – but by far the overwhelming distinguishing factor in determining a South African’s relationship to and understanding of culture, tradition, and history is race.

This is not exclusive to South Africa. Other societies such as the United States, and many of South Africa’s neighbours, are significantly marked by the continuing presence of racial difference and distinction. What is unique about the South African situation is the recent legacy of a totalising system of racial classification. The societal stratification based on that classification that continues to dictate the way the country sees itself and is seen by others. This thesis examines the artistic attempts to engage with the


\textsuperscript{12} Quoted in \textit{The Star} 24/09/98 p.9.

\textsuperscript{13} Many examples could be cited here but perhaps the most obvious are the commemoration of nineteenth century battles, such as the Battle of Blood River in 1838 and the events leading up to it. Zulus see this as the beginning of their subjugation by the Whites, whereas Afrikaners view it as their glorious god-given revenge for King Dingane’s betrayal.
representation of the post-apartheid nation, envisaged as the 'rainbow nation', at a historical time when nationalism is perceived as a reactionary force, the nation state is no longer intrinsic to the needs of capital, and people are increasingly subscribing to identities – local and global – distinct from national identities.

There are always competing configurations of what constitutes national identity in nation states. Invariably civic and ethnic nationalisms have been used to mobilize people behind a vision of the 'nation'. Civic nationalism fosters loyalty to a political community, usually the nation-state, whereas ethnic nationalism emphasizes the common descent or affinities of people with respect to language and religion. The former is tolerant and inclusive, whilst the latter is exclusive and often discriminates against outsiders. And there remain serious doubts about the efficacy of civic nationalism in promoting a sense of national identity in South Africa.14

In order to understand the complexities involved in establishing a national identity (or even national identities) at this particular historical juncture and how and if individuals and groups internalize them, and construct meaning around this internalisation, it is necessary to examine the history of those identities and the politics of identity negotiation that drive the formation of identity in post-apartheid South Africa. This chapter analyzes how these identities have been formed, located, and constructed; how this changed in the post-1994 climate, and what are the political, economic, social, and cultural ramifications of these changes. The tension that emerges as a result of this analysis, between ethno-nationalisms that privilege the formation of identity on exclusive bases and inclusive visions that establish the equality of individuals in their relationship with the state, are at the crux of understanding cultural debates in contemporary South Africa. Understanding these positions, their construction, and their ramifications for contemporary South Africa and its artistic production is the centre of this thesis.

Black Identity Constructions

The original inhabitants of the Southern African region were the KhoiSan. Within this grouping San is the term usually invoked for the hunter-gatherer communities, whilst Khoi (or Khoi-Khoi) is used to denote the pastoralists. The so-called Bantu migration that begun around the beginning of the Christian era reached the Southern African region between 300 and 1000 AD. Though the route taken and the nature of the migration itself is disputed, it is probable that the geographical features of the Kalahari and Namib deserts forced the migration eastwards to the plateau between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers, arriving in what is now South Africa before the first millennium. The nature of the
relations between the arriving peoples and the KhoiSan is extremely speculative.\textsuperscript{15} It is known that the greater parts of the community moved into the desert areas in the north of the current geographical state and the coastal regions. It seems probable that this resettlement was not voluntary since it meant leaving their historic lands and the most fertile land that lies, by and large, in the interior. In terms of the Bantu migrants, it seems logical, as pastoralists, that they would have wished to control the most productive land.

All of the Southern African languages, with the exception of the KhoiSan and the later Indo-European arrivals, belong to the language group Niger-Congo, but there are substantial differences between the various tongues. The Niger-Congo languages can essentially be divided into four distinct sub-groups for those people living south of the Zambezi, all of which are represented in the current South Africa. The largest of these is the Nguni subgroup which includes Zulu, Xhosa, Siswathi(Swazi), and Ndebele. The second largest in South Africa is the Sotho subgroup that includes Tswana, Basotho (or Southern Sotho), and Sepedi (or Northern Sotho). The other groups include Tshivenda (obliquely related to the Shona/Sena family) and Xitshonga (sometimes Xitchinga) that is related to the group of languages spoken in contemporary Southern Mozambique (though it does have an oblique affinity with the Nguni sub-group).

The arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in 1652 altered the situation irrevocably. For the first sixty-five years, emigration and settlement was encouraged near the port, in order to have farmers to provide livestock and fruit for ships sailing to the East Indies. Due to the suitability of the immediate hinterland for viticulture and grain farming, livestock farmers continued to push further away from the Cape of Good Hope where they came increasingly into contact – and conflict – with the indigenous KhoiSan. The White population did not grow exponentially in comparison to the emigration to other colonies, such as the United States, rising from 2000 in 1717 to only 25,000 in 1806 when the British established control of the colony. At this point, White annexation of the land had

\textsuperscript{15} The only sources available are the oral traditions of the various groups and the San rock-painting. Since viewing the latter as a form of objective historical or visual record has been largely disproved (see Lewis-Williams, Dowson), the only accounts are oral. These indicate co-operation in some areas and conflict in others though it is obviously difficult to determine accuracy at a distance of a thousand years.
reached about 1000 kilometres from Cape Town, including what is now Port Elizabeth to the east and Springbok to the north.

The significance of the period from the establishment of the Zulu state in 1816 to the declaration of the Union in 1910 is that it was in this era that the ethnic identities of the diverse communities that make up the South African population were constructed and affirmed, both culturally and socially, and with the creation of the Union, politically and legally. Whilst these have obviously not remained static, they nevertheless form the basis of the conception and perception of ethnic identity in South Africa until the end of the apartheid era – and in many respects to the present day. The emergence of the Zulu state and its subsequent military success led to the emergence of a distinct Zulu identity, that separated itself from the other Nguni-speaking areas. The emergence of this identity and its ‘othering’ of the related ethnic groups was in spite of the fact that the languages spoken by this group remain intelligible to other members of the Nguni sub-group. The establishment of the Swazi and Basotho kingdoms led to these groups political identity being cemented with the establishment of political states that were ethnically based. Though both peoples had many of their ethnically identified groups inside the Union, the overwhelming majority of citizens of the respective states perceived themselves to be ethnically homogenous.

**White Identity Constructions**

British control of the Cape and anti-slavery policies led disenchanted ‘Afrikaners’\(^\text{16}\) to head north in what has become mythologized as the Great Trek (1835-42). This migrating group of approximately 15,000 people caused the continued marginalization of the KhoiSan to the extent that, apart from a few isolated pockets, the communities were almost entirely located along the Namib and Kalahari borders.\(^\text{17}\) In their push to occupy

---

\(^{16}\) The 1828 Cape Ordinance 50 extended the rule of law to Khoi-San residents and free blacks and slavery was abolished in 1834. One quote in the Voortrekker Museum in Pretoria states that “It’s not so much their freedom that drove us to such lengths, as their being placed on an equal footing with Christians, contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race.” I have put the term Afrikaners in inverted commas because, as I discuss further on, the nomenclature was not used with any regularity at this point to identify the white pseudo-Dutch speaking peoples.

\(^{17}\) The KhoiSan group that was responsible for the Drakensberg paintings were systematically exterminated or enslaved, so that by the end of the nineteenth century they were considered extinct.
the interior, the Afrikaners met considerable resistance from Niger-Congo speaking people fleeing the Zulu *mfecane*. The *mfecane* (or mass migration) has historically been viewed as the result of rise of the Zulu state as a military and imperial power and is associated primarily with Shaka, who came to power in 1816. The resulting migrations have distinctively shaped the established areas of perceived ethnic groups in Southern Africa. The Swazi established a kingdom under Sobhuza in the 1820's not far from the present day capital of Swaziland, Mbabane. The Ndebele trekked north and whilst most of the group settled across the Limpopo river in contemporary Zimbabwe, some remained in what was to become the Northern Transvaal. The Basotho, under the leadership of Moshoeshoe, regrouped in the Maluti mountains where they came into conflict with Afrikaners from the Orange Free State, in contrast to the Swazi who formed an alliance with the Boers against the Zulu state.

The internal chaos in the east of the country allowed the British to annex Natal, which at this stage consisted of the immediate area around Durban. The Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal received international recognition in the 1850's, and for a period of fifteen years there were reasonably settled frontiers. The British controlled the coastal areas and the Afrikaner republics occupied the majority of the interior – with the exception of the Swazi, Basotho, Zulu, and Xhosa-Pondo states.

The discovery of diamonds at Kimberley in 1866 led to an influx of European, predominantly British, capital and labour and the annexation of Tswana and Khoi-San lands to the north. A protectorate was declared over the remaining Tswana and Basotho lands (Bechuanaland and Basutoland). The effects of this were dwarfed by the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in the 1880's. The needs of capital required control and

---

18 The traditional theory of Zulu state formation causing the *mfecane* has been challenged by scholars, such as Julian Cobbing, who have argued that an European agency resulting from the impact of the slave trade was responsible for African competition for slaves and the establishment of defensive politico-military states in the region. This has in turn been challenged by its positioning of European agency at the centre of what has been considered an Afrocentric process. I favour this explanation, whilst acknowledging that the contest for resources (including by Europeans and ‘Coloured’ Griquas) may have catalyzed the process of the formation. The slave trade had already significantly declined by 1817 (when Shaka initiated his series of conquests) and the establishment of the Zulu state can be seen in terms of a process of historical state formation that had already produced the Mthetwa and Ndwendane states.

23
rapid development of the area. This motivated British attempts to drive the Boer republics into a federation with the Cape province and Natal, which had been extended to incorporate the Zulu state after its eventual defeat in 1879. When these attempts were not successful, the British tried to force the republics to grant voting rights to British workers in the republics – which would have led to British control. The refusal to do so was used as a pretext for the conflict that has become known as the Second Boer War\textsuperscript{19}, which lasted from 1899-1902. This resulted from the needs of capital and the demands of the Berlin conference of 1886 that established the boundaries of colonial states.\textsuperscript{20} The Boer republics, recognizing the threat of British desires, were increasingly gravitating towards the idea of a German protectorate. This, despite Anglo-German plans for a carve-up of Portuguese colonial territories in the rest of Southern Africa, was not acceptable to British capital interests, and motivated Cecil Rhodes amongst others to push for immediate British annexation of the Boer republics. The terms of the treaty settlement that ended the war paved the way for declaration of the Union of South Africa in 1910 as an independent self-governing entity.

At independence, enhanced by the positionalities adopted during the second Boer War, the White population was more or less defined as English or Afrikaans, though relatively substantial numbers of Greek, East European, and later Portuguese settlers defined themselves independently. Within the two major groups, there were substantial minorities of Jews and Germans, who were broadly identified with the larger groups politically and culturally but retained a distinct social identity within the White community. The emergence of an Afrikaner identity is a late nineteenth century and early twentieth century phenomenon. As recently as 1908 D.F. Malan remarked that it was necessary to

\textsuperscript{19} The First Boer War was a low intensity conflict that lasted from 1877-81. It was motivated by the declaration of British sovereignty over the Transvaal. The British suffered a number of casualties in comparison to the Boer forces and an armistice was agreed where Transvaal retained autonomy for its internal affairs but acknowledged British suzerainty in respect of external matters. As mentioned above, this arrangement proved unacceptable to British capital needs following the discovery of massive gold seams in the Witwatersrand in the 1880’s.

\textsuperscript{20} The Berlin Conference was held at the instigation of those European powers, principally Germany, who wished to transform the coastal domination into a territorial control of the hinterland. It was agreed at the conference that tax revenue would represent the benchmark for a colonial power to demonstrate its control of a territory. The division of territory paid no regard to the homogeneity of ethnic groups or indigenous views – hence the straight lines on the map.
Raise the Afrikaans language to a written language, let it become the vehicle for our culture, our history, our national ideals, and you will raise the people who speak it.21

Before the advent of the Boer war, the White Afrikaners were a disparate group with many sub-divisions. The French influence of the Huguenots – who had arrived in the eighteenth century to escape religious persecution in Europe – had been assimilated and subsumed within the settler polity; however, there remained a definite elite who retained a language not far removed from the High Dutch of their ancestors. The more rural people had evolved a bastardized language that, whilst retaining a Dutch base incorporated elements of French, English, German, Malay, KhoiSan, and a few Niger-Congo elements. In the eighteenth century, the term Afrikaner was used to refer to slaves and ex-slaves of African origin. Even as late as the early twentieth century the term was often defined as referring to all Whites born in South Africa.22

The construction of a distinct Afrikaner identity began in the 1870's. This followed the abolition of Dutch as a medium of instruction in government schools in the Cape colony in 1865 and the annexation of Basutoland (1868); the Diamond Fields (1871); the Transvaal (1877). The indignation resulting from particularly the latter two led to widespread anti-British sentiments and the first Boer War (1877-81). But perhaps the most significant factor at that time was the Dutch Reformed Church’s perceived marginalization by the colonial state. The disestablishment of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Cape and the increasing anglicization of society, through education and job requirements, led some ministers to preach against the ‘connected evils’ of ‘progress, industrialization, and anglicization.’ One of the most prominent of these was Hooganhout who articulated his view in the novel Catherina. This contrasted the urban, supposed

22 Ibid. p.24 -5.
decadence of Cape Town with the god-fearing rural lives of the Boers. Another minister A. Panneveis implored that the Bible be translated into Afrikaans,

Not only for the brown people but also for many whites who do not understand half of the Dutch language.23

In 1875, S.J. du Toit formed the Genootshap van Regle Afrikaners (Society of Real Afrikaners). He wrote a nationalist history, a grammar, some school textbooks, and published a newspaper, Die Patriot. His exclusive definition of Afrikaners as those of Dutch descent who spoke Afrikaans found little identification at this point, though the President of the Transvaal, Paul Kruger, empathized with this view. The defining point of Afrikaner nationalism was the Boer War. Following ‘honourable’ defeat, a history evolved which focused on ill treatment of the Afrikaners by the British - particularly the incarceration of civilians in ‘concentration camps’24. This history became part of an Afrikaner hagiography that performed the function of a founding myth of origin This began with the take-over of the Cape colony, the recognition of non-white rights, the Great Trek, and then the war. The Voortrekkers became idealized as Christian pioneers and the migration attained the mythic status of the Biblical exodus, which was further enhanced by the teachings of the Dutch reformed church, whose doctrines viewed the ‘promised land’ as equating to the Boer republics and which, at its most ludicrous, stated that the blacks were the children of Cain, whilst the whites were descended from Abel. The undoubtedly brutal treatment served up by the British in the war was fervently remembered and used as a means of uniting the disparate groups. The language itself was given status by the writing of a dictionary and an attempt to standardize the use of it.

Coloured Identity Constructions

23 Ibid. p.34.
24 There is no doubt that the British were negligent in their treatment of Afrikaner civilians, and the type of incarceration was not dissimilar to what has become to be known as concentration camps. However, the use of such an emotive term does not accurately reflect the assumed similarities that it implies, with the Nazi treatment of detainees in the Second World War.
Perhaps the most interesting construction of identity has been that of the ‘Coloured’ people. Although the term had had some currency in the country during the nineteenth century, as a means of referring to people of mixed race origin and also those Khoi-San who remained in the Cape area, it was also used in its then normative Western sense to refer to all non-whites. It was not until the population census of 1904 that the term emerged as a generally accepted referral to those people who did not fit into one of the other colonial racial categories. Though there were Coloured communities in Natal and Griqualand, and small groups in all the major urban centres, by far the overwhelming majority were in the Western and Northern Cape, where they continue to constitute the majority of the population. The construction of a Coloured identity is symbiotic to the emergence of a distinct Afrikaner identity. In the nineteenth century, the mutual impoverishment of the Coloured and White Afrikaans speakers led to

A very real blurring of ethnic identity among the poor.25

The political discrimination against Coloureds in the Transvaal and the socio-religious discrimination amongst Afrikaners in the Cape led increasingly to a Coloured identification with the British at the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the treatment of Coloureds was one of the nominal reasons – in order to gain the support of Liberals as well as Tories – advanced by the British High Commissioner, Alfred Milner, for the invasion of the Boer republics. However, despite being an important factor in the British ‘victory’, the establishment of the Union brought no greater freedoms for the Coloured population. Demands from White labour resulted in the more skilled industrial and mining jobs being reserved for that section of the population. Increasingly, White Afrikaners sought to differentiate themselves from those who shared their language – a separate church was set up for the Coloured persons – and figures within the White Afrikaner community began to deny any common heritage with their Coloured brethren. Although some figures within the British establishment realized the political danger of

alienating the Coloureds from the White population\textsuperscript{26}, they still capitulated to White Afrikaner demands for no extension of the existing franchises in the respective colonies. This exclusion led to the setting up of a Coloured trade union, the publication of a newspaper, \textit{The Spectator}, and the beginning of a political organization, the African Peoples' Organization which was open only to Coloureds. As Goldin observes,

\begin{quote}
The mobilization of a separate Coloured ethnic identity at the turn of the century was at least in part a rear-guard defensive action by skilled and petty-bourgeois people against their exclusion from the White society. It was an attempt to establish a springboard from which to launch a greater claim for inclusion within the ruling dispensation.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

**Asian Identity Constructions**

In 1860 a significant contingent of Indian workers arrived to work on the sugar plantations in Natal. They reflected the ethnic and religious divisions of the Indian subcontinent. Although they were always defined as ‘Asian’ by the colonial and apartheid states, they were by no means uniform in their cultural identity, though politically they are still often referred to by commentators as a homogenous grouping. Within the so-called ‘Asian’ group, there were a small minority of Chinese who had generally arrived as traders in the nineteenth century, but their impact both culturally and politically has been limited by the fact they are a small number and do not have a distinct regional base in the manner of the Indians in Natal.

**Segregation and the road to apartheid**

At the outset of the Union there were no uniform political rights for non-Whites. In the former Boer republics, a White male only franchise was enforced, though the definition of White became more exclusive as the century went on. After initial attempts to

\textsuperscript{26} The British High Commissioner from 1900-10, Lord Selborne, stated “Our object should be to teach the Coloured people to give their loyalty to the white population. It seems to me sheer folly to classify them away from their natural allegiance to the whites and making common cause with the Natives.” Quoted in Goldin, p.249.

\textsuperscript{27} Goldin, p.248.
maximise the number of the White population, there was an increased rejection and alienation of those that visually seemed to be more non-White than White. In Natal and the Cape Province, a qualitative franchise based on property and income remained in place, albeit one designed to preserve White interests. This was far more restrictive in Natal than the Cape, where a substantial number of Black and Coloured voters were registered in contrast to the tiny portion of Indians in Natal. The White domination was reinforced by the extension of the franchise to White women in 1932. All Blacks were eliminated from the voters’ roll in 1936 when four Senators were appointed to oversee ‘Native’ interests.

The translation of the ethnic divisions within the White community into the political arena did not, somewhat surprisingly, immediately follow the establishment of the Union. This was probably due to perceived class differences in the Afrikaner grouping between the elite, the urban working-classes, and the rural population. Although all three of the prime ministers between 1910 and 1948 were Afrikaners and indeed, former Boer generals in the war, they were not as committed to fostering an Afrikaner nationalism as their successors. The first prime ministers of the Union era were Louis Botha (1910-19) and Jan Smuts (1919-23) who stood for reconciliation between the English and Afrikaans speaking Whites. Smuts, in particular, had a great deal of respect amongst English speakers and the international community at large for his exploits in the First World War and was largely responsible for securing the League of Nations mandate over the former German colony South-West Africa at Versailles. J.M.B. Hertzog had split from the broad coalition in 1913 and set up the National Party (NP). Whilst some roots of the apartheid policy can be traced back to this group, its policies were more concerned with developing a broad White South African nationalism rather than purely focused on the political and social mobilisation of Afrikaners. The NP took power in 1923 in coalition with the broadly English-speaking workers’ Labour Party. The economic crisis of the 1930’s led to a national government under the United Party that was led by Hertzog until

28 This was contemporaneous with the Bolshevik Revolution in the Soviet Union, which was a catalyst for a significantly enhanced class awareness amongst people worldwide – whatever their views on the merits of the theory.
29 As shown by the statue of him in Trafalgar Square.
1939, and by Smuts until 1948. On the formation of the United Party in 1933, a splinter group of Afrikaners under D.F. Malan formed the Purified National Party. Opposition to support for the Allies in the Second World War led Hertzog to resign and undoubtedly strengthened Afrikaner nationalism. Many of the future members of the apartheid era government were members of a shadowy pro-Nazi group called the Ossewa Brandweg and were involved in petty sabotage against the war effort. More significantly, the rise of National Socialism gave the nationalists a political ideology that they could theorize and to which they could relate. It was no coincidence that the first election following the end of the war resulted in the Nationalist victory.

Segregation is obviously most notoriously associated with the apartheid era, but its origins can be identified considerably before then. Although the colonial era was marked
by discrimination, it was only with the creation of the Union that this was codified into a more comprehensive legalistic system that formed the basis for the legislation of the apartheid instigators. By far the most significant act was the Natives Land Act of 1913 that designated 8.9 million hectares (about seven percent of the Union) as Native Reserves. Measures were also implemented to prevent non-White, and particularly Black occupation of land. This led to the forced removal of Blacks not directly dependent on White employers. The Land Act was envisaged as the beginning of the permanent separation of the two races. The Beaumont Commission of 1916 recommended that the ‘Native’ allocation be extended by 4.2 million hectares; but this was not enacted until 1936. When this act was passed a further two million hectares were allocated in recognition of changing land occupancy in the intervening period. However, at no time did more than half the Black population live in these areas. The years for which statistics are available, 1913 and 1960, indicate that about a half of the Black population lived in these areas in 1913 and approximately a third in 1960.

The invention of Black peoples as rural centred communities was part of the legitimizing mythology of apartheid. Black urban settlement was not formally recognized until the 1980’s. From the Union era onwards the construction of the Black as a migrant worker whose real ‘home’ lay in the rural areas was entrenched within the consciousness of the White population. The effect of this on the Black population is more difficult to quantify and is analyzed later. Before the Union, urban segregation was more or less enforced in the British colonies by economics. There were no legal bars to Blacks owning land or property in the urban areas of Durban or Cape Town, for instance, but few members of the community possessed the financial wherewithal to purchase either. In 1923, the Natives (Urban Areas) Act was passed which required local municipalities to set up separate locations for different sections of the population. This act was tightened and consolidated with seven further acts throughout the Union period, notably in 1945. Further racial acts of a supposedly ‘non-racial’ nature were enacted in order to enforce the separation of races. These included the Slums Act of 1934 that enforced the demolition of various poor mixed suburbs on grounds of hygiene and civic pride. The people displaced by this act were re-housed in racially segregated municipal housing.
Discrimination against Indians also increased in the Union period. Agitation from the White community against increasingly mixed suburbs resulted in a decree from the Natal Provincial Council whose intention was

To separate the population of European descent, as far as possible, from Asians and Natives in residential areas – not to segregate any section or class entirely in parts of the Borough or from areas where at the present time any section has property or interests.\(^{30}\)

The segregation of Indians was reinforced by the passing of the Trading and Occupation of Land (Natal and Transvaal) Act of 1943 and the Asiatic Land Tenure and Representation Act of 1946 that sought to confine Asian ownership and occupation of land to delineated areas. By 1948, urban segregation was at a similar level in South Africa to that of the United States at the time.\(^{31}\) The only area that was markedly different was the relative integration between Whites and Coloureds in the Western Cape.

**The Apartheid Era**

The election victory of the National Party in 1948 set South Africa on a different course from the rest of the world from which it would only depart from in the early 1990’s. Although the attitudes of the White minority before this point are easy to condemn from a present day perspective, they were really no different, in either thought or deed, from those that existed contemporaneously in the United States, Australia, or colonial Africa. It is perhaps worth remembering that Indian independence was only ‘achieved’ in 1947, and that with the exception of Ethiopia, whose brief occupation by Italian forces ended in 1941, and Liberia, which was effectively an American colony in all but name with a Black ‘colonial’ oligarchy constituted through freemasonry, the rest of sub-Saharan Africa remained under the colonial yoke until Ghanaian independence in 1957, and the


\(^{31}\) Christopher 1994, p.42-47.
first Southern African country's independence, Botswana's, was still nearly twenty years away. However, the institutionalisation of racial discrimination after 1948 created a codified legalistic system of oppression that drew on Nazi Germany in its attention to detail at a time when the rest of the world was in revulsion at the systematized genocide that the regime represented.

The coming of the apartheid state was marked by two pieces of legislation that defined the lives of South Africans for forty years. The first of these was the Population Registration Act that required that every citizen be defined as White, Black or Coloured. Within this latter group, a person would also be differentiated into Cape Malay; Cape Coloured; Griqua; Indian; Chinese. There was no provision for being anything else. The arbitrary and ambiguous demarcations of the Union had become a statutory requirement that defined peoples' living areas, schools, medical facilities, park benches, beaches, and toilets, who they could marry and whom they could have sex with.

The second piece of legislation was the Group Areas Act that sought to establish contiguous areas of land throughout the country including the urban areas in order to completely separate the living and working of the different communities identified by the Act. Black areas were locations situated outside of the towns, whilst Indian and Coloured areas were scheduled in undeveloped or slum areas in the city. The bureaucracy and enforcement of this measure took some considerable time and it was not until the late '1960s' that the process was largely completed.

The architects of apartheid then turned to the perhaps the most sinister aspect of the system – the denial of citizenship to people in their own country. Realising the emergence of an international trend towards decolonization and majority rule and wanting, insofar as possible to prevent collective Black or non-White identity, the regime classified all Blacks as belonging to one of ten 'tribes'. The classifications they used were simplistic and clichéd. Broad linguistic groups were created and defined as 'tribes'. Each group was then attributed an ethnic area which was part of the already delineated Native Reserves. Though some of these areas undoubtedly had some cultural resonance for the
various groups, the Reserves were characterized by poor quality agricultural land and lack of infrastructure and economic growth. One of the other motivating factors for this classification is that it reduced each ‘tribe’ to a constituency roughly equivalent to or smaller than the White community, who bizarrely were counted as a uniform cultural group. As it stood, only thirteen percent of the country was designated as black areas and even the most introspective members of the ruling party recognized that this would be impossible to gain widespread support for the project, internally and externally. Various plans and commissions were established to increase the economic and political viability of the homelands or ‘Bantustans’. The first of these was an attempt to persuade the British government to incorporate the Protectorate territories within the Union. If this request had been agreed, it would have enabled the regime to include these lands in its ‘Bantu’ or ‘Native’ allocation and enable the government to claim that it was setting aside approximately half of the land for one race whilst the other three would occupy the other half. When this attempt failed due to British fears for the treatment of the indigenous people under the apartheid system, the regime set up the Tomlinson Commission to look into ‘homeland’ economic viability and territory consolidation.

Within the farcical context of apartheid, the Tomlinson Commission was actually a reasonable attempt to create viable nation-states that had at least some potential for economic sustenance – which is probably why the vast majority of its recommendations were ignored or substantially modified. In terms of territory, the Commission advised that the majority of the ‘islands’ of Bophuthatswana be incorporated into one contiguous state that could then become part of the Bechuanaland Protectorate; the South Sotho homeland of Qwaqwa be expanded and added to Basutoland; the Swazi homeland of Kangwane and the northern coastal area of KwaZulu be incorporated within Swaziland; the homelands of the Venda and the Shangaara/Tsonga be merged to form a single geographical entity

---

32 These were Basotholand, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland.
33 Before 1955, most of the homelands consisted of multiple fragments of territory that would have been completely ungovernable by a single entity. Where this was not the case as in, for example, Gazankulu, it was because the contiguous entity was so small that it stood alone. The sole exception to this was the relatively large homeland of Transkei.
34 The official name for the commission was the Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa.
with borders with Southern Rhodesia and Mozambique; the lands of the Kwazulu, Transkei, and Lebowa to be consolidated and the latter given an international boundary with Bechuanaland and Southern Rhodesia. Economically, the Commission envisaged substantial spending in the homelands in order to make them attractive for investment that would in turn generate employment and attract people to their supposed areas. In addition economic zones should be established on the borders of the homelands, so that White capital could make use of the labour pool without the need for migrant labour as in the ‘White’ cities.

Map of the Homelands (source: The Atlas of Apartheid)
The envisaged investment in the states was about ten times what the regime had intended and the loss of land was judged too great to be politically acceptable.\(^{35}\) The Commission proposals were ignored except for the need to create economic zones on the borders of the homelands to create the possibility of commuters from the homelands to ‘White’ South Africa, so removing greater numbers of Blacks from the country and increasing the percentage of non-Black citizens.

The homeland policy reached its ‘logical’ conclusion in 1976-7, when the rulers of Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Transkei agreed to formal independence from South Africa. Ciskei followed in 1982. At this stage the King of Swaziland, Sobhuza II, was also interested in adding the Kangwane homeland and northern KwaZulu to his kingdom, but concerted opposition from the two homeland governments and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) thwarted the plan.\(^{36}\) The programme was further hampered by the refusal of Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the ‘chief’ of the KwaZulu homeland to consider independence without the inclusion of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. This had serious implications for the granting of ‘independence’ to other homelands and was rejected outright. This influenced the leaders of the Lebowa and Gazankulu homelands who both

\(^{35}\) Officially, the allocation of land was not allowed to exceed the thirteen percent allocated in the earlier acts, although in the seventies when the regime was seeking international recognition for the states, this requirement was simply dropped.

\(^{36}\) This is a classic example of Pretoria’s policy backfiring on itself. Members of the Swazi oligarchy were in favour of the merger, particularly as it would have gained Swaziland access to the coast. This would have been potentially beneficial economically in that it would have lessened dependence on Mozambique and South Africa but would have also incorporated the area used for the important Newala festival that affirms kingship and national unity. In this festival, designated men journey to the Indian Ocean and collect the foam from the waves which is then brought back to the current royal capital where the celebration takes place. The acquisition of this land would obviously have been a powerful legitimating factor in the sustaining of kingly authority that was under threat at the time from those who wanted democratic reform. However, the new elite of the Kangwane homeland, led by Enos Mabuza and his Inkatha style ‘Inyanda’ Party feared the loss of their own position and wealth, since they had no standing according to Swazi royal hierarchy and objected to the incorporation on the grounds that the Kangwane people had developed a separate identity since the separation of Swazi lands. The move was also opposed by Buthelezi, since the coastal area was nominally part of KwaZulu, and more significantly by the OAU. This was not solely because of the apartheid regime. The non-acquisition of neighbouring territories by other states as opposed to the ‘Balkanization’ of states is one of the ‘sacred cows’ of the OAU charter, as it is probably accurately seen as leading to potential anarchy given the arbitrariness of most of Africa’s borders. Where such attempts have been made by Libya, Morocco, and Somalia, the Organization has always supported the maintenance of the status quo.
modelled themselves on Buthelezi and they too rejected the notional ‘independence’ on offer.

The use of identity criteria as a basis for state partition has been singularly disastrous in terms of the settlement of grievances on either side. In the twentieth century, it has been used in India, Cyprus, Ireland, Yugoslavia, and Palestine. In all of these cases the principal difference in terms of identity has been religious rather than ethnicity – although this has been the result of construction, politicization and mobilization to a greater or lesser degree in all the above cases. The constructed ethnic criteria of apartheid had no basis in religion, though this identifying device was employed to justify the system. As the apartheid system crumbled, there were a few last ditch attempts by its architects to carve out an ethnically based separation of the state. The first of these was in the late seventies by J. Blenck and K. von der Roop and later modified by G. Maasdorp. It involved the division of the country corresponding to the historic limit of Black settlement, which was all the land exclusive of the Cape Province. This would have created two separate states, but even in the Western half, the Whites would have been in the minority to the Coloured population. It also would have left the Witwatersrand and Durban in the ‘Black’ half, which was not something that could be seriously contemplated politically by the National Party.

In the dying days of apartheid, there were attempts by White Afrikaner groups to establish a homeland or volkstat. The most realistic proposal was the state of Orandee, corresponding approximately to the post-apartheid province of the Northern Cape. The ethnic logic of this state was that the overwhelming majority of the population were/are Afrikaans speakers. The area is sparsely populated due to its mostly inhospitable climate and soil. During the run-up and immediate aftermath of the 1994 elections, Nelson Mandela did not officially rule out the possibility of the volkstat in this region; but this was more an attempt to keep the far right onside within the democratic process, than any serious possibility of this area being allowed to secede.
The apartheid government's 'divide and rule' tactics through its emphasis on ethnic identity have had a considerable effect. The continual reinforcing and support of ethnically defined political and cultural activities and institutions has made every South African citizen acutely conscious of his or her perceived ethnic identity.

In the context of ethnically defined political entities in the homelands, 'ethnic differences' were amplified and led to considerable tension. The dispute over land between the Venda and Gazankulu governments was a prime example of this. The Venda homeland was territorially contiguous but bordered one of the five parts of Lebowa and one of the two parts of Gazankulu. Whilst the prime focus of the Lebowa administration was directed to its other more substantial entities, the Venda and Gazankulu 'capitals' were situated less than fifty kilometres from each other, and each group sought to identify themselves in terms of the 'othering' of the neighbouring group. Hudson Ntsanowi, the chief minister of Gazankulu, was the leader of an Inkatha-style Shangaan/Tsonga political party Ximoko that attempted to reinforce constructed cultural traditions and connect the group with the pre-colonial Gaza states of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Part of this was the making of grand territorial claims, many of which impinged on Venda designated land. The tendency of the apartheid government to support the side of the more co-operative Venda administration only exacerbated the tension between the two sides. Many of these tensions have survived the apartheid era and affect relations between the two groups.

The reason that some of the homeland governments opted for independence was that it created a new ethnically based elite who were able to establish their own patronage networks that enabled themselves to be enriched. This occurred to a greater or lesser extent in all of the homeland governments but the most obscene examples took place in the Transkei administration of 'Kaiser' Matanzima (which was overthrown in 1989), the Bophuthatswana government of Lucas Mangope, and the Lennox Sebe regime in Ciskei.
The existence of homeland governments was ideal for Pretoria since it enabled them to demonstrate their stable governance in contrast to the situation that existed in the homelands. The conflicts between states were viewed as evidence of the ‘tribal’ nature of the Blacks, whilst the ‘corruption’ was seen as systematic and inevitable in African political systems, enhanced by the referral to numerous governments in the rest of Africa. The regime only chose to intervene when they thought an ANC presence might be being established, as they did in almost all the Southern African states (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) and even in London and possibly, though this has yet to be legally proven, in Sweden where they assassinated the prime minister Olaf Palme. One of the major legacies of this construction of ethnicity was that ethnic cultural and political expression was one of the only ways for Blacks to legitimately express themselves under apartheid. Although in some cases this was used to

37 Mangope’s administration was so profitable for himself and his client network that he joined with Inkatha and the white Afrikaner far right in trying to achieve a federal state structure, in his case recognizing the separate identity of Bop. The failure to achieve this recognition led to a desperate attempt to secede from South Africa in 1993 that sparked a popular insurrection. The killing of AWB members by Bop. policemen provided one of the most memorable images of the transitional phase and went a long way to debunking the supremacist myths of the Whites. Mangope was convicted in 1998 of the embezzlement of R20 million, but has now returned to politics as the leader of a regionalist Tswana political party, the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), that allegedly espouses Christian values and forms the opposition in North-West province that encompasses the former bantustan of Bophuthatswana.

38 The Ciskei homeland was perhaps the most artificial of all of the regime’s creations. Its separation from the main Xhosa homeland, Transkei, was purely the product of the government’s unwillingness to relinquish direct control of East London, which was situated between the two. The Ciskei administration was offered the possibility of incorporation into Transkei, at the latter’s independence but rejected it on similar grounds to the proposed Kangwane/Swaziland merger. Sebe came to power by emphasizing the difference between two groups of Xhosa speakers, the Rharhabe and the Mfengu. The Mfengu were those people who had arrived in the area as a result of the Zulu mfecane. There was lingering resentment between the groups due to the fact the Christianized Mfengu chose to co-operate with the colonial administration at the end of the nineteenth century - an act that had led to the annexation of the Xhosa territory. Sebe exploited this difference as far as was possible and tried to legitimize himself by inventing connections to Rharhabe historical figures. This was disputed by the recognized Xhosa chiefs’ clan - the Gcaleka who resided in Transkei. When the Rharhabe chief died in 1976, the Gcaleka appointed successor was opposed by Sebe, who installed his own candidate, Chief Maqoma. Sebe tried to legitimize and emphasize the distinction between Transkei and Ciskei by building a new capital at Bisho and establishing a ‘temple’ at Ntaba ka Ndoda. Sebe stated that the site was the religious centre of the Xhosa, being referred to in one poem by Mqhayi as the place of the High God Qamata, though this was not widely recognized. He also falsely claimed that it had been the last stand of ‘Ciskei’ warriors against the colonial forces. In order to authenticate the site, he built an 18,000 seater stadium with a ‘Heroes’ Acre’ containing the remains of those selected to be the heroes of Ciskei by Sebe. Here he buried a supposed ancestor of Chief Maqoma who was removed from Robben Island. The whole complex was surmounted by a bust of Sebe himself.
further the struggle against apartheid, for the most part it played into the regime’s hands. The emergence and encouragement of these ethnic identities has had significant political and cultural ramifications in terms of establishing a national identity or identities that acted as the a priori means of self-identification. This means that even the use of a restricted category of identity, such as Black South African, is unlikely to be articulated by anyone outside a politicised urban group without an ethnic qualification, such as Zulu or Tswana. South African came to be understood, even within the country, as a pejorative description, that excluded the non-White population. During the ‘struggle’, politicised Blacks preferred to refer to Azania and Azanians. The terms signified a potential revolutionary transformation in the way that the adoption of the names Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe prefigured the post-colonial state during the colonial era and began the process of national identity formation in those countries. For the majority though, ethnic identities remained the primary means of distinction and self-identity.

The consequences of the affirmation of ethnic identity as the primary means of self-identity has meant that the ‘new’ South Africa has faced immense hurdles in attempting to invent an inclusive national identity. The table below, which dates from a year after the first democratic elections, highlights some of these challenges. Most notably, more than half of the Black respondents – when requested to identify themselves – do so in terms of ethnic group, rather than race or by national identity. In this way, the legacy of the apartheid regime’s divide and rule tactics are as haunting for the post-apartheid order as the racial essentialism and distinction it more clearly espoused.
Non-racialism

Whilst the majority of political groupings in South Africa have represented a small ethnically defined constituencies, the tripartite alliance of the African National Congress (ANC), the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the South African Communist Party (SACP) consistently opposed the focus on ethnic identity that was imposed by the apartheid regime and reinforced by the establishment of the homelands and their governments. In the period of the ‘struggle’ from 1960 (when the party opted for armed conflict) to 1990, there was a denial of the validity of ethnic identity, which was viewed as pandering to the apartheid state and contributing to the division of the masses. In 1959 a faction of the party, led by Robert Sobukwe, broke away to form the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) fired by the rhetoric of figures such as Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta and disillusioned with the influence of White and Indian Communists. This objection to the non-Africanist position adopted by the movement was repeated throughout the course of the struggle and came to the fore again at the Kabwe conference of 1985, where for the first time Whites were permitted to have
positions on the national executive. This decision caused a spate of defections to other parties, particularly the PAC and Inkatha.

The exclusively racial construction of apartheid led to the ANC’s creed of non-racialism. The commitment to non-racialism was founded as a reverse discourse in the Foucauldian sense and constructed as a resistance identity, as set out by Calhoun. Namely, one generated by those actors that are in a positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different form, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society.

The commitment to non-racialism was first set out in the Freedom Charter of 1955. It was challenged throughout the ‘struggle’ by various anti-apartheid activists. In the early sixties, the PAC rivaled the ANC for popular support. The appeal to an exclusionary resistance identity was most powerfully made by the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970’s, and in particular by its leader Steve Biko. With the senior ANC leaders either in exile or imprisoned on Robben Island, Biko was by far the most charismatic and intelligent leader inside the country. His brand of resistance was developed as a reversal of the pseudo-Darwinist apartheid racial hierarchy. It reversed the value judgment of the regime and its ideologues yet reinforced the racial boundary that the state had created.

The effect of the emergence of this type of resistance identity was most clearly seen in the Soweto uprising of 1976 – provoked by the change of the teaching language of instruction to Afrikaans. However, with Biko’s murder by the state in 1977, there was a refocusing on Mandela as ‘the people’s leader’ during the 1980’s. This was pressed by the ANC headquarters in Lusaka and taken up inside the country by the United Democratic Movement (UDM) and the Anti-Apartheid Movement overseas.

**(De-)Constructing the rainbow**

---

39 This conceptualization of resistance identity is derived from Craig Calhoun 1994: *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, Blackwell, Oxford. I have conflated it with the more activist ‘reverse discourse’ set out by Foucault in, for example, *Language, Counter-Memory and Practice* 1977, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

40 The date is significant in that it represents a policy response to the onset of apartheid legislation. This shows its conception as a reverse discourse.
Such was the ANC’s commitment to the principal of non-racialism that the oppositional denial of race as a meaningful signifier of difference was almost as totalizing as the apartheid discourse. Any attempt to advance positions that varied this line was perceived as ‘reactionary’ and tantamount to kowtowing to the ideology of the regime. Non-racialism therefore emerged as a fundamental principle of the imaginary post-apartheid future. The ANC had been absolute in its negotiating with the National Party that it would have no part of any system that preserved any element of separate voting rolls. The imagined non-racial future was given a name – the rainbow nation – during the transition. Archbishop Desmond Tutu is usually credited with its inception, although some insist that Albie Sachs, the Head of the Constitutional Court, was the first to use it. Whatever its origin, it gained a total presence and currency, and was given the definite stamp of approval by Mandela’s Presidential acceptance speech when he stated,

We shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without fear in their hearts... A rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.

Due to the obvious arbitrary nature of the geopolitical boundaries of almost all African states, there is an axiomatic difficulty in the formulation of the nation-state and the process of civic identity – as opposed to ethno-nationalist identity – which occurred in most Western countries in the period of the Industrial Revolution. In Europe and elsewhere, the legitimacy of the nation-state structure, and its relationship to the people

---

41 The Lancaster House settlement of 1979 that brought to an end the second Chimurenga in Zimbabwe maintained a separate White voters’ roll for the first two elections. This was part of a policy, contrived by the local Whites and the Thatcher Government, to prevent the election of a Marxist Government. It backfired spectacularly when Robert Mugabe surprisingly won an outright majority of the popular vote. The parliamentary seats that had been set aside for the Whites were co-opted to a presidential mandate. Control of these seats gave ZANU-PF a workable majority in the last parliamentary election in 2001.

42 The establishment of the nation-state in this period is well documented, though there remains significant disagreement over the nature of the terminology. The events of the nineties and after in, for instance Eastern Europe, have illustrated the fragility of this concept and its constant need for the nation to be reinvented in the minds of each new generation. In the context of Africa, I would argue that this period of establishing an identity with the nation-state only really took place in anti-colonial struggles and then the post-independence era. The primary problem with the process of generating a civic nationalism in South Africa – and indeed, many other African countries – is that many people still identify with pre-colonial political formations, often manifested in the present-day as ethno-linguistic affiliations.
within (and outside) its border, was constructed as a discourse that supported oligarchic interests over a considerable historical timeframe. This enabled the evolution of civic identity in a gradualist way. This contrasts strongly with the African experience where this process has been compressed into a short space of time with almost no ownership of the identity in the population. The difference between the situations in Europe and Africa mean that the civic nationalist concept as often been viewed as an import and named as such by the label of ‘Euro-nationalism’. The alienation of people from a statist conception of identity has created serious difficulties for African states in the creation of non-exclusive national identities that are not dependent on the privileging of one type of ethno-nationalism.

Partha Chatterjee has argued that it is the pervading narrative of capital that is the determinate in the opposition of state and individual. A narrative that has been responsible for the transformation of the

    Violence of mercantilist trade, war, genocide, conquest and colonialism into a story of universal progress, development, modernisation and freedom.43

The connection of the rise of industrial capitalism and the emergence of the nation-state is well documented. Chatterjee sees the formation of the identity of the nation-state as the suppression of community, which it supplements. This identity needs to be continually reinvented in order to sustain its presencing. It cannot allow the rise of difference with impunity since this establishes counter-narratives that threaten the totality of its sovereignty. Examples of this can be seen in almost all of the twentieth century cases of national partition. In the former Soviet Union, the inability to reinvent the territorial state in the guise of the Commonwealth of Independent States led to a demand for full independence from the fourteen non-Russian states. The failure of two of these, Georgia and Moldova, to generate national identity resulted in further splits occurring. However, in a climate where the belief in the Modernist ideal of progress has been seriously undermined at the least or even discarded entirely and the rise of economic globalization,

the nation-state has been replaced as the sole presence of sovereignty. It is this context that the nascent nationalism of the ‘new’ South Africa was/is being constructed. Its desire for full presence is undermined as the model of the nation-state is subverted, no longer fundamental to the needs of capital.

However, many have a nostalgia for nationalism and the ideal of a South African national identity formation has been held out by critics such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. This is the nationalism of the reverse nation, defined as the ‘other’ to the apartheid state of division and oppression. Imagined as the ‘rainbow’ nation, its project is deferred, haunted by memory and history. Within the discourse of the formation of the imaginary exists the two dialectics. One sees the means to its establishment as demanding a continuation of the reverse nation into the nation-state or conversely in the rise of ethnic identities suppressed in the struggle.44

The perceived oppositionality of these dialectics further problematizes the quest for an inclusive national identity and perpetuates division into the post-apartheid nation.

Both positions, reproducing principles of racial and cultural difference, are constituted through an ambivalence immanent to the very desire of Impersonation (defined as the process of figuring the nation in exemplary human form), and perhaps indicative of certain formations of democracy – specifically, “a contemporary Heart of Darkness horror: the nightmare of difference seeking to prevail by (literally) disembodying humanity”.45

---

44 While this seems contradictory, both the black ethnically based parties, such as Inkatha, Mangope’s UCDP, and ACDP, and the traditional support of the ANC, emphasize the collective imagining of identity in the nation, though the former are not committed to the territorial identification of South Africa as a whole. It is not coincidental that Inkatha have moved away from the right-wing alliance that opposed the unitary state formation and proposed substantial or total devolution in a confederal structure to a position of alliance with government and a more Africanist stance.

Although the nation-state remained an important construction in the articulation of the market, it was being superseded by the process of globalisation with its stress on multinational companies and trans-national markets. The impact on the process of globalisation on an individual conception of identity is that it promotes options that enable new identity networks to establish themselves which dilute the principal of a normative, linking identity – such as the nation.

The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options. 46

Taking Benedict Anderson’s widely accepted thesis on the role of the development of communication technologies, such as printing and newspapers, in the formation of the imaginary ‘national’ community 47, it is logical to expect that the emergence of trans-national media will impact significantly on constructions of identity. While this has enabling possibilities, it has also led to a rise in insecurity – as evidenced by the dynamic of self-determination – that has given rise to a desire for fixity in the unit of the nation.

The disintegration of pluri-national states in Eastern Europe, such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, is illustrative of the global revival of the ethno-nationalist forces that were precisely those that the ‘new’ South Africa was attempting to subjugate within the construction of a national community and identity. The increasing currency that the right of ethnic communities to self-determination received during this period, was particularly problematic and strengthened demands from, amongst others, Inkatha and the Afrikaner Volksfront to exercise their community’s right to self-sovereignty.

Initially, the ANC attempted to construct the reverse nation imagined in the struggle era by interweaving the strands of the individualistic approach of the sovereignty of the citizen with a community focused approach that stressed privilege only in the context of restitution and reparation for the legacy of discrimination. This compounded approach defined the conceptualisation of the ‘rainbow nation’ in the interstices between the local and global. It is probably most clearly evidenced in the definitively liberal constitution. Given the inherent difficulties of communicating the ‘rainbowist’ vision to long differentiated groups with diametrically opposed views of history and culture, the ANC appeared to aim for a totalising approach that continually emphasized the currency of the ‘rainbowist’ vision as the basis for South Africa’s future.

Once in power, the ANC was able to build a momentum in the media for the ‘rainbowist’ discourse. The responsibility for the production of the ‘rainbowist’ discourse was taken up by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in its repetitive use of the phrase ‘Simunye – we are one’ and by corporations such as Anglo – American and South African National Breweries, who emphasised the oneness of the nation in their publicity. The ‘rainbow’ nation term became a signifier of euphoric future that never attained stability in the present. Moments of its presencing were instantly abolishing. The pot of gold always situated over the horizon. Nevertheless, its dialectic project spawned a discourse that dominated the period between the first and second elections. Its obsessive repetition attempted to cloud and disimagine the reality of a country still largely locked socio-economically into an apartheid spectre, one that continues to frequent.

The ideological and political commitment to ‘rainbowism’ was increasing personified by Mandela. By the late nineties, Mandela’s identification as the definitive emblem of the ‘new’ nation was unchallenged and he was acclaimed by Jacques Derrida.

47 South Africa’s constitution was drafted by a number of exiled lawyers who had the advantage of looking at many existing examples and the way in which they celebrated the principles of equality and diversity. The constitution owes much to the social democratic tradition of Scandinavia, Canada, and Holland; but benefits from its late writing in terms of integration. For instance, the right to individual sexual orientation is as embedded as the right to individual religious worship.
As the ultimate apostle and interpreter of the rational legal traditions associated with the Western Enlightenment.49

The non-racial vision of a future South Africa was a powerful standpoint against the racist ideology of the apartheid regime. From its origin in the traditions of humanism and social democracy, it came over time to embody the reverse nation of equality and rule of law - as opposed to its stratification along hierarchical (obviously racial in the context of apartheid) lines. The continuing refusal of the ANC leadership under Mandela to adopt an Africanist political perspective left it exposed to the potential rise of a party advocating that position. With the transfer of the presidency to Mbeki, there have been significant changes to the language used by government. Talk of the rainbow nation still has a currency; but it is noticeably downplayed from the immediate post-apartheid era. There is a logic in seeing the transfer of the office of the presidency from Mandela to Mbeki as the defining moment in the Africanisation of the ‘rainbowist’ vision. However, its roots lie in the suppressed Africanist tendency that had led to the PAC breakaway in 1959 that remained as a political undercurrent without being permitted full expression.

Asserting difference – Africanism and its implications
In July 1997 the ANC published a paper, entitled *Nation-Formation and Nation Building*, that established a desire to

Assert African hegemony in the context of a multi-cultural and non-racial society50.

This signaled the beginning of a move away from the ‘rainbowist’ discourse towards a more aggressive Africanist position that sought to address the lack of economic transformation in the post-apartheid era. Affirmative action and positive discrimination

49 Quoted in Lodge T. 2002: *Politics in South Africa (From Mandela to Mbeki)*, David Philip, Cape Town, p.8.
targets have become more ambitious with a legal status that allows government punitive redress if businesses and institutions fail to comply. The policy has been critiqued by the neo-liberal opposition parties and commentators as re-racializing South African politics at the expense of minority groups, notably the Whites. But in reality, with the brief exception of the euphoric period of the first democratic election and its immediate aftermath, the racial dimension of South African politics has remained all too readily apparent throughout the post-apartheid period.

The reinvigorated stress on an Africanist dimension to ANC policy has aimed to reduce the potential for the rise of an Africanist party that could present electoral challenges in the ANC heartlands, where the interest in the introduction of a non-racial meritocracy cuts little cloth with those still dispossessed by the legacy of discrimination. Tensions therefore emerged between liberals who espoused a rapid or even immediate adoption of equal opportunities legislation that prevented the consideration of race as a factor in selection – whether in politics, business, education or sport – and those who propose(d) a significant period of Black advancement and positive discrimination in order to try and address the evident historical inequalities that resulted from the White supremacist era. In the former camp are a range of political actors, representing minorities and some within the liberal tendency in the ANC. Opposed are those on the left of the ANC and the various Africanist and Black ethnic constituency parties.

Perhaps the key evidence of South Africa’s continuing division along racial identity faultlines is shown through the ballot box. In 1994, the ANC won 62.52% of the national vote and formed the provincial administration in all of the nine provinces, except KwaZulu-Natal, which was won by Inkatha, and the Western Cape, which was won by the National Party. This marked South Africa’s one and only cross-racial vote in that many non-Blacks voted ANC, the National Party was supported by Whites and Coloureds – admittedly almost exclusively Afrikaans speakers, but a different division to race – and Inkatha attracted support from its Zulu heartland; but also from many Whites and Asians. Parties that attracted almost exclusive ethnic constituencies were the Democratic Party (Anglophone Whites), the Volksfront (Afrikaans Whites) and other
minor parties who failed to garner 2% of the vote. It was clear that the Black majority, other than a significant proportion of Zulus, had put their faith in the party of liberation, Mandela and the vision of the ‘rainbow nation’.

By the 1999 election the electorate divided far more clearly along ethnic lines. The ANC increased its share of the vote to 66.36% – almost wholly through attracting more Black support. Inkatha’s share of the vote grew marginally to 8.58%; but almost excusively in the Zulu populated provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. The Zulu chauvinism articulated by many within the senior ranks of the party alienated the White and Indian supporters that had seen the party as a meaningful Black led alternative to ANC hegemony. It also prevented the diversification of the party’s support amongst Blacks outside its core ethnic base. The former ruling National Party tried to reinvent itself in order to shake off the stigma of the apartheid era – prefacing its title with a ‘New’ a la New Labour – to show its engagement with the transformed order. Whilst it initially had success in the Northern and Western Cape in attracting the working-class Coloured vote, it lost the support of its original White Afrikaner base to the right and left. This left it as a powerful stakeholder in the Northern and Western Cape, but almost completely decimated elsewhere.

In 1994 and 1999, the party played the race card in its electioneering with warning of the swart gevaar or black peril. This has pandered to Coloured fears of marginalization in political, cultural, and employment terms. Part of this is the increasing demise of Afrikaans. Having been the favoured language of the apartheid regime, it has all but disappeared in public life. Whereas schools were forced to teach it in the previous era, it is now just one of the choices on offer and is increasingly being discarded in the east of the country in favour of Xhosa, and more particularly, Zulu. In media terms it is given similar airtime to the other nine official languages and English is rapidly becoming recognised as the lingua franca of the whole nation.

The party to benefit most from the National Party’s loss of the support of its former White constituency was the Democratic Party (DP). Traditionally, the Party of English
speaking ‘liberals’, it has gained support and credibility, amongst minority groups, in the vacuum left by the NP by opposing the ANC very vocally. Its leader, Tony Leon is viewed as a strong figure and it became the party that had the greatest White and Indian support in 1999 as well as gaining some limited Black middle-class backing. A party that entered the equation just prior to the 1999 election is the United Democratic Movement (UDM). Led by former Transkei Premier and ANC dissident Bantu Holomeisa, the party attracted those in the Xhosa population not disposed to support the ANC. Although Holomeisa is undoubtedly a popular figure in his former homeland, the UDM are unlikely to make significant inroads in gaining Xhosa support since the majority of the ANC leadership (Mandela, Mbeki, Sisulu, Tshwete) are also from the area.

The end result of the 1999 election left Mbeki with the same seven provinces under ANC control, but with an increased share of the vote across the board. Although Mbeki maintained the courtesy of retaining Buthelezi as Interior Minister, the ANC began to look to co-opt smaller parties to increase its political domination. Immediately following the election, an emboldened Tony Leon sought to establish a cross-party opposition that could offer some plausible alternative to the ANC. This was most evident in a coalition with the National Party in the Western Cape that kept the ANC out of power despite it having been the largest single party. Overtures were also made to UCDP, UDM and particularly Inkatha. However, the DP’s intention to lead this potential coalition undermined the formation of a potentially unified opposition. Matters came to a head when the NNP/DP coalition in the Western Cape fell apart and the NNP in a remarkable volte-face formed a coalition with the ANC in the Northern and Western Cape. Given the NNP’s increasing alignment with the ANC, it was perhaps unsurprising when the party lost the last vestiges of its support from the Coloured community in the 2004 election. After the election, the NNP leader Martinus van Schalkwyk dissolved the party in exchange for receiving a Cabinet position and advised its remaining members to join him in crossing the floor to the ANC.

51 The Institute of Race Relations, quoted in The Star 10/09/98.
In the course of Mbeki’s first term, the ANC had also managed to co-opt the other liberation parties, Azapo and the PAC – although the one nationally prominent PAC figure, Patricia de Lille, formed her own party rather than join the government. Although, this move added little in terms of electoral support to the ANC, it was significant in reinforcing the party as the organisation responsible for the liberation of the country, marked the increasing ‘Africanist’ stance of the ANC and prevented the any imminent possibility of the emergence to the ‘left’ of another party who could have emerged to squeeze the ANC from that side. All the remaining opposition is positioned to the ‘right’ of the government. The most evident and vocal of these parties continue to be the DP (now rechristened the Democratic Alliance (DA)) which continues to represent White – and, to a degree, Asian – minority interests. The other parties remain ethnically based parties stressing the lack of government respect for ‘traditional’ values, or ‘Christian’ values.\textsuperscript{52} The ANC’s domination of the political space was demonstrated by their increased share of the vote to 69.69\% in 2004.

The monetarist system adopted by the ANC has not as yet provided the means to achieve its transformation targets, most notably in terms of reducing unemployment. With a population growth rate of over two percent per annum, it is estimated that in order to start making any serious reduction in unemployment and to generate wealth creation – and therefore economic empowerment – the economic growth rate needs to consistently rise above six percent.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{52} South Africa has an enormous Church going population. It is usually estimated to be more than 60\% of the population, of whom the vast majority class themselves as ‘evangelical’. This exceeds the United States in terms of the proportion of the population professing Christian faith and attending Church. This constituency has not really been mobilized in a political sense, despite the emergence of parties like the UCDP and the African Christian Party. Given the effects of increasing religious mobilization elsewhere in the world, it is readily conceivable that this could represent a mass constituency to challenge the ANC. Though it is currently far more likely to be a member of both ‘congregations’, issues such as religious instruction, HIV/AIDS, and homosexuality present a potential clash between the Christian doctrine and the ANC’s political policies as they stand at present.

\textsuperscript{53} Growth rates rose 3.5\% in the mid-1990s before falling back in the late nineties and then rising again to 3.6\% in 2002. Forecast projections for 2004 and 2005 indicate stable growth in the 3\% bracket (+/- 0.3). Figures taken from \textit{Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report}, September 2004.
Whilst it is probable that sustained economic growth can be achieved, it is ahistorical to believe that it will reach the levels necessary to make serious inroads into unemployment. The main problem is that whilst the ANC’s macro-economic policy could be something out of a World Bank seminar, overseas investment, the supposed vehicle for large scale growth in the economy, has not been forthcoming to anything like the envisaged extent. The reasons for this are: the high crime rate, generally acknowledged to be the most serious of any country not identified as a war zone; low productivity (South Africa fares very badly in comparison to other comparable ‘emerging markets’ such as Malaysia and Mexico); and the chronic shortage of skills and training. This last point is entirely a legacy of the apartheid era. During this time education for the majority of the population was deliberately sub-standard\textsuperscript{54} whilst Whites were elevated to jobs they were not able to perform to a proficient standard. This skills shortage meant that the South African economy was permanently in recession from the oil crisis of the early seventies onwards. It was also significant in the demise of apartheid in that international capital started to pressure the regime in the early to mid-eighties to improve Black education as it was not able to find suitably skilled employees to meet its business needs.

Given the improbability of rapid economic growth, it is almost inevitable that disenchantment with the ANC will grow. The interesting question for this thesis is the likely direction of its expression. The dissolution of the ‘rainbowist’ vision is increasingly evident. This may be an ideological position for some in the party who see the vision as emblematic of the failure of the post-apartheid era to deliver the substantive transformation in society that they sought. However, it is more likely that ‘realpolitik’ was a driving factor. To represent Africanist positions enables the ANC to merge the beliefs of Black Consciousness, negritude et al to appeal to popular consciousness whilst retaining the support of big business due to the macro-economic stability they have achieved, as well as drawing on their historical credentials as the party of liberation. This

\textsuperscript{54} A comparison that is often quoted is that in 1982, the government was spending R12 on every White child’s education for every rand spent on that of a Black child. The figure is now estimated to be 2:1 due to the greater wealth of the municipalities where Whites live.
represents a potent political force that positions the party as the natural party of
government. As Filatova argues

... Africanism is a much more powerful card to play than 'rainbowism'... at
this particular moment of South Africa's history a nationalist stance offers a
better political potential to the ANC than non-racialism, whether based on
class solidarity or on 'rainbow' all-inclusive nationhood. To insist that
'cultural difference' is a material fact of post-apartheid South Africa is one
thing, but to suggest that it is a potentially valuable political resource, and the
only political resource left to underprivileged groups, are different matters.55

This particular type of ethno-nationalism mobilises those who were disenfranchised by
apartheid and who have yet to benefit from the subsequent transformation since it affirms
their support for the party to act as their vehicle to power and resources. It also privileges
the creation of an exclusive national identity that situates South Africa as an intrinsic part
of the African continent. This contrasts with the multi-cultural 'rainbowist' vision that
aimed to propose a form of post-ethnic, post-national identity that is, by definition,
paradoxical to the establishment of a unitary national identity.

The post-apartheid South African state finds itself having to reconcile the
tensions implicit in the pursuit of nation building and in adopting some form
of multiculturalism. The first imperative strives to construct a new national
identity. Nation building seeks to create a sense of belonging to the broader
South African community and a pride in its achievements; what ... Mbeki has
recently termed a 'new patriotism'. The second imperative concerns the need
to acknowledge cultural diversity and accommodate group identities such as
cultural or ethnic minorities. Multiculturalism challenges any conception of

55 Filatova I. 1997: The Rainbow Against the African Sky or African Hegemony in a Multi-Cultural
the nation as a cultural whole and fosters the recognition of sub-national identities.56

The political support for an Afro-centric positionality is evidenced in Mbeki’s adoption of an Afro-centric foreign policy that has seen him personally engaged in finding solutions to violent conflicts in Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Cote d’Ivoire. This supports South Africa’s increasing attempts to present itself as the natural sub-Saharan hegemonic power on a global stage. South Africa will be the site of the proposed African parliament and has taken the lead in political initiatives, such as the enhanced role of the African Union and NEPAD (New economic partnership for African development), and culturally populist events such as pan-African music festivals and the 2010 football World Cup.

Domestically, Mbeki has been increasingly clear that the party must represent those who have hitherto failed to benefit from the transition to the new dispensation. Mbeki has been clear to articulate a vision of Africa that privileges the Black population whilst allowing an inclusivity to those minorities who want to identify themselves under that label.57 The Africanist focus of the ANC is clearly manifested in two policy areas, one internal one external, where he has refused to bow to the wishes of powerful local and global interest groups and the more idealist and ideological members of the party – including Mandela himself. These are the government’s responses to HIV/AIDS and Zimbabwe.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic’s effect on Africa is immense. Aside from the evident human trauma that its effects cause, it is particularly pernicious on a social and economic level since it primarily affects those in the 20-40 age bracket who are responsible for providing the economic and social renewal of the country. Mbeki’s stubborn refusal to accept

---

56 Baines 1998.
57 Most notably in his ‘I am an African’ speech on behalf of the ANC, on the occasion of the adoption by the Constitutional Assembly of the ‘Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill 1996’ (8 May 1996).
established medical evidence on the causal link between HIV and AIDS has been viewed as a convenient economic stance that enables the government to avoid the costly diversion of resources that universal anti-retroviral coverage would provide. In fact, his public pronouncements on the issue centre on the issue of African pride and its subversion by the West. Whilst this is an understandable threat given the construction of Africa in the colonial era, it appears paranoid and unjustified in this instance.

On Zimbabwe, Mbeki’s repeated failure to seek a solution to the political and economic spiral of abuse that the Mugabe regime is perpetuating seems bizarre at first glance. The constant stream of refugees into the eastern half of the country undermines social stability in those areas and provides a ready supply of cheap labour that impacts negatively on government attempts to reduce unemployment. In addition it – crucially given the ANC’s macro-economic approach – deters foreign investment in the country and the region since investors remain unconvinced that similar fates might not befall South Africa in the future, and angers Western governments who view it as further evidence of Africa failing to act to address problems of the misuse of power. There is also a significant degree of opposition in the ANC by those, such as Mandela and Tutu, who wish to reinforce the commitment to rule of law and freedom of speech; and the trade unionists in COSATU who want to see Morgan Tsvangirai (formerly the trade union leader in Zimbabwe) given a fair run at the presidency; and from Whites throughout the country who see the failure to stand up against victimization in Zimbabwe as a worrying portent. Despite all this opposition, Mbeki plays to a populist Africanist audience who view Mugabe’s stance as an affirmation of power against Western domination and stays loyal to the regional liberation clique of leaders who opposed White domination.

Regional Precedents

There is a significant body of evidence – led by private sector experience in South Africa – that shows the economic benefits that anti-retroviral treatment provides.

The popular support for Mugabe in South Africa was shown by the standing ovation he received in 2004 on a visit to South Africa – to commemorate ten years of democracy! – that outlasted the ovation received by Mbeki.
This commitment to Africanism has many implications for the future direction of the
country. The ANC has drawn on lessons from the experience of successful centre-left
parties in the West, in being upfront and unabashed in its commitment to a monetarist
economic system aimed at attracting foreign direct investment to generate growth, whilst
maintaining a focused role for the state in terms of the provision of utilities and the
establishing of a social democratic transformative political framework within which
business must function. It has also successfully sought, following the example of its
regional African neighbours, to dominate the access to power and position itself as the
natural party of government. This follows the example of the former liberation
movements in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe who have maintained
executive control since independence. The conflation of party and state enables a
domination of the political space. Initially ideologically supported by the Marxist-
Leninist one-party state model, state capture has become a pervasive way of preserving
stable resource networks and oligarchic position. With the exception of Namibia, this
process has been conflict affected and has led to the emergence, particularly in Angola
and Zimbabwe, of clientist systems that privilege elite and group interest at the expense
of the population as a whole. Post-colonial theorists60 have argued that the post-colonial
state, and its process of emergence, has confused the concept of representation as proxy
with representation as similitude. This slippage allows the formulation of the construct
that the government is the people, rather than their representative, and allows the
entrenchment of liberation elite interests and the suppression of opposition. In Southern
Africa these processes have been so successful in maintaining exclusive political
sovereignty that it is almost inconceivable any of these parties could lose, or allow the
loss of, power at the respective next elections. This is in spite of the economic meltdown
and suppression of rule of law that is ongoing in Zimbabwe and the endemic corruption
that has skewed the benefits of Angola’s wealth of resources to a tiny elite.61

60 For example Chatterjee P. 1986: Nationalist thought and the colonial world: A derivative discourse?,
Subaltern studies, OUP, Delhi.
61 President de Santos is the largest private investor in Brazil and is estimated to have, personally, received
US0.5 billion in off budgetary payments in 2001.
If the example of other Southern African states is analyzed, it shows the potential political direction that South Africa could take by appealing to exclusive ethno-nationalisms that privilege groups in society at the expense of others, and rejecting the all-inclusive construction of national identity that a multi-cultural ‘rainbowism’ envisioned. The South African situation is different from that of Botswana and Zimbabwe, where one particular ethnically defined group constitute the overwhelming majority of the population. This enables those governments to accommodate the ethnically-based, so-called traditional authorities within their remit since in both cases there is a significant element of identifiable nation-state. This has led to the sidelining of the minorities but they are too marginal to affect the operation of power. In Mozambique and Angola, however, the states are made up of numerous ethnically defined groups. In the interests of building a national identity, the party of liberation, FRELIMO and MPLA respectively, sought to deny the role of ‘traditional’ political leaders who were regarded as ‘tribalist’ and counter-revolutionary. This enabled those leaders to become a focus for dissent when the economic development of the rural areas was neglected in favour of perceived modernizing industrialization. The logic of the Cold War and the apartheid state’s ‘total strategy’ resulted in the militarization of these marginalized elements in ethno-nationalist organizations that resulted in the substantive destruction of both of those countries.

In Angola there were two dominant patron-client structures. One was operated by the MPLA government, and the other controlled by UNITA and Jonas Savimbi. Angola is on a par with Nigeria as the largest oil-producing nations in Africa, with new reserves still being discovered. This provides the government with an income of several billion dollars per annum, enabling it to buy high specification military hardware and fulfil the expectations of its urban based support. UNITA had access to the country’s major diamond mines from which it was able to achieve an income estimated to be around 800 million dollars per annum. This enabled the group to finance its own war effort and client network based in the central highlands. The peace effort faltered every time the government tried to restore state control to the diamond areas. Savimbi was content to pursue the peace process as long as it enabled him to supply his network. Whenever
control of this was threatened, he returned to guerrilla warfare. The state of war that existed in the country enabled both sides to fulfil the needs of their client network.

This is a prime example of a clientist state, most clearly articulated by Jean-Francois Bayart and Patrick Chabal. Some commentators have described the development of this type of political system as the ‘Africanization’ of the political system. The theory of clientism is based on the fact that, in the majority of sub-Saharan states, access to wealth is synonymous with access to power. Power enables the representative of the community to enrich her/himself and benefit her/his constituency by ensuring that central government funding is directed in favour of their constituency and their constituents. This trade-off, whilst perhaps undesirable from a Western standpoint, is accepted for the most part by the majority of Africans. Thus, the example cited by Chabal of Houphouet-Boigny in Cote d'Ivoire. In this case Boigny blatantly enriched himself and his family, while privileging his ethnic constituency, for example in the massive development of his home village, Yamassoukro. Despite this ‘corruption’, Boigny was re-elected in the first multi-party election of 1992. Similar examples of this are Daniel arap Moi in Kenya, Omar Bongo in Gabon, and Paul Biya in Cameroon. Naturally, if this situation evolves into a kleptocracy of the type controlled by Mobutu Sese Seko in the former Zaire, the population and those members of the political class outside the patronage network will seek redress, whether this comes in the form of the ballot box or a taking up of arms or something in between. Clientism is tolerated by Western governments in countries where stability is vital to resource access. This is the primary reason why the West has always supported stability in African governments. Demands for ‘democratic’ reform are generally only made when the interests of capital are endangered. After all, the existence of the apartheid regime did not prevent any serious investment until the 1980’s, when the skills shortage became so acute as to not be conducive for the operation of capital needs.

---

Conclusion

In choosing to adopt an ‘Africanist’ conceptualisation of identity and establishing an open timeframe for the continuation of positive discrimination in favour of the Black population, the ANC risks provoking division between sections of the population in a country with such highly politicised identities. The privileging of certain sections of the population – no matter how justified it appears historically – could reinvigorate ethnic conflict by providing a discourse to those individuals and groups alienated by the orthodoxies of the ‘new’ South Africa.

The politicization of ethnic identity that exists in South Africa could be one of the greatest destabilizing factors in the country. This could be seriously exacerbated if the ANC is perceived as failing to deliver on its promises to its electoral constituency. Given the adoption of the ‘trickle-down’ approach by the ANC, it is likely that short of a period of remarkable economic growth in the next parliamentary term, the government will see its support base ebb before the next scheduled election. Looking at the contextual examples from the region, the ANC risks challenges to their desired status as the natural party of government by privileging the interests of certain groups within South African society. Concerted opposition from minority groups may be insufficient to unseat the party from national power, given the increasing conflation of party and state; but risks producing a major faultline between those who can identify their place in the ‘new’ South Africa and those who cannot. If this opposition spreads to Black ethnic groups who feel that one group, such as the Xhosa, are being particularly privileged, political crisis could emerge.

South Africa had a major – probably insurmountable – challenge to produce an inclusive national identity from the ruins of common community that apartheid had left in its wake. Given that, as with so many African countries, the primary factor in the existence of a national consciousness was the anti-apartheid (anti-colonial) struggle, the imagined anti-apartheid state provided a logical ‘reverse’ nation that favoured a multi-cultural individualism that bore some resemblance to the multi-cultural models produced in parts of the West and in India. The dynamic of the new,
and inclusive, state was personified by Nelson Mandela; however, the inability of the ‘rainbowist’ vision to assert a totalizing presence at a time when the process of globalization had rendered nation-states no longer intrinsic to the needs of capital led to the new leadership of the ANC, typified by Mbeki, articulating an alternative stance. They chose to reinvigorate an ethno-nationalist identity in the form of Africanism on the grounds that this included the significant majority of people in the country, knowing that capital interests would not seek to undermine this conceptualization and its formulation if macro-economic stability remained intact.

The tensions that exist between the civic nationalist – or Euro-nationalist – and the ethno-nationalist conceptualization of identity have impacted on South Africans’ mediation of self and their presentation of that self to the rest of the world. Art and its (re-)presentation provide an empirical base on which to analyze the negotiation of identities and the contested ‘location of culture’ in the societal architecture of the ‘new’ South Africa.
CHAPTER TWO

IMAGIN(IN)G THE RAINBOW

"The rainbow nation concept is a pot of shit." (Breyten Breytenbach 1997)

"We will privilege works and artists who address both explicitly and conceptually new readings and renderings of citizenship and nationality, nations and nationalism, exile, immigration, technology, the city, interdeterminancy, hybridity, while exploring the tensions between the local and global." (Okwui Enwezor 1997)

"Trade Routes ... proposes a continent that is able to speak for itself in the very same languages that the rest of the world does, as equals." (Kendell Geers 1997)

"From its (the 2nd Biennale) very conception in Brooklyn, New York…" (Olu Oguibe 1998)

"If South African artists were seemingly moving towards ‘one South Africa’ in 1994, that sense of common identity has now been ruptured by global art institutions such as the Biennale and their accompanying critiques.” (Sidney Kasfir 1999)

This chapter is an archaeological analysis of the art of the ‘rainbow nation’ between 1993 and 1999. This was the period of South Africa’s cultural (re-)engagement with the rest of the world. Although a case can be made for an alternative time frame, as outlined in the previous chapter, the date of the second election represented the re-racialisation of voter constituencies along apartheid lines and the exit from the presidency of Mandela – who in so many ways is emblematic of the ‘rainbowist’ discourse. This chapter will seek to establish how artists’ and curators’ imaginings of the ‘new’ South Africa were employed in the service of two dialectics. These have been identified as ethno-nationalism and civic or Euro-nationalism,

In which adherents of the former, often characterised as ‘primitive, fanatical, and dangerous’, accuse the latter of ‘mouthing global platitudes in defence of
privilege, espousing amorphous non-racism and common humanity to protect neo-colonial interests.\textsuperscript{63}

The essentialist binarism of this positionality is a feature of discourse concerning South African contemporary art. In order to understand this dichotomy and the cultural importance of the role of group exhibitions, it is necessary to consider the absolutes of the apartheid era. With the exception of the exhibitions discussed below, group exhibitions were prohibited in the apartheid era. Internally, there remained opposition from the state to the display of the work of artists from different races alongside each other. Externally, the cultural boycott meant that group shows were extremely rare. Following the demise of apartheid, the very fact of holding group exhibitions – and the inclusions and exclusions they made and the discourses they served became a key cultural signifier of the normalization of South African society and its (re-)entry into the global family of nations.

This excavation begins at the exhibition of \textit{Tributaries}, sponsored by BMW, which took place in 1984-5 at the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg. Curated by Ricky Burnett, this exhibition democratized the display of contemporary art in South Africa and set a marker whose influence is still felt some sixteen years later. Whilst it was not the first exhibition to display the cultural production of Black and White artists together\textsuperscript{64}, it was the first in South Africa to attempt to collapse the boundaries between art and craft, rural and urban, trained and untrained. Jackson Hlungwane, Karel Nel, Noria Mabasa, and Paul Stopforth were displayed in the same location. This was important for deconstructing the Eurocentrist hierarchy of materials and genres that privileged the Western fine art tradition at the expense of the cultural production of Black groups within the country.


\textsuperscript{64} Black artists, such as Mohl and Sekoto, who painted in a formal style, had often been incorporated as a footnote in exhibitions and workshop shows, such as the Polly Street Art Centre, had not been mounted on a separatist basis.
Under the apartheid education system, Black people were, with few exceptions, not taught art. The emphasis was on craft, which the regime saw as a suitable reflection of Black’s supposed ‘tribal’ nature. Obviously, this attempt to confine the ‘other’ was a desire to speak of the self as sophisticated, civilized, and perhaps most significantly, as part of the Western cultural tradition. The collapse of these categories in the exhibition offered a cultural pluralism in line with what had been set out at an ANC-aligned forum in 1982 in Gaborone in neighbouring Botswana, entitled ‘Culture and Resistance’.

Subsequent arguments have surrounded the decontextualized gallery setting and the need to use Western processes of legitimation to ‘elevate’ the status of Black cultural production, but the show’s role in articulating possibilities outside the divisive nature of the state and its desired cultural separation overrode those objections.

At the time of the exhibition, the country was in a state of organic crisis. The old was dying, the new had not been born. This was the era of the State of Emergency, declared by the Botha regime in 1985 and extended to the whole country the following year.

The political situation of the apartheid years demanded a political art of engagement. Those artists who refused to comply with the strictures on content outlined by the liberation movement did so under the guise of a Modernist position of the autonomy of art. Discourse surrounding South African art at this time was limited to the provincial narrative accounts of Esme Berman et al, which sought to identify value in purely aesthetic terms without acknowledging the socio-political climate in the country.

---

65 The ANC requested of cultural practitioners that they be supportive of the struggle in the content of their works, though there was no move to impose the Socialist Realist style adopted elsewhere. Artists were asked to desist from breaking the cultural boycott, particularly with regard to any group show that could be used to support the regime.

66 It is interesting that one of those artists, Marion Arnold, who agreed to represent South Africa in the Valpariso Biennale in Chile, has since published a book offering a feminist reading of the art of some South African women and was one of the curators of the recent Emergence show that states, “The concept of ideology … provides the spine that literally cuts through the heart of the exhibition.” The curator of the South African contribution to Pinochet’s cultural programme was Marilyn Martin, now director of the South African National Gallery (SANG).

Criticism of Black art was confined to *Images of Man*, a catalogue of the Fort Hare collection – a Black university in the Bantustan of Ciskei. The coming changes in the country and the need to assert their place within them led state-sponsored institutions to mount a series of exhibitions in the late eighties which sought to establish a ‘new’ South African art tradition.

‘Preparing ourselves for Freedom’
The first of these was *The Neglected Tradition*, which was displayed at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) in 1988. The exhibition was curated by Steven Sack, whose work in community arts projects (which often acted as a fundraising front for the ANC) made him a politically acceptable choice. The exhibition set out a parallel tradition to the one displayed in the gallery that centred on the works of Black urban artists. Suddenly artists who had been entirely starved of any establishment recognition were accorded a place within the canon of South African art history. Artists such as George Bhengu, Gladys Mgudlandlu, Ernest Mancoba, John Koenakeefe Mohl and George Pemba were written into history in order to serve the construction of the future present. However, one figure in particular was singled out, Gerard Sekoto. Sekoto had gone into exile in Paris in 1948, but the period predating this was now heralded as fundamental to South African art. Within a year of the exhibition, a catalogue of his work had appeared which was substantiated by a major retrospective at JAG with a new catalogue. Both the old artistic elite of the establishment institutions and the new cultural elite of the ANC identified Sekoto as a figure that would constitute a seminal position in the tradition that was to be established.

Also in 1989, were two other significant exhibitions. The JAG staged *Images of Wood* and the Standard Bank Foundation at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) displayed *Ten Years of Collecting*. The JAG show presented an alternative construction of non-racialism, centred on medium. Wood was seen as appropriate in that the exhibition was sponsored by the Merensky Foundation, whose money was derived from the production of timber. The curator, Elizabeth Rankin, has been criticized for largely focusing on sculpture which reinforced preconceptions about the acceptable forms of Black
expression. Furthermore, the linear nature of the narrative with its focus on specific pieces and artists was targeted as undermining differences in approach and purpose in the search to create an undifferentiated tradition which pandered to Eurocentric attitudes concerning the production of art historical discourse. However, Rankin acknowledged the shortcomings in the show and argues that sculpture had been marginalized as a medium. In her view, the show had been an opportunity to bring together various traditions without collapsing them into a single narrative. The catalogue starts off assessing the work of White and Black sculptors separately but then begins to bring the analyses together in the later stages in the service of articulating an artificially unified history of the immediate past.

A sense of history was crucial to the Wits collection. By demonstrating the time span involved in the collection of its art objects, the university was seeking to establish its credentials as a progressive institution that had long given recognition to the cultural production of Southern Africans. In fact the collection had originally intended to collect the works from all over sub-Saharan Africa and decided to focus on the region only after being priced out of the market for art from Central and West Africa. At the instigation of the sponsors and in response to the perceived success of the Neglected Tradition show, the scope of the collection was widened to encompass contemporary production from both the rural and urban areas, creating an ongoing historicity to the collection that aimed at emphasizing the sponsors’ progressive orientation. Whether this was successful or if the additions created an ethnographic present for the museological display as a whole is a matter of opinion.

Whilst this collapse of hierarchies was the prime focus domestically, abroad the picture was different. A canon of Resistance Art was established by three publications with one major exhibition. The cultural boycott was firmly adhered to and without approval from the ANC, the books would have been unlikely to be published and the show would definitely not have been held. The two books were Art of the South African Townships by Gavin Younge and Resistance Art by Sue Williamson. It is clear in both cases that the title of the book was designed as an afterthought in order to enhance appeal abroad.
Younge's text focuses on Black art production but bizarrely includes a range of rural sculptors from the Northern areas of the country. These sculptors, sometimes linked under the reductionist 'tribal' prefix of Venda, were certainly not reflective of Black urban cultural production the high density areas. Perhaps, the Western audience, engaged by almost nightly coverage of township violence and confrontation, was thought more amenable to a title that focused on appropriate cultural manifestations of the imagery to which they were accustomed. The title of Resistance Art was politicized just before publication by Andries Oliphant, editor of the SACP backed magazine Staffrider. The text was a survey of the arts scene in the country rather than a focus on tendentious art in support of the struggle. Included are Lyn Smuts, Andrew Verster, Pippa Skotnes, and Jeremy Wafer's somewhat notorious Air Conditioner68. Even revisionist accounts of Minimalism's subversion of the Modernist paradigm would hesitate to posit a politically engaged reading for this piece.

The discourse of Resistance Art was supplemented by the exhibition, with accompanying catalogue, of Art from South Africa which began at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford in June 1990 and subsequently was displayed at a further six British venues. Although conceived as far back as 1985, by the time the exhibition opened the situation in the country had altered dramatically. In February of that year the ANC, PAC, and SACP had been unbanned by the government and Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners released. The catalogue accounted for this and devoted substantial space to the debate surrounding Albie Sachs69's paper 'Preparing ourselves for Freedom'. In this Sachs calls for a move away from the neo-Leninist position of culture as a weapon of the struggle stating,

68 The notoriety of this piece stems from its citing in any review of the book as an example of non-politically engaged art that had been included in the text.
69 Albie Sachs was a leading opponent of apartheid who was targeted for assassination by the Pretoria regime (he was severely injured by a car bomb) whilst he was living in exile in Maputo. Although predominately notable as a lawyer – he is now Head of the Constitutional Court – his time in Mozambique made him an authority on cultural production and its role in supporting revolutionary transformation.
The power of art lies precisely in its capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions.\(^{70}\)

Sachs' call was seen in some quarters as premature but, by and large, was supported by the wider cultural community. By this stage it was clear that there was going to be substantive change in South Africa, though – as discussed in the previous chapter – the precise nature of that transfer of power and the transformation of society at large would remain hotly disputed beyond the 1994 elections. The period leading up to the elections has already been analyzed in terms of its political ramifications. In cultural terms, the situation was equally contested, if with less dramatic consequences. The ANC's move away from Marxist-Leninist ideology, of which Sachs' paper was the most obvious cultural manifestation, had removed the political insistence on tendentious content, but imaging the 'new' nation has proved highly problematic.

(Re-)presenting South Africa

Outside of the country, the association of South African art with resistance predicated on the representation of the reverse nation was a powerful identifying tool. Inside the nation, establishments and institutions tried to position themselves to adapt to the 'new' South Africa. Taking the lead from the political establishment, cultural agents, including artists, adopted the metaphor of the 'rainbow nation' and the discourse of 'rainbowism', which reflected the euphoric imagining of the future as opposed to the dis-imagining of the present reality.

South Africa's return to the international arena was their acceptance of an invitation to participate in the 1992 Cricket World Cup. This was a calculated move by the ANC leadership to reduce White opposition to the constitutional negotiations that were being undertaken contemporaneously, by showing the benefits that normalization would bring. Culturally, the first national representation was at the Venice Biennale of 1993 – the first time South Africa had been invited since 1968. Two artists were selected for the main

exhibit whilst another nineteen featured in auxiliary pavilions. The chosen, Jackson Hlungwane and Sandra Kriel, (re-)presented the ‘rainbow nation.’ Here was the imagining of future identity – a Shangaan visionary rural sculptor and a politicized White social realist working in materials considered to be outside the Western fine art tradition. It offered a pluralism that spoke of inclusivity, a specificity of place but not of making. The popularization of the anti-apartheid struggle throughout the world and the cultural isolation of artists within the country meant that, as soon as the democratic political process was installed, many offers of exhibitions were forthcoming.

The defining filter through which contemporary art production in South Africa was viewed was the cultural relativist paradigm established by exhibitions like Tributaries in South Africa and on a global stage by the Magiciens de la Terre exhibition in Paris in 1989. The non-hierarchical juxtaposition of non-Western and Western artists was predicated on an attempt to deconstruct the relative positioning of oppositions such as art/craft; First World/Third World, Modernist/primitive; sophisticated/naïve. However, the tendency to select non-art school trained artists from the Third World in place of those who had formal training, either in art schools or through traditional fora ‘othered’ those artists and reinforced a dichotomy between a sophisticated Western practice and a naïve non-Western aesthetic – ironically celebrated and sustained by collectors in the West.

The collapse of the distinctions between fine art, craft and design, whilst well-intentioned, proposed a cultural relativity that was validated yet again in the terms of the West. Unfortunately, most curators and gallery owners in South Africa responded to this by offering their own microcosmic versions that offered little other than broad platitudes about cultural pluralism.
The Africa '95 festival presented South African art to a London audience. However, whilst pieces such as the Coldstream stone and various Zulu cultural artefacts took their place alongside the 'masterpieces' of African Art, in the comprehensive blockbuster show at the Royal Academy, the contemporary art element of the festival was a missed opportunity. As opposed to the Royal Academy show, Seven Stories about Modern Art included art from seven countries. The selection of countries was arbitrary in the extreme with seven artist/curators being entrusted with their respective country selections. There was no explanation for the inclusions and exclusions made. Although concerted

71 Though I am assured that there was substantial research that went into the selection, the choice of Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia as four of the seven can at best be viewed as idiosyncratic. Whilst the other three nations are something of a given, accepting the curator’s criterion of the “intensity of the dynamic or on connections which grew out of them…” (Deliss [ed.] 1997, p.17) it would be hard to make a case for
attempts were made to deconstruct the ‘naïve’ filter imposed by the market on much contemporary African Art, the inclusion of work by artists such as Ken Sempangi, Theresa Musoke, Meek Gichugu and Joel Oswaggo reinforced Western preconceptions about African art discourses. Those forty odd countries deemed unworthy of inclusion were confined to appendices in the catalogue. The ‘stories’ did not interweave to form a dialogue between the various countries represented and demonstrated all too clearly that geographical location remains Africa’s unifying context. As a cultural category and semantic filter, ‘Africa’ is redundant, serving only imperial interest and its counter discourses, Pan-Africanism and negritude.

Sam Nhlengethwa – *It left him cold*

The actual works selected from the South African contribution were variable. Ezrom Legae’s *Chicken Series*, Paul Stopforth’s *Interrogators* and untitled body depictions of any of the four mentioned above Ghana, Mozambique, Egypt, Zimbabwe, and the former Zaire. If the exhibition was intended to reverse the under-representation of East African artists within the international arena, this should have been made explicit.
Biko’s corpse, based on police autopsy photographs, and Sam Nhlengethwa’s *It left him cold* (1990) demonstrate reactions to an event that politicized people internally and externally. As a powerful signifier of the international Anti-Apartheid movement was Peter Gabriel’s tribute to the Black Consciousness leader, it provided an appropriate historicizing of South African contemporary art in an overseas context. If these exhibits had formed the basis of an exhibition indicating responses to the significant events and traumas of the apartheid/colonial era, it might have been of immense importance. As it was the quality and depth of the those pieces was set off by a half-hearted treatment of the South African landscape tradition, which failed to contextualize the pieces effectively, and some examples of the Thupelo workshop.

The non-selection of any South African artists for the *Big City* show, drawn from Jean Pigozzi’s collection, at the Serpentine was probably fortunate in retrospect, since it motivated Linda Givon – undoubtedly the most significant commercial gallery owner in the country – to curate two exhibitions that ran contemporaneously with the festival, *On the Road* at the Delfina Studio Trust in Vauxhall and *Mayibuye I Africa* at the Bernard Jacobsen Gallery in the West End. The South African artists selected were all from the Goodman Gallery stable and there was some suggestion of their privileging over those selected from Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, the artists included Antonio Ole, Tapfuma Gutsa, and Berry Bickle from the frontline states and Kendell Geers, William Kentridge, and Willie Bester from South Africa. The regional focus of the *On the Road* show offered a more insightful discourse between art objects than *Seven Stories*... Instead of replicating the reductive filter of Africa, the exhibition brought together pieces from the Southern African region that engaged with the shared histories of settler domination, violent insurrection and popular revolt, civil war, and a post-independence/post-apartheid era Socialist movements, as well as trade, social, and economic links. Many ‘struggle’ commentators criticized the rush to be seen as part of the international community – at the expense of establishing trans-continental networks and contacts. While this may have been motivated by an essentialist quest for authenticity in some cases, the *On the Road* exhibition demonstrated the possibilities of a regional focus that moves beyond pan-Africanist pretensions.
The 1st Johannesburg biennale

The 1st Johannesburg biennale had been conceived and the funding designated under the auspices of the apartheid city authority. This caused widespread criticism and started the controversy that was to dog both this event and its successor. In hindsight, it is easy to see that the prevalent local conception of the biennales as elitist and pandering to the tastes of an overwhelmingly White bourgeoisie had justification. The director, Christopher Till, formerly head of JAG, and the co-ordinator modelled the structure on that of the worldwide biennale circuit of Venice, Sao Paolo, Sydney and Dakar with its affirmation of the nation-state as the predominant filter by the division of works into national pavilions.

Perhaps this was perceived as the least confrontational method at a time when ethno-nationalists (Ricky Burnett and Gordon Metz amongst others) were calling for an entirely South African focus, whilst other Euro-nationalists (Kendell Geers) wanted a showcase for international contemporary art. Things started badly when three months before the 1994 election, a group of thirty international curators were flown to Johannesburg to assess the state of art in the country and make preliminary selections for their exhibits. This exercise drew substantial criticism since the curators were entertained and housed lavishly and, most significantly, not one of those invited was from the African continent.

The setting of the exhibitions in the cultural institutions of the apartheid era signified a power transfer rather than transformation. Some doubted whether the major galleries and museums would be able to make the ideological leap that the new order required.

Institutions lack the conceptual and intellectual capacity to deal with the challenges that the current political changes present...Having excluded Black South Africans in the past, they have themselves become cut off from the main forces and sources of change and creativity in the country, leading to a climate of intellectual sterility and insecurity.72

72 Metz G. 1995 in City Press 12/03/95.
The Western world-view must still be entrenched in the institutional structures of South Africa.  

David Koloane objected to the location of the exhibits as being problematic for access and devaluing the community art production at the expense of the international projects. The major shows were located in central Johannesburg, ‘Outside/Inside’ at the JAG with the rest, including the major international pavilions in the Newtown cultural precinct in central Johannesburg. Only four of the fourteen shows were situated elsewhere. One just outside the city centre: one in the definitive elite suburb of Sandton; and two in Soweto. It would be fair to say that none of these elements were crucial to the conception of the Biennale. Understandable though Koloane’s objections were, it is easy to see why the Metropolitan Council wished to utilize the Newtown cultural precinct as much as possible. Not to have done so would have rendered the identity of the area redundant. To have located the exhibitions in a variety of gallery sites would have been criticized for not enabling access to those who were unable to afford to travel across the city to different galleries. One alternative would have been to have situated the main body of the show in the high density townships, such as Soweto and Alexandra. This would have ensured that the majority of the audience was Black; but how large that audience would have been is open to question – Black people having been denied any art education under the apartheid system. As it was, the decision to site the main focus of the biennale in the centre of the city spoke volumes for re-claiming the space as the location of a ‘new’ South African culture. While there is no doubt that certain institutions saw the Biennale as part of an ongoing process of self-legitimation, to have not made use of apartheid institutions would have been to attempt to dismiss the value and role of the entire Modernist/Western cultural paradigm.

---


74 It is possible to argue that the Biennale could have approached art education in a more aggressive way that would have led to greater Black viewer participation.
The exhibitions themselves were of variable quality and conception. There were nine major South African projects in the centre of the city. In the Electric Workshop, there was supposed to be a ninety metre mural as a tribute to Joe Slovo, the former SACP leader and the first Minister of Housing in the Government of National Unity. The work was to place under the direction of Malangatana Valente Ngwenya, a celebrated Mozambiquan artist justly famous as a muralist. There is some doubt as to whether the project was ever completed. Also in the Electric Workshop was ‘Space/(Dis)Place’ ‘not curated’ by Elizabeth Rankin. The primary focus was on the interaction of sculptures in the space. However, the selection of ten White sculptors obviously provoked controversy. Rankin’s only justification for this was that

> Although White, academically trained, and of European descent, these artists affirm their African identity. Their work engages with issues, public or private, which are insistently-located in their experience of the sub-continent.  

Here the question of identity is unproblematized, presented as a knowable commodity. Precisely where the ‘sub-continent’ exists, is never elaborated. The JAG held ‘Outside Inside’, curated by then director Julia Charlton. The nine artists were invited

> To make new works which engage critically with any aspect of the gallery.  
> The artists were encouraged to explore the form of installation.

Karel Nel chose to focus on the construction of power through place using government maps of high density areas. Durant Sihlali engaged with the momentous nature of the historical moment in a work that dealt with the institutional nature of the gallery space.

---

75 I received several entirely contradictory accounts of this project in my research. What seems to have taken place is that the site and materials were not ready at the designated time and Malangatana, perhaps in order to make a point, returned to Mozambique. He was then persuaded to return once provision had been made but I was unable to verify if the work had ever been completed. No one I interviewed could remember having actually seen the mural, which seems surprising if it was ninety metres long. It certainly does not exist in the Electric Workshop now.


and the denial of access to Black South Africans. Engaging in both a literal manner and as an indictment of their exclusion from the paradigms of Western art, the work comprised a passage which was divided onto three lengths entitled ‘dark days of death and destruction’, ‘more optimistic’, and ‘brilliant, strong, bold, reassuring’ referring to the periods before, during, and after the transformation identified with the electoral process.

By incorporating forms of art not usually found in South Africa’s art museums, Sihlali challenges assumptions about what is generally thought of as being art, and what is collected by and represented in art museums. He asserts the validity of traditional art forms of Black South Africans while acknowledging the influence of his Western art-historical training.78

Other memorable pieces were produced by Johannesburg conceptualists Willem Boshoff and Kendell Geers. Boshoff, whose art has been described as ‘pure conceptualism’, displayed his Blind Alphabe (1995). This artist takes between sixty and eighty words beginning with the designated letter, in this case B, and carves a sculpture in wood to represent the signified object of the word. The words selected are what Boshoff describes as ‘endangered species’, in that they are words that are found in the dictionary; but are not used in normal speech or writing.

The sculptures are then contained in metal mesh cover, the top of which has writing in Braille. Sighted people are prevented from opening the casings and must rely on blind guidance as to what word the sculpture is created to embody. The work’s Derridean play of the textual slippage between sight and site suggests an interaction with the location of the building and those excluded from it, both socially by apartheid and artistically by the Eurocentric Modernist hegemony. This reversal of the usual power relations between the included and excluded, or perhaps given the exhibition title those ‘inside’ and those

‘outside’, has obvious resonance with the political situation in South Africa. In Gordon Metz’s words,

Willem Boshoff – *Blind Alphabet* (source [www.onepeople.com/bosinterv.html](http://www.onepeople.com/bosinterv.html))

The margins must become the mainstream and vice-versa.\(^{79}\)

Kendell Geers is an individual who courts publicity and controversy in a way that tends to alienate a significant group of people.\(^{80}\) However, there is no doubt he is one of most effective artists in the country. His piece for the biennale showed Geers at his best – pursuing his own agenda defiantly, indicting artworld practice and convention, and provoking outraged conservative media opinion. His rejection of the framework for the biennale and his work for it clearly identified Geers as a champion of the civic nationalist tendency in his decisive rejection of any enabling possibilities to be gained from the inclusion of a representative sample, in terms of the population, of South African artists.

Geers had originally rejected the idea of a biennale, on grounds that South African artists and audiences should be exposed to contemporary international art before attempting to

\(^{79}\) Metz G. 1999: Interview with the author 28/04/99.

\(^{80}\) Geers’ work and persona is analyzed in the next chapter.
be considered on the same terms. The title of his piece drew the audience’s attention to his action, evoking a South African tradition of resistance to authority.

Geers’ *Title Withheld (Boycott)* of 1995 emptied one of the rooms at JAG of all its artworks – a gesture that was construed in some quarters as emphasizing the plight of the homeless. A conceptual reading of the piece would see the site of the work as the central room of a building designed by the colonial architect Edwin Lutyens. Lutyens, along with perhaps Herbert Baker, was the definitive colonial architect. He was responsible for what might be viewed retrospectively as the mausoleum of the British Empire – the Governors’ Palace in New Delhi. By displaying the room for what it was, Geers alluded to the institutional nature of the building and its historical function in the construction of the imperial vision. That this was at least partly predicated on the exclusion and denial of the ‘other’ made the gesture even more poignant. Artistically, a precedent for the gesture can be found in Piero Manzoni’s *The Spirit of the Artist* of 1959 or Robert Barry’s *Closed Gallery* that ‘opened’ ten years later.

The removal of the works from the room caused problems for the storage areas of the gallery, disrupting the smooth functioning of the gallery and focusing attention on how cultural history and politics are presented, showing the significance of absence and exclusion in its service to the present.

Geers was also responsible for what was undoubtedly the most impressive exhibition in the event as a whole – ‘Volatile Colonies’ at MuseumAfrica. With a minimal budget, Geers persuaded seven of the most innovative and important contemporary artists to participate. Geers described them as

> Connected by their experiences and relationships with the languages of art rather than by their ethnicity. Although able to survive in the centre, they are always aware of their own intrinsic differences in relation to that position. No

---

81 Geers was obviously of the view that South African art had moved on significantly in global terms in the two years between the first and second biennales, given his statement quoted at the start of this chapter.
longer content to be tolerated as victims, they are seizing control of their lives and art by setting trends rather than following. Their ethnic origins and experiences are transformed from an initial disadvantage into a weapon against the languages of art.82

The seven artists, Janine Antoni, Hany Armanious, Carlos Capelan, Ilya Kabakov, Philippe Parreno, Paul Ramirez-Jonas, and Rikrit Tiravanija, are linked by their birth outside of the mainstream Western centres; yet all now reside in First World capitals (Paris, New York, Sydney, Stockholm). They represent the voices of marginalized outsiders who deconstruct from within. Working in the conceptual tradition, they intervene in art practice and discourse, establishing a space for themselves that challenges the norms of contemporary art. While any of the above artists could be cited as an example, Tiravanija’s art exemplifies many of the concerns articulated by the others. Born in Argentina in 1961 of Thai parentage, but now resident in New York, he plays with artworld expectation and his ethnic origin. Perhaps his most notorious show involved himself cooking Thai food at the opening of his exhibition. The debris that resulted from this performance was then left untouched: plastic containers; decaying noodles; chopsticks. This then constituted the material body of the show. Tiravanija here reacts to the conventional nature of the artworld and its commodification. The fetishism of the object and the aura of the artist are considered in relation to the need for space in order to satisfy the economics of supply and demand. Tiravanija parodies the concept of eating the other, making himself available in easily consumable parts to ‘take away’. This comments on how the West prefers to consume the non-West, – in digestible parcels that can be bought, sold and consumed.83

Adjacent to the ‘Volatile Colonies’ show was ‘Objects of Defiance/Spaces of Contemplation’ curated by SANG’s Emma Bedford. Bedford attempts to postulate a cross-racial interrogation of feminist concerns, stating

83 The decay evidenced in the work could be read as relating to the wasteland of the urbanscape and the slow rotting of its society. Tiravanija’s interest in the hybrid dynamic of cities is evidenced by his rickshaw piece for the *Cities on the Move* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 1999.
It is alarming to note how few South Africans are concerned with gender issues. If the world is to be a more humane place, the realities of deprivation need to be confronted to ensure that all women have access to the support systems and resources that men enjoy.\textsuperscript{84}

Although there is absolutely no denying the need for greater emphasis on women’s rights in South Africa, once again we have an example of privileged White women pledging solidarity on a gender basis with their non-White counterparts. The enabling possibilities of feminist discourse in South Africa has been scarred by this practice and left itself open to accusations of positionality.\textsuperscript{85} It seems that White women are collapsing patriarchy into apartheid when in fact they were apartheid’s greatest supporters.\textsuperscript{86} White women benefited as directly as White men from the privileges and lifestyle that the pernicious system permitted them to enjoy. Given these differences, it is not surprising that this elision of oppression is never articulated by those who suffered most at apartheid’s expense – Black women.

Also in the MuseumAfrica was the exhibition ‘Cavewall to Canvas’, centring on KhoiSan artistic output. The problems of outsider curation were much in evidence in the ‘Miscast’ show at SANG in 1996, but here Catherina Scheepers-Meyer and David Morris presented the art sympathetically and with clear emphasis on the different backgrounds and origins of the individual artists, rather than collapsing them into a collective with a San or Bushman author-function. Juxtaposed with the work contained in the rock art collection, it brought attention to the marginalization of the region’s autochthonous inhabitants and acted as an affirmation of their artistic traditions. A clear individualization of the artists refused an ethnographic present categorization though the relationship between the

\textsuperscript{85} See later discussion in this chapter surrounding Grey Areas. 
\textsuperscript{86} In the last Whites only general election of 1992, the ruling National Party received 1,543,474 votes. 56.64\% of these were from women. The far right Conservative Party, who opposed even the limited reforms enacted by the NP, received 668,299 votes. 62.75\% of these were from women. The Democratic Party, the only major White party that opposed apartheid, received 119,611 votes. 38.5\% of these were from women. No other party received more than 100,000 votes. The statistics demonstrate unequivocally that, contrary to the attempted positionality articulated by some White women that apartheid was imposed by a form of patriarchal control that excluded them from power, women were fundamental to the perpetuation of the apartheid system.
contemporary work and the historic pieces was not problematized in its retention of the historic subject matter. This was probably an attempt at cultural affirmation by a much-marginalized group, but also fed the discourse that presents San culture as a historical leftover, unchanged by the passing of time.

On the top level of the Museum were photography shows ‘My Area’ and ‘No Limits – No Frontiers’ which concentrated on the diverse cultural production of what was then known as the Northern Transvaal. While this display brought to the art-going public’s attention a range of new artists, as well as some more established figures such as Johannes Maswanganye and Phuthuma Seoka, its framing text provided cliché as its context. The artist’s relationship to nature and ritual use of objects were emphasized that demonstrated all too readily the rural/urban divide. A more challenging presentation might have highlighted rural poverty and unemployment and the relationship to economic necessity that may have influenced form and content. A more interesting treatment of the objects was seen in ‘Africa Earthed’, which examined ceramic production in the country and questioned the art/craft divide as colonial and patriarchal in its hierarchy.

The national pavilions provided its usual mix of the good, the bad, and the ugly. The United States and the United Kingdom provided particularly weak contributions,87 which was bizarre at a time when more than ever New York remained the principal centre of value and validation and London was self-infatuated with BritArt. Nonetheless, several noteworthies made an appearance. France included Christian Boltanski and Bernard Lavier, Japan had Koji Abe and Chinese-born Cai Guo Qiang while South African Marlene Dumas returned as part of her adopted Netherlands offering. The African contribution showed the diversity of practice on the continent, including Ronald Hazoume and Calixte Dakpogan’s recycled sculptures created from urban waste and a series of remarkable pieces from the dynamic tradition of contemporary art in Senegal, here represented by Viye Diba, Moustapha Dime, and Souleymane Keita. Aside from these, the most impressive exhibitions came from the former frontline states. Zimbabwe

87 USA was represented by John Outterbridge and Betye Saar, while the UK had Mohini Chandra, Joy Gregory, Yve Lomax and Maud Sutler.
showed its diversity to those who would want to reduce its contemporary scene to 'Shona' sculpture, including Tapfuma Gutsa, Helen Lieros and Joseph Muzondo. Mozambique also demonstrated that it had moved on in some senses from its mural tradition of the immediate post-independence period. Alongside the more renowned Malangatana, Chissano, and Reinata Sadimba was Titos Mabote. His *Mutilado da Guerra* (1996) rendered in mixed media made explicit the damage inflicted on Mozambique by its more powerful neighbor which continues to affect the everyday life of people in that country in the form of a destroyed infrastructure and facilities and the ever-present danger of landmines, supplied to RENAMO by the South African Defence Force.

The most poignant exhibition was contributed by Angola. Paulo Kapela displayed his installations that focus on contradiction in the lived urban experience. Kinhasa-trained Lukulu Zola N’donga was represented by his wood carving while Francisco Van-Dunem showed his Miroesque canvases. A particularly startling piece was provided by Fernando Alvim.

..., ..., ..., ratatatatatatatabooooom..., ratatatatatatabooooom, boom..., boom: Is there anybody who was born in Angola during the 60’s who has never heard the whistling of bullets? Anybody? Who the hell...?88

Alvim’s art deals with constructs of memory and non-memory. Here his work deals with an autopsy of South Africa’s participation in the Angolan conflict. Contrasting the site of euphoric space and nationalism with a national identity born out of the ruins of conflict. War not just considered as lived experience; but the defining construct of what it is to be Angolan at the end of the twentieth century. Using the cultural traditions that have influenced the present hybrid identity, Alvim investigates images of power by removing the boundaries between the cultures and their visual imagery, perhaps to speak of the self. The spectator is confronted by the icons of Christianity and the Bakongo. In *New Project for a North-South exchange* (1994), Jesus is claimed and empowered by the supplement

---

of a nkisi shown with nails as in the minkisi nkondi. Referencing the Christian tradition, the conception of martyrdom is invoked. The double coding and the violence of making (and empowering) signify the dual aspects of the conflicting ideologies imposed on Angola. The basic tenets of Christianity are humanistic, yet its enforcement has been brutal and intolerant.

Perhaps Alvim was alluding to the status of Angola as the martyr of the Cold War. Long concluded in the rest of the world, Angola was the forgotten legacy. Unable to accept a Marxist orientated government in control of substantial oil and mineral reserves, the United States sponsored and organized terrorism against the MPLA government and the Angolan people. Operating primarily through its South African surrogate, the United States had been responsible for a seemingly unending conflict that has devastated the country. In Johannesburg, Alvim sought to counter the euphoria of the ‘rainbow’ nation, by emphasizing that apartheid’s legacy, and that of its Western backers, remains all too present and real for those in Angola.

Not that the Angolan government is excused. Marx, Lenin, and Guevara are juxtaposed with Vasco de Gama and Jesus in a catalogue of the various icons used to justify and propagate the suffering of its people. Skeletons and X-ray imagery remind the viewer of the starkness and brutality of everyday life and its numerous victims.

**Between the biennales**

Between the end of the first biennale and the start of the second, there were three important exhibitions that engaged the discourse of how South Africa projected itself to the world in: Lisbon; Berlin; and one that traversed North America. ‘Don’t Mess with Mister In-Between’ was held in Portugal in 1996, curated by Ruth Rosengarden, a woman of Portuguese origin who had grown up in South Africa. Rosengarden proclaimed that

---

89 The United States covertly assisted South African forces as a proxy agent against the Cuban presence in Angola – which was supported and condoned by the Soviet Union.
This event (the first biennale) served as a watershed and as a symbol, in that it proclaimed the legitimation of post-apartheid South Africa within global culture.90

Rosengarden rejected the dichotomy of apartheid and post-apartheid and refused to privilege the production of Black South Africans. Rosengarden recognized her privileged position as curator and stated:

My decision has not been to act as a tourist within the implicitly exotic (or curious, or ‘authentic’) terrain but to remain within the limits defined by Western traditions, by contemporary discourse. All the work chosen, therefore, falls within the parameter of Western artistic criteria.91

The implicit recognition of the exclusion of non-Western traditions from ‘contemporary discourse’ was problematic. While there undoubtedly had been significant marginalization of non-Western voices, the contributions of Said, Spivak, Soyinka, Bhabha, Hall and Gates had been fundamental in the negotiation of what might have been generalized as post-modernism. Also, the location of White South African artists within an undefined Western tradition smacks of the apartheid regime’s positioning and a very non-post-modernist rejection of place and context. Rosengarden contradicted this further on when she argued:

It was only in the 1980’s that there emerged in South Africa, critical forms of art that melded local content and an acknowledgement (or appropriation or invention) of ‘traditional’ art forms within the more conceptual framework afforded by points of contact with contemporary art in Europe and the USA...92

---

90 Rosengarden R. 1996: Entre Linhas (Don’t Mess with Mister In-Between), Lisbon, Culturgest, p.3.
91 Ibid. p.6-7.
92 Ibid. p.13.
Rosengarden chooses to locate the works selected in the context of hybridity, as defined by Bhabha. This is an interesting conception but one at odds with her comments on the Western tradition. It seems as if she was looking for a theoretical justification for moving beyond the culturally relativist model and for not mounting an ethnically representative exhibition.

'Panoramas of Passage' was a travelling show curated by Clive van den Berg, a lecturer in the Fine Art Department at Wits. Van den Berg, whose own practice centres on gay identity and subjectivity and its repression under the apartheid regime, was asked by the Meridian International Center in Washington to produce an archival record of the South African landscape tradition up until the start of the democratic era. Van den Berg sourced over a hundred pieces ranging from the imperial vision of Charles Bell and Thomas Baines through the construction of Afrikaner nationalism in the work of Pierneef and Coetzee to the tendentious Social(ist) Realist style linocuts of Bongiwe Dhlomo. The title, with its reference to the picturesque tradition, accurately reflected the colonial tradition from which the genre emerged. However, to have mounted an exhibition that disregarded or diminished the extent of colonial invention would have been to sever any understanding of its subversive employment by some artists in the anti-apartheid struggle. Therefore, the viewer was presented with Bell’s rolling landscapes that spoke of the availability of land and the rare presencing of Africans displayed for the colonial consumption as ‘noble savages’. Van den Berg describes this as a process of

The European who ... scans its perimeters, naming as he pleases, augmenting emptiness with wilful fantasy.94

The paintings of Pierneef and Coetzee are represented by Golden Gate and Sketch for a One and a Half Shilling Stamp respectively. These works dating from the highpoint of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930’s and 1940’s emphasize the affiliation to the land and its integral part in the creation of Afrikaans mythology. Coetzee dwells on the historic

---

93 I discuss the importance of this tradition in the next chapter.
94 Van den Berg C. 1995: Panoramas of Passage, Johannesburg, University of Witwatersrand, p.11.
events used to demonstrate the commitment to the land; the blood shed for its acquisition and preservation; the God given endorsement for their occupation.

It is in this context that the later work needs to be examined. The photographer, David Goldblatt, is one of the most effective at capturing the historical moment. His *Home Land* series ironically profiles the Afrikaner in the land, portraying alienation, poverty, and the inability to absorb change or its necessity.

In *Family on Trek in the Karoo* (1986), Goldblatt shows a family with a horse-drawn wagon juxtaposed with a national highway. The landscape depicted threatens to overwhelm the family carrying with sinister connotations of the unacknowledged vulnerability of their situation. Goldblatt tackles two of the core elements of the Afrikaner myth in this work. The wagon is an allusion to the (in)famous laager which consisted of a defensive military formation used in battle to face attack by numerous
enemy forces. Evoked by Afrikaner nationalists as a heroic episode\textsuperscript{95}, it was seen by many outsiders as exemplifying the mentality of insularity and closure to outside influences. Primarily though, Goldblatt parodies the Voortrek on which Afrikaner identity is dependent – The quest for the ‘promised land’ where they could be free of British influence and feel free to impose their will on the indigenous people without outside sanction or interference. This event, which is analyzed in the second chapter, was crucial in the self-portrayal of Afrikaners and the evolution of their identity. Here, Goldblatt shows how redundant such myths are in the context of the State of Emergency and the portrayal is undoubtedly one of a people desperately craving the ideologies of the past, ironically fixed in the ethnographic present that they tried to impose on the black population.

Works by artists Roger van Wyk and Marion Arnold use pictorial devices to illustrate the disruption to the mythic idyll portrayed in earlier works. Van Wyk appropriates the iconic elements of the genre – churches, Cape Dutch style housing, framing distant mountains. But here they are juxtaposed with land mines and hand grenades. Penny Siopis deconstructed the history painting tradition in her ‘struggle’ work and one of the most important pieces, *Piling Wreckage Upon Wreckage* (1989), was included. Siopis’ layering of paint turns the work into an almost sculptural piece, disrupting the two-dimensionality of the tradition and the *parergon*\textsuperscript{96} of establishing value. The title is taken from a quote of Walter Benjamin’s that speaks of the ‘Angel of History’. Here, Siopis takes the signifiers of Western social distinction, from diplomas to furniture, and those objects, European and African, that the colonial project set as markers of difference. Readings of this work might centre on the folly of the construction of a Eurocentric society in Africa and that the weight of history was now against it and that the price must be paid.

Bongiwe Dhlomo presents an alternative perspective in her *Removals* series, three of which were included in the exhibition. Linocut was an important medium of black art in

\textsuperscript{95} For instance, the Voortrekker Monument is surrounded by four wagons situated at each of the corners.

\textsuperscript{96} In the Derridean sense of a framing device that isolates the object and promotes it status.
the apartheid era, in that it required relatively few facilities to be produced and offered the possibility of commercial viability through the multiple copies that could be made and distributed to a wide audience. The small scale of the work and the cluttered pictorial space portray the reality of black urban life, emphasizing the lack of personal space that is readily apparent in the high-density areas. The titles of the works *Bulldoze the Blackspots* and *People were Living There* capture some of the misery of the forced removals policy. This continued up until the mid-eighties under the provision of the Group Areas Act and its amendments. The works show the didactic nature of the Social Realism style that was employed in the linocut medium by many politicized black artists. The use of linocut offered an affordable medium to the Black artist that could be used to create a series of prints that could be sold and that, artistically, lent itself well to the tendentious communication of messages by artists.

Although both *Panoramas of Passage* and *Entre Linhas* attempted to posit a non-racially based selection criteria, focusing on conception or genre as a suitable tool for the analysis of artistic production in South Africa, they drew criticism for their under representation of Black artists. Regina Woods described the landscape show in terms of

> Viewers were largely seeing history through the eyes of a select minority …

> The demographics of the represented artists were of apartheid South Africa and not of the present.97

What this was meant to refer to is uncertain, since obviously the demographics of the country remained almost identical to those of the apartheid years. This type of criticism formed the basis of the most controversial work on the *Colours* exhibition in Berlin in 1996. Again, it was Kendell Geers who was responsible for attracting media attention to the show at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt. Geers supplied three works for the exhibition, curated by Alfons Hug and Sabine Vogel, *Title Withheld (Kunst; Kitsch; Kultur; Kapital – 1996)*, *Title Withheld (Score – 1995/6)*, and the performance installation *Title Withheld (Masquerade – 1996)*. *Title Withheld (Score)*, which was first

---

mounted for the *Mayibuye* exhibition discussed earlier, divided the participant artists into the received categories of race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation with totals displayed of the various breakdowns and their sum. The overall total obviously exceeded the number of artists on display, with Geers making the point that identities are always multivalent and shifting and criticizing this as the sole filter through which South African art is viewed and validated. The work caused discomfort and controversy with the curators and gallery public whose expectations and value judgements were challenged. The piece was excluded. *Title Withheld (Kunst; Kitsch; Kultur; Kapital)*, a series of identical postcards showing Ndebele wall-painting, had the last two of these omitted from the show. The reason for this exclusion is more difficult to ascertain. The conception of this work related again to the classification of South African art and how it was influenced by the context of its display. Therefore, the same work could be considered as art, kitsch, culture, or economic capital. Perhaps, Geers was suggesting that this is how the artistic production of an individual becomes consumable for the Western art market, which is responsible for the classification and its connection to economic value.

Kendell Geers – *Title Withheld (Masquerade)* (source www.secession.at/art/1999_geers_e.html)
The work that attracted most attention was *Title Withheld (Masquerade)*, performed by Geers at the opening. Consisting materially of a combat jacket and a rubber mask of Nelson Mandela, Geers donned these in order to meet the then President. Despite the protests of onlookers and gallery officials, Geers completed the piece. This recalls Mandela’s gesture at the Rugby World Cup Final at Ellis Park in Johannesburg the previous year when he wore a Springbok (*Amabokkebokke*) jersey with a number six on the back (the number of the South African captain Francois Pienaar). This was extremely effective in garnering White support for Mandela, if not for the ANC, and was read in some circles as both giving approval to a overwhelmingly White team and claiming them for the nation. A reading of the Geers’ performance could be an attempt to deconstruct the status of the ‘rainbow nation’ and its personification, Nelson Mandela. In the context of masquerade a reading could focus on the tradition of mocking the status of public figures, particularly those placed on a pedestal, yet it could also be argued that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

Geers’ work was curatorally located within the paradigm of unified cultural product that uncritically juxtaposes traditional ‘gallery art’ with traditional ‘rural craft’. That this division is constructed along the urban/rural fault line is not in any way coincidental. The exhibition proposed an imaginary context of national production, with the nation state in its market role of author-function. In Berlin, this categorical collapse was seen with the art of Wayne Barker, Willie Bester, Moshekwa Langa and Pat Mautloa displayed with, for instance, the work of the Ndou brothers, Freddie Ramabulana and Johannes Segogela. The globalization of capitalism in general, and multi-nationals in particular was addressed in Wayne Barker’s *His and Her Mozambique*. This was the Mozambique of Bob Dylan, served up for Western spectacle yet susceptible to its financial whims. Barker portrays the ultimate international brand (Coca-Cola) as the frontline of this cultural exchange, questioning the sovereignty and independence of the Third World nations in this process. Global concerns were also articulated by Kay Hassan and Pat Mautloa in

---

98 Reviewers of the exhibition described Mandela’s reaction as humorous and participatory, Geers claims that it was definitely of the ‘we are not amused’ variety. (personal communication)

99 Moshekwa Langa and Willie Bester are discussed in chapters four and five respectively.
their *Mkhukhu-Shack* installation. Hassan and Mautloa re-created the archetypal Soweto urban space in the gallery space. Their materials were drawn not from the detritus of the South African cityscape but from the immediate area surrounding the gallery, deconstructing the expectation of the viewer and questioning the opposition between the First and Third World and its location.

The installation forced the visitor into an alienation, engaged in a struggle to be part of the once comfortable furniture of space, the attentive occupant was, in most case, forced to begin constructing or reflecting on his/her ethnicity in order to substitute for the loss of a feeling of social integration. The three exhibitions exemplify the positioning of South African practice and the intense desire by adherents of particular ideologies to support their perspective in terms of the construct of the nation, and more particularly in this context its representation both internally and externally. The first biennale and the exhibitions that took place both inside and outside the country had established a cultural discourse of the post-apartheid nation and its nationalism, which was unsuccessfully negotiating a path between the two opposing dialectics that sought to establish their will to presence – described at the outset as ‘ethno-nationalism’ and ‘Euro-nationalism’.

The construct of making the nationalist future present in the signifier of the rainbow meant that those

Entrusted with the nation’s culture find it impossible to put a face on the ‘new’ South Africa.101

The 2nd Johannesburg biennale

101 Ibid. I have used this quote in the sense of the idea of (re-)presenting the nation, the conception of the mask to at once embody and disguise the reality. The original quote comes from a review of a photography portrait exhibition at SANG.
The staging of the 2nd biennale may have been expected to reprise the idea of South Africa entering the global community of nations, with an emphasis on the role of culture in defining the post-apartheid ‘rainbow’ nation. Instead, it was an event whose influence still resounds in the South African contemporary art scene and challenged the Biennale structure throughout the artworld. In a bid to move away from the criticisms of White organizational dominance in the creation, conception, and running of its predecessor, the (mainly White) biennale committee selected Okwui Enwezor, a Nigerian based in New York, as Artistic Director. If Enwezor’s Blackness was supposed to allay criticism, the committee seriously misjudged the prevalent climate in the country. Unable to focus on race, critics played on the fact of his ‘foreignness’ and his status as an ‘outsider’. The overwhelming notion of national identity has resulted in a xenophobic construction of makwerekwere (literally foreigners in Zulu). The continuing influx of economic refugees into the urban areas of South Africa, particularly Johannesburg, has led to their identification with crime, drugs, and the prevention of employment opportunities for South Africans. One result of this is that the centre of Johannesburg has become a point of migration for the Southern African region in the widest sense and now fulfils the role of a regional capital in a way that Nairobi does for East Africa or Lagos for West Africa. Perhaps, this xenophobia is constructive for the nation constituted on the idea of ‘us’ and ‘them’, certainly it was invoked anytime people wanted to criticize the biennale, even to the extent of Enwezor being accused of arrogance for refusing to pander to this.

(Enwezor should have) assumed the cloak of our xenophobia before trampling on it – his lack of confidence in us has been both marginalizing and humiliating.

The title of the event, ‘Trade Routes: History and Geography’ alluded to the conception of the show. For Enwezor,

---

102 This is obviously not unique to South Africa, as the election of Haider in Austria and the debate around the nature of refugees in Britain and Italy has shown, but it has increased dramatically in the post-apartheid era.
103 Givon L., quoted in Mail & Guardian, 12-18 December 1997, p.68.
(The biennale) aims to examine this history of globalisation, by exploring how economic imperatives of the last five hundred years have produced resilient cultural fusions and disjunctions...

Of particular interest is how such redefinitions and reinventions have produced new temporalities and complex, cultural cuttings across race, nationality, and gender. To bring about pointed discussions around these issues, we will privilege works and artists who address both explicitly and conceptually new readings and renderings of citizenship and nationality, nations and nationalism, exile, immigration, technology, the city, indeterminacy, hybridity, while exploring the tensions between local and global.104

In order to realize this vision, Enwezor enlisted fellow curators, Kellie Jones, Hou Hanru, Gerardo Mosquera, Colin Richards, and Octavio Zaya. In addition to the art exhibitions, there was a film programme and a conference convened and organized by Olu Oguibe. Oguibe, fabulously described as Enwezor’s ‘bouncer’ by Candice Breitz, gave an insight into the underlying themes of the biennale when he stated,

South Africa was a most appropriate venue for (a biennale whose) ... very conception (was) in Brooklyn, New York.105

This comment identifies the fact that South Africa was a stage for the performance of the biennale. It was an attempt to hold an international exhibition on the African continent, which situated Africa accurately as part of the historical global trade network and inaccurately as part of the contemporary art global circuit. That it made little recognition of specific place other than as backdrop was a source of continual criticism from the


105 Oguibe O. 1998: History, Geography, and Culture in Atlantica 19, Winter 1998, p.188-190. I have juxtaposed two parts of the article. The original sentences are not sequential.

93
South African artworld that felt peripheral to its thrust. South Africa was viewed by Enwezor as a platform for his dialectic of neo-conceptualism as a foundation for an anti-artworld hegemonic art practice and discourse, which refused the branding of a post-modernist multi-cultural relativism. His avowedly and insistently intellectual approach corresponded with the stance adopted by Catherine David in the contemporaneous Documenta X. She memorably stated she was

Not entirely convinced that visual art is still of crucial importance to contemporary culture … what is more interesting than the works themselves is the emergence of numerous disruptive attitudes and practices as opposed to traditional production strategies.\(^{106}\)

However, while David privileged the Western politically engaged conceptual art of the sixties and seventies, Enwezor presented a post-colonial perspective exemplified by contemporary artists of non-Western origin. Transgressing the modernist construct of nation and the artistic notions of form and aesthetic, he proposed lines of inquiry that revolved on axes of migration and hybridity and their historical and geographical contexts. This approach brought a wealth of acclaim from the global artworld and was the definitive reason in Enwezor being invited to curate Documenta XI (2002) - undoubtedly the most prestigious and significant contemporary art event in the calendar.

The most important exhibition of the 90’s.\(^{107}\)

Avoided didactism in favo(u)r of work which was suggestive, layered and often surprisingly poetic.\(^{108}\)

Unfortunately, the local community failed to respond to the artworks selected and attendance figures were dismal. The failure of the Metropolitan Council to produce the

\(^{106}\) Quoted in Royoux J. 1997: Documenta X in Flash Art March/April 1997, p.86.


promised financing for the project meant that many of the educational and promotional features had to be downsized or scrapped altogether. Interestingly, the move away from the standard national pavilion model of biennales resulted in a substantial reduction in budget, which indicates that the preference of foreign governments, an important source of funding for Third World biennales, remained the previous model promoting the nation-state as a vehicle for financial and cultural interests.109

The funding crisis was such that the Council tried to close the event on several occasions and this was only prevented by fundraising and donations. The Department of Education refused to participate in an outreach program for schools, so even the numbers of schoolchildren attending was very small. The failure to engage the public was used by those within the South African artworld as an example of the alien nature of the biennale. The omission of those artists who work in a non-conceptual manner was criticized as elitist and as a repetition of the exclusionary aspects of Modernism. The inclusion of 'only' thirty-six South African artists, approximately a quarter of the one hundred and forty-seven on display, also provoked the ire of those who were not selected.

A more interesting critique might have focused on the need of the margin, as Enwezor conceived and portrayed it, to come to the centre for validation. For despite the critical inquiry into the nature of the artworld and its functioning, these artists and curators who identify themselves as being outside of the Western mainstream110 remain committed to viewing its centres as the arbitrators of value. Given the art world's co-option of the quintessential conceptual work, Duchamp's Fountain, the ready saleability of many neo-conceptual pieces, and the unashamedly visual nature of the work of the vast majority of self-styled conceptual artists, it is pertinent to question whether conceptual art retains the auto-subversive effects of the Dada group, or if it often simply maintains existing capital networks and acts as an affirmation rather than destabilization of the centre.

109 The biennale budget was originally $1.8 million dollars of which $700,000 was supposed to be provided by the city in contrast to $2.45 million for the 1st biennale with $1.12 million from the Council. Quoted in Heartney E. 1998, p.51.
110 It seems almost compulsory to identify oneself as being outside of White patriarchal heterosexist hegemony. "As a humanist whose background in the deprived geographies of the world..." (Oguibe 1997: Forsaken Geographies in DeBord (ed.), p.50.). I examine this quest for positionality further on.
The biennale itself was divided between two cities, with two exhibitions in Cape Town and four in Johannesburg. In the latter, the Newtown Cultural District again held the major exhibitions, though the nearby JAG was selected for the ‘Important and Exportant’ show curated by Gerardo Mosquera. Mosquera’s brief was to feature

Important artists whose works exhibit the complexities of contemporary artistic processes, serving as crucial influences in the work of young artists in different parts of the world.111

Mosquera’s pun on the notion of importance and its Modernist/universalist connotations reflects the narrow construction of the term, and its validation by critical and market networks that are directly related to the economic value. His stated intention was

To work inside the structures, but against the status quo, opening alleys for invasions.112

Rather than challenge the construction of value and its symbiotic relationship to the artworld power networks, Mosquera sought to articulate a space in the contemporary art canon for those artists ‘marginalized’ by point of origin, continuing the theme of promoting and legitimating the conceptual art production from outside the Western art centres.

Willem Boshoff presented The Writing that Fell off the Wall (1997), a series of fourteen regularly distanced white monolithic structures, encircled on the floor by words written in the seven European colonial languages of Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. The fourteen words were chosen by Boshoff as external conceptions that had been imposed on Africa: truth; identity; perfection; standard; limit; order; principle; faith; purpose; salvation; progress; destiny; reason; purity. Boshoff states

112 Ibid. p.153.
that the physical and conceptual boundaries of Africa have been decreed by the powers in the languages he has employed in this piece. The work functions as a memorial to the mythic icons of the Enlightenment and its successor, Modernism. On a formal level, the replication of the Minimalist aesthetic sculpture of the sixties recalls the climax of Modernism and its subversion, suggesting that although the West may have left its physical mark on the continent, in terms of the boundaries that it delineated and the monuments it constructed, the philosophical underpinning of the period has collapsed – leaving its debris for others to resolve. Another reading might focus on how Africa’s physical monuments are those that it was bequeathed by colonialism. The relative absence of new monuments from the post-independence/post-apartheid era undermining the building of a new order. The fourteen monoliths stand as a reminder of the colonial exploitation that was often imposed in the name of Christianity – evoking the Stations of the Cross that were a prime component of the received experience of the imperial aesthetic in Africa.113 The title of the work supports the Christian references in its similarity to the oft-portrayed subject of Balthazar’s feast and the ‘Writing on the Wall’. The wall in the title recalls the notion of boundary and the reference to that most infamous of walls in Berlin, used to detain people in their own country.

Boshoff was accompanied in the ‘Land’ half of the exhibition by Sophie Calle, Frederic Bruly Bouabre and Ana Mendieta. Bouabre had been consigned to the artworld categorization of contemporary African artist. His deceptively simple work had been considered within the framework that encompasses Congolese popular painting and the Oshogbo school. Here, Mosquera positions the artist outside of that frame, emphasizing his conceptual identity and importance to the development of

A de-Eurocentralized contemporary culture, constructed through a plurality of active perspectives.114

---

113 Religious imagery and iconography was often the first exposure of Africans to Western aesthetic styles. Hence, the proliferation of Christian images in the early colonial period. Even until independence, mission schools provided the bulk of Western artistic education amongst Blacks. In Southern Africa, notable examples are the Serima and Driefontein missions in the then Rhodesia and the Rorke’s Drift school in Natal.

114 Ibid. p.161.
Bouabre creates a personal intertextual space by establishing narratives on myths and signs expressed in a relationship between the text and the image, setting up a productive dialogue with the works of Boshoff and Calle. Ana Mendieta is an artist who died in 1985; but who has only recently been heralded by the artworld. Her work was a combination of diverse artistic practices that manifested themselves in the early Seventies, such as body art, land art and performance. Mosquera identifies her as an artist who could act as

A symbol for the future negotiations of Cuban trans-territorialized culture.\textsuperscript{115}

Her art was concerned with space, both positive and negative, about the establishing of presence and yet its absence. Critics have interpreted this as relating to her biographical history of forced migration from Cuba to the United States. Another reading might focus on the need for full presencing of identity. Unable to achieve this in the United States, a great deal of her work was site-specific pieces located in Mexico. In these she drew on the iconic signifiers of Christianity, particularly in the forms seen in a Cuban context. The use of cruciform silhouettes seems to see the body as a space of violence yet contrastingly its location in the landscape plays with the association of the female and nature. The presence/absence dichotomy of the work draws on the personification of the earth as female in Latin American culture; but also the absence of womens’ voices in society. Perhaps the most rewarding readings may be those identifying her as working in the Mexican feminist tradition of Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti, who both celebrated and critiqued the role women were societally constructed to play. Her influence on the use of the body/self in art has been increasingly influential in contemporary art – including in the South African context on the work of Tracey Rose, and particularly Berni Searle.

Mosquera’s show provided the historical contextualization for the main focus of the biennale, the ‘Alternating Currents’ exhibition at the Electric Workshop, curated by Enwezor and Octavio Zaya. The theoretical underpinning was defined by a challenge to

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
the triumphalism of the West in the wake of the Cold War, and in particular to the notion of the ‘End of History’ as articulated by Francis Fukuyama. Whilst the short-sightedness of the latter is readily apparent, it is arguable if the exhibition succeeded in its aims of overcoming the Eurocentric projection of history and culture. Enwezor and Zaya sought to achieve this by presenting artworks and artists who situated themselves in the space defined by the constructive nihilism of Lyotard. There was an air of mourning for the proliferation of multi-national capitalism. The patent desire was to critique this phenomenon by offering up perspectives on the historical and geographical constructions of globalization and identity and how this offered an alternative to the globalized economic vision.

The eighty-four artists selected for the show, including fifteen South Africans, provided an articulation of both the formation of hybrid identity and the preponderance of a neo-conceptual language in which this is articulated. The loss of home as the definitive standpoint of identity and meaning was a central theme tackled by diasporic artists such as Oladele Ajiboye Bamboye, Gordon Bleach, Stan Douglas, Olafur Eliasson, Salem Mekouria, Shirin Neshat and Vong Phaophanit. The creation and negotiation of the frontier as the space that defines the ‘other’, and consequently the self, was investigated in video by Douglas. Centring on the territory of Nutka (1996) where the Amerindians encountered the European presence that was to transform their lives, Douglas’ piece had a particular resonance with its sub-text of exclusion in one’s own land. Verwoed had stated when pressured by the international community to reform apartheid that it was Canada’s reservation system that had provided the model.

Bamboye opened a process of retrieval in his stills of Homeward: Bound (1996), which concerned itself with the double-binding nature of ‘home’. Bleach, Eliasson, and Mekouria used photography as a documentation process of the nature of home, and its presencing away from the territory, an identification that is often mediated in photographs. The cliched nature of the projections of other countries was referenced by Phaophanit’s Neon Rice Field (1995), which engaged with the intersection between what is held as tradition and the new, often associated with the local and global respectively.
Photography was also the medium of choice for Finn Eske Mannikko, Malian Seydou Keita, and South Africans Santu Mofokeng and Zwelethu Mthetwa. The emphasis in all four artists was on the pride of everyday people, depicted in their chosen manner and setting. Mannikko and Mthetwa celebrated the dignity of working people and many observers saw the parallel between the recording of domestic space. Keita provided an insight into people's self-depiction in the Bamako of the 1950's and linked with the archival works presented by Mofokeng, which he entitled the *Black Photo Album/Look at Me* (1996).

These pictures, which must have been taken at some considerable cost to the subjects, show a self-pride at a time when Black people were being repressed and devalued by the colonial and apartheid regimes. An interesting aspect of the works is the adoption of European dress by the subjects, something that became a significant issue in later years when, for instance, at the Rivonia trials, Nelson Mandela refused to wear a tie on the grounds that this would have represented his acceptance of an order that was part of the oligarchic system to which he was so opposed. Many have viewed his wearing of, what
might be termed, Afro-kitsch shirts as part of an ongoing refusal to submit to the imposed conventions of the West.

Perhaps the most influential artist of those included was the Cuban Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who was resident in New York until his death in 1996. Gonzalez-Torres was a seminal figure in the deconstruction of the gallery object as a fetishized commodity. He destabilized the uniqueness of the gallery object and played with notions of artistic aura. In *Untitled (Memorial Day Weekend)* of 1991, Gonzalez-Torres printed the three words onto sheets of paper that could be endlessly replenished by the gallery staff, therefore undermining the nature of the Modernist ‘work’ – by asserting authorship through conception and focusing on the spectator as participant. This (ironic?) celebration of the take-away culture with its signifier presaging the presencing of the sign, albeit without the ostentatious nature of ‘late’ capitalist shopping, is reflected in other works such as *Untitled (Welcome Back Heroes – 1991)* which was constituted of a two hundred pound pile of *Bazooka* bubble gums which are available for the audience to take-away.\(^{116}\) Possible readings of this work include the use of the spectacle of war for the consumption of the viewer/voter. The contemporaneous inference of the Gulf War suggests an interrogation of the hyperreality as articulated by Baudrillard. Gonzalez-Torres’ work has also been extremely influential in its exploration of the constructs of identity, without submitting to the ghettoization of status and closure of meaning that identity constructs have been used to perpetuate.

Another piece to attract particular attention was Coco Fusco’s performance piece that greeted audiences as they arrived at the exhibition. This consisted of Fusco and assistants demanding inspection of a Pass Book, purchased as an entry ticket, which was derived from the notorious Pass Laws that were only abolished by the apartheid government in 1986. As an American, many saw this as a crass gesture made by an outsider trying to ingratiate herself with a specific audience, but Fusco maintained that it was White South

\(^{116}\) The retrospective of Gonzalez-Torres’ work at the Serpentine Gallery in 2000 recreated this piece using Marks & Spencer’s éclairs!
Africans who felt threatened by this gesture whilst Blacks saw it in a more humorous light that put Whites in the position of being subject to apartheid-style authority.

South African artists included in this exhibition were: Wayne Barker; Andries Botha; Kendell Geers; Kay Hassan; Pat Mautloa; Santu Mofokeng; Zwelethu Mthethwa; Malcolm Payne; Jo Radcliffe; Joachim Schonfeldt; Penny Siopis; Jeremy Wafer; Sue Williamson. Whatever national sentiment or inflection that might have been identified in their work was elided into the curatorial thrust of the whole show. Some commentators bemoaned the integration of these artists into the international show. But surely the fact that these artists were able to appear in an exhibition with the artists considered to be of international standing such as, apart from those already mentioned, Wenda Gu, Abdoulaye Konate, Igor and Svetlana Kopystiansky, Marc Latamie, Shirin Nishrat, Gabriel Orozco and Marko Peljhan, without appearing naïve or exotic, indicates not only an acceptance of South Africa into the international art field but a wealth of talent to be exploited. Arguments revolved around an elitism that these artists, who had all appeared in overseas shows, represented and with what consequence for those excluded by the selection process. Unquestionably the dialectical positioning of the major exhibition of the biennale was in favour of individual advancement at the expense of wider community issues, something that could not be so readily posited for the South African-only part, ‘Graft’.

‘Graft’, curated by Wits lecturer Colin Richards, was situated outside the main biennale centre of Johannesburg, in Cape Town. The pervasiveness of Whiteness into language and culture is aptly illustrated by its local reference, ‘The Mother City’. The siting of this show and ‘Life’s Little Necessities’ outside of Johannesburg was not coincidental. Enwezor’s stated vision for the biennale was to investigate the space between reinventions and reconceptualizations of the constructs of race, gender and nationality. These two shows detract from his stated dynamic in that they were selected precisely on the grounds of gender and nationality – a type of artworld affirmative action. The locating of these two components in Cape Town enabled the event as a whole to have a more nationwide perspective, which theoretically should have reduced complaints about
the amount of funding designated for the Gauteng province. Furthermore, it ensured that the majority of international reviews would be concentrated on the Johannesburg side, since this is where the opening was staged. The majority of correspondents sent to the event did not travel to Cape Town. If Enwezor can be viewed as having focused on the international reception of the Biennale, in order to brighten his reputation as a rising star in the international art scene, then the relegation of these two exhibitions to the periphery is understandable.

Kellie Jones, the curator of 'Life's Little Necessities' has spoken of Enwezor's reluctance to agree to her vision of the exhibition, which mediated the changing and evolving nature of womanhood in response to globalizing currents. Many of the women selected were examples of the trans-national citizens that Enwezor favoured such as Zarina Bhinji, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons, Wangechi Mutu, and Fatimah Tuggar or Black Americans like Lorna Simpson, Jocelyn Taylor, and Pat Ward Williams. Perhaps the most interesting and pertinent piece was Taylor's video projection *Alien at Rest*.


117 Although the state component of the funding came predominately from the Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, there was some local ire at the continuation of the practice of funding cultural events in the metropole.
The three parts of this work are made up of the two outside frames showing a naked Taylor in the bath, ducking down into the water and then rising up to confront the viewer. The central frame shows Taylor striding confidently naked through New York. Her overt and blatant nudity unsettles the viewer and acts as a stark contrast to a literal interpretation of her situation as a naked woman in an urban context. Jones views this as an affront to the notion of the Black female body as a signifier of sexual experience, reclaiming subjectivity. The piece was inspired by a protest by Black South African women against their forced removal from so-called temporary dwellings—though some had lived there for more than ten years. In this context, their gesture of shedding their clothing acted as a powerful indication of both their vulnerability against the massive bulldozers that formed the backdrop and their will not to submit to authority.

Although somewhat peripheral to the central dynamic of the biennale, ‘Graft’ nonetheless provided the opportunity for many of the post-apartheid generation of artists to showcase their work. The title was multivalent in nature: suggesting the surgical skin grafting process necessary to transform the face of the old into the new; the element of work that was needed to effect such a transformation (and a hint of Richards belief in the importance of the labour process in art);\(^\text{118}\) and the reference to (White) foreboding about the client network and patronage nature of many African states that could manifest itself in the country. Richards’ selection included many artists who had studied or worked abroad such as Simeon Allen, Candice Breitz, Angela Ferreira, Moshekwa Langa, and Johannes Phokela. Also participating were Allan Alborough, Bridget Baker, Pitzo Chinzima, Maureen de Jager, Anton Karstel, Antoinette Murdoch, Tracey Rose, Marlaine Tosoni, and Sandile Zulu. The exhibition provided a launchpad for the careers of Alborough, Langa, Rose and Zulu who have since gone on to a series of overseas shows and prizes both inside and outside the country.\(^\text{119}\)

\(^\text{118}\) For instance, his own art that consists of painstakingly drawn pieces and his quote, “Painting, usually still ‘representative’ of all art of ambition.” (Richards C. 1997a: Graft, in Debord [ed.], p.235-6.)

\(^\text{119}\) Alborough has been selected as the Standard Bank Young Artist of 2000, Zulu won first prize at the Seychelles Biennale and was included in the Liberated Voices exhibition. Langa and Rose have appeared in a host of international exhibitions and have received significant attention in the art press. I examine their work elsewhere.
Particularly effective in the setting was Allen’s *The Jetty* that was situated in the entrance room to SANG. The piece questioned the processes that decide on the selection of work and its public accessibility by including some pieces within its screen of videotape and excluding others. Furthermore, videotape is available to view only by those who own a machine, highlighting the relationship between finance and access to information. The installation provided a post-apartheid reflection and refraction of Jane Alexander’s *Butcher Boys*[^120] (undoubtedly the Gallery’s most memorable work of the apartheid era and iconic within the canon of South African art). The chilling faces of the sculpture were now re-contextualized within the gallery setting, giving off an eerie cinematographic quality that celebrated and renewed their iconic standing. Allen claimed that the videotape included the scenes from the intense media coverage that surrounded the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, adding a haunting element to the piece that captured the moment of its time and offered readings concerning the nature of celebrity and, particularly celebrity death. This draws on the tradition of Warhol’s disaster series and his multiple screenprints of Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, and Jackie Kennedy. Here though the presence of celebrity is not apparent as spectacle but conveyed as information. Unable to be verify the knowledge of this factor the viewer, the relevance of the reality is subsumed by the hyperreal function of media spectacle. Allen’s contribution plays with the conceptual tradition of emphasizing the museum as context and determinant of meaning.

Antoinette Murdoch displayed *Gereformeer*, which centred on the transformation of the gallery space into a personal sacred space – perhaps playing on the religious-like sanctity of the museum and its status in the formation of status and culture. Various Christian ceremonial paraphernalia and references are incorporated within the installation: photographs of baptisms; christening bracelets; plastic wreaths. These are surrounded with wallpaper and blankets made from toilet paper. The objects themselves invest the space with the inference of domesticity, whilst the crudity and fragility of the material suggest a vulnerability and innocence that is easily soiled. Moreover, the use of the so-called craft tradition of Western art as an intrinsic element of this work highlights a

[^120]: I discuss this iconic work in the context of Alexander’s overall production in Chapter Five.
discrepancy in the display of South African art that undermines the ‘oneness’ of the tradition that is now proposed by the national institutions.

The reaction of the post-apartheid art hierarchies in the major museums, which remain largely similar to the apartheid hierarchies, to the collapse of the old order has been to collapse the categorization of visual culture from the perceived Western constructs of art and craft into a ‘Tributaries’ imitative, self-styled ‘democratic’ representation of the diverse traditions that make up the history, present and future of South African visual culture. Therefore, the display of ‘tribally’ labelled items of material culture alongside a painting by Robert Hodgins or an installation by Kay Hassan is a commonplace occurrence within the major South African art institutions. This policy of inclusivity, conceived as the polarity of the exclusion and exclusivity of the apartheid era, may be well-intentioned but is founded on dubious assumptions.

The Modernist conception of ‘art’ with its

Normal association with creative and imaginative, as a matter of classification, dates effectively from the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.¹²¹

Thomas McEvilley argues that,

The ideas underlying and surrounding the production of European art for the last several centuries have included the idea that the destiny of art is to embody the force of progress; the positive evaluation of innovation through which that progress is to be attained; an emphasis on individual sensibility as the medium through which that innovation is to be effected and a consequent elevation of the person of the artist to a stature above that of the artisan.¹²²

This ideal which privileged the innovative can be seen in the belief in the role of the avant-garde which dominated the Modernist era – though since exposed by historians like Rosalind Krauss as an essential tool of the market. Nonetheless, the conception that art should challenge the existing norms of both itself and society at large has been preserved. This has patently not been the case in the indigenous canon of visual culture, where the object, whether or not it was designed for aesthetic contemplation, has remained culturally affirmative. Of course, there are plentiful examples of European material culture that have acted in a similar way; but even in the field of haute couture where continual innovation is required to stimulate demand, there have been no exhibitions that juxtaposed its product with those of the visual arts. That this may be an omission in the standard of display, reflecting patriarchal or other oligarchic imposed hierarchies is an interesting line of inquiry. However, the tendency to collapse the art/craft boundaries is only applied in the context of non-Western art. This has resulted all too often in the promoting the type of cultural production that conforms to Western market expectation. The failure to mount any display that puts European art in the context of other contemporaneous forms of material culture, in contrast to the display of significant items of autochthonous art, such as rock painting or the Lydenburg heads (which inhabit the realm of ethnographic spectacle) makes a mockery of the policy of ‘democratic’ visual culture and retains and affirms the colonial hierarchies that are the galleries’ stated aims to deconstruct.

**Speaking for the Other**

Indeed, it was one of SANG’s exhibitions, together with the work of the artist Candice Breitz in the ‘Graft’ exhibition that was the focus of a series of heated debates that grew out of the biennale conference. The controversy had as its centre a text by Okwui Enwezor, entitled ‘Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and fantasy in contemporary South African Art’, which was originally published in the catalogue of an exhibition that travelled throughout Norway under the heading ‘Contemporary Art from South Africa’.

The show contained works by thirteen artists, including Norwegian exile Ernst de Jong. Whilst some of the individual works by Kentridge, Koloane, Mthetwa and Siopis were important pieces, their works gained little through juxtaposition with Velaphi Mzimba, Helen Sebidi, Martin Tose or Lukas van Vuuren. At best, the exhibition could be described as presenting the diversity of primarily two-dimensional work within the four main urban centres in the country. This exhibition and the accompanying texts were brought to the attention of the South African audience by Kendell Geers in his review for *The Star* newspaper. Geers, with his penchant for headline-grabbing, represented Enwezor’s perspective as being that the work of many White South African women artists was “Patronizing and essentially racist”.

This reductive assessment was supplemented by a polemical essay by Olu Oguibe. Entitled ‘Beyond Visual Pleasures: A Brief Reflection on the Work of Contemporary African Women Artists’, the text engaged with the issue of gender identity as manifested in the work of woman artists both on the continent and in the diaspora. Oguibe then contrasted the presentation of gender in the works of some of these artists with that of South African women. Having placed the *A Few South Africans* series (1984-5) by Sue Williamson on a pedestal with the draughtsmanship of Helen Sebidi124, Oguibe criticized the use of photographic imagery in the work of Penny Siopis though seeming somewhat ambivalent about her (anti-) History painting series. The criticism focused on use of the Black body and its representation in the Eurocentric construction of history being incorporated within the works of the White artist. However, this was mild when compared to the invective launched against Candice Breitz and Minette Vari. Oguibe describes their art as being

> The art of hatred and violence125

And continues that

124 This is a prime example of what Albie Sachs called ‘solidarity criticism’.
She (Breitz) does not figure them in order to identify with them; she figures them in order to put them down.

With Vari we have another example of a woman artist whose work concerns itself with women, an artist in whose work we locate what we might call a gendered vision. Yet this vision is problematized by its racial and political specifics as by its employment of a gendered rhetoric. It neither empowers the women that it figures, nor does it empathize with them. Instead it objectifies them, and cannibalizes them.126

The crux of Oguibe’s diatribe is that the use of the Black body is a process of abjection, caused by the a priori notion that the Black body is (re-)presented for White spectacle and consumption, something that is also central is Enwezor’s argument. Enwezor conflates the abjecting of the Black subject with the conceptualization of fixity, as theorized by Homi Bhabha.

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated ... as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved.127

---

126 Ibid.
This passage becomes the basis for Enwezor's argument. Identifying the use of old photographic images of Africans in the work of White artists as a sign of the desire for fixity in the context of the representation of the other, Enwezor asserts the intentionality of the artist as antagonistic to the ideal of the rainbow nation and in the service of "Wounded Whiteness" and "separatism under disguise". Furthermore, he utilizes Bhabha's theory of anxious repetition in terms of the use of colonial photographs.

Penny Siopis paints over them and drapes them with assorted paraphernalia. She sentimentalizes her images, turning them into over-aestheticised vessels for pleasurable consumption. Candice Breitz whites them out, decapitates and attempts an unsuccessful hybridisation of the bodies of Black and White women in a state of falsely mediated sisterhood.

Although there is brief mention of Wayne Barker, Enwezor's targets in this text, like Oguibe, are the White women artists who he postulates as being subject to the 'doing it for daddy' syndrome.

The subjectivity and desire of the White woman is much attached and closer to White patriarchy and its desubjectivisation of both Black men and women.

This is a contentious thesis, but one that can be supported in a South African context. As earlier stated, feminism and cross-racial gender identification has always been advocated by the White liberal. Since the demise of the apartheid system, it has become routine for White women to seek positionality by dwelling on the patriarchal aspects of the

---

128 This analysis of Enwezor's text draws substantially on some of the arguments outlined by Axel. I have used his outline of the discursively contradictory nature of Enwezor's text in order to demonstrate the semantic differences between his writing and curating, as well as using Bourdieu's citation of cultural capital in reference to Enwezor, Geers, and Oguibe.
130 Ibid. p.27-28.
132 Enwezor 1997, p.32.
apartheid regime, eliding their status with those who were marginalized and brutalized by the previous system. Enwezor and Oguibe indicate this, the former citing Fanon in saying

You come too late, much too late. There will always be a world – a White world – between you and us.\(^{133}\)

Unfortunately, Enwezor embellishes his account with fetishized imaginings of White desire, which pander to the stereotype he so roundly criticizes, in his mention of the Broederbond and an anecdotal neighbour who unfurls the flag of the Boer republics as a matter of duty every weekend. Indeed, his comparison with the nostalgia for the Confederacy flag in the southern United States is informative, since it displays the map of the discourse which he has chosen to transpose to the territory where he stages his field of operations. The charge of the inability to represent outside of the stereotype is derived from debates that surrounded the portrayal, depiction, and (re-)presentation of First Nation people in the United States. While it may have been useful in that distinct context, its transferral to South Africa is problematic. Where it perhaps does serve a purpose is in the critique of the Bushmen exhibit held at SANG.

Entitled Miscast: Negotiating the Bushmen Identity in South Africa, it was curated by Pippa Skotnes. Skotnes has appropriated Bushman\(^{134}\) imagery in her own work, with uncertain purpose, in what might be viewed as a cynical attempt to place a claim on these works in the name of the canon of South African art. The catalogue that accompanied the spectacle contained the views of fifteen White contributors, whilst the Bushman voice was confined to the margin of colonial translations. Contemporary Bushmen who were invited to the opening were outraged at what they perceived to be the continuation of the practice of their own history being written without consultation and in terms that they themselves viewed as demeaning. One element that was particularly singled out was the linoleum carpet composed of Bushmen figures that the visitor was required to walk upon

\(^{133}\) Fanon F. 1939: The Wretched of the Earth, p.39, quoted in Enwezor 1997, p.31.

\(^{134}\) Although the term is problematic, it has been rehabilitated to a certain extent as Khoi-San, or one of its variations, has become somewhat tarnished.
in a sanctimonious gesture of complicity with their persecution. Others included the porno-scientific display of naked individuals and body parts. If this was intended to show the violence that had been perpetrated towards these people, it did so by continuing the practice. Perhaps the most productive aspect of the exhibition was that at the conference that followed, the invited Bushmen used the opportunity to restate their claims for greater recognition of land rights.

Enwezor’s criticisms of this exhibition are well-founded and it is possible to empathize with his citation of “anxious repetition” in this instance. Where it becomes open to question is in his juxtaposing of this exhibit with the work of Breitz and Siopis. Siopis had first used the figure of Saartjie Baartman in her anti-history series of the late eighties, though she also appeared in later work. Given the strong tradition of the history painting genre in Western art history, usually employed in the service of the regime, Siopis attempted to formulate what might be understood as a ‘reverse genre’ (after Foucault) as a critique of the regime and art history’s part in its propaganda. A precedent for this could be identified in the *Brutus* work of Jacques-Louis David that was painted in the dying years of the Ancien Regime in France. Siopis’ highlighting of the plight of Saartjie Baartman contributed significantly to awareness of her fate and the post-apartheid campaign to have her remains restored to South Africa. Yet, Enwezor sees her gesture as a representational decapitation that echoes the historical pathology that served up her body for pseudo-scientific enquiry of the day. It is here that Enwezor displays his collapse of the representational into the literal, defining White artists’ portrayal of the Black body as symptomatic of their (negative) view of the new order, and the Rainbow Nation project in particular. Axel identifies this in his critique of Enwezor’s desire for totality, stating,

The art product would become a substitute for the very thing it is supposed to represent (the putative *presence* of the national subject) in such a way that the represented ‘reality’ seems to speak: a movement, thus, from the production of art to nationalist mnemotechnique. And in speaking, the subject, *contra* Lacanian theory, would not be decentred by the very nature of language (or
vision), and its desire, the expression of national integrity, would be fulfilled.135

This perspective returns us to the making of the nation state and its need for full presence to maintain its sovereignty. Enwezor criticizes those artists who disrupt the wholeness of the black body since this undermines the full presencing of the Rainbow Nation, problematically identified as the predominately male Black body, reviving a Modernist, or even pre-Modernist conception of the body as metonymical to the state. This contention is devalued by his own biennale that sought to assert a globalized post-colonial perspective that problematized the nation state, nationality, and nationalism. Indeed, Enwezor has continually warned against the essentialism of pan-Africanism and its function as a totalized Black identity, something he alludes to at the end of his text.

In proposing a re-examination of certain facts lodged in the iconographical heart of South Africa, in a delimited forum of Whiteness as a nation unto itself, ought we not to admit that also, that it is the reappropriation of blackness as a nationalistic emblem, a fantasy of the coherence of African identity, that has set up the oppositional measures against the “Rainbow Nation”?136

Having identified the two dialectics that contest the terrain of nationalism in South Africa, it is straightforward to see Enwezor’s positioning within the ethno-nationalist camp in respect of his text, yet his concern with the denial of fixity and the focus on hybridity and migration in the conception of the biennale contradict this stance and adhere to arguments advanced in favour of Euro-nationalism. It is this paradoxical position that has enabled those marginalized by the biennale to criticize the event in terms of his, and his supporters’ texts.

136 Enwezor 1997, p.32.
The tone of post-apartheid South Africa is both introverted and xenophobic. Localized issues are dominant, not global concerns, and least of all, any ideas of transnationalism.\textsuperscript{137}

South Africa’s expectation in the post-apartheid era had been conditioned to that of an open-arms welcome from the rest of world. Mandela, and to a lesser extent other long term detainees and exiles, have been feted throughout the world for their commitment to reconciliation and their ability to maintain their dignity and perspective even when threatened by major political and economic powers. In sport, undoubtedly the most significant arena for the majority of the population, South Africa made a triumphant return in football, the major sport of the Black population, by winning the African Nations Cup in 1996, while the rugby side that won the World Cup a year earlier showed that there was the potential for the whole country to unite behind what was always considered a preserve of the White, predominately Afrikaans, establishment. In cultural terms, there were willing audiences abroad for anything from Cape Jazz to Kwaito, and Athol Fugard’s plays, amongst others, have retained their popularity in spite of the end of the struggle. Artistically, South Africa had been well received at the Venice Biennale of 1993, and had been the subject, as is detailed above, of a substantial number of overseas exhibitions. The first biennale had heralded South Africa’s return to the international cultural fold by reflecting the diversity of cultural practice in the country, when with a few notable exceptions the overall quality of the international representation was weak. In contrast, the second biennale had brought to the South African stage for the first time, the luminaries of the international art scene in a ground breaking exhibition that was highlighted as one of the most significant of recent times. South African artists made a considerable contribution to this, supplying roughly a quarter of the artists who were selected – providing the launchpad for the careers of artists like Moshekwa Langa, Tracey Rose, and Sandile Zulu. Yet, the South African artworld and press preferred to focus on the fact that some had been excluded and that the exhibition had been curated by a foreigner. Many South Africans failed to respond to the more sombre tone, which side-stepped the euphoric spectacle that had been present in the first international events that

followed the demise of apartheid. The failure of South Africa to ‘win’ the biennale alienated the public, and sounded the death knell for the future of the event.

Liberated Voices?
With the demise of the biennales as a showcase for South African artists, overseas opportunities have become ever more sought after. While many have achieved acclaim through individual shows, the construct of the national show has become as redundant, in cultural and social terms, as its rainbow prefix. Nevertheless, due to the economic imperatives that it engender and the continuing demand for presence the nation state asserts, there have been three significant exhibitions selected around the notion of nationality. Two of these can be considered as counterparts since they sought to portray the euphoric moment that the post-apartheid era is taken to embody. The first of these indicted this euphoric presencing in its title, ‘Liberated Voices’, in a patent attempt to imag(in)e the ‘reverse’ nation of the pre-apartheid era in the body of the ‘new’ South Africa.

Richards asserts the importance of nationalism in creating ‘identity’, which he defines as the effort to construct or reconstruct the self, and sees reflected in South African ‘nation-building’ efforts. This kind of nationalism also reclaims the individual’s history. The present site of the struggle, then, is the person who can construct, or reconstruct, the South African cultural identity.138

As discussed before, the bid to construct this imagined community at a time when capital forces had moved beyond the confines of the nation state was problematic. Interestingly, D’Amato, following Richards, seeks to perform the same metonymical collapse of the body of the nation into the literal body that was desired by Enwezor. Economic considerations aside, the exhibition imagined the Rainbow Nation as the non-racially defined paradise that exists for a multitude of reasons in the United States for the
majority of liberals and more widely within the Black community. An absence of any recognition of the continuity of apartheid structures on an economic, social, and political level marked the exhibition. Indeed, the show explicitly contrasted the political production of the apartheid era with the overtly non-political work of the post-apartheid era. Yet D'Amato asserts that the conceptual framework of the 2nd biennale could easily be equated with the resistance aesthetic of South African artists, who were dealing conceptually with the same issues as other contemporary artists.  

This text contradicts the curatorial thrust of the exhibition since, by D'Amato’s own definition, what might be generalized as the resistance aesthetic is

A concept involving artists who take an active role, through a critical discourse, to effect change – be it political and social or aesthetic and cultural – in the status quo.

The resistance aesthetic with its obvious debt to the tradition of early Socialist Realism can hardly be compared to the prevailing artistic climate of the late seventies and eighties in the rest of the world, when even in the Eastern Bloc, politically engaged art was viewed as formulaic. While, it could be argued that certain individuals such as Boshoff and Payne expressed their opposition to the system in a conceptual manner, this owed more to the influence of the Conceptual artists of the late sixties and early seventies than any of their later international contemporaries. Indeed, the fashion in the Western art world during the eighties was predominately for the realism in its neo or super manifestations or for the pastiche that was identified with artists such as Jeff Koons.

---

139 Ibid. p.48.
140 Ibid. p.43.
The artists whose work was selected for the exhibition could be defined in identity terms as being either Black male or White female artists, the exceptions being Paul Stopforth and Cape Town artist Brett Murray. This offered a bizarre parallel with the conference at the Second Biennale that degenerated into a competition between these two groups as to who was the most authentic voice of Black female concerns. It might be argued by the curator that this was unintentional since both groupings contained established artists such as Bester and Koloane, and Siopis and Williamson, as well as more up and coming practitioners like Mnisi and Zulu, and Baker and Schreders. This show, which opened in New York at the Museum of African Art and later travelled to a range of destinations throughout the country, had a local counterpart in Emergence, which opened to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Standard Bank Grahamstown festival. The festival is attended by an almost exclusively by South Africans – partly because it takes place in the southern hemisphere winter of June and July. The show then moved to Port Elizabeth, Durban, and Johannesburg where it attracted a wider cross-section of people, but not to Cape Town, since SANG was unable to reach agreement with the organizers. This was unfortunate in that the exhibition made a genuine attempt to reflect the changing state of the visual arts over the past quarter century. Though the twenty-five year time plan was conceived in reference to the existence of the festival, the year 1975, or more accurately 1976, marked a significant departure in the cultural and political landscape of the country. This is most obviously crystalized in the events of 16 June 1976, which reflected the state’s increasingly oppressive reaction to the rising tide of Black Consciousness. However, the year is also significant for the introduction of television to the country. Whilst in the first few years, this was the preserve of the White elite, its influence throughout the decade of the eighties grew to the mass media status that it represents in much of the world. Indeed, the significance of these two events is intensely related to the outside conception of South Africa and, in turn, its own awareness of global events and concerns.

The curators of Emergence were Julia Charlton and Fiona Rankin-Smith, in consultation with Marion Arnold. While it was inopportune, given the historical moment, to select
three White women as the curators, it was at least acknowledged in the opening statement of the pamphlet and ‘catalogue’.

The field of South African art practice over the last 25 years is vast, and it was not our intention, nor is it possible, to be representative. We fully acknowledge that the selection of artists and themes bears the stamp of our personal and social histories.\textsuperscript{141}

Charlton and Rankin-Smith divided the exhibition into seven themes, which reflected the subject matter that the piece concerned itself with. These were: Politics, ideas and the emergence of contemporary South African art; Charting terrain; Telling and remembering; Identity and the artist; Classification: ART/craft; Mind Mapping; Spirituality and religion. The largest section was the first. Here the curators focused on specific events such as Biko’s death that defined the era with pieces by Paul Stopforth, \textit{Biko I and II} (1980), which were rejected from the Valpariso Biennale mentioned earlier, and Sam Nhlengethwa’s \textit{It left him cold} (1990), as well as more generally conceived works, such as the photomontage series of Jane Alexander that incorporated \textit{The Butcher Boys} (a loan of the original could not be negotiated from the National Gallery), and Sue Williamson’s \textit{Wet Bag technique} (1998) that dealt with a demonstration during the TRC hearings of how this particular form of torture was utilized. In the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, which is a notoriously bad venue for the hanging and contemplation of art works, this section was lit by strobe lighting which added a clinical, stark nature to the works displayed and (deliberately) made the images difficult to view. This imitation of hospital style starkness echoed the tradition of the sick society that could only produce art of the same, something that was integral to the work of many ‘resistance’ artists.

Karoo (1986) showed diverse treatments of South African responses to the environment. A politically engaged understanding of this section might focus on how responses were governed emotionally and in terms of medium by the racial positioning of the respective practionners. Whereas Schoeman’s decoration of his rickshaw or karretjie was primarily governed by economic impulses – the need to differentiate his vehicle from other operators – the work of the other artists can be understood with the gallery setting in mind. Another artist included in this section was Nukwin Mabusa, whose painted garden showed a remarkable commitment to the land over an extended period.
‘Identity and the artist’ contained Thomas Kgope’s Africa (1986), which was used on promotional literature for the show. Kgope’s treatment is a two-dimensional understanding of the continent in terms of the figure of a Black woman, alluding to the identification of the continent with the concept of ‘Mother Africa’. This somewhat stereotypical vision of the fecundity of the land and its people was reinforced by the inclusion of an Ndebele wall-design in the top corner and the representation of various figures in a village environment.

The highlighting of this piece merely emphasised White/Western constructions of Africa, and seemed to be presented uncritically in terms of any understanding of the role of White patronage of the arts and its determination of subject matter. This stress on ‘tribal’ identities was accentuated by the inclusion of Sandile Goje’s Circumcision School (1993), which dealt with rites undertaken by the Xhosa in early adulthood. The juxtaposition of these pieces with a work by Hentie van der Merwe’s Portrait (1997) was crude. Portrait displayed army recruits’ pictures in a mediation on the homoerotic elements of the naked display of young men. The work posed questions about the nature of the army as a male-dominated force that denied and repressed any sexual activity between its members. The accompanying texts collapsed the repression of identity under apartheid into a privileging of the White, male, heterosexist position while absolving others of complicity. Given the gender of the curators and the sexual orientation of one of the selectors, this seemed again to seek the victim positioning that was criticized above.

The curators’ stamp was readily apparent in ‘Classification’, something that was perhaps unsurprising given Arnold’s many articles on the subject and Rankin-Smith’s position as the director of the Gertrude Posel collection at the University of Witswatersrand. The problems of the simplistic collapse of the categorization process have already been discussed, but what was darkly amusing in the Albany hanging was the obscuring of an interesting painting by Bongi Dhlomo, entitled African Art (c.1992), which depicted a headrest (an important source of material culture amongst many Southern African ethnic groups). The work offered the deliciously ambivalent readings of the categorization of the piece as craft under the colonial aegis, or at best differentiating the work from the
Western tradition of ‘fine art’ by prefixing ‘African’ as part of the categorization. Alternatively, given Dhlomo’s political work as a linocut artist in the struggle, the painting could be viewed as alluding to the safety of this tradition that has been used under separatist ideology to indicate the different nature of African art and Africans through the citation of the ‘noble savage’ construct. In Grahamstown, spectators were unable to view the work clearly due to the hanging immediately behind a cabinet containing the pottery of Bonnie Ntshalishali and Faye Halstead-Banning. This made consideration of the Dhlomo piece difficult and raised questions about the status given to the work in the context of the exhibition. The purely unchallenging culturally enforcing nature of the ceramics that were adjacent to the work, if anything, highlighted the reasons why certain critics and practitioners on both sides of the art/craft divide argue for some form of retention of the categories.

Another piece within this section was Deborah Bell’s *Journey* (1998), which appropriated the form of a Mengbetu funerary sculpture and synthesized it with incisions reminiscent of Nguni earthenware to form a totalized image that was female, in contrast to the Mengbetu tradition of using males for this type of customary piece. This feminist reworking of a tradition by an individual alien to the sophisticated cultural system of the Central African group smacked of Western arrogance, while the gesture of national acculturation in the inclusion of Zulu-style scarifications seemed to conform to the criticisms levelled at White artists in the ‘speaking for the other’ debate.

‘Mind-Mapping’ was an engagement with conceptual strategies that had been employed in the period. Willem Boshoff, Alan Crump, and Berni Searle were among the artists selected for this element, but perhaps the most interesting piece was provided by Neil Goedhals. Goedhals was one of the first of the younger generation to adopt conceptual practice and his work was a considerable influence on artists such as Wayne Barker and Kendell Geers, but died before his reputation was established. Here, his *Cul de Sac* (1990) was his degree certificate from Wits in Fine Art that has been partly painted over with a monochromatic representation of a traffic sign. The gesture undermines the significance of the award and its purpose, questioning the status of the institution and its
role as a determiner of value. This theme is continued by the addition of the artist’s signature that acts as an authentication and marker of value of the work. Here, it competes for authority with the signatures of the Principal and the Registrar. The obscuring of the grade attained only adds to the sense of futility that the work conveys.

‘Telling and Remembering’ had great potential in its allusion both to the oral tradition of indigenous societies in framing the past and more importantly its use in the present, and the TRC hearings that were ongoing at the time, but like the exhibition as a whole, the work selected did not generally advance the textual arguments contained in the exhibition. Penny Siopis’ video work My Lovely Day (1997) offered a personal perspective that showed how the history of the nation might be constructed in the twenty-first century in terms of subjective accounts of individuals as opposed to the quest for linear meta-narratives.

**Conclusion**

Emergence within South Africa and particularly Liberated Voices abroad seemed to signify the closure of the ‘rainbow nation’ as the primary filter through which South African art is viewed both externally and internally. The quest to depict the reverse nation in the body of the post-apartheid society remains an imaginary one that appears ahistorical in the twenty-first century where the nation-state’s identity and will to presence have been undermined by the processes of globalization and the individual and collective reactions to it. Throughout the last decade, the space of nationalism has been contested, largely between the two polarities outlined at the outset. The representation of the nation has continued and will continue to be a battleground between adherents of the two dialectics – since it embodies and disguises a fundamental difference in how the nation should attempt to construct the past, present, and future.

\[142\] In fact, the various ten-year commemorative exhibitions held in 2004, such as A Decade of Democracy at the SANG, New Identities in Bochum, and Personal Affects in New York provided a further chance to refigure many of these issues and debates.
In the political arena, the identity divisions of the apartheid era have resurfaced in the second and third democratic elections in 1999 and 2004, replacing the unity and cross-community solidarity that was clear in the heady days of 1994 and its aftermath. In sport, an area of immense importance in the cementing of national identities, the nation has been scarred by its failure to secure the hosting of either the 2004 Olympics or the 2006 World Cup; the Hansie Cronje affair; the continual debates around the persistence of quotas for teams representing the nation have raised many questions about the role and desire for the presencing of the nation.

Culturally, the surety of the euphoric vision of the first biennale and contemporaneous exhibitions has been undermined by the questions asked by its successor and the controversies that emanated from it. South Africa is unsure of what type of nationalist vision, or non-nationalist vision, it wants to subscribe to and be identified with by foreigners – in the region, in the continent, in the West and the world as a whole.

Given the inherent difficulties in attempting to construct a national identity and national representation at this historical point, it was and is necessary to have an almost universal ownership, in the nation, for the vision of what should be to come. For everyone to see a rainbow, they must be facing the mist in front with the sun behind them. At this juncture it is impossible to say that South Africans are facing in that same direction.

---

143 See previous chapter.
The next two chapters analyze how individual artists have responded to the imagined community of the nation in South Africa, and specifically, its post-apartheid manifestation. As has been argued in previous chapters, the nation-state has been attempting to achieve its presencing at a historic point: when this structure is no longer integral to the base needs of capital; and when increased globalization has raised the possibility of many alternative formations of community and self-identity. The desire to embody the reverse nation of the ‘struggle’ era, which had been constructed as a resistance identity to the dominant legitimizing identity of apartheid, in the post-apartheid nation has led to the competing nationalist dialectics of ethno-nationalism and civic nationalism contesting the map of nationalism that has become dominant in the ‘new’ South Africa. The vision of the ‘rainbow’ nation that attempted to exclude ethno-nationalisms and regional affiliation remains a utopia located over the future’s horizon. While the project retains currency with an intellectual and politicized elite of all races, it had failed to achieve its presencing by the end of the Mandela presidency in 1999. Although haunted by the legacies of the segregation era, politicians have come to increasingly represent racially defined constituencies.

Whilst it would be misleading to view artists as representative of their communities, race is the dominant awareness in terms of the self and others in South Africa. The debate around the depiction of the other has amply indicated the difficulties inherent in ‘speaking for’ individuals or communities that refuse identity with the speaker. It is intriguing to see how difference emerges in artists’ treatment of historical and contemporary events, and in the reception of their works both inside the country and abroad. This analysis will be grouped in terms of the artists from the two major urban conglomerations in South Africa that are also dominant in terms of the expression of economic, social and cultural significance: Johannesburg and Cape Town.
The failure of the ‘rainbow nation’ to establish itself as a totalising meta-narrative of the appropriate representation of the ‘new’ South Africa has divided artists between the dialectical poles of ‘ethno-nationalism’ and ‘Euro-nationalism’. As evidenced in the previous chapter, South Africa’s self-presentation and, particularly, its presentation to the rest of the world have supported the ‘rainbowist’ vision from an Africanist standpoint. Most exhibitions have been assiduous in assuring that the racial make-up of the artists on show is reflective of the make-up of the South African population. Often this categorisation has been in the terms of the, largely Western, countries where national group shows have been staged. This provides a convenient gerrymander that divides artists into White and non-White, as opposed to using South African constructions of racial identity, and allows curators to fulfil their briefs and beliefs that South African exhibitions should have White artists as a minority group. The reductive, simplistic, and unmeritocratic construction of these debates have frustrated and alienated many artists from situating themselves in terms of national identity.

To generalize, it is evident that artists whose artistic consciousnesses were shaped during the apartheid era, are more content to see the enabling potential of a South African nationalism drawing strongly on the imagined reverse nation. For younger artists, the constraints of consciously figuring and representing a constructed national identity are barriers to a full exploration of the different types of meaning and significance that can be read in their work and the wider possibilities offered by a globalized artworld.

For artists like Kentridge and Koloane, the ‘struggle’ and triumph over the system of oppression and the legacy of that system remain vivid and live subjects – as they do for a large number of the population as a whole. South African group shows are illustrative of that triumph; and positive discrimination is a necessary tool to achieve a representational selection of artists and redress the societal imbalances that apartheid perpetuated – in terms of status in society, education and access to space and materials. For some artists in this group, the apartheid epoch has provided a continuing source of material that is saleable to a ready market at home and abroad. They have neither the need nor the desire
to move on in terms of formal style or content, especially as the legacy of apartheid’s inequalities is still so evidently present in society.

For artists like Langa and Rose, the strictures placed on the display, reception and interpretation of their work by the emblematic nature of the representation of the ‘rainbow’ era have become a source of frustration. For them, the victory over apartheid ended the cultural isolation of South Africa from the rest of the world. They wanted to be understood and valued as artists on an individual basis – rather than because of who they are, where they come from and what they represent. The parochial atmosphere that exists in much of the South African art world and in the wider art world’s reception of nationally branded South African art, coupled with the inability to move beyond a certain type of critical reading, has led a number of this generation of artists to pursue their careers overseas. Langa resides in Amsterdam, Candice Breitz has relocated to the United States, Robin Rhode is in Berlin.

**Johannesburg**

Johannesburg is a unique city. Perhaps the key to it lies in its Nguni name ‘Egoli’, which translates as ‘place of gold’. A proposal to adopt this name formally remains on the table. This would be appropriate in the context of this analysis since it is here, the financial and economic heart of the country, and indeed the region, that the social transformation generally envisaged in South Africa must take place. If the ideals of the ‘new’ South Africa that defined the rainbow nation project are to be preserved, if the pots of gold that lie at the rainbow’s end are to be ever more than a fleeting mirage, it is substantially in the transformation of Johannesburg that it must take place. This must be figured in the image of the city. Johannesburg remains a Western style city to the casual observer. It follows the pattern of many American cities in its establishment of communities around suburban locations. These are as diverse as Sandton and Soweto, Houghton and Hillbrow. This pattern revolves around a centre that was inspired by the British colonial model of the early twentieth century as seen in New Delhi and to a lesser extent in Harare (Salisbury) and Nairobi. After 1948, apartheid era building sought to break with the British tradition and adopt an American Modernist approach derived from cities such as
Atlanta or Dallas. This approach gave rise to a radial layout that established disaggregated centres of congregation and living oriented around the establishment of malls as the places for communal interaction and exchange. The application of the segregationist era legislation such as the Group Areas act led to the land in the South being allocated, unofficially at first and then later officially, to the Black population who had been compelled by a combination of subjugation, taxation, and dispossession to seek employment in the major industrial centres of the Witwatersrand.

The name of Egoli dates from the time that still defines the landscape of the city. It was the discovery of gold in 1886 on the Witwatersrand that led to the establishment of the city, the growth in its population, and its predominant position in the regional economy. Johannesburg’s artificiality can be understood from its geographical location. It is by far the biggest city in the world to be situated away from any major water access. It is also the second highest city – the equivalent of locating a city halfway up Kilimanjaro. Its very existence is defined by gold, and it is this quest, albeit not quite so literally in the present day, that has motivated immigrants to come to the city for more than a century. This is as true today in the immigration of diverse African communities from all over southern Africa, Congo, Nigeria, and even Senegal, as it was of the substantial White immigration of the late nineteenth century and the migration of millions of Black South Africans from rural areas over the course of the last century or so.

Johannesburg’s existence and status as the commercial capital of the region is reflected in its cultural institutions. Unlike Cape Town, which has been the national cultural capitol under the apartheid regime, as evidenced by the Iziko (Southern Flagship) grouping discussed in the next chapter, and the ANC, in its focus on Robben Island as the site of ‘new’ national identity. By contrast, the state’s role in art institutions in Johannesburg’s is limited to the Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Newtown Cultural Precinct.145

144 Although Mexico City is now only accessible by artificial waterways, its founding myth amongst the Aztecs suggests that the inspiration for the location of the site was the now dry inland lake that was situated in the city’s north-east.
145 These are ideally located in one sense in that they are situated within the greater city centre which provides, theoretically, easy public access; but leads to their effective boycott by many on security grounds.
The role of the private sector is key. This is both in terms of the formation of corporate collections, such as Billiton, ABSA, and Standard Bank, and commercial galleries, such as the Goodman, Everard Read, Gallery Warren Siebrits and Gallery Momo – all of which are located within the vicinity of Rosebank (an affluent northern suburb). Even the initial founding of the Apartheid Museum was privately motivated and financed, though it has since received official recognition. This marked contrast to the state role in the Cape, particularly Robben Island, is perversely appropriate in a city so defined by the needs of capital exploitation.

Mining processes established a series of mine dumps that characterize the topology of the city and have constructed the ‘natural’ landscape of the city. The naturalizing of the landscape and the imperial presence was a central trope of the colonial landscape tradition in painting. In South Africa, early finance for exploitation of the land (and its people) was attracted, in part, by the depictions of artists such as Baines, Bell, and Bowler. Later on, the art of Naude, Pierneef and Wenning articulated Afrikaner rural sensibilities and quasi-religious attachment to the land. The most significant contemporary artist working in the landscape genre, albeit in a deconstructive relationship to the aforementioned exponents, has been William Kentridge.

**William Kentridge**

Kentridge’s star has been on the rise since his inclusion in *Documenta X* in 1997, as well as the Havana and Johannesburg Biennales of the same year, and has lead to solo exhibitions at MOMA in New York, the Serpentine Gallery and Tate Modern in London, as well as a host of other major centres. As such, he is by far and away the best known and, in market terms, most valuable of contemporary South African artists. Kentridge comes from a family of lawyers. His father, Sidney, represented several of the activists at the treason trial of 1963, including Nelson Mandela, and acted on behalf of the Biko

---

146 The artificiality of the 'natural' landscape and its importance to the psyche of national cultures is chronicled in Schama S. 1996: *Landscape and Memory*, Fontana, London and New York.
family in the inquest into the Black Consciousness leader's death, eliciting the infamous "It left him cold" phrase from one of the State's cronies. This upbringing meant that Kentridge was less insulated from the violence in the country than many of his White contemporaries. This awareness lead him to try to find a suitable expression for his convictions. One of these avenues was theatre, an experience that Kentridge describes as

It was simple agitprop theatre. I was neither an activist nor a politician. I was working with two theatre groups: one that consisted of students performing in ordinary theatres, and another that worked with trade unions, using plays to raise consciousness. We would stage a play which showed domestic workers how badly they were being treated, implying that they should strike for equal rights. This would be presented in a hall with four thousand domestic workers. I understood then that this work was about actors' needs rather than its meaning for the audience. There was a false assumption about the public that we 'knew' what 'the people' needed, so I stopped my involvement with these groups.¹⁴⁷

Kentridge spent the latter half of the seventies studying art at the non-racial Bill Ainslie Foundation in Johannesburg, whilst also pursuing a degree. He then undertook a course in theatre and mime in Paris. On returning to South Africa, he elected to work writing and directing films, notably Howl at the Moon with Hugo Cassirer which won the Red Ribbon Award for Short Film in New York, and producing plays including set design. In 1985 he staged his first exhibition since 1981 at the Cassirer Fine Art Gallery, and participated in the Cape Town Triennial and the celebrated Tributaries. Over the next four years, Kentridge had regular solo shows at Cassirer and won the Standard Bank Young Artist Award at the Grahamstown Festival of 1987. His work from this period identifies the concern of the transfer of European culture and tradition to the South African context as a central theme in the artist's work. Not surprisingly, the theatre provides the subject matter for many of the drawings, often juxtaposing the violence of

the society outside with the comfort of the existence of the viewer and the artist. The stability of the scene is always questioned, the threat is never far from the surface. Three of the best examples of this can be seen in *The Boating Party* (1986), *Flood at the Opera House* (1988), and the *Art in a State of ...* triptych (1988). *The Boating Party* takes as its focus the eponymous work of Renoir which depicted the lazy idyll of the Parisien haut bourgeoisie. For Kentridge, this provides

> Immediate pleasure, in the sense of a feeling of well-being in the world. They are visions of a state of grace, of an achieved paradise.\(^{148}\)

However, in this manifestation, the scene is contextualized by the addition of a warthog. It is the final panel that attracts attention. Here, the eye is directed by a line from the head of a foreboding creature (hyena?) to the burning tyre that dominates the space of the canvas, about to crash into the table where the warthog has been replaced by a jelly — a signifier of the instability of the settler way of life. The burning tyre presents the spectre of mob justice, touching on the fears of the White liberal about what the revolution will hold for them, this being the year of the extension of the State of Emergency to the entire country. Of course, the ‘necklace’, contrasted here with the White woman’s sapphire equivalent, was the punishment meted out to suspected collaborators by the mob. Kentridge here begs the question of whether the White individual remains in collusion with the regime, simply by her/his way of life and continued presence in the country, something suggested by both Steve Biko and Chris Hani.\(^{149}\)

Kentridge’s series of posters *Art in a State of Grace, Art in a State of Siege, Art in a State of Hope* pay homage to the Trade Union propaganda posters that were prevalent at the time and the politically engaged art traditions of the inter-war years in Europe. However,

---


\(^{149}\) Hani, the chief-of-staff of Umkhonto we Sizwe – the armed wing of the ANC – and later leader of the SACP said “Their (White South Africans) life is good. They go to their cinemas, they go to their five-star hotels. That’s why they are supporting the system. It guarantees a happy life for them, a sweet life. Part of our campaign is to prevent that sweet life.” Quoted in Williamson S. 1989: *Resistance Art in South Africa*, David Philip, Cape Town, p.33.
within these works there is a knowing nostalgia for the perceived certainties of the past that is both desired and dismissed. The first poster recalls the fin de siècle art of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists who refused engagement with the world outside the canvas that would be replicated by the adherents of Greenbergian Modernism. The second offers a parody of the centennial celebrations of the city that were scheduled for 1986. Here, a gross, suited businessman smoking a cigar – an early model for Soho Eckstein – is portrayed above a slogan reading, ‘100 Years of Easy Living’. At the foot of the silkscreen are three statements: Cultural Activity is an Epistemological Struggle; Political Activity is an Epistemological Struggle: London is a Suburb of Johannesburg. The last of these is an oft-stated belief of Kentridge, alluding to the nature of settler education that provided a far more intimate knowledge of the imperial cities of the world than about African civilisations that were geographically far more immediate. This supported the process of alienation and dislocation experienced by many settlers and their desire to (re)create pastiche representations of places remembered through educational indoctrination as opposed to phenomenological experience. In a wry analogy to this process, the last poster of the triptych transports Tatlin’s Monument to the Third International, which was never constructed beyond a model, to Berea, a small town on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Kentridge identifies with the hope that such a monument expresses, but tempers it with the knowledge of what has occurred since.

Tatlin’s Monument to the Third International is one of the greatest images of hope I know. I say image because although the monument existed as a model I know it only through photographs. These are enough. It is the project rather than the actual object that is moving. I imagine that the greying concrete pylons of the actual monument, a thousand feet high, would be monstrous. But there is in the image of Tatlin and his assistants clambering round the model, huge enough in itself, a hope and certainty that I can only envy. Such hope, particularly here and now (1988), seems impossible. The failures of those hopes and ideals, their betrayals, are too powerful and too numerous. I cannot paint pictures of a future like that and believe in pictures.150

150 Quoted in Cameron, Christov-Bakgariev, and Coetzee, p.102-3.
I think societies that spend time contemplating the past are better off than societies that pretend they are starting off with a clean slate. Brecht in the thirties could write ‘Rather the bad of the new than the good of the old’ but it was kind of a disaster in retrospect.\footnote{151}

These works identify a central recurring theme in Kentridge’s oeuvre of White guilt. Although this sentiment has been much criticized in recent years as a White middle-class wringing of hands while decrying direct action, Kentridge states,

\footnote{151 Interview with the author. 16/12/98.}
White guilt is much maligned. Its most dominant feature is its rarity. It exists in small drops taken at infrequent intervals and its effects do not last for long. But the claim goes further than this. People far closer to the violence and misery still return out of the tear smoke and an hour later are cooking their dinners or watching *The A-Team* on television...152

This sentiment is clearly shown in the *Flood at the Opera House*. Again, in an incongruous setting in the location of Johannesburg – a signifier of privilege and the privileging of European culture – is another naked figure, a depiction of vulnerability that runs through the artist’s work, is shown in a state of either dressing or undressing. The most direct reading of the work draws on the Judaeo-Christian tradition of baptism as a cleansing of original sin which again references the concept of guilt by association – that to be born White in the society is to be guilty. The flooding of the institution, signifying the White establishment, offers the hope of re-birth not only for the individual; but also for the country.

The bruising on the body references the metonymical conflation of the body with the land and its scarring by the settler presence. This comes to the fore to Kentridge’s landscape work and is shown in his working process by the use of erasure. The transparency of the working process is one of the trademarks of the artist’s animations or ‘drawings for projection’ as he entitles them. Kentridge creates the animated sequence by working on a series of drawings that are shot two frames at a time. The additions and erasures in the film serve to convey to the viewer the build up of the work and the artist’s touch. The nature of paper as a palimpsest reveals the trace elements of what has been remaindered. The ability to detect trace elements in the work references two philosophical paradigms, made explicit in the works of Baudrillard and Derrida, though there are several citable antecedents. The formation of meaning by the viewer, which has been theorized as instantly self-abolishing, has been revised to allow for the element of trace which remains and which influences future formations. This trace element is also part of the construction of memory, in the sense of a process of anamnesis, and it is this aspect that seems most

152 Christov-Bakgariev, p.56.
appropriate to Kentridge’s work. Given the collapse of the body into the land, it is not too
great an extension to add the personification of the landscape through the quality of
memory, and for the paper to act as the hyperreal territory that makes apparent the
scarring that is a fundamental aspect of the working process.

This is most readily apparent in the first of the ‘Drawings for projection’, *Johannesburg, 2nd Greatest City after Paris*, which was first shown in 1989. The narrative supplies the
characters who will dominate the series, Soho Eckstein and Felix Teitlebaum, and Soho’s
wife. Eckstein, a Johannesburg property developer, is shown in pin-stripe suit behind a
desk, consumed by his establishment of a property empire through the expansion of the
mining town. This has dire consequences for the surrounding landscape, represented as
littered with the debris of building expansion. His neglect of his wife, introduced as
‘Waiting’, allows the usually naked Felix, described as ‘Captive of the City’, to conduct
an affair. The affair is presented through the fantasy of Felix that associates her with
water and bathing, crystallized in the gift of the fish, which is contrasted with the arid
urbanscape of the mining town that is Soho’s preserve. Kentridge develops an opposition
between the two men, that culminates at the end of the piece with them fighting in the
sewer, the space of contaminated water, through themes such as paper, which for Soho is
the stuff of documents and banknotes as against Felix’s love letters and drawings.

William Kentridge – *Johannesburg, 2nd greatest city after Paris* (source www.laixinart.org)
It is possible to read Soho as the personification of Johannesburg itself, at this time an entirely white-zoned area in theory. His obsession with money has lead him to eventual conflict and the loss of those closest to him and the extension of his empire has dictated the lie and condition of the land around. The only textual caption relating to him reads ‘Soho feeds the poor’ accompanied by the character erasing the dispossessed by throwing food at them, alluding to the scraps from the rich (White) man’s table that is all that is on offer for the masses. Even this is resented, but acts as a source of power relations. The coding in this image relates to the comments of Marie-Antoinette as the sans-culottes and peasants protested at the onset of the French Revolution. The historical parallel is clear and highlights the unstable nature of the privilege enjoyed by the few. Scraps from the table and charity might assuage the conscience, but it would not nearly be enough to prevent the overturning of the old order. The dichotomy established between the two male protagonists in terms of water heightens the association of Soho with Johannesburg, not situated on a body of water, and augments the alienation of Felix, who is depicted from behind gazing out at the landscape. The use of his own self as the physical model for Felix’s character enhances the sentiment of being confined within the city, for Kentridge has stated

I have never been able to escape Johannesburg. The four houses I have lived in, my school, studio, have all been within three kilometres of each other. And in the end, all my work is rooted in this rather desperate provincial city.\footnote{Quoted in Christov-Bakgariev, p.14.}

The colonial construction of the paradisial landscape and the apartheid separation of Black/White and rural/urban\footnote{It was not until the eighties that the regime recognized that Blacks could be urban dwellers, as opposed to migrants from the rural areas.} are ironically played with, as the main characters are always displayed within walled space, in opposition to the masses who are always seen in the open space of the land. The depiction of the landscape as mutilated enforces the conception of the White subject trapped within the city because the colonial gaze and
view has been distorted, either at origin or through subsequent exploitation, and parodies the affiliation with the land that is central to the construction of Afrikaner identity.

The second animation in the series, consisting of two sequences and lasting for just over three minutes, is entitled Monument, which adapts the narrative of Samuel Beckett’s Catastrophe. At first, the spectator is greeted by the figure of an unidentified Black labourer, carrying a heavy load on his head, with the focus on the face of the man, who is replaced by a sight of his feet, overlapping continuously in movement. The sequence is completed by the man appearing on the desolate outskirts of the city from which he proceeds towards the horizon. Here, there is a representation of the drudgery of labour, yet the man’s gaze conveys a dignity reminiscent of non-heroic Socialist Realism. The burden carried by the man can be taken as an allegory of the fruits of labour that are not returned to those who undertake the manual tasks. The explicit depiction of movement recalls Futurist attempts to illustrate motion and the utopian dreams of Modernist machine-inspired progress. In the second sequence, which is introduced with the text ‘Soho Eckstein Civic Benefactor’, Soho arrives on scene with a sheaf of papers that transform into megaphones, while microphones snake towards him. The amplifiers emit dark stains that join to form a black square, which is slowly whited out to be replaced by a wrapped form, à la Christo. A crowd gathers for the unveiling which reveals the form to be the man of the first sequence. As the focus pans upwards, it shows the figure is alive.

Cameron understands this animation in terms of a conflict between the linkages of power, injustice, and art, saying

As both product and embodiment of nature, the labourer represents the moral dilemma at the core of Soho’s empire. The latter may feel sufficient gratitude to build a monument to the anonymous multitudes labouring on his behalf, but he must stop short of recognizing their humanity or there will be no

---

155 Kentridge knew the play extremely well, having directed a production of it in Johannesburg in 1984.
empire to build. In this equation, abuse of the populace becomes a coefficient to the exploitation of the landscape...\textsuperscript{156}

This reflects the dilemma that faced big business, dominated by Anglophone Whites, which realised that the prosperity of the Whites was dependent on the exploitation of cheap labour yet the skills base was too narrow within the non-Black communities to achieve the economic growth that was necessary to bring the country out of recession. This could only be attained by extending the skills base of the entire country, which of course required better education at the very least – something that was never going to be the case while the majority of urban youth hardly attended school.

The film also raises the question of the nature of monuments and their place in the construction of (national) identity. South Africa’s monuments do not represent the democratic body of the post-apartheid unitary state, and this piece questions for what purpose the monuments have been erected and for whose benefit. In a country where most of the readily identifiable landmarks, such as road names, civil engineering projects and buildings retain their apartheid nomenclature, it remains a significant barrier to the construction of a new national identity.

The third animation to be completed was \textit{Mine} which dates from 1991. Kentridge has generally shown the work as the second in the series when they have been exhibited together preceding \textit{Monument}. In \textit{Mine}, the viewer is presented with the emphatic contrast between the existence of Soho and the miners who work for him. The film begins again with the focus on a head, this time an image of a sixteenth century head from Ife, whose crown ambivalently shifts into a mining lamp. The scene changes into a vertical cross-section of the mine, showing the rise of a lift, cramped with workers, to the surface. The terrain changes to the cover of Soho’s bed, contrasting with the sleeping arrangements of the miners in cold, overcrowded conditions. This is followed by one of the most dramatic and memorable moments in the entire animation sequence when the plunger of Soho’s cafetière continues its downward momentum into the mine until it

\textsuperscript{156} Cameron, Christov-Bakgariev, Coetzee, p.56-7.
reaches the bottom where the workers are drilling the rock face, allowing light into the scene. The tunnels then mimic the dimensions of a slave ship. Soho’s cafetièrè is transformed into a cash register that produces streams of paper and workers who form blocks of either gold or Modernist-style buildings. An object is found and transported up to Soho’s desk, where it is revealed as a tiny rhinoceros, which animates and attracts Soho’s attention.

In *Mine*, the most striking theme is the disparity in standard of living between Soho and the labourers. Obvious polarities of scale are highlighted in the sleeping conditions and the images involving the cafetièrè, certainly a signifier of the luxury of White existence at this juncture, but the presence of the crowd and their standard of living hints at the instability of the situation. The scene in which the miners rise to the surface before coming out onto the land can be read as an indication of the political situation and the transformation of power that was expected. The crowd scene is particularly poignant.
since this it was contemporaneous with the first time mass protests had been seen on the streets of the inner city.

The transformation of the miners working into the map of the slave-ship alludes blatantly to the conditions of labour in the mines and the captive nature of the workface. It also references exploitation as an ongoing historical situation with infamous antecedents. The historical theme is reinforced by, what Kentridge describes as

The similarity between these slave diagrams and the serried ranks of people carved on West African doors.¹⁵⁷

This is continued by the ambivalent representation of the Ife head, which acknowledges the connection between the historical exploitation of the body with the land. This can also be read as a signifier of the wealth of indigenous African traditions (though reduced to a corporate desk adornment), the denial of which was an important block in the construction and justification of colonialism and apartheid. The figure of the rhinoceros can be interpreted as a signifier of more immediate African cultural tradition of the Zimbabwe culture of Mwene Mutapa and, specifically, the golden rhinoceros found at the Mapungubwe site on the south side of the Limpopo. This object is the most remarkable of a group found in what is thought to be a royal burial ground and is significant in documenting the smelting skills of smiths of the Karanga Shona/Venda civilisation. The denial of African agency in this civilisation, and the monuments and artefacts that remain, was a key platform in the attempt to justify the settler regime in the then Rhodesia by seeing the extant evidence as the product of a earlier exogenous, such as Phoenician, occupation. An alternative reading highlighted by Christov-Bakgariev understands the animal as relating to the ecological damage that has been caused to the land by the excavation process. Kentridge again references the problematic nature of monuments in the country in the metamorphosis of the workers into the gold and buildings, which indicates the way in which capital for the erection of monuments and buildings was obtained. The use of a Modernist building begs an interesting question of

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Christov-Bakgariev, p.68.
whether apartheid was in some way Modernist in conception, in that it attempted to rationalize the colonial system into a statutory code that promised the development of the society.\textsuperscript{158} The identification of the Modernist building with the apartheid generated wealth is continued in Kentridge’s next animation, \textit{Sobriety, Obesity, and Growing Old} (1991).

In this animation, Kentridge continues the dichotomy between Soho and Felix. Soho retains his association with the city and the aridity of its landscape while Felix is presented naked in the open landscape, echoing imperialist depiction of the ‘native’ whose body is identified with the land. The political state of the country provides the opening scene where a protest march fills the streets of the city. Whilst in the previous films the crowd has usually been portrayed as moving away from the city into the landscape, here they come to occupy, or possibly reclaim. The charcoal technique of rendering the image provides the knowing nostalgia for the revolutionary aspirations of the inter-war period in Europe, reinforced by the red banners that dominate the space. These drawings reflect the paradoxical nature of White liberal positionality in the transitional period, almost mourning the security of the certainties of dying past against the insecurity of the order that was yet to be born.

The failure of the apartheid project is represented by the Modernist architecture. Soho’s inability to comprehend the changing order leaves him vulnerable not only on a public level, but on a personal one as he watches his wife making love to Felix. Felix and Mrs. Eckstein are depicted as listening to the demands of the crowd through the nostalgic megaphone. The couple’s love generates a sea of water that engulfs Soho’s office and the structure begins to crumble. Soho himself is responsible for its final demise as he detonates what remains of his crumbling empire. Again, the use of water is significant in terms of its metaphorical and literal cleansing properties and its actual absence from the

\textsuperscript{158} "Apartheid offered a promise of a future unfolding and a sense of historical majesty that goes with any nationalist narrative, especially when this is paired with the promise (if not the reality) of the rationally administered state ... it was the failure of prophecy and the fragmentation of the simulacrum of majesty that doomed them." Thornton R. 2000: \textit{Potentials of Boundaries in South Africa: towards a theory of the social edge} in \textit{co@rtnews}, third edition, 2000, pp.34-6.
The only time in the whole sequence of the 'Drawings for projection' that a Black person is named and individualized, showing Kentridge's desire to avoid the conundrum of 'speaking for' the 'other'.
through the ‘other’ refers also to the lack of authenticity of the settler. This dislocation and absence of ‘real’ experience were felt keenly by those who questioned the status of White power, perhaps due to the regime’s obsession with presenting itself as legitimate through the identification of the people with the land and with the historical struggles to occupy it. Nandi’s process of marking and recording and her ability to translate the real into the hyperreal signify her autochthonous identification with the land and ‘real’ experience. Contained within the marking process is an attestation of ownership rights.

When the film returns to Nandi, she continues to survey what lies before her, turning upwards to record the sky. A series of lines between the stars combine to form a shape that resembles a body bag. When we return to the landscape, her markings define the outline of bodies strewn across the terrain. Red crosses mark the place of death and the violation of the land, recorded by the surveyor as its pathologist. This continues Kentridge’s identification of the scarring of the body and the land. Here, the process is so traumatic that the sky can only convey the violence of the society. But the land hides its history, as Kentridge states

Sites of events, massacres, battles, celebrations, retain scant record of them. The name Sharpeville conjures up a knowledge of the massacre outside the police station in the township near Vereeniging. And perhaps images from photographs, documentary films that may have been seen. But at the site itself, there is almost no trace of what happened there. This is natural. It is an area that is still used, an area in which people live and work. It is not a museum. There are no bloodstains. The ghosts of the people do not stalk the streets. Scenes of battles, great and small, disappear, are absorbed by the terrain, except in those few places where memorials are specifically erected, monuments established, as outposts, as defences against this process of disremembering and absorption.\(^{160}\)

Kentridge has stated,

\(^{160}\) Quoted in Christov-Bakgariev, p.97.
*Felix in Exile* was made at the time of the first general election in South Africa, and questioned the way in which the people who had died on the journey to this new dispensation would be remembered – using the landscape as a metaphor for the process of remembering or forgetting.161

The public memorializing of history and sacrifice provides a particularly vivid contrast between Black and White. As discussed in the second chapter, the apartheid regime sponsored and organised the creation of an historical mythology that celebrated the

---

161 Ibid. p.90. It is interesting that Kentridge uses a medical term “dispensation” to refer to the condition of the country, something that comes to the fore in the next animation, *History of the Main Complaint.*
emergence of the Afrikaner people. The role of landscape is also paramount in the Anglo-colonial mediation of history. The conflict between the British and Zulu armies was particularly well documented and recreated for contemporary consumption. The ‘Battlefields’ area of KwaZulu-Natal reflects this in its name and by the volume of domestic and international visitors who come to gain insight into the events of that time.

One parallel to be drawn concerns the drawings themselves, and the trace elements of successive erasures. While it is often possible to detect where a previous marking had been it is difficult to make out what it was without seeing the preceding frames. The understanding of the artist’s working process as a metaphor for the nature of memory in a South African context is all the more pertinent since it stems not from the intrusion of biography, but from the paper itself. This is enhanced in the next sequence when Felix begins to shave in the mirror, as he wipes out his reflection to be met by the face of Nandi returning his gaze. The pair embrace in a pool before Nandi starts to draw, with landmarks rising up from the land. The erasure of his own reflection allows Felix to step outside of his confinement and embrace the outside world. The transformation of the gaze at the self into the meeting of equals, friends, even lovers, offers the White liberal utopia of the envisaged post-apartheid state where all could prosper without the estrangement of the apartheid era. It is through the recognition of going beyond the self and self-interest that Felix is able to establish a relationship with the ‘other’. The pictorial device employed by Kentridge to represent the barrier references Jean Cocteau’s visionary film *Orphee*, where the mirror acts as a border between the worlds of the living and the dead. The pool of water echoes Jean Marais’ arrival in the land of the ‘other’. A more immediate local antecedent might be the rock surfaces used by Khoi-San shamens to record their states of trance. Particular surfaces were identified as particularly powerful and closer to the spirit realm, the ‘other’ world, and were re-painted over. Beneath the most recent working of the surface lay traces of former depictions. This trace element alludes back to Kentridge’s own working methods and the incomplete erasure of drawings in subsequent scenes. The rockpainting, Cocteau’s cinematography and Kentridge’s work can all be seen as attempts or interrogations of collapsing the distance between the ‘real’ and imagined. Whereas the former two deal with the distance between
the ‘real’ world and the spiritual realm, Kentridge’s questioning of distance and access takes place within a single country, highlighting the differences between the two worlds, White and Black.

The pool of water briefly indicates the possibility of the ending of exile and the potential of re-birth in the new order. Although some commentators have identified the place of exile in the narrative as Paris (probably due to the amount of South African intelligentsia who resided there during the apartheid years and Kentridge’s own sojourn there), it is the sense of internal exile that is invoked here. Reflecting on the reversal of the time when activists and dissidents were confined to their allotted ‘homeland’ and indeed, had the system been extended in the manner intended, it would theoretically have exiled the entire Black population within their own country, it was now the Whites who were marginalized by the turn of events in which even the political establishment had a minor role. It was an historical moment, but one in which many were excluded from its centre and the full experience by their previous deeds, or those conducted in their name. Kentridge states

The film *Felix in Exile* was more about the feeling of being exiled from the centre of things. Not geographically, but of what it is to live in momentous times, but at the edge of them, and have things happen around you but not through you.\(^\text{164}\)

---

\(^\text{162}\) Although there is a general perception in the country (and outside) that the ANC ‘won’ the negotiation process, left-wing critics have claimed that the real agenda was laid down by the interests of White capital – certainly not homogenous with the political oligarchy – and that the ANC failed to push through a transformative or revolutionary agreement. I would argue that the majority of the party were more interested in the replacement of the old elite with one constituted by the party, however democratic and meritocratic that formation may (have) be(en). For instance, “It is of less importance to us whether capitalism is smashed or not. It is of greater importance to us that while capitalism exists, we must fight and struggle to get our full share and benefit from the system.” (Dr. Xuma, President-General of the ANC, 1945, quoted in McKinley D 1997: *The ANC and the Liberation Struggle*, Pluto, London and Chicago, p.1.)

\(^\text{163}\) A tempting parallel here is with Mallory’s *Mort d’Arthur* and the failure of Sir Lancelot to see the Holy Grail due to his sins, primarily adultery with Queen Guinevere. This subject was a favorite of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, particularly Edward Burne-Jones who made several versions of the subject in different media.

\(^\text{164}\) Interview with the author. 16/12/98.
The utopian vision of this scene is momentary. Nandi is killed by a bullet, becoming herself a body in the landscape and leaving Felix isolated in the desolation. Felix’s despair is of his creation, in that it was the actions and neglect of ‘his’ people that resulted in the crime situation deteriorating to the extent it threatened the very existence that the regime existed to perpetuate.

_The History of the Main Complaint_ was first shown in 1996 at the _Faultlines_ exhibition at the Castle in Cape Town. It is important to any reading of the animation to note that this was also the year of the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which sought to discover the ‘Truth’ about the abuses of the apartheid era in order to begin a process of nationwide healing that would lead to a goal of national reconciliation. The religious nature of the set-up drew on Christian, specifically Roman Catholic, confessional practice for its moral underpinning. The perpetrator of the abuse would come before the court to confess her/his crime. If the court decreed that the person had made a full disclosure of the evidence then they would be granted amnesty for their crime. The proceedings of the court lasted for more than three years, and the panel comprised people from the whole range of the South African political spectrum. Although there is no doubt that the process helped to establish a truth narrative that brought to light many of the extreme excesses of the period, the failure to indict any of the senior figures of the regime, or to even elicit an apology from F.W. de Klerk or P.W. Botha for the system of apartheid, undermined its conclusions. Further controversy ensued from the blanket amnesty given to senior figures of the ANC and the desire of the ‘liberal’ Whites on the court to equate the abuses committed in the context of the ‘armed struggle’ with those perpetrated by the regime and its agents.

In the film, Soho returns as the central figure. He is hidden from our gaze by the white curtain of a hospital bed, but then revealed in a coma breathing only with the assistance

---

165 This is perhaps unsurprising since it was inspired by the Comision Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliacion in Chile that was established to examine the crimes of the Pinochet regime. As an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country, the confessional system provided a readily understood means of achieving absolution.
of apparatus. Although the appearance of the hospital has a fin de siècle air in the depiction of the bed and the dress of the doctors who are about to attend to the patient, the location in time is problematized by the inclusion of the latest medical technology, albeit drawn in a grainy way that lets them take on an unidentifiable age, such as X-rays, sonars, and CAT scanning machines. A bowl of water situated by the side of the bed is highlighted by its blue colour, the only time blue is used in the film. A doctor places a stethoscope on parts of Soho’s body and the X-ray image is used to show the sensor as it moves down the body, attempting to locate the damage. The interior of the body is transformed into the cityscape of the Johannesburg… film, seen through the filter of the windscreen of a speeding car. The unasked question is whether the damage can be identified, so that a cure or remedy may be found. Is it still possible to locate the cause or is it too buried and hidden within the body and the body of the city? Various office paraphernalia that have been associated with Soho appear in this sequence. Eyes appear in the rear-view mirror, but they cannot, due to the angle, be Soho’s. The piece cuts repeatedly between the examination of the body in the hospital and the driving on the journey. The second depiction of the driving animation shows the car passing rows of man-made upright posts. Kentridge reinforces the conceptualization of the constructed landscape and its unnatural quality. As J.M. Coetzee states

In the European landscape of Hobbema or Ruysdael, these might be rows of poplars. But in Kentridge’s South Africa the uprights are more abstract; whatever they are they are man-made.166

A dinner party setting flashes up and is deleted. More paraphernalia appear, including the stamp used by Soho to destroy his empire in Sobriety... Here it eliminates two of the red crosses that have appeared in the body; but more are generated by a typewriter. The narrative returns to the car journey, showing brutal violence committed to those whose bodies lie at the roadside, the place of their injury marked by the same red crosses that are present in Soho. The viewer is then

166 Cameron, Christov-Bakgariev, and Coetzee, p.91.
witness to a serious assault on an unidentified man. The location of the his injuries shown by red crosses on an X-ray of his skull, recalling police photographs and, within the South African art tradition, the silverpoint drawings of Paul Stopforth that were themselves inspired by the police photographs of the injuries inflicted on Steve Biko. Finally, we are shown the reason for Soho’s ‘complaint’, which of course is also the complaint against him. He was involved in a car accident where a pedestrian was hit and was thrown against the windscreen. With this recognition, Soho awakes from his coma, the water remains untouched, and Soho is next revealed back at his desk, surrounded again by his paraphernalia, working as normal, as if nothing had happened. Kentridge states

In the film, the question was – here’s a person who’s in a coma because of the weight of what he’s seen, of what he’s been through. The question is – is that going to kill him? It becomes clear. No, people don’t die from the guilt of their feelings or the weight of their memories - even though they ought to perhaps. But they contain them. These memories may suddenly resurface in a crisis, but they get put away. So in the end, all the things that Eckstein has experienced get resolved or get reduced to momentos on his desk, and he continues through the world. He’s busy, but the sobering thing is – well, if he’s just back and busy in the world, then what was the point of the whole journey? … What exactly is the balance between historical memory and forgetting in order to make a sane society?¹⁶⁷

The central concern articulated in the imagery of the film is the use of the past in the present. Kentridge offers us traces of Soho’s memory and it is through this process of remembering that Soho is able to recover – collapsing the recovery of memory with the recovery from illness, which allegorically can be extended to South Africa, or at least its White population. The notion of complicity is important. Soho’s awakening is only achieved by his acknowledgement of involvement in the car crash. This is an incident where there is an identifiable

¹⁶⁷ Quoted in Christov-Bakgariev, p.179.
responsibility though not necessarily blame. The artist’s invitation to the viewer to recognize their own complicit relationship with the situation, by accompanying Soho on his journey, is made through the device of the rear-view mirror. The mirror, which is by design a device for seeing both what is past and what is about to occur, reflects only the eyes of the spectator, encouraging them to look at themselves for an understanding of the ‘complaint’. The fact that Kentridge has chosen to depict his own eyes, which are also a model in the series for Felix’s, suggests a willingness to acknowledge his own role and responsibility.

The bowl of water can be interpreted in the context of the TRC as offering the possibility of forgiveness and a new beginning, in return for a recognition of the guilt of Whites in the establishment and maintenance of the system, and therefore its actions. However, the water remains untouched at the end of the film. Perhaps this is Kentridge’s indication that no matter what is revealed and acknowledged in the process, it is not possible to begin again. The return of Soho, seemingly unchanged, to his position of power and authority, suggests the continuity of many of the structures into the ‘new’ era. A recognition that, although the political system was now a participatory democracy, the economic power was still very much in the hands of the same elite who had controlled it under the old regime.

The accompanying music to the animation was a madrigal by the seventeenth century composer Monteverdi. At the time of making the animation, Kentridge was involved in the production of an opera by Monteverdi, entitled Il Ritorno d’Ulisse, which informed aspects of both this film and its successor, Weighing... and Wanting. Kentridge states,

My interest in it was sparked by forgiveness. (But) for me, it had much more to do with the duality of frailty and optimism. In the opera, in particular, Ulysses assumes he’s dead or dying – the gods have killed him, there’s nothing to be done. Then there’s moments when he’s absolutely confident he
is on his way home. … It was that kind of split identity that was my interest in the project and using images of human frailty, of physical frailty, images of the body as a kind of metaphor for looking at the fallibility of other kinds of human projects.¹⁶⁸

The most striking parallel between the opera and History of the Main Complaint is the location of the ‘hero’ in the hospital bed. In the opera, Kentridge used puppets in order to represent Ulysses’ self-projection as a conquering Greek hero. This enables the iterative narrative while the main protagonist lies uncured from what afflicts him. Ulysses’ existence and his survival are defined by scarring, the significance of which is blatantly reinforced in a local context by the backdrop being formed by the Johannesburg urbanscape. His name derives etymologically from the Greek for wounded thigh and it is this wound that identifies him to his household in the narrative, leading to his reconciliation with Penelope. In the same way, South Africa is known by its scarred landscape that defines what it is and where it has come from. The landscape is the memory of history that enables recognition and self-recognition.

The brutality of the state is contrasted and enforced by its juxtaposition with images derived from the drawings of the development of modern medicine. This shows the violence of rationalism that is reiterated in the use of the model worker’s house from Sergei Eisenstein’s film The General Line, again using the metaphor of Modernist architecture. The building appears again in Weighing… and Wanting. Christov-Bakgariev comments,

The anatomy theatre is a symbol of the birth of modern science, in which doctors dissect and study bodies that are already dead, for the purpose of gaining pure knowledge and furthering their science. Kentridge subtly questions this objective, depersonalized approach by contrasting it with the parallel narrative of his film, which is structured like a process of medical

¹⁶⁸ Interview with the author. 16/12/98.
anamnesis – the subjective recollection of the living patient’s personal history for the purpose of diagnosis and healing. Kentridge always focuses on the personal narrative, the private story of the individual, not on the grand, abstract accounts of South Africa or apartheid. And healing is acknowledging, negotiating a balance between remembering and forgetting, drawing and erasing, two sides of the same coin in the uncertain journey of life. Just as Penelope sews during the day and undoes at night what she has sewn, postponing her marriage to the suitors, Kentridge draws and erases his images.

The reconciliation with Penelope offers a glorious climax to the piece, but yet is tinged by the knowing nostalgia for the certainties of the old. The dropping of the last part of the opera’s title ‘in Patria’ questions the status of a homeland, the usual translation. This is due in part to its dubious South African heritage as a name for the Bantustans of the apartheid state, and the status of home and the nation at the end of the twentieth century when its presence is undermined by the globalization of capital. The status of the settler remains problematic. The concept of return to a homeland would be interpreted in many different ways in South Africa. There remains a link to Europe, to the West that is emotionally strong and reinforced by cultural exchange and Western hegemony that displaces the connection to the country and hints at a temporary nature to the presence. Kentridge speaks of the true emotion that a genuine awaited return brings when he states

The last moment is a fantastic moment. There’s a sense that there’s nothing interesting in the story after the reconciliation – give us back our troubled

---

169 This also reflects the method in which Kentridge develops the narrative in his drawings in that he starts with a few pre-conceived ideas and then reacts to how the drawing is developing, allowing him the opportunity to take on any interesting possibilities that manifest themselves during the process. The process of the sewing of Penelope reflects how meaning, in the films and more generally, arrives and then is abolished, leaving only trace elements that can be detected.

170 Christov-Bakargiev, pp. 142-3.
times. That’s built into the structure of the opera and I’m sure that’s one of the things that attracted me to it.\textsuperscript{171}

This return from longstanding exile was an experience known to many returnees in South Africa. A significant number of the ANC government were people who had been based abroad or others who had been internally exiled to their ‘homeland’.

Whilst in \textit{Il Ritorno d’Ulisse} the theme of reconciliation at the end of a physical and personal journey is explicit and defining, in \textit{Weighing... and Wanting} its status is far more ambiguous but is invoked and alluded to throughout the film. In this piece, the narrative is not necessarily linear, but could be circular. It is uncertain whether the sequence has a physical nature or if it occurs purely as a metaphysical stream of consciousness. The viewer is presented with an image of suburban domesticity that commences with the focus on a tea cup, which then expands to show a lounge complete with fireplace and a vase of flowers. Text appears on the wall. First, there is ‘Weighing’ which is then followed by ‘…and Wanting’. The scene of domesticity and control is then contrasted with a desolate landscape containing a pool of water. A large rock materializes in the landscape whose shape resembles a brain. Soho, or perhaps Felix, or the artist himself as the distinctions have been increasingly collapsed in the series, enters the CAT scan machine. A picture of his brain is depicted and the audience is shown memories that surface: a mineshaft; a crowd of workers; the sound of different voices. The next sequence focuses on the Modernist house that has appeared in previous animations, here contextualized to the South African environment by the addition of a swimming pool. Soho is seen returning to the house, stopping to pick up the stone, a small version of the rock portrayed earlier, which he is then seen inspecting at the table. On the table is a set of scales. The stone reveals its own story, or that of Soho, giving rise to images of Soho embracing a naked woman, before returning to the depiction of the rock in the landscape.

\textsuperscript{171} Interview with the author. 16/12/98.
Soho is represented listening to the teacup as if it were a conch. The image of the woman is replaced by pylons in the landscape, which in turn become scars on the back of Soho. The landscape becomes a scene on the living-room wall, mutating into text that reads ‘In whose lap do I lie?’ In the next scene, the image of controlled domesticity is shattered by the passion unleashed in the woman who beats Soho, breaks the tea cup, tears the papers, breaking up the drawing itself. The narrative then cuts to Soho alone in the house, then reunited with the woman bringing the fragments of the drawing together. The rock returns and the piece ends with Soho resting his head on it, leaving uncertainty as to the ‘real’ nature of the events.

Kentridge utilizes several of the themes that have appeared in the series. However, their employment in this particular animation is somewhat more ambivalent than in its predecessors. This may be due to the fact that the film was released in 1998, four years into the ‘new’ South Africa and at a time when many were starting to question elements that had previously been accepted and taken for granted. The TRC was continuing a seemingly unending process of uncovering the ‘truth’ about the apartheid era. While many have rightly highlighted the benefits that accrued from this, not least in the shaping of a collective body of memory with which to identify the past and generate identities in the present and future, there was a substantial minority who questioned the excavation and its value as a healing process. In this film, Kentridge offers a rendering of the process as circular without definite result. One of the artist’s central concerns throughout his work has been the focus on memory and forgetting, and the dilemma raised by the need to remember enough to be true to the historical process and to forget.

172This seems to derive from the monologue uttered by Ulysses in Monteverdi’s opera (Act I, Scene VII),

Am I asleep, or am I awake?
What countryside do I see again?
What air do I breathe?
On what soil do I tread?
enough to enable the country as a whole to move beyond the polarizations of the past.

As in the previous works in the series, Kentridge has looked to the landscape as a source of memory. Water is again highlighted by its depiction in blue. The association of the water with the passion of Felix and the stuff of healing is problematized by its containment within the confines of the swimming pool. The pool has always had a status as a signifier of (White) privilege and its appearance here reflects the view articulated visually in History... that although the establishment may have undertaken some process of change from the apartheid era, many of the structures and figures that control power, particularly economic, remain the same in the post-apartheid period. The water of change that flooded the opera house has become neatly parcelled for the consumption and use of the elite.

The rock is shown to contain the memory of what has taken place, hence its collapse into the image of the brain. It contains the potential to reveal the past up to the present and begins as a threatening presence on the landscape, recalling an earlier drawing by the artist of A Well Built City Never Resists Destruction. However, through the process of the film it is reduced to a trinket that can be held in the hand, a trophy that can find its place in the decor of the house (the house itself representing the failure of the optimism of the Soviet Revolution and the Modernist architectural project for worker housing, in that here it is shown as a house of the privileged). The status of this process is unclear. On the one hand, there is the knowing nostalgia for the certainties of the past and the belief in the opportunities of the potential change, the overturning of the old order. On the other there is the knowledge of what such change can result in and a question of whether the process has been substantive enough.

This is further emphasized in the title of the work itself, Weighing... and Wanting, a clear reference to the biblical Book of Daniel. In the story, Balthazar the
immoral king is confronted by a message that appears on the wall and is interpreted by Daniel. The interpretation is

God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting.\textsuperscript{173}

This message is reinforced by the presence of scales in the narrative, which could be read as referencing the Egyptian tradition of the weighing of the heart. Here, clearly the inference is that although the regime has been judged to have been found wanting, there was been little or no redress for the past. Those who have been imprisoned may have had individual guilt, but the leaders who were responsible for the system and its systematic excesses remain at large.

Interestingly, Kentridge’s identity as a White South African governed his reception at the solo show mounted at the Serpentine Gallery in May 1999. Sarah Kent began her review, entitled ‘White and wrong’ comparing apartheid to the Holocaust,\textsuperscript{174} implicating Kentridge as a Nazi, or at least a complicit sympathiser, the article ends with the judgement

The probing obviously mirrors the work of the TRC and the artist’s own form of reckoning. “How to find the weight keeping him unconscious, how to find the event to arouse him?” asks Kentridge. But for the viewer, who tends to see the characters as individuals rather than as personifications, the question seems indulgent and the work sentimental. Doubtless, the artist would claim to be representing the problem faced by all white South Africans, but given the enormity of the material, this personal focus still seems inappropriate.\textsuperscript{175}

In \textit{The Telegraph}, Richard Dorment describes Kentridge’s work as giving

\textsuperscript{173} Daniel 5:29.\textsuperscript{174} This is not to belittle the intense suffering of a substantial majority of the population in South Africa, but to equate it with one of the worst genocides perpetrated in history is inaccurate.\textsuperscript{175} Kent S. 1999: ‘White and Wrong’ in \textit{Time Out 5-12 May 1999}, p.42.
An unbearably smug view of South African history.

Dorment continues

A younger audience may well see this artist’s directness as refreshing and new. In fact it is very old-fashioned. These films might have been made in Czechoslovakia or Poland in the 1950’s or by an underground student’s collective during the Vietnam War.

Like all agitprop, they frankly aim to manipulate the viewer’s mind by appealing to his emotions. When an image of white men kicking a helpless black comes on to the screen, Kentridge dares us to feel anything but outrage. For Kentridge, South Africa has only one history, the one told by liberal whites, one in which any five year-old could tell the good guys from the bad.

I must admit that at first I, too, fell for it. But the more time I’ve spent in the Serpentine Gallery’s show of Kentridge’s animations and drawings, the more I have come to distrust him.

Why, for example, is the entire responsibility for the oppression of South African blacks placed on the shoulders of a Jewish capitalist? What about the politicians who enacted the laws of apartheid and the policemen who enforced them? What about the people who defended Steve Biko and other activists? (my italics)\(^{176}\)

The dangers of reviews being written by those who impose their own limited knowledge of a country, let alone its artistic practice, in a judgement of a single individual and his work is amply demonstrated. Dorment patronizes Kentridge by disallowing the possibility of irony or pastiche in the stylistic quotation from the

\(^{176}\) Dorment R. 1999: ‘It’s not art – it’s agitprop’ in *The Daily Telegraph* 04/05/99.
Weimar artists. The citation of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Vietnam is evidently intended to act as a means of devaluing the work. Indeed, Dorment and Kent would seem to prefer that the artist attempted a holistic overview representing the concerns of the entire South African community. While this is ignorant of the nature of identities in the country, it also refuses space for the Black artist to articulate their perspective. Dorment and Kent propose, in time honoured White liberal tradition, that the White artist should speak for a body of people that refuse identity with her/him, in fact believing that there is a single narrative that can be identified and produced. This attitude is not only severely outdated, but discriminatory in its refusal of a post-modern condition to South Africa, since it is highly unlikely that Dorment or Kent would have presented their criticism in this form if the subject had been the work of a Western artist.

The lack of background research is all too plainly indicated in the accusation that Kentridge is placing all the blame for apartheid on the shoulders of Jews, something also referred to by Waldemar Janusczak who went as far as to call Kentridge “anti-Semitic”. Being Jewish, the artist must have been surprised by this accusation, which was actually an admission of complicity in the system. But the best part of all has to be Dorment’s claim that Kentridge has ignored the role of the Whites who ‘defended Steve Biko and other activists.’ Given that Kentridge’s father represented both Nelson Mandela and Steve Biko in cases against the apartheid state, a more comical criticism is difficult to imagine. The farce of the standard of criticism, in the most part, of the London show is an indictment of British art critics striving for an ill-understood political correctness and bears no relevance to a serious assessment of the artist’s oeuvre and its merit in both a South African context and further afield.

While in the decade long process of creating the series of animations that have been discussed, Kentridge undertook a number of collaborations with other artists, including Faustus in Africa! (1995) with the Handspring Puppet Company, and the pieces produced with Doris Bloom, for the 1995 Johannesburg Biennale.
Kentridge had participated in earlier collaborations with the Handspring Puppet Company, most notably in *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, which was a South African contextualization of an unfinished work by the German nineteenth century playwright Georg Buchner. Here, Kentridge took a more celebrated text in Johan Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust*, which was reformulated with additional text by the rap poet Lesego Rampolekeng. The result was a piece that focused on the perversion of Enlightenment principles that excused to the European establishment the colonialist enterprise. In the play, Faustus sells his soul in return for African adventures. Landscapes of the colonial vision are used as a backdrop, but the picturesque perspective is scarred by the markings of a surveyor that are highlighted by their rendering in (blood) red. A continual theme is the need to parcel Africa into consumable parts for the digestion of Faustus. When he eats, his spoon marks the land and the cuts made by knife transform into the boundaries of the countries in Africa. The ability to collect these consumable parts is also referenced in the Ife heads, recalling the depiction in *Mine*, that he is shown purchasing at Sotheby’s and the mosquito that is pinned by the entomologist’s needle. The location of the Ife head in the West probably references the colonial theft of objects from the African continent and the desire to commodify the continent’s produce into a monetary form of exchange that would render it digestible to Western consciousness. This process of commodification allowed the establishment of economic value to be on the terms and understanding of the West. The Ife head is a trophy because of its perceived value in the West in the same way that a head of a beast would be displayed as evidence of conquest and victory. It is irrelevant what value the object may have had in its indigenous context.

At the end of the play, time catches up with Faustus and the devil in the form of a hyena comes to collect his due, but just as the blow is to be struck to condemn

---

177 The use of an *Ife* head to make this point could have been more illustrative if another iconic African figure, such as a Benin head or a Fang mask, had been chosen. The number of Ife heads in the West is relatively small, though increased following the looting of the Ife museum in 1994. Perhaps Kentridge chose this example to illustrate that the theft of Africa’s heritage remained a current issue.
Faustus, he is spared by the declaration of a general amnesty and asked to assist, along with the devil, in the new emperor’s kingdom. There is an explicit reference here to the role of former politicians and grandees of the apartheid state in the new dispensation. There was seen blatantly in a political context in the Government of National Unity, which allowed many of the former National Party government to retain senior executive positions.

Kentridge’s exhibit for the first biennale was a collaboration with Doris Bloom. The project consisted of a series of images of land marking of which two images were eventually chosen. The two act as a counterpoint to each other, articulating the nature of the land space and its role in the generation of memory and non-memory (ie forgetting). The first of these images was of an organic representation of the heart, conforming with Kentridge’s long-standing interest in the representation of what is unseen in the body and its role in the formulation of knowledge. It strengthens further Kentridge’s identification of the human body with the body of the land in his work and how each acts as a physical memory in an understanding of past events and the construction of memory.

The site selected for the scarring of the land was the farm just outside the city where Bloom had grown up. The obvious nostalgia of the setting offers readings on the nature of home when compared with exile (‘home is where the heart is’), the innocence of childhood with its demise, utopian dreams of the past with the dystopian fears of the present. The fact that the chalk drawing could only be viewed from the air gives it an uncertain meta-physical quality that references Inca drawings in the Pampas and the land-marking techniques seen in Britain. However, the knowing quality of these emotions is only fully realised with the work’s juxtaposition with the image of the burning gate that was staged in central Johannesburg, in the Newtown cultural district whose establishment was marked by the holding of the biennale. The piece marks a rite of passage for the land, signifying its rebirth under the democratic order and the re-entry of the nation into

178 The fire drawing was used on the majority of the promotional material for the biennale.
the international community. The piece itself was by its nature a momentary phenomenon, yet the branding of the land left trace elements that could be detected for a long time after, showing the memory of the land. The piece itself contained the nostalgia of childhood; its representation being that of a gate whose type was prevalent in the period when the artists were children.

It’s a gate from my childhood, from 1956. It’s a childhood symbol – a utopian vision that’s not necessarily (utopian) at all ... it charts the development of gates and walls in South Africa from (the) 1950’s until now ... The standard height of gates then was 4’6”, which would have been the height of the walls alongside them – which is to say the gate is a symbolic division between people ... Then in the 1960’s, you would have had some extensions to that gate. But essentially the 1960’s was an era of White confidence. The apartheid regime was at its most powerful, or (there were) the least cracks in the system ... The next real jump in my head was 1976, when there were riots in Soweto. Some of it had spread over to suburbs in Johannesburg, and there was a huge fear. What happened then, is that you got a huge amount of walls that went up to six foot, usually precast concrete walls. But sometimes built on the top of the 4’6” walls you’d then have a series of metal railings or spikes bringing it up to a six foot height. In some versions what happened is you’d have rail right to the top of this 4’6” gate and then another two feet of metal railings and spikes. Those were the gates of 1976.

The next real development was around the time of the states of emergency in the mid-1980’s ... what you had was the development of people putting razor wire on top of their fences, which were now nearly six foot. So the tracery of razor wire became the next level of the gate. So you’d have a 4’6” initial gate, on top of that metal spikes, and on top of that a circle of razor wire. That was the fence and gates in the 1980’s.
Then in the 1990's, during the transition period, just before the election, there was absolute criminal activity in the suburbs and also just a general uncertainty amongst whites as to what the future was going to be. We had the development that we are living with now in the late part of this century, which is electrified fencing put on top of this all ... And, in the context of these additions and protections and setting up gates not just as a symbolic barrier between people but as a new fortress, that gate of the 1950’s is utopian
– utopian in the sense of something to aim for, to look forward to when people feel safe enough to have (only) that symbolic barrier.\textsuperscript{179}

The gate then can be seen as a metaphor of inclusion and exclusion and as outlined above, its development as an exclusionary device ran in parallel with the efforts of the regime to maintain the status of racial privilege. It marks the boundary, the point at which an entity asserts its presence (Heidegger). The homestead gate is a microcosm for the fencing of the border, the international boundary. It is a signifier of control and the specifically, the control of entry or exit. The contrast between own and other is marked in a similar way to the methods adopted by the first Europeans to define their territory, presencing and ownership of the land by the planting of the hedge of bitter almonds.

Here, the gateway signals the beginning of the presencing of the new state and the utopian possibilities of breaking down the barriers that exist in the society. But its employment as an image in this context can also be read as the gateway to new opportunities, signified by the re-entry of the country into the international arena, exemplified by the staging of the biennale. A juxtaposition of the two images reveals the gate to contain the form of an idealized heart – which seems to act as a contrast to the representation of the organic heart on the veld. Readings could be postulated on the nature of the urban/rural divide that exists as a serious faultline in South Africa and the perceived ‘naturalness’ of the landscape as opposed to the built environment of the city. But, of course, one of the primary foci of Kentridge’s work has been the constructed artificiality of the landscape and the secrets that it both conceals and reveals. The representation of the organic heart can be viewed in similar light in that its depiction makes visible something that is, by its nature, concealed. While the representation is a sum of the visible knowledge of the organ, it hides the complexities that are known about it.

Therefore, a question can be posed of which is more ‘real’ – the recognized construction of the heart of the city or the perceived natural idyll of the landscape.

Kentridge’s ‘drawings for projection’ offer a microcosmic depiction of the ‘personal as political’. By articulating the dilemmas and conundra that affect the urban White liberal in South Africa, Kentridge reveals both the structures that supported apartheid and their continuance into the ‘new’ South Africa and the anxieties about the change that have affected even the majority of those who opposed apartheid. The religious metaphors of confession, cleansing, and rebirth offered a potential catharsis to the White South African who admits her/his complicity in the memories that the artist identifies as the beginning of a potential national identity. However, the ambiguities in the work are often their most poignant aspect. The continuous knowing nostalgia, reflected most blatantly in the aesthetic style of the drawings, both identifies with the dreams of the architects of change but offers a warning to those of the previous failures of attempted utopias. The achievement of a positive future is haunted by the ghosts of the past. The amount that is forgotten as much as that which is remembered may determine the social, political, and physical landscape of the ‘rainbow’ nation.

William Kentridge has compiled a remarkable oeuvre in his career that has deservedly brought him to the attention of the international art world. The very fact of his success and recognition shows that, in an increasingly globalized art world, it is possible for artists from outside the mainstream artistic centres to achieve recognition in the very places that once excluded them. Kentridge’s clear identification with South Africa, and Johannesburg in particular, is readily evident from both the subjects of his work and his statements. His continuing interest in memory and how it is reflected and mediated in the land and its people show his is a vision that recognizes the need for the acknowledgement of history before society can move on to the euphoric future. This approach and his continued willingness to show alongside his countrymen in nationally branded exhibitions indicate his belief in the possibilities offered by a South African nationalism.
Kendell Geers

An artist who could go some way to emulating Kentridge is also a White male from Johannesburg, Kendell Geers. Geers is an artist who uses conceptual, or neo-conceptual strategies in his work. Geers’ initial pieces mounted a conceptual approach and interpretation to ‘resistance art’. Conceptualism had had a limited impact on South African culture. The brilliant Johannesburg artist Willem Boshoff has worked on a conceptual basis since the early 1970’s but his highly intellectual and crafted material approach has little in common with other artists. Malcolm Payne, a Cape Town artist, offers more of a local antecedent for Geers’ work. His overtly political engagement with Conceptualism also dates from the seventies. Perhaps his most memorable piece was Colour Test (1974) – which presented his South African identity card with the Rorschach test for colour blindness in place of his photograph. This strain of simple but effective political Conceptualism is Geers’ chosen language of artistic communication.

Geers has been something of a pioneer in the South African artworld. His neo-conceptual methodology has influenced a younger generation of artists in its effective contextualisation of a global dynamic. Equally, his polemical avowal of a Euro-nationalist position has also been influential in the positioning of many younger artists.

Geers has focused his career on the creation of a public persona that is his most dedicated and ongoing work in progress. Like no other individual in the South African art world, he polarizes opinion between those who regard him as responsible for some of the most memorable and important pieces of art to emerge from the country in the nineties, and those who see him as an opinionated fraud whose influence has had a seriously negative impact on the development of art and its criticism in South Africa. While these binary perceptions may seem

---

180 As mentioned in the previous chapter, Neil Goedthals in his brief career was a significant influence on Geers.
bizarre to those on the outside, they have a contextual logic in the case of South Africa.

Much of this situation can be explained by his cross-cutting role across the art world, being artist, critic, judge, writer, and curator with a grasp of publicity strategies and impact that far outweighs most of his contemporaries. When tackled on the problems that this multi-disciplinary role causes, Geers emphasizes the separation between his own work, his criticism, and his curating and his strategies for keeping the activities as distinct interventions; but this argument ignores the fact that, as already stated, his most important and memorable piece of all is the ongoing invention of self, most obviously signified in his *Title Withheld (Kendell Geers)*, a dog tag worn by the artist that will be auctioned on the occasion of his death.

The other material aspect of this piece is *Title Withheld (CV)* which is included, in its latest form, in the majority of Geers’ exhibitions and can be viewed on his website. This work is key to an understanding of Geers’ production and his situating of self. The work centres on violence. The events cited refer to occasions of historical violence that have shaped the present context of South African society and Geers as its product. In some cases, this is obvious from the reference to the event, for example 1960 is listed as ‘69 people die in Sharpeville Massacre; African National Congress banned’, in others the violence is implicit, such as the first entry of ‘1652 Jan van Riebeeck declares the Cape of Good Hope a Dutch colony’. The simple fact of which conceals the violence inflicted on the indigenous people and the beginning of history of exclusion from power and violence in the quest for the preservation of the power relations structure. Interspersed in this chronicle are Geers’ personal experiences of violence, both actual and metaphorical, that have scarred the terrain of his experience. Again, the inference in the fact is one of implicit violence, such as ‘1983 car bomb, Pretoria; run away from home’ and ‘1987 2 attempted suicides; car bomb, Johannesburg’. From 1990 onwards the list centres on Geers’ rejections by the art world. There is
no mention of his successful inclusion in various exhibitions that he either participated in or curated.

The collapse of space between the definitively personal facts of Geers’ life and the generally accepted historical record has two particular effects. The first is the claiming of various events as key elements in the construction of the self, such as ‘car bomb, Uffizi Museum’ and ‘cultural weapons banned in South Africa’. By inserting them into his CV, Geers claims a responsibility for actions and events that on the face of it he would seem to have no involvement with. The bomb at the Uffizi became the subject of Geers’ Title Withheld (27 May 1993), which he describes as a ‘Performance/Installation’. The installation part of the work consists of the display of a newspaper article from the following day in The Citizen, a generally right-wing South African daily newspaper formerly seen as the English language voice of the apartheid regime, which speculated on the responsibility for the atrocity but was unable to report anything substantive. Geers was present in Italy at the time of the bomb due to his participation in a South African sideshow at the Venice Biennale, but no one would have associated him with the blast, save for his drawing attention to it in this way. The value of the work lies in its collapse of the real and the hyperreal to the extent that they become an indistinguishable seme/seam.

Similar is the listing of the cultural weapons embargo that was introduced by the government primarily to prevent the carrying of stabbing spears by the activists of the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party. However, Geers self-styled status as an ‘Aesthetic Terrorist’ leads him to cite this outlawing as something for which he had, at least partial, responsibility. Secondly, by listing the events of his life together with accepted historical fact, he lends his personal chronology an accepted status that denies the subjectivity of opinion, which the basic statement of the event conceals. This is most apparent in altering his birth date to May 1968, the date most readily associated with the radical student uprisings that occurred in Paris, Prague, and other Western cities and which can be argued began the
deconstruction of modernism that has been ongoing since. Other noteworthy events were the beginning of the Situationists International connected with Guy Debord, whose 1994 suicide is included in the work, and his writing of ‘The Society of the Spectacle’, a text that Geers cites on many occasions, and the death of Marcel Duchamp. Though Geers has sought to distance himself from Duchamp’s inspiration in more recent interviews, Duchamp’s strategies for the questioning of the status of art and its value are integral to any understanding of Geers’ work. Geers paid his own unique tribute to Duchamp’s work by urinating, or at least claiming to have done, in the artist’s Fountain in the Palazzo Grazzi in Venice.

An understanding of the importance of *Title Withheld (CV)* to any consideration of Geers’ work is the status of the narrative account of an artist’s life – which is used in many critiques of their work and seen as a means of gaining access to identifying meaning in an object. By falsifying his CV, Geers is controlling the terms on which people can access meaning in his work and rendering the process of interpreting his life experience in any study of his production as warped, if not entirely redundant. One other vital element that can be identified in this piece is the construction of the artist as victim and, therefore, a marginalized entity excluded from the mainstream of the world.

When art from Africa is being exhibited in Europe, its impact is partially assured by virtue of its marginality. But Cuba’s is a biennale of the marginalized and marginality *per se* is therefore not enough to carry the work. Some of the South African pieces in Havana suffered as a result. Of course, even among the marginalized, this biennale was not taken as seriously as Venice or Documenta. In those places, marginality sells.¹⁸¹

This statement demonstrates Geers’ ability to alienate the art world and other artists through the manipulation of what Bourdieu terms ‘cultural capital’, since

implicit in it is the claim that whilst some other South African artists only have access to international fora due to their status as South Africans, his own work achieves this access on merit, in spite of his history of exclusion. Whatever the ‘truth’ of this claim, there is no doubt that it suits Geers to play on this strategy rather than emphasizing his privileged status as a White male in the South African context. Indeed, the projection of his marginality is key to his desire to represent himself as a leader of a South African ‘avant-garde’ which threatens the (presumably bourgeois) establishment in the country and the international art world.

My task is to challenge people out of their middle-class complacency. It’s not that I set out to be controversial, but for art to be good, it has to examine the values of its age, and shake them up a little.182

This self-construction, and the reasoning behind it, is articulated in his 1997 text ‘The Perversity of My Birth: the Birth of my Perversity’

He or she (the aesthetic terrorist) must insert himself or herself into the ‘New Moral Order’ of the Spectacular and in the manner of the revolutionary double agent construct modes of resistance that translate into strategic interventions with the Institution of art that are simultaneously relevant to life outside the White Cube. Such interventions can be formal, abstract, visual or structural providing they remain critical of life and information within the Society of the Spectacle. The absence of economic, intellectual and moral support for critical thinking in Africa assists the artist’s task as there are no markets that can be alienated. It has always been an African survival strategy to recycle foreign objects, images and ideologies. In art, we must create in this spirit a political Arte Povera that hijacks and kidnaps the international (historically defined) languages and codes, tortures and interrogates them until they reveal their own true nature and identity. Then, according to the

182 Quoted in Style, April 1994, p.30.
strategy that we know best, that of the Freedom Fighter or Terrorist, to plant bombs at strategic points set to explode with maximum linguistic and semantic impact.  

This positioning of the artist as revolutionary is a claim that is neither new nor original and seems somewhat strange given theorists’, such as Rosalind Krauss’, deconstruction of the symbiotic relationship between the art market and the so-called ‘avant-garde’. Specifically in a South African context, it is necessary to consider the view of David Koloane, amongst others, that this positioning is being claimed and advocated in a country that has no normative middle-class establishment of values to transgress. However, amongst the White population, there is a replication of Western class divisions, or at least a perception of comparative social hierarchies, dividing around the identity faultline of Afrikaans or English speaking Whites. Geers, emanating from what is considered to be the Afrikaner urban working-class, can then be viewed as challenging the normative White middle-class values that have been predominant in South African society, particularly in an art world context. There still remains the question of the construction of ‘avant-gardism’ and its relationship to the market and the self-styled ‘subversive’ strategies employed by Geers in his work. Given his disavowal of the ‘White Cube’ context, it is perhaps surprising that he is a long-standing member of the Goodman Gallery’s stable of artists and the curator of the art collection of the Billiton (formerly Gencor) mining group, one of the establishment pillars of the South African economy.

Geers first came to prominence as a student in 1988 when he was one of 143 men to refuse to be conscripted into the South African Defence Force. The public

---


184 The Goodman Gallery, owned by Linda Givon, is by far the most significant commercial gallery in the country. Established in the Sixties, it took over from the Hugo Cassirer gallery as the backing behind most of the significant South African artists. The gallery is part of the international art network and has ties with the Stephen Freedman Gallery in London and the prestigious Marion Goodman Gallery in New York. The space is a ‘White Cube’ format, situated on Jan Smuts Avenue, in the upmarket suburb of Rosebank.
nature of this statement forced him to leave the country and go to the United States. During this period in exile, two of his works were included in the *Resistance Art* text. One was a car tyre on which had been emblazoned the rhyme ‘Eeny meeny miny mo, Catch a nigger by his toe, If he hollers let him go, Eeny meeny miny mo’. Geers appropriates the rhyme from its historical context of the mid-nineteenth century United States and translates it to the South African context at a time when South Africa was about to undergo as fundamental change as the United States did in the abolition of slavery and the American Civil War. But as with much of Geers’ output, there is a more sinister reading available. The rhyme is used to select the odd one out, the one who will be eliminated. The use of the tyre makes a blatant reference to the murder of suspected police informers in the eighties by the process of ‘necklacing’. The reference shows the dark side of the mob rule that existed within many of the high-density urban areas in South Africa in the second half of the eighties. Although undoubtedly there were a number of genuine collaborators that were executed in this manner, the method was often used by township elites to remove rivals.

Geers returned to this theme later on in his career when he displayed a video installation of a ‘necklacing’ that was carried out on a young woman who was suspected of being a collaborator. The shocking juxtaposition of the attitude of the woman, who appeared to display a passive resignation to her fate, contrasted dramatically with the frenzy of the mob as they struggled to be the one who would light the fuel. The raw intensity of the situation and the emotions make it a darkly compelling piece of footage.

The other piece selected for the text was a series of candles in the form of a cross which was accompanied by a newspaper article reporting the death of a child who had been left unsupervised in the home and had died in the fire. Geers also dealt with this subject in *Title Withheld (Brick)* of 1988, which is now in the Johannesburg Art Gallery. On this piece, text reporting a house fire in Mmabatho

---

185 ‘Necklacing’ involved placing a petrol filled tyre over the individual’s head, which was then set on fire.
had been attached to the brick, which had killed a family poisoned by the fumes after they had resorted to the bricks for fuel. It is an indictment of South African society, and the system that spawned it, that in the high density urban areas, bricks are used as an immediate fuel rather than as the building blocks of progress.

For Geers, the brick is an important object that he has employed in other contexts to display the specificity of the South African experience. In an installation from 1993, Geers displayed bricks suspended on nylon ropes in a gallery in a replication of the methods employed by criminal gangs to smash car windscreens by hanging bricks from motorway bridges at the requisite height. Victims of this type of crime are then robbed when they stop after the glass has been smashed. Another reading of this piece sees the activization of the Modernist art object in a political, specific context as opposed to Carl Andre’s infamous *Equivalent VIII* (1966), which epitomized the formal concerns of late Modernism. This reveals a
theme of significance in Geers' work, the destabilization of the gallery context and its role as a determinant of meaning of the object.

Geers' other *Title Withheld (Brick)* consists of a brick thrown through the gallery window (originally 1995). This work demands attention in a gallery since it relies on the context for its perception as an artwork, yet it debases the sanctity of the gallery space. The question arises of at what stage of its passing through the window, did the brick become an art object. Was it when it left the hand of the artist? When it smashed the glass of the gallery? When it came to rest on the floor? When it was perceived by a viewer? By this process, Geers problematizes the status of the work and the reverential contemplation of the Modernist art
object. The continuing exhibition of the piece creates significant administrative problems for the gallery in terms of security,\textsuperscript{186} insurance, and climate control. Geers’ piece at the Johannesburg Art Gallery for the first Biennale, which incorporated this theme, has been discussed in the previous chapter.

The exclusionary nature of the gallery space is the reference for \textit{Title Withheld (Deported)}, which was displayed at the Pretoria Art Museum. The piece consisted of an electrified fence with a sign that read ‘Danger, Gevaar, Ingozi’. This takes the ‘do not touch’ culture of the exhibited object to the extreme. The evident theme of inclusion/exclusion has many antecedents in South Africa. The use of electrified fencing or razor wire is ‘normal’ practice in Johannesburg residences. As well as the exclusion on security grounds of those denied access, it can be interpreted as signalling the presence of ownership, inclusion, and nation. The latter is due to the existence of similar structures all around the South African border. These were originally put in place by the apartheid state primarily to prevent guerrilla access into the country. They remain in place as a deterrent to the economic migrants from the rest of Africa. Even once inside, the powerful dislike of foreigners means the inclusion/exclusion divide is microcosmed within the national border, as other borders, both physical and non-physical are used to determine access.

Access is one of the aspects of \textit{Title Withheld (Untitled)}, which was included in the ‘Cross/ing’ exhibition curated by Olu Oguibe. The work displayed two car number plates bearing the letters ‘N-T-T-L-D’. This makes more explicit the space of the viewer as the site of the construction of meaning, as it can be read as either entitled or untitled.

Ownership of a car remains a significant status symbol in South Africa, the absence of which positions the individual in socio-economic terms. The transport

\textsuperscript{186} This is particularly evident in Johannesburg, which has the reputation for being the most dangerous city in the world outside of active war zones.
system for those without these benefits of access and ownership is a dangerous space. Aside from the usual dangers of high accident rates, commuters have been targeted by political terrorists, notably in the period leading up to the 1994 election, and subject to the intense violence of taxi wars. The competition for control of routes has led to outbreaks of violence in the Gauteng area. Often, commuters have been killed as rival firms have chosen to settle their differences with machine-guns. The lack of government control over this informal area of the economy has led to its association with car crime. Vehicle crime is so prevalent that one noteworthy barrier to car ownership is the cost of insurance. The absence of the car in this piece evokes connotations of the everyday reality of crime and its violent nature, particularly in a country notorious for ‘car-jacking’ and the elimination of witnesses.

As is Geers’ wont, the transfer of this implicit violence to the gallery setting has other resonances against the gallery system and the identification of the Modernist art object. Geers parodies the Modernist construction of the ‘untitled’ contemplative object with his usual use of the activist term ‘title withheld’. In this instance, it is also a case of object withheld, in that the work is defined by what is absent from the scene. The withholding of the letters on the number plate effectively transfers the responsibility of meaning to the site of the viewer. The title can also be read as a comment on the likely audience for the work at a South African gallery. The galleries which display contemporary are, in general, exclusionary by the location in White areas and attract an audience which is enabled to reach them physically and perhaps consider buying into them and what they represent by furnishing their houses or offices with a piece. This maintains the haute coulture status of art as a luxury item and reinforces its elitist and exclusionary status within society.

Another intervention into the workings of the gallery system can be seen in Title Withheld (Small Change). This piece consisted of the artist ‘randomly’

---

187 This work has also been displayed as Title Withheld (R7.63).
dropping the contents of his pockets onto the gallery floor as an entry for the Volkskaas Atelier Awards, then arguably the most important contemporary art prize in the country. Two of Geers’ fellow artists then decided to ‘borrow’ the money on the floor, which they replaced the next day. However, Geers had made copies of the coins used and was able to demonstrate that those now on display were not those in the original piece. He then made an insurance claim against the value of the work, which he stated was R30,000 on the grounds that the gallery and sponsor had been negligent in not providing security for the work. With some reluctance, the bank paid the insurance value of the work and the coins of the second version and the correspondence that followed are now in the collection of the architect Pierre Lombard.

Lombard owns a substantial collection of contemporary South African art, including several of Geers’ works, which is mostly displayed in his architectural award-winning Houghton home. In 1998, Volkskaas Bank as part of its relaunch as part of ABSA, used Lombard’s house as the setting for one of its advertisements. Included in the picture was one of Geers’ works, Title Withheld (Nek), situated on a podium appropriate for the contemplation of the art object. Unusually, the object in question here is the broken neck of a Heineken beer bottle. Again the object is marked by violence, the product of being smashed to leave just the jagged top of the bottle. This transformation alludes to the possibility of violence and the use of the object as a potentially lethal weapon. It indicates that weapons and violence can be found in the most mundane of objects. Geers has stated,

"Objects, images, situations and documents are re-cycled from reality and inserted into the context of art. Selected for their ideological and ethical values, they function as a Reality Principle challenging the passive relationship art has come to have with its audience. At its most successful art is no longer immune from life." 188

---

188 Quoted in Flash Art, Special edition 1-2, 1995.
Kendell Geers – *Title Withheld (Nek)*

The most common sighting of a broken beer bottleneck in South Africa is in its use as a pipe for smoking tobacco, or more usually marijuana, reflecting the recycling of objects for more insidious use. Another reading of the work centres on the inversion of the artist’s name in the title of the work and its inclusion in the brand name of the beer. Beneath the brand name is the listing of country of origin, ‘Made in Holland’ in addition to the phrase ‘The original quality’. This element throws up a significant number of reading centring around the construct of identity.
This is Geers acknowledging his own roots and those of the Afrikaners as emanating from Holland. What is clear is that there is no potential for the reformulation of that identity, like the bottle, it has been smashed and reconfigured for uses outside its point of origin, which, of course, is not recoverable in any case. It was the search for this 'original quality' that drove many of the ideologues of the apartheid era, even if the patent motivation was the control of power. Geers presents the dilemma of the Afrikaner. For unlike the vast majority other diasporic communities in South Africa, who have retained connections both physical and emotional to the motherlands of their identity, Afrikaners are unlikely to identify with their Dutch and Flemish heritage. For a long time they were not acknowledged as anything other than a bastard offshoot. Though there has been some recent emigration to Belgium, this is more in line with the level of Whites leaving the country and the obvious linguistic links than any quest to re-enter the womb of the motherland. So, although 'Made in Holland', this is identity re-invented on another hemisphere, another continent. Just as with the makers of the beer, the product has been transformed by its emergence in a different cultural environment. Again, Geers situates the object in the context of violence. The piece is displayed with the reference 'Original destroyed on flight TWA 800'. This destabilizes the status of the object, indicating not solely that this is 'only' a copy, but that the original is not recoverable. It has been blown to smithereens in an explosion that has never been fully explained. Was it the Americans blowing up their own airliner? Was it an international terrorist conspiracy? Was it the presence of the Geers artwork? The 'truth' will not be known and it is not recoverable.

'Guilty' was one of Geers' most notorious pieces. In January 1998, a celebration was planned to commemorate the centenary of the opening of Fort Klapperkop. The fort had been constructed under the Transvaal Government of Paul Kruger to protect Pretoria from potential British invasion and came into active use soon after in the (Second) Boer War of 1899-1902, renamed by the first ANC administration as 'The South African War'. It remains an important signifier of
Afrikaner identity and the mythologized history of suffering that plays a fundamental part in the construction of that identity. Indeed, the decision to change the name of the war was motivated by the lack of acknowledgement of the role and impact of the population other than the British and the Afrikaners. Originally invited by participate in the event by the French Institute, the offer was quickly withdrawn after protests from some of those involved in the festival. Geers had elected to hijack the event by circulating flyers stating that he would present a series of lectures, performances and cultural events that would critique the significance and meaning of Fort Klapperkop, the Boer War and most importantly Afrikaans culture in the New South Africa. This would include a church service, cannon firing, traditional Afrikaans dancing and cuisine. Naturally, credit for the arrangement of these events was denied to Geers by the festival organisers, one of whom said,

We are in no way part of his art. He is playing with my integrity if he thinks that I’m going to be his ball to kick around. It’s enough to make me furious.

Geers’ original plan had been to close down the fort, with himself inside, a hundred years after Kruger’s opening. The reversal of access can be read as the desire for the closure of a period of identity which as has been related was responsible for the creation of the separate white Afrikaner identity, primarily as a political device, following the defeat of the Boer Republics. The hundred-year period had seen this identity perceived as having pejorative connotations in a similar way to the German identity in the immediate post-war period or that of the Serbs in the nineties. This perception was so virulent that Geers, for one, had disavowed himself of that identity and refused to use its primary signifying force, the taal (language). This identification with discredited ideologies was reinforced by the invitation to the event, which showed armed German soldiers, pictured on duty for the visit of Mandela to the ‘Colours’ exhibition in Berlin in 1996.

Geers clear disavowal of any affiliation with his ethnic community emphasized his desire to be considered outside traditional frames of reference. His challenge to the ‘rainbowist’ totality in Berlin showed his reluctance to be subsumed within the pervasive categories of the ‘new’ South Africa.

The fort commemoration also marked the end of a fifty-year period when Afrikaners had benefited from the positive discrimination employed by the Nationalist Party regime. This had now been reversed, along with the name of the war. Geers’ plan had been to raise anarchist flags and hang a large sign with the words ‘Guilty’. The flags have a strong visual resemblance to the three-legged swastika of the extreme AWB, using the same pictorial devices of a strongly linear black emblem against a white area inset within a deep red background. Perhaps Geers intended to signify that in order to dress the (self-) wound caused by this history, it was needed to have an endpoint of which Fort Klappersdorp could have been a potent signifier.

Prevented from attending the event, though performance artist Steven Cohen, a confidante of Geers, tried to gain entry to the site in drag and was not allowed within the site’s confines, Geers staged an event – or not, as the case may be. Geers claimed that he was going to fly a plane over the fort trailing a banner with the words ‘Guilty Skulding Molato Netyalo’ (guilty in English, Afrikaans, Zulu, and Xhosa). There was some debate as to whether this occurred. According to viewers on the ground, including an ever-expanding media interest, a plane appeared too far away to read its sign some time after the event was scheduled to commence. Geers claims that the plane passed over the fort and other signifiers of Afrikaner identity: the Voortrekker Monument; Paul Kruger’s house; the Lotus Versfield stadium (the cradle of rugby in South Africa); the Central prison in Pretoria. Kerkham states,

---

190 Described in the previous chapter.
It is irrelevant whether Geers actually flew over the fort or not, and it is significant that there was a media surge relating such different versions of the event. An irate Mrs. Coetzee, for example, wrote a letter complaining bitterly about Geers’ attempt to desecrate the ‘fallen of South Africa’, whereas the Sunday Independent accredited the situation with the impact of Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot. However, the beauty of the dissonant traces of this event lies in the fact that they acerbically point to the glaringly different constructions of social mythology and narrative in South Africa’s precarious history, or rather histories, and to the staunchness attached to these stories that many are willing to risk their lives for. As Baudillard suggests, ‘History is our lost referential, that is to say our myth’. ... The intervention, if it exists at all, goes way beyond Geers himself. As it turns out no crime was committed that January weekend in 1998, but numerous unsolved and indeed, suspiciously unattended to crimes were churned to the surface of South African mythology. As such, I submit that Geers did succeed in a certain amount of cultural-political subversion, as he invited his viewers/investigators to follow the clues of his forensic aesthetics, which as some might have noticed, pointed to reality and history as being suspect.

Kerkham’s analysis positions Geers on a cutting edge of the contemporary South African art scene. Geers’ redeployment of conceptual strategies problematizes the existence of the work as a contemplative object or event. His savvy manipulation of the media sets him apart from his peers and enables his texts to be read as Baudrillardian inspired hyperrealism. However, this is a transgression of the old order’s values. To have performed a piece such as ‘Guilty’ in the climate of the apartheid years could be been perceived as subversive, but in the ‘new’ South Africa with its progressive constitution and widespread toleration, offending Mrs. Coetzee or the AWB, whom Geers alleges have made death threats against him, is

---

191 Perhaps Kerkham might have used different here, on the basis that a single truth or history is endlessly deferred, never manifesting itself wholly.
192 Kerkham 2000: p.35.
to reinforce the notion that these value transgressions work within the frame of White reference.

Shortly after the 1999 election, Geers transferred his base to Europe and was last located in Brussels. The vast majority of his recent exhibitions have been in Europe and the United States, including solo shows in London, Rome, and Cincinnati. He has not participated in any of the recent ten-year South African shows. He was, however, selected for *Documenta XI* by Enwezor. Clearly Geers had had enough of the South African artworld where he felt under-valued, and where he had polarized opinion. His ‘marginality’ as a South African can work quite effectively in a First World context to position him alongside others of Third World origin who now reside in First World art centres. In a South African context, or the context of a South African group show, he is being counted and considered as a White (Male, Heterosexist) South African – as his *Title Withheld (Score)* so aptly captures.

Geers had a considerable impact on the framing of contemporary artistic discourse in South Africa. His extreme advocacy of a global perspective that requires South African art to be valued and judged in terms of the global artworld has been highly influential in both attracting artists and critics to that perception – as well as providing a hate figure for those who prefer an introspective judgement privileging national interests and considerations.

**David Koloane**

In complete contrast to Geers, David Koloane has been an unstinting advocate of the need to privilege Black art practice in recognition of the vast differences that have been available in financial, training, and educational resources to Black and White artists. David Koloane’s experience of Johannesburg life was significantly at odds with that of Geers or Kentridge. Born in 1938 in Alexandra, his identification as a ‘Bantu’ by the apartheid state denied him the access to the centres of power and privilege afforded to his White counterparts. Unable to
register on any formal programme of art tuition, Koloane received training from the late Bill Ainslie at his studios in Johannesburg between 1974 and 1977. Subsequently he founded the Federated Union of Black Artists in Soweto in 1977 that offered training to Black artists.

Koloane is often viewed purely as a ‘struggle’ artist working within the discourse of Resistance Art. Koloane’s standing as an artist is much higher outside South Africa than internally. In the UK, and to a lesser extent the US, he is often regarded as a definitive voice on the cultural condition of Black South Africans. There are a variety of reasons for this to this. ‘Struggle’ themes continue to have an artistic and economic currency abroad, but are perceived to be somewhat outdated in the ‘new’ South Africa.

His reminder of how the situation the country finds itself in is a product of its past is an uncomfortable reminder for individuals and corporations buying South African contemporary art in the country of their own role and/or complicity in maintaining the structures of the previous regime.

The urban reality that Koloane portrays continues to be a present and everyday reality for so many, that sits uncomfortably with the representation of transformation and its construction as a part of the meta-discourse of the ‘new’ South Africa and the ‘rainbow nation’.

Koloane’s long history as an artist in the apartheid years imparts him with a ‘struggle authenticity’ in the outside selecting, curating and critiquing of South African art. The struggle against apartheid was one that had a considerable amount of overseas engagement and publicization. As shown in the previous chapter, the identity make-up of any South African contemporary art exhibition is very important and Koloane’s presence as an artist or writer lends an authenticity to the currency and value of an exhibition branded under the title ‘South African’.
Koloane has used his position to the benefit of Black artists in the country, particularly in the Johannesburg area. With Anthony Caro and Robert Loder, he was responsible for bringing the Triangle Workshop concept to Southern Africa in 1985. Named the Thupelo art project in South Africa, the concept spread all through the region with workshops being staged regularly in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique and elsewhere. Koloane was also the prime mover in the establishment of the Bag Factory in Fordsburg in central Johannesburg in 1991. The disused factory provided studio space for artists, mainly Black men, and was the launching pad for a number of critically respected artists such as Kagiso Pat Mautloa, Sam Nhlengethwa and Kay Hassan.

Koloane refused to conform to working in a naturalist narrative style that was the expectation of black artists in the struggle. He identified his working style with that of an Abstract Expressionism inspired by influences gleaned from indirect exposure to the practice of Newman, Rothko, and particularly Jackson Pollock with whom his work bears an obvious stylistic resemblance. Almost any of his pieces from 1985 to 1989 (usually Untitleds) show this stylistic influence. Koloane’s adoption of this arch Modernist way of working was criticised by both liberal paternalists and leftists. The former represented the tendency, central to the Modernist construction of discourse, that the Black artist should produce work in a ‘primitive’ manner that emphasised a relationship or closeness to nature and made apparent an untutored brush and absence of formal training. Koloane has said that

Black artists are generally not expected to venture beyond a certain threshold in their work, the reason being the fear mostly from art dealers that they will lose their indigenous identity or their roots as the sentiment is popularly expressed.193

The nature of solidarity criticism sought for the revolutionary artist to work in a didactic, tendentious style that was naturalistic and offered easy reading to the untrained audience. The adoption of a style so strongly associated with American neo-imperialism and the capitalist value system in the polarisation of the Cold War era was a particular target of criticism. Koloane was seen by some as having sold out to a presumed art autonomy that refused engagement with the struggle.

In the seventies and early eighties in South Africa, Black urban artistic expression was synonymous with the practice of so-called ‘township art’. There was a ready market at home and abroad for this genre, initiated by artists such as Gerard Sekoto and developed and politicised by the work of artists such as fellow Joburger Durant Sihlali. The work appealed to both a White liberal elite internally and an overseas market wanting to gain closeness to the authentic lived experience of township life. By the eighties, a stylised genre had emerged that lacked innovation and focused on the production of this consumable product. It would have been easy for Koloane to work in this style – not to say more profitable – however, he engaged resolutely with his interpretation of Modernism, and specifically Abstract Expressionism. The value of the work from a critical standpoint lies more in the refusal to conform to either of the stereotypes others sought to impose on the Black artist than perhaps the work itself. Legitimate questions can be raised as to the value of a neo-Abstract Expressionist practice in eighties South Africa. There is little that can be said to be particularly innovative or insightful in the work, other than stylistically. Its interest lies in its individualistic stance that rejected the group identities imposed and propagated by the regime or others who would not have wanted in any way to identify themselves with the state, but that sought to control others to conform to identities and practice that suited their own frame of reference.

By contrast, Koloane’s critical writing and positioning align him firmly in the ‘ethno-nationalist’ camp. For Koloane, there must first be an establishment of a true identity within the nation before engagement can take place with the rest of the world. When this engagement does take place, it should privilege the African continent over the West or other more distant cultures.
In the early nineties, Koloane began to reintroduce a figurative element into his canvases. Koloane has focused on the stylistic shift he chose to make; but it is hard not to contextualize the work in terms of the dramatic socio-political events that were happening around him – particularly in view of the township cityscapes that returned to his canvases after a long absence. Rather than return to the wholly naturalistic style of ‘township’ art, Koloane employs his expressionist technique to represent life in the high density areas and inner city Johannesburg. These are the regular sites/sights for millions of commuters who make the journey each day from the outlying areas to the centre of town. In this choice of subject matter, his work reflects the lived experience of the Black urban population with most of the works depicting either dawn or dusk – the only times available for any contemplation. His treatment of light can be seen effectively in *Blue Cityscape* (2000) and *City Lights* (1999). Social commentary can be read into *City Dwellers* (1998) which depicts a series of sex workers whose exploitation has continued under the new dispensation with little change from the past. *Coca-Cola Moonlight* (1999-2001) highlights commuters at a bus station in the foreground against the
represented neon glow of the Coca-Cola sign – the ultimate signifier of branding and globalisation. The title puts an emphasis on the artificiality of this. This juxtaposition builds on an earlier series – *Made in South Africa* – around the time of the elections. In these works, Koloane divides the canvas pretty much in two. The upper register is used for the natural presence of the sun or moon which is dramatically contrasted with the lower register that displays the urban detritus of life in the high density areas.

The difficulties faced in the high density areas give rise to what is probably Koloane’s most interesting series – his depiction of ‘township’ dogs. Koloane’s visual focus on the dogs themselves is emphasized by his blurring of the background. This is particularly effective in works such as *Menace* (1993), *Fighting dogs* (1993) and *Street Dogs* (1996).

These works date from the era on endemic Black on Black violence supported by elements within the old regime’s security apparatus. Shadowy forces were at work and the pieces use
The recurrent image of the dog in Koloane’s work is used to point out the brutality of life in the townships, its ‘man eat man’ attitude and the survival skills that it requires.\(^{194}\)

The works also reference the use of a Zulu word *Makloyi* that is used to refer to stray dogs; but also to urban unemployed who are forced to scavenge for a living – relying on key survival skills in order to find enough money each day to live. There is undoubtedly a humanist element to the work as well as Koloane has stated,

There is always some focus on street children but very little, if any on street dogs. The dogs move around in packs like hyenas and can be just as vicious. They drift around waste dumps, garbage cans, wedding and funeral ceremonies. The commuters, on the other hand, leave their homes against a mist of brazier fire, smog and industrial emissions. They return at dusk under a blanket of dark and ominous layers that hover over the township so much that shape and form become blurred.\(^{195}\)

Koloane has recently focused on jazz. Jazz in South Africa has a powerful local tradition that took inspiration not only from the musical style of New Orleans, but from its status as a signifier of resistance for the Civil Rights movement. Though usually associated in South Africa with the Cape – it is generally referred to as ‘Cape’ Jazz – it was also an important cultural product of Sophiatown, which was destroyed in the 1960’s as part of the re-allocation of land to Whites.\(^{196}\) Koloane’s *Jazz Session I and II* (both 1996) signal an affirmation of the vibrancy and dynamism of the scene with the their tight composition and indicative movements. Koloane describes the genre as representing

\[^{196}\] I discuss this process in more detail in relation to District Six in the next chapter.
The collective memory of a people trapped in a space or environment not of their choice. It was a self-affirming celebration of overcoming which discouraged any form of self-pity.\textsuperscript{197}

Koloane is a powerful voice inside and outside the country that urges re-engagement into the global art community to be taken at pace dictated by the extent of the transformation in South African society. His apposite critiques of the role of Western constructs such as the avant-garde and his demonstration of the different critiques and expectations levelled at Black and White artists retain a value and currency in a South Africa struggling to shake off its past. The fact that most 'Euro-nationalists' and businesses are only too keen to catalyse the process and that their ascendancy looks assured, does not necessarily denigrate the importance of an alternative perspective.

His own work, whilst unable to compare with the best contemporary South African practice on either a formal or conceptual level, has nonetheless been highly significant in establishing paths for Black artists to follow, especially when there were none.

**Moshekwa Langa**

Perhaps the most individualistic and varied South African artist of the recent past has been Moshekwa Langa. The common consensus was that in 1995 Langa came from the bush, exhibited an eponymous show at the Rembrandt van Rijn Gallery in Johannesburg and was to become the darling of the 'new' South African art world.

With the exception of one or two artists such as Lucas Seage, Conceptual art had been the exclusive preserve of White artists. The reasons for this were numerous. Under the apartheid system, Blacks had been denied entry to art schools and received training only at informal art foundations (usually administered by White artistic counterparts). The prevailing expectation of Black artists from White counterparts, political activists and the

\textsuperscript{197} Quoted in Tadjo, p.36.
market was to produce art that conformed with the strictures imposed by the conditions of the struggle, that is to say art that had a revolutionary content and preferably didactic means of conveying the message, and/or art that conformed with the stereotypes that surround(ed) the canon of African art. Unsurprisingly, artists who had been used to these expectations found it difficult, and not necessarily desirable, to move to a type of art practice that was evidently international in nature, outlook and source. With the onset of the organic crisis in the regime and the inevitability of its impending demise, the cultural ground shifted. Whilst some White artists continued to work in styles undifferentiated from their practice of the apartheid era, a new neo-conceptual ‘grouping’ came to the fore. In Johannesburg at least, the most prominent and certainly most infamous was Kendell Geers. Others were Stephen Hobbs, Joaquim Schoenfeldt, Steven Cohen, Wayne Barker, Minette Vari, Hentie van der Merwe and Belinda Blignaut. While some of these artists could be said to represent previously suppressed identities – Cohen and van der Merwe, for example, used their own identity to interrogate wider issues relating to homosexuality in South Africa – all of them were White.

In the immediate post-apartheid era, this was not conducive to achieving recognition for this particular field of South African art practice. International curators and dealers were flocking to the country; but, had no interest in producing a show that did not, to use the euphemism of the time, reflect the ethnic composition of the whole country. As set out in chapter two, this dichotomic presentation of the ‘new’ South Africa was problematic in terms of the critical filters that were used to understand and review the work; the integrity and cohesion of the exhibitions they were displayed in; the stark juxtaposition between White and Black art practice. In addition, while Western curators, audiences and markets were still readily lapping up the ‘struggle’ art, in its immediate context it had obviously lost its main point of focus – even if the legacy and continuing iniquities were all too readily apparent.

Langa’s arrival on the scene presented a whole new aesthetic and conceptual engagement with apartheid and its legacy that left behind the didactic, politically-engaged practice of
the struggle and addressed issues of identity and alienation that were the currency of the
global art circuit at the time. Or did it?

In the rush to adopt and celebrate the arrival of new Black, authentic, and even gay talent,
Langa himself, or at least his perspective, was seemingly forgotten in the rush to proclaim
the contextual legitimation of conceptual, identity centred production. With the South
African art world there for his taking, Langa decamped to Amsterdam to take up a place
at the Rijksakademie. Other than a residency at SANG in early 2002 as part of the Fresh
programme, he has not returned for any significant length of time.

Some of the comments by him and about him offer a possible insight into the reasons for
a self-imposed exile at a time when many cultural practitioners were returning home.

People can’t reconcile my idiosyncratic views with their own desire to
classify me. I sometimes have a sense of people trying to lay claim to me, of
putting me where they think I should be and not leaving me to do my
experiments, have my failures in peace … people seem to talk about me
rather than to me.198

My intention … is to invent an accomplice (working name: John Ruskin).
Because Moshekwa has to answer stupid questions most of the time – ‘Where
is Africa in your work?’ – we will both be able to answer and I think having
this personage might go a long way to deflecting confining thinking. My/our
work will be seen in an altered state and not within the limits of simply
‘African Art’. I am very keen to make this kind of confusion – whose work is
which? Which work is more authentically ‘African’ … I want to show that
there are multiple forms of influence and that I and other African artists
meander and incorporate different forms.199

198 Quoted in Jamal & Williamson 1996: Art in South Africa: The Future Present, David Philip, Cape Town
and Johannesburg, p.86.
199 Quoted on www.artthrob.co.za
Colin Richards has referred to him as

A perfidious trickster…. a disruptive enigma … an enabling narcissist … a knowing child\textsuperscript{200}

And stated about the reception of his works,

You’re unsettled, you’re undone, because you can’t place him and consequently you don’t know where your place is.\textsuperscript{201}

Langa’s public comments on his production tend to be obtuse and refuse classification with the meanings and filters that are imposed.

(My work) is about the dangerous potential of innocence, about artifice represented as reality, and the borderline between this and that, where one is neither fish nor fowl.\textsuperscript{202}

The work itself is not located in any specificity. It has to do with various things. It is not about anything. I mean the work I showed, that day, at the conference I haven’t given it up. This speech is in the process of being written and written up sometimes I write if, sometimes it is written by the language. No. Matter. I leave it now. To be continued.\textsuperscript{203}

The desire to understand and attribute meaning to Langa’s work in terms of identity, nationalist and other, is manifest. Born in the ‘homeland’ of KwaNdebele in 1975 – the smallest of the apartheid established Bantustans and entirely without historical and

\textsuperscript{200}Quoted in Jamal & Williamson 1996, p.86.
\textsuperscript{201}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{203}Excerpt from \textit{Postscript (Vile Relations)}, paper for \textit{The Body Politic} conference held in Johannesburg, 3-4 September 1996.
cultural resonance for its supposed inhabitants or economic viability – Langa was educated at the Waldof school in Johannesburg. Attending this Rudolph Steiner establishment, Langa was one of very few Blacks to receive a level of formal schooling that would be considered the norm in the West. Returning to his ‘home’, Langa made a series of pieces that formed the basis of that first exhibition in Johannesburg. Two of the bodies of work concerned what have become known as the ‘Skins’ works and a series of disfigured maps.

The ‘Skins’ were a series of pieces made from industrial materials, such as cement bags, Vaseline, turpentine and creosote that had been torn and treated to take on a visual resemblance to the animal skins that are found in tourist shops throughout Africa. The

---

204 The title of the works was *Untitled* but they became known as the ‘Skins’ after a review by Victor
works can be read as comments on the commodification of Africa into consumable parcels for White/Western consumption. The skin is a common souvenir that allows the visitor to bring a touch of the bush to their interior decoration scheme – a souvenir or aide-mémoire of the adventure into the unknown. The artificiality of this is axiomatic, but reinforced here by the materials used. The industrial nature of the products reflects a more realistic representation of contemporary life in Africa as opposed to the prelapsarian nostalgia offered by the animal skin. There is a questioning of the value and, perhaps, the use of a living resource in this way in satisfying the desire ‘to take home a piece of Africa.’

A potentially more sinister work from this period, also Untitled, is a similar piece where the paper has been hung to resemble the abattoir and the element of ‘play’ is ever present as an interrogative device in Langa’s work and asserts itself here in relation to the collapse between the interior decoration function of the animal skin and the gallery object status of the work. Langa described himself around this time as a

New curio from Africa.205

The ‘play’ with the nature of commodification is evident, particularly the biographical reading of the work that confuses the distinction between the artist and artwork. This is a feature of Langa’s practice and explains, at least partly, the fixity of the identity filter that is employed to offer insight into the work.

The series of map related pieces offer the most evident relationship with a racial or ethnic group identity in Langa’s work. Langa has had a longstanding interest in maps and what they represented as official documents in the apartheid era. In a much quoted anecdote, when he received his first map he was unable to locate his home village, or the places nearby that acted as points of reference in his life because they were deemed too unimportant to register on a map by the sanctioned cartographers.

Metsoamere.

205 Jamal & Williamson, p.86.
I found these (government-produced) maps interesting because they were documents of authority. But I couldn’t find or situate myself in this kind of document. I found them totally useless.\textsuperscript{206}

In an act of defiance, Langa took to defacing the maps in a style that gave them a personal resonance and meaning. Many of these have related to South Africa and the part of what is now Limpopo province where he lived. Others were more global maps that showed the deceptive scales in place to represent, for example, Africa and Europe. This personalisation of the official documents of the regime offers many potential readings. The absence of place, location and home are readily apparent. The difference between the real and the hyperreal representation of place, location and home is problematized and questioned.

The map represents the nation yet the nation has no record or place for certain people. The interest of the regime in the people whom it had confined to a barren ‘homeland’ was minimal. Hardly anything was recorded as existing in the ‘homelands’ because it was assumed not to be of value. Therefore, the relationship between the nation, ‘homeland’ and sense of home was a quest for an identity. Langa’s markings on the maps consist of graffiti style statements and annotations of places, surrounded by a masking tape used to partly close up areas that are not for equal focus with the rest of the work.

A particular example of this can be seen in an \textit{Untitled} from 1996. Headed “2528 Pretoria third edition 1984 (this edition’s okay)” with a ‘subheading’ of “it will surprise and delight”, other annotations read “inset detail (do not cross the red line) (do not break glass in case of emergency), there will be no care of emergency (this is an emergency state anyhow)”. A line is drawn in white-out to link Pretoria and Bophuthatswana, inscribed with the note “we present another episode in this intriguing saga”. A further link in white-

\textsuperscript{206}Quoted in Stein J.: ‘Map artwork offers identity in Cincinnati Post 12/01/04, available at www.cincypost.com/2004/01/12/langa01-12-2004.html
out is made to KwaNdebele with a nearby unnamed spot carrying the words “this is where I came in”.

Other examples of the map series centre on cartographic representations of the area between Pretoria and Bophuthatswana, such as *It came from outer space* and *Trespassers will be shot, survivors will be shot in the foot. Speculations will be rife* (both undated but probably from 1994-6). In these works, Langa highlights controlling aspects of possession and dispossession, from the title of the second work and incorporated phrases such as “fishing rights”, “state copyright”, “right of way reserved”, “water rights only up to here”. The constructed and fantastical nature of the society reflected in the map (or does society reflect the map?) is highlighted by the first title and the inclusion of text such as “Invasion of the body snatchers”, “they lived happily (n)ever after” and “Exclusive story, this week only”. *It came from outer space* is dominated by a large circle divide into black and white halves. Given the title, it is tempting to see this as a saucer from a sci-fi film, but its visual impact appears more like an apartheid yin-yang where the bonding and integration of the two colours has been separated out in a defined linear way.

The wit and media savvy nature of the visual and textual commentary place Langa firmly in a different sphere from many South African artists. The inclusion of the banal instructions of authority offer an insight into the experience of the banality of the system. The injustice was codified into an official system that maintained many of the trappings of ‘usual’ authority elsewhere. Langa’s personalisation of the map shows both that official seemingly neutral documents were both evidence of the totalising agency of the system and suspected as such by recipients or viewers. The phraseology employed by Langa suggests the fictional nature of the documentation as part of an ongoing process. This reflects the creation of the ‘homelands’, which would not have appeared on a map ten years before. Names like Verwoerdburg and Triomf indicate a politicization of the, supposedly objective, document. The particular emphasis on the area between Pretoria, Bophuthatswana and KwaNdebele is interesting. This was Langa’s place of origin and the area with which he had an intimate familiarity that in a different place and time would be understood as ‘home’. The dominance of the apartheid system made this sense of
belonging a constructed artificial one. To accept the construction of ‘home’ in a ‘homeland’ was to be compliant with the system. The particular situations of Bophuthatswana and KwaNdebele demonstrated the iniquities and artificiality of the system. Bophuthatswana was ruled by a Pretoria-sanctioned autocrat, Lucas Mangope.\textsuperscript{207} Although it consisted geographically of thirteen ‘islands’ surrounded in almost all cases entirely by the South African state, it was relatively successful economically unlike all the other ‘homeland’ entities. The reasons for this included its proximity to the urban areas of the Witwatersrand, its relative ethnic and cultural homogeneity, its proximity and links to a successful ethnic motherland (Botswana), its ability to attract investment – represented most evidently in the form of Sun City.

KwaNdebele was extremely poor, had been carved out of a previous ‘homeland’ allocation for a different ethnic group, had no real meaning or history as a place of Ndebele occupation and had no viable economic sustainability. The physical and political relationship between these three areas signified the disparities created by the system and the constructed and artificial essentialism of the premises upon which it was predicated. Defacing and looking to locate oneself within the map is, therefore, a very subjectively personal political statement that reflects a quest for self-understanding and self-situation that is a key theme in all Langa’s production.

Many of the ‘map’ pieces are backed with black garbage bags which suggests an economy of materials – perhaps playing with the idea of the underprivileged Black artist – and also Langa’s verdict on the value of the official documents. In a contemporaneous work, Langa sealed a number of ‘homeland’ directories in garbage bags and suspended them on coat hangers. This related to the demise of the ‘homelands’ and the political reintegration into the nation of the ‘new’ South Africa. This act of sealing and closure can be read as an archaeological exhibit – a record of a time past containing a detail of the people who had been designated, generally against their will, to live in these bizarre entities. It can also be viewed as a criminal exhibit – a piece of evidence that can be used

\textsuperscript{207} Discussed in more detail in the second chapter.
as physical evidence of the existence of the system. It cannot be denied by those that its very existence accuses.

Two notable related pieces that date from 1997, shortly before Langa left South Africa, are *Temporal distance (with criminal intent) You will find us in the best places* and *Mountains of my youth – a novel*. These pieces create a landscape using balls of coloured string, toy cars and tanks and various found objects like bottles and mirror balls. Hamza Walker stated,

Part of this installation’s critical success lay in the playful manner it reinscribes Marcel Duchamp’s famous installation *Mile of string* with in the rubric of globalisation. Not surprisingly, Duchamp, as part of the 1942 *First papers of Surrealism* exhibition, in which *Mile of string* was included, encouraged Sidney Janis’ children to play loudly and excitedly during the opening reception – a gesture that Langa has subsumed through his use of toys. Given *Temporal Distance’s* delightfully haphazard resemblances to a
Walker focuses on the nature of ‘play’ in Situationist thought, as represented in this work, which challenged the Modern Movement’s functionalist orthodoxy that prevailed in the post-war era. Another conceptual notion of ‘play’ that can be applied to Langa’s work comes from Barthes’ concept of the free ‘play’ of signifiers disrupted from the stability of the semiological sign. The personalisation of artistic concepts provides a subjective vocabulary that can be understood only in so far as it is possible to survey a significant body of work of the artist, and in the taking as personal reference points artistic works that have come to hold a received interpretation such as Duchamp’s or Jackson Pollack, who provides a obvious formal reference for Temporal Distance. Whereas writers such as Guy Debord understood the pursuit of leisure as a challenge to the cultural order of the time, Langa’s work challenged the predominant political order. This is evidenced by the title that plays on the fears of the oligarchy in relinquishing power. One of the myths that became self-perpetuating in apartheid South Africa was the immediacy of danger and the threat to society. This was played upon by Black liberation movements to whom it ascribed a presence that was not supported by the level of actual subversive activity sustained against the regime; but also by the state for whom it provided a convenient excuse to further increase the oppression and repression that were the controlling tools of the regime. The fear of the collapse of the state and the ‘certain’ anarchy that would result was a prime motivating force in the maintenance of the status quo from those who had the most to lose – generally the Whites. Langa’s title plays with that fear and is supported by the web-like construction that the piece presents, interweaving itself around objects and place of solidity and familiarity.

A further personalisation of Duchamp’s work can be seen in Rome, a giclée print on watercolour from 2000 that depicts water going into a urinal. The reference here is to Duchamp’s infamous and iconic Fountain. The ‘original’ stands in Italy – in Venice; but,
of course, it is Rome that is defined by its fountains. The Fontana Trevi, the Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi, Roman baths and the drinking fountains present a quintessential vision of Rome as the eternal city, the centre of Christianity (and therefore ‘civilisation’), the home of artistic creativity. Langa’s picture shows another side to the city – the public urinal. There is the inference of a dirty side to the city where poverty exists side by side with splendour and wealth, and where racism is an accepted societal norm.\footnote{Other than the Fascist history and its physical and artistic legacy in the Via Imperialii and elsewhere, there is the revival of the Allenza Nationale that celebrates its links to that past. Lazio, one of the two major football teams in the city, have an overtly racist fan base that has courted controversy in recent years by brandishing swastikas, glorifying the Serbian warlord Arkan and jeering Black players from other teams. This climate of hatred, supported by a preponderance of racist and fascist graffiti make it particularly unwelcoming for the non-White visitor.} A much quoted difference between southern and northern hemisphere concerns the way water goes down the plughole. Here, Langa is capturing the moment when the water is draining but it is impossible to determine in which direction. The only orientation is provided by the title highlighting the sense of place.

The feeling of being away from home is supported by another print Langa did in the city entitled Roman Sky which focuses on a jet plane’s trace in the sky. There is a sense of longing that could be interpreted as a quest for ‘home’ or a sense of belonging. Another identifying construct that can be read in the Rome photograph is the reference to a particular type of gay activity. Langa has clearly identified himself with gay artistic practice since participating in a Gay Rites/Rewrites show in South Africa in 1995 and it forms an important aspect of his work, particularly the performance and video pieces discussed below. Again, it can be construed as a parody of the stereotyping of gay practice by documenting a public urinal, but it can also be seen as a celebration of another side of life in Rome. Positioning himself as a gay Black male establishes a contrast with the White virginal purity of the marble fountains, the Madonna and all the associated signifiers that have been used to create the dualistic polarities so favoured in Christianity and Christian practice.
Langa’s self-representation and identity as a gay man is clearly seen in his work in pieces, such as *Sperm stain*. A particular type of gay performative practice, commonly known and theorised (by Susan Sontag amongst others) as ‘camp’ informs a number of Langa’s video still works. These include *How I left the couch* (1999) and *My life as a disco queen, as told to John Ruskin* (1999). The quality of camp work in Sontag’s estimation is to display

A seriousness that fails\(^{210}\)

And to contain

The proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve.\(^{211}\)


\(^{211}\) Ibid. p.287.
Langa has drawn on a critical theorising of ‘camp versus classical’ in a recent installation centring on *Rebecca* by Daphne du Mourier. *Sperm stain* was allegedly inspired by an old Hollywood representation of Luise Rainer which was found by Langa in Amsterdam marked by a water stain. The video still of *Sperm stain* personalises this anonymous history of marking the image seen in the Hollywood piece. Langa shows himself in close up with a stained mattress in the background. The allusion here to an untold story is left to the mind of the viewer to construct their own story for the work.

![Moshekwa Langa – *My life as a disco queen*](image)

The display element of camp is seen in *My life as a disco queen* which shows a bare-chested Langa in a pair of blue jeans ‘performing’ with a microphone. This is then offered to the viewer as an invitation to sing along to Langa’s performance. The phallic nature of the microphone offers the viewer the option of a more sexually explicit interpretation. *How I left the couch?* offers a suspense to the viewer in what can be read as a personal recreation of the jumps Langa has made in his life: to become an artist; to
leave KwaNdebele; to be overt about his sexuality; to leave South Africa; to reject the
easy and lazy labelling of him as a ‘South African Black’ artist. The couch is now
commonly interpreted as signifying therapy. Leaving the couch suggests a departure from
all the baggage that constrains the individual; but also provides the reference points
integral to an understanding of belonging. The visual language of the polaroid
photographs that Langa has selected as the medium, presents a blurred Langa in white
underpants and socks poised on the couch ready to leap. The second Polaroid (an inflight
shot) shows his head disappearing from the frame and focuses the eye on the near
symmetry of the body. The third image displays one step further on – preparing to land.

This is a constructed entry into the private and personal world of Langa. The
contradiction of that entry is inherent in that by the very nature of the photographs as
artworks they have a status as public property. The paradoxical nature of biography and
identity are integral to any understanding of Langa’s work. This is exemplified by the
third of the polaroid ‘series’ works, Far from any scenery he knew or understood (1999).
The imagery is very similar to the disco queen and couch photographs. Langa is shown
looking away from the camera as if thinking or lost. Again there is a return to the theme
of belonging and the concept of ‘home’. The physical and geographical dislocation from
KwaNdebele and Johannesburg and the ‘Mountains of my youth’ suggest a double-
binded desire for return that is the nostalgia of exile. The difficulty in locating ‘home’ is
clearly articulated by Langa.

I want to go home. But where is home? My family is in South Africa but my
life is not here. My bed is in Amsterdam.212

Perhaps the most blatantly autobiographical works Langa has displayed are the listed
collections of references such as I love my pashmina (2002) and Archive (2002) and the
video piece Where do I begin? (2001) which won the FNB Vita art prize of the same
year. Tracy Murinik described the latter.

‘Where do I begin?’ – the seductive first line of the Shirley Bassey song which loops continuously to form the soundtrack to the video is the core, resonant issue. This concept is also the basis of Langa’s novel (and, arguably, all of Langa’s production), which confronts and engages precisely the issues of telling about oneself. The critical, elliptical point, of course, is that the telling is never complete. Neither is the memory of a life story a neat chronology of incident and effect. The moments that are told become indexical to a particular point in the larger story: an archive of referential points, physical and emotional.²¹³

It is interesting that this work emerged after Langa’s temporary return to South Africa. It seems almost like an attempt to create a linear narrative from a series of events in the way that people do to try to ‘make sense’ of their lives. As Murinik points out, the lack of finality means that there is always scope for reinterpretation and reinvention. The dislocation experienced by an absence of fixity in terms of sense of self and other, ‘home’ and away can produce an alienation that questions traditional boundaries in the way that this work begs the question. Langa aims for an autobiographical fixity in his text works, like Archive and I love my pashmina that present a series of subjective references that inscribe a belonging and intimate knowledge to the work. The references range from commonly known names and places to ones that would be known to a South African, to those specific to a particular geographical or cultural area in the country, to those that have no obvious reason or association for being there other than they have been selected by Langa for inclusion.

Langa’s oeuvre clearly problematizes the relationship between static identities and the individual. His apparent flippant production of work masks a complexity and coding of messages that interrogates the workings of identity formation and reception. The relationship between methodology and identity in his work has been described in terms of,

²¹³ Murinik, p.15.
The evolution of his 'novel' involves a working process not unlike that of James Joyce: encompassing a fluidity of thought and process which allows the artist to navigate between the absurd and the deeply serious, accommodating the contradictions that these infer. Langa's prolific output of drawings, paintings, collages and accumulated environments attest to this desire in many ways. They encompass everything from irony, wit and insights into human nature to admissions of loss, anxiety and disappointment; delight, curiosity, playfulness; fragility and sentiment. The 'novel' is essentially a study of himself in the world, as he grapples with issues of his own identity and experience.214

Langa’s defiantly rejectionist course against the boxes into which commentators have wanted to interpret his work mark his practice as, perhaps, the definitive mediation of an individualistic production that conforms to an individualistic Euro-nationalist understanding of the relationship between self and nation. In rejecting attempts to define his practice in terms of identity, he has achieved a respect and reputation in the artworld centres that would have been unlikely in the margin of South Africa.

Langa is intuitively in tune with the great historic and artistic interrogations profoundly marked by the post-modern deconstructionism of our time. The sites, the networks of territories, the settlement patterns and their inscriptions, the globalisation of taste, the blending of artistic codes, the weakening, or even disappearance, of the old temples of culture, or the absence of a unifying discourse are its projections.215

**Tracey Rose**

Like Langa, Tracey Rose appeals to many curators with a desire to put a face on the 'new' South Africa. Durban-born but Johannesburg based, Rose has an ambivalence in her appearance that allows her to 'play' with her received identity to be White, Black or a

---

214 Murinik pp. 8-10.
state located between these polarities. In terms of finding a representative of the imagined future image of the ‘rainbowist’ South African citizen, Rose represents a image that offers as a counterpart to the masculinist (patriarchal?) domination of the nation’s personifications.216 A further reason for the attention being paid to her is her flair for publicity. This is often achieved with daring and a media savvy knowledge that perhaps shows the influence of Kendell Geers’ modus operandi. Although as a South African Johannesburg based conceptual artist, the citing of the influence of Geers is natural, Rose draws on a variety of art historical, historical, and media influences in her work.

Though, in contrast to contemporaries such as Langa, Rose remains located in South Africa and much of the significance of her work is imparted by the South African context, her work again centres on an understanding of her own identity between the interstices of gender and race. She aggressively confronts the construction of how these identities have been located – both in a global context and in South Africa.

Coming to the art world’s attention with her dramatic work at the second Johannesburg Biennale, Rose’s work has been praised by curators such as Dan Cameron. In a review of her work in the international art periodical Artforum, Jan Avgikos wrote,

> Part of Rose’s appeal is her fluid referencing of 60’s and 70’s performance art. When pushing herself beyond the point of physical exhaustion, parodying racial stereotypes, or overlaying sex with violence and pleasure with pain, Rose locates herself among women who have previously confronted themselves (and others) in their art. Valie Export, Marina Abramovic, and

216 Obviously, Mandela stands in a unique category when identifying an individual who is viewed as representative of the nation. The vast majority of the cultural, sporting, and other political icons who form the level below Mandela are male also. Two of the most popular and prominent South African women were Winnie Mandela and Brenda Fassie who enjoyed immense popularity amongst particular constituencies; but were viewed very negatively elsewhere. The rise to prominence of Charlise Theron has made her famous in South Africa but, being White, her appeal as a representative icon is limited. Other prominent women such as Patricia de Lille present an alternative, but her age precludes identification as a post-apartheid icon.
Adrian Piper come to mind – all were inventing formal languages to ‘break through the frame’ of gender and race around the time Rose was born.\textsuperscript{217}

The influence of performance art on Rose’s practice is readily evident. In addition to the artists cited by Avgikos, Jocelyn Taylor and Ana Mendieta would appear to have been sources. The work of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena in their performance critiques of essentialism and a Western centric Modernist approach to art from outside the mainstream also bears a conceptual identity with much of Rose’s practice. The critique of this pigeon holing is readily apparent in an early public work entitled \textit{Authenticity I} (1996). The piece juxtaposes a found bronze representation of Rodin’s \textit{The Thinker} with a text setting out the history of the object. In place of the usual provenance ‘authenticity’ that accompanies much African art, there was a personal story about how the object had been used in the family home – often as a weapon in sibling rivalry.

\begin{quote}
Not only is this a pun on Africa authenticity, as the work’s title makes clear, but it also reveals the anxiety of influence, the apprehension that Africans are destined always to copy Western ‘masters’ (a dominion to which all non-Western modern and contemporary artists are banished).\textsuperscript{218}
\end{quote}

The text includes a reference to how the chip in it occurred. With this, Rose parodies the desirous status of patina in the African art object and the added value that an object accrues if its state reflects use. The violence referred to in the text references the Western expectation of ‘the dark continent’ as a primordial mass of violence as well as the reality of contemporary life in South Africa where violence is ever present – to the extent that the murder rate is the highest in the world outside active conflict zones – and the nature of domestic violence. The selection of a throwaway copy of \textit{The Thinker} shows the permeation of Western cultural influence into everyday life in South Africa. Rather than dealing with what Jones calls ‘the anxiety of influence’, the work reflects the multiplicity of influences that are present for the South African, particularly those located in the urban

\textsuperscript{217} Avgikos J., Tracey Rose in \textit{Artforum}, October 2002, p.152.
areas. The status of Rodin’s piece as a celebration of the Western male has been analysed and deconstructed by feminist critics. There is, therefore, a certain irony in the object being employed by Rose to hit her brother on the head.

Rose’s apartheid classification as a Coloured provides a fertile source of inspiration for her art. The two most striking examples of this are Ongetitled (1996) and Span II (1997). In both of these works, there is an interrogation of the historic power relationships that existed between the colonial and apartheid rulers and the Coloured populations. Rose attempts to subvert the colonial and patriarchal gaze by an empowerment of the status of the object/subject of the work – herself. In both performances, Rose uses Afrikaans in the title. As discussed in the second chapter, Afrikaans has a widespread association with the apartheid regime; but the greater number of speakers exist in the Coloured community. The spoken languages are marked by difference to the extent that a speaker of the language can tell whether or not the person speaking is White or Coloured, in theory. The emergence of this distinction is a relatively recent phenomenon when Afrikaner intellectuals aimed to replace much of the non-European words with Dutch derivations. This formal Afrikaans was taught in schools, but did not reflect the language spoken on the street. Obviously, at the class margins, there were middle-class Coloureds who spoke ‘classical’ Afrikaans while there were many working-class Whites whose speech was indistinguishable from street Afrikaans. The title Span comes from street slang Afrikaans meaning ‘work’. The references in Ongetitled are both to the Modernist art tradition in the West that privileged the autonomous status of the art object, and more immediately to the type of racial classification imposed by the apartheid state. Stephen Hobbs described the work in terms of,

Rose’s imagery is determined by complex interconnections between art and identity. In Rose’s compulsive examination of her ‘Coloured’ identity, the use of ‘Untitled’ in her title/non-title is the artist’s symbolic reference to work that she has produced around her birth certificate. Rose states “I have a rather
The arbitrary nature of these distinctions is axiomatic; but a whole pseudo-scientific discipline existed under the apartheid regime that concerned itself with racial distinction. The differences, as judged by the state, defined peoples’ lives and many Coloureds sought to identify themselves as White and Blacks as Coloured since this status conferred a range of privileges and economic opportunities denied to the lower groups in the apartheid hierarchy.

One of the most important physical characteristics examined was hair. The tightness of the curl could make all the difference as to which group you fell into. The focus and significance of hair amongst Black women worldwide has been documented by various commentators and artists – so it may be considered a logical subject for Rose’s art. But what makes it interesting is the politicisation of hair in the South African context that adds a further dimension to the readings available to the viewer. Rose has stated,

Hair is significant in Coloured communities. It marks you in certain ways, towards blackness or whiteness. On the one hand, it's about the ‘privilege’ of having straight hair as opposed to ‘kroes’ (literally kinky) hair, but on the other hand, having straight hair meant you were often insulted for thinking you were white, for pretending to be white.

The repressive character of the state with its constant harassment and surveillance of those perceived to be working against it is shown by the positioning of the camera. The

---

220 Due to the social and economic hierarchical stratification imposed by the system it was unusual for anyone to apply for reclassification towards a ‘darker’ colour. The most famous example was Dimitri Tsafendas, the assassin of Verwoerd, who applied for reclassification so that he could marry a Coloured girl. When this was not forthcoming, he acted to kill Verwoerd. He was ruled by the court to be insane and was kept in detention on death row for 28 years. His story was theatricalized in a play by Anthony Sher, entitled I.D. (2003) and was the subject of a book by Anton Kreuger called Living in strange lands (1999).
video is shot from above and resembles a closed circuit camera film. The setting of the work in the ‘private’ space of the bathroom shows the intrusion of the camera into personal life, stresses the vulnerability and reflects the repressive harassment of the state in an inversion of the ‘personal is political’ mantra. For Rose, the entry of the (pornographic) gaze into private space also references a feeling that is something akin to the Catholic paranoia that God is watching you, just like the myths in fairytales about being watched – even in the private space of the bathroom.\(^{222}\)

The gaze of the viewer therefore becomes a focus between the divine all-seeing and the perverse earthly nature of total covert surveillance. This slippage in the role of the viewer problematizes the nature of the gaze and the power relationship between viewer and viewed. The assertion of the viewed as the creator whilst also the object of the gaze questions the relationship between artist and audience and viewer and viewed in its empowerment of the female nude – long portrayed as a passive object in the Western art historical canon available for male consumption. This is a recurring theme within Rose’s work which draws on the activization of the previously passive object to challenge the privileging of the White male gaze. The femininity of the subject/object is both asserted and undermined by the act of removing hair from her body. Rose has stated

The act that I perform in *Ongetiteld* is about both de-masculating and de-feminising my body, shaving off the masculine and feminine hair. The kind of de-sexualisation carries with it a certain kind of violence. The piece is about making myself unattractive and unappealing … I’m intrigued by the fact that the body hair on a woman’s stomach and nipples borders on masculinity. Confronting this hair is, to some extent, about confronting sexual ambiguity.\(^{223}\)

\(^{222}\)Ibid.
\(^{223}\)Ibid.
This seems to reflect only one dimension of the action, as the control of hair is normatively perceived as reflecting the male desire of the ideal nude. Classical representations of women tend to ignore or remove all hair beneath the head. The ‘ideal’ of female beauty as perpetuated by both men and women tends to the minimum of body hair on the female body – hence the number of hair removal and electrolysis options available. It can be argued that there is a cultural conditioning about this that favours the White female body as the feminine ideal. Perversely, the presence of hair on the head is generally seen as a feminine quality. The removal of this hair seems to be more in the line with Rose’s stated intention. The removal of hair is also a removal of the past in that forensic study of hair can create a personal history that is not available through the analysis of, for instance, the skin. Removing hair is both a denial of access to that personal history – that contrasts which the pornographic nature of the camera’s gaze – and the establishment of a new beginning, uncluttered by the past. This can obviously be read as a metaphor for the possibilities offered by the ‘new’ South Africa.

Part of this new beginning is a catharsis of the old. South Africa’s chosen methodology for achieving this was the TRC. Rose’s significant work (Span I & II – both 1997) at the second Biennale combined a commentary on the performative nature of public penance with a complementary piece that drew on many of the themes discussed in relation to Ongetitled – but with a museological slant. Span II consisted of a naked Rose sitting on top on a television monitor, weaving her (removed) hair into strands. The focus of the image that appears of the monitor is the weaving of her hair, which obstructs a public view of her pubic area. She had situated herself within a large glass box, such as the type that is usually employed for ethnographic display. The most apparent references from this performance work are to the notorious diorama that was located across the park at the South African Museum of Natural History. This diorama that showed KhoiSan people alongside stuffed animals in a recreated ‘natural’ environment was one of the most blatant colonial/apartheid cultural attempts to locate the KhoiSan in the ethnographic present.
The imposition of the colonial gaze and fixity perpetuated by such representations throughout the era of White domination were a key platform in the construction of the supposed superiority of Western culture at the expense of the autochthonous people and their culture. The other obvious reference was to the case of Saartjie Baartman. Baartman was a KhoiSan (generally referred to as Hottentot in nineteenth century White parlance) who was taken to Europe in the early part of the nineteenth century and displayed in both France and Britain as a freak show exhibit. Much of this colonial voyeurism was justified at the time on pseudo-scientific and pseudo-Darwinist grounds. Much of the contemporary language that discusses Baartman focuses on the (alleged) size of her bottom and labia and how this was indicative of a voracious sexual appetite that ‘savage’
women were alleged to possess. Such was the extent of this pornographic gaze that on her early death, her genitals were preserved in the Musée d'Ethnographie in Paris for 'scientific' study until their return to South Africa in 2002. The work offers the interpretation of identity solidarity in its empathy with the KhoiSan ancestors of the 'Coloureds'. There is an easy view of Rose (re-)presenting and reaffirming the nineteenth century subject in a seizure of the power relations structure inherent in the work. As opposed to being reduced to being the object of 'scientific' exploration, Rose affirms the status of the descendents of Baartman's people in the city that is the colonial 'Mother City' but where the majority of the population are identified as 'Coloured'. The fact that the performance takes place in an institution that fundamentally reflects the colonisation of the country by its very presence, a neo-classical cultural temple that recreates the privileging of culture seen in the many imperial recreations of the Forum, adds to the inversion of the order and an assertion of the presence of the autochthonous people (and perhaps their ancestors) in the 'new' South Africa.

In a published statement, Rose mediated on the gender relations aspect of the piece and its role as confessional.

It's ... a generic statement about the emotional and physical domination of women by men. I sit on a sideways TV that displays an image of a reclining nude, an image in art history (that) is engaged on such passive terms. With my naked body on the TV I wanted to negate the passivity of the action of the reclining nude. I wanted to see what I could do with my body to negate this passivity in the face of domination. In doing the piece, I had to confront what I wasn't supposed to do with my body. Like cut off my hair so as to accentuate the asexuality of my body. The work is a cleansing act, a coming out. I didn't want it to be a mere verbal confession, it had to be a physical act that pushed more parameters. In Span II, me knotting inside the glass case not only invokes the rosary beads of my childhood, but also the working with
one's hands, and the meaning of this handiwork as a form of empowerment.²²⁴

Tracey Rose – Span I (installation view source www.artthrob.co.za)

Rose’s statement highlights the TRC context of the verbal confession that achieves a legal redemption even if it failed to satisfy the demands of the victims’ families. The “mere” nature of the verbal confession and its association with Roman Catholicism is reinforced by the rosary beads. The physicality of the beads is given a personal dimension by their manufacture from hair – which as discussed above is known to contain a personal history unavailable from the flesh. The implication of the need for a

greater penance to reflect the historical crimes of the colonial and apartheid eras is clear. There is a sense of unease at the exchange of forgiveness for 'full' confession. The companion piece *Span I*, a personal confessional text written by Rose, focuses on her own childhood stories of discrimination against others which was written onto a wall by an ex-prisoner. Rose describes it as,

> The wall's a purge ... actually it's a public purge. It's also a perversion of the idea of a lack of penance, where I become vindicated through the act of employing an ex-prisoner to 'perform' my confession. There's also a power relationship which existed between us, employer-employee, guilty-forgiven.\(^{225}\)

Other than linking with the other *Span* piece to form a very public confession of her past 'crimes', the work contrasts the type of pointless endeavour forced upon the Black leaders held at Robben Island with the refusal of the leaders of the NP, such as Botha and de Klerk, to appear at the TRC in person. The very public nature of Rose's work reflects the public nature of the TRC confessions and the role that public reconciliation had in the construction of the new order.

This confessional theme in Rose's work was continued with a text based video work that showed at SANG in 1999, entitled *Sticks and Stones*, as part of the *Channel* exhibition. As suggested by the title, the work revisited the childhood confessional theme begun in *Span*, in an inquisition of the damage caused by verbal racial insults. Rose states,

> They're memory-based recollections, thought and experiences from my childhood, a documentary of a 'coloured' person. The diary-like intimacy of the thoughts, like in a confessional, there's a degree of confidentiality that allows me to be what I am, say what I want, without being totally implicated.\(^{226}\)

\(^{225}\)ibid.  
\(^{226}\)ibid.
The text moves across the screen very rapidly, so that it is impossible for the viewer to understand without repeated viewings, although the loop is short. The textual nature of the work brings out the polarisation between the white text and the black background. If the racially aware context of the country is factored into account, the work can be read as a fleeting White presence in the Black space; but one whose voice is heard and, indeed, dominant in the inter-relationship between the two. Of course, located in the in-between space are the Coloureds, neither Black nor White and perhaps marginalized by the polarised focus on that binarism that dictates many of the debates about South Africa.

Rose’s interest in the gaze and the underlying violence and power relations that it signifies led to one of her most innovative pieces, *TKO* (2001). The work consisted of a performance of the naked Rose undertaking a boxing workout with a punch bag, which builds to an orgasmic climax. The performance was shot from four different sources including one camera located inside the punch bag. The multiplicity of image sources problematizes the relationship between subject and object and the role of viewer as both the object of the violence in the blows meted out to the bag and the spectator of the violence being perpetrated. The damage received by the inanimate object is, of course, insignificant in contrast to the effect on the perpetrator of the violence who pants more and more incessantly as the effort of the action begins to take its toll. There is a reading available here about the effect of violence on the perpetrator that can be read as a microcosm of the violence in society in the country.

Rose’s decision to perform the work naked and to turn the effect of the exercise into an orgasm adds a sexual dimension that could refer to the level of violence faced by women in South Africa, often with a sexual power motive – South Africa still has one of highest levels of recorded rape in the world and most estimates are that this constitutes a small fraction (perhaps less than ten percent) of the real total. There is also a personal dynamic to the work that could be generalized as the effect of beating oneself up about something. Rose has an oft-mentioned self-criticality, and indeed criticality of others’, such as curators’, use and understanding of her work. The effect of internalizing this criticality
can lead to a passionate outburst that is self-beneficial; but also to a violence that ends up hurting no one other than the self. Rose has discussed the ‘formal’ element of the creation of the work in terms of the amount of specific training she undertook to realise the piece.

Monet’s waterlilies struck me – that commitment to the surface – my understanding of boxing was that it was an art, a passion, like dancing, and the intention was that each punch would be a mark, a gesture, building up to something.227

In 2004, for the Decade of Democracy exhibition staged at SANG, Rose produced an iconic image that was used as the poster image for the exhibition and the catalogue cover. As opposed to the usual media disinterest that this type of commemorative exhibition might generate, Rose’s image was picked as a signifier of the ‘new’ South Africa (with the predictable conservative backlash). The image is a reconstruction of Rodin’s *The Kiss* with Rose performing the part of the woman in the traditional embrace and a Black male figure as the other half.

Aside from the effects of translating an iconic sculptural image into performance art – a theatrical device that has a long-standing history – the contextualization and sexualization of the image empower it for a contemporary audience. All the more so when considered against the fact that inter-racial sexual relations were illegal until the 1980’s and even now retain an infrequency that causes notice and even offence. In the catalogue, Ashraf Jamal describes the effect of the work.

By placing herself at the centre of her art she does not thereby fetishize or memorialize herself, but, in an act of mimicry, of self-mockery, Rose introduces the importance of play, of the performative, in making of art and the ceaselessness recreation of one’s cultural and socio-historical identity. That Rose, as a Coloured, figures as a glitch, a quirk, a protean and degenerate anomaly in South Africa’s Manichean racial register, has no

227 Quoted on www.artthrob.co.za
doubt, impacted on her take on identity. She can be everything and nothing. She can as easily spoof the fetishistic integrity of race as turn it on its head. However, at the root of the mockery lies the realisation that no identity is binding, but that each and every attempt to pin something or someone down illuminates the shadow and the act of a radical human heterogeneity. The centre could never hold, the tidy polarities we set us between Black and White, man and woman, could never fit the flux.228


What Jamal refers to here is the constructed illusion that Rose appears White – almost alabaster when set against the Blackness of the man’s skin. As a Coloured, she has the ability to manipulate her appearance from appearing as apparently Black with an afro – as she did in the recent *Ciao Bella* work (2003) – to the White image portrayed here, This ability undermines the constructed essentialism of the apartheid racial registers that continue to dominate the framing of identity in South Africa.

There are also interesting gender dynamics in the piece. The image, as with much of Rodin’s sculpture – most notably his rendering of Emile Zola, has been critiqued as phallocentric. By adopting a process of inserting her own body into the piece, Rose problematizes or even reverses the power relations inherent in the piece. Critic Salah Hassan has described insertion

\[
\text{As an act of counter-penetration, an assertion of one's own subjectivity in response to objectification.}^{229}
\]

The work also plays with the constructed notions of the essentialist male and female stereotypes represented by the virulent Black male and the virginal White female. The inter-relationship between the two is further problematized when the knowledge becomes available that the male in the image is in fact not South African, but her New York dealer. So, whilst Rose is in control of the formation and construction of the image, its ultimate (capital) value is in the hands of the photographed male. This can perhaps be read as a wry comment on the extent of the economic transformation in gender relations – even if the social dimension has undergone a significant shift. The fact that he is also New York based can be seen as indicative of a continuing set of power relations – that no matter how significant or important the art of the post-apartheid era in South Africa is (this is after all the definitive national commemorative exhibition inside the country) – it

---

229 Quoted in O’Toole S: Tracey Rose – ‘*Ciao Bella* at the Goodman Gallery’, review on www.artthrob.co.za
must still come to the Western centres of cultural validation for its value to be constructed and established.

Usha Seejaram
An artist who is explicit about the role that identity plays in her practice is Johannesburg based Usha Seejaram (née Prajapant). The Asian community in South Africa numbers more than a million, primarily with a heritage from the Indian sub-continent. Many of the forefathers of the current Asian South Africans were brought to the country by the British to work on agricultural plantations. Partly as a legacy of this, the Asian population is concentrated in the area around Durban, which was the major city in the former colonial territory of Natal – roughly analogous to the post-apartheid state of KwaZulu-Natal. The ‘Indian’ population in South Africa is reckoned to form the largest Indian diaspora in the world. Due to the preponderance of the population in the Durban environs, there is an easy slippage (similar to the Coloureds and the Cape) that stereotypes all South African ‘Indians’ as ‘coming from’ that region. In fact, Seejaram was born in Bethal, now in Mpumalanga, and continues to live in Lenasia on the outskirts of Johannesburg. These were the two zones in the former Transvaal allocated by the apartheid state to persons of Asian origin.230 Because of this, the area remains strongly ‘Indian’ in character with a monocultural dominance. Seejaram has highlighted the influence of this community in her outlook and art practice.

I acknowledge my ‘Indianness’. I think it’s almost unavoidable. I live in a community of Indians. A lot of ritual and ceremony happens around me.231

Seejaram’s practice defines the dichotomy facing ethnically defined communities in South Africa. As a ‘South African Indian’, her heritage powerfully asserts itself on political, social and cultural levels. Living and engaging primarily with other members of

[230] The cultural fixity imposed by the apartheid state was such that persons of Asian origin were not permitted to stay, even for one night, in the province formerly known as the Orange Free State. Transit was theoretically possible but involved the submission to the bureaucratic minefield, favored by totalitarian regimes.

her ethnic community where she lives, she leaves this cocoon immediately on commuting into Johannesburg where Indians and 'Indianness' have a marginal presence. Some of Seejaram’s works deal with the nature of the journey into the city from Lenasia and the transformation that is undertaken in this process, such as The Object of Illustration (2001).

As can be seen in other Asian diasporic communities, there is a pervasive tension between a home life and the expectations that govern that existence and a public life engaging with majoritarian norms and practices. Discriminated against by apartheid, many Asians were leading members of the ANC during the struggle. Some remain so; but many have been marginalised by the Africanist inflection of the ‘new’ order. Yet a tension continues to prevail between being included within a ‘new’ South African nationalism and the desire to retain cultural links with the ‘homeland’. Although diasporic links has always been current between South Africa and the sub-continent, globalisation has enhanced their immediacy and availability. The significantly reduced real costs of air travel represent one aspect as does the booming Bollywood culture and other regular processes of cultural exchange between South Africa and the sub-continent.

Seejaram’s first major work, which brought her to the attention of the South African artworld interrogated many of these questions about the continuation of tradition, diasporic links to the centre, and the fixity/ non-fixity of cultures located in alien environments. The piece Motherland (1999) was shown as part of the Isintu exhibition that proposed the existence of south-south links between non-White South African artists and Australian Aboriginal artists.

The bags, in which goods were transported from India to South Africa, operate as metaphors. They look voluminous but they are very light. I feel that the Indian people in South Africa, because of being removed from India, feel a need to hold on so tightly to their culture. And that in that process they
are almost losing it. The wax bowls are cast from clay pots used in significant rituals. A lot of them are broken.\textsuperscript{232}

Seejaram here outlines the fragility but yet persistence of cultures when transported to different contexts. The piece is effective in that it juxtaposes the wax bowls with the constancy and staining of the pigment. Other cross-cultural readings present themselves.

In India the terracotta bowls are used both ceremonially and for quotidian rituals. In India, the cups have a throw-away status and are not retained. Here, translated into the medium of wax, their fragility has increased as has their status as an object – from disposable cup to artistic veneration. Yet their susceptibility to outside forces such as fire or force has been dramatically increased, as Seejaram highlights through the suspension of the bags over the work. It is not difficult to see this as a metaphor for the status of cultural tradition outside its indigenous context. It starts to lose the link with meaning and the ability to be refreshed and reinvented is challenged by distance. The bags with their

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.
Hindi markings indicate both a point of origin and the fact that a journey has been undertaken to reach this point.

Practices of displacement ... emerge as constitutive of cultural meanings rather than as their simple transfer or extension.²³³

Though Seejaram is patently referring to the Indian community here, a cross-community meaning could be asserted for other minorities in the country and their connections to mythic ‘homelands’ – whether England, Holland, Malaysia or China.

Seejaram’s more recent work deals with a displacement and search for ‘home’ and belonging. This search works on a community level in recalling her ancestors and their use of memory to reconstruct the remembered traditions; the refreshing of those traditions through personal communications and diasporic networks. It also works on a personal level in terms of her own status as someone who is third generation in South Africa; yet still perceived by some as an outsider and named as such (Indian), although India is at once distant and familiar.

The video work Two Rooms and a Kitchen (2002) conveys Seejaram’s attenuated sense of displacement and location. It recounts the stories of Indians displaced by the Group Areas Act, who, in the depths of memory, recall fine and seemingly extraneous details of their lives that give the work a texture and depth that no documentary, defined by a political or ideological agenda, could convey. A further subtext is that the work projects the artist’s own sense of displacement from an origin that she can only experience in a disarticulated and translated sense. Seejaram’s recent preoccupation with saathiyas – decorative and celebratory pictograms – points to a need to retrace a lost heritage and, therein, find herself – if only to lose herself again.²³⁴

²³⁴ Ibid.
Rose and Seejaram are artists whose practice interrogates of the constructs of identity that have been imposed upon them. The focus and desire is to understand the societal basis of the constructs, whether they retain a currency and validity in the post-apartheid era and how they relate to themselves as individuals and as South Africans. Their artistic practice focuses on the local context for its content and inspiration. Engagement with influences, sources and practice from the twin poles (in a generalised sense) of the West and Africa presents a conception that relates primarily to the realities of the local situation, whilst displaying an understanding and conceptualisation of global contemporary art dynamics that positions them on a global stage. Refusing participation in South African national shows challenges and deconstructs the pervasive group essentialism of ethno-nationalism. The intimacy and subjective focus of the art affirms a desire to acknowledge an individualistic civic nationalist relationship between nation and individual.

Conclusion
The difficulty for South Africa in achieving the presencing of the nation-state at a time of increased globalization has been documented. Johannesburg is the urban metropolis that most clearly evidences the transforming networks of exchange: economic, social, and cultural. A city conceived solely as a means to greater facilitate the exploitation of the earth with a history of migration dating back more than a century, it is a melting pot with a plethora of connections to London, Lisbon, Maputo, Lagos and Dakar, as well as its links with the diverse communities and centres in South Africa. It is now the key economic and cultural powerhouse in the Southern African region, and arguably in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite its leading economic status, it is readily apparent that it has never received the official state patronage that has been bestowed upon Pretoria and Cape Town as shown culturally by the relative dearth of major state institutions. Yet it remains the place where the transformation of society that is envisaged in South Africa will most clearly take place, and the metronome that will dictate the pace of that transformation. Artists in Johannesburg have an exposure to global art trends and dynamics. Internalizing and contextualizing these is not a fawning imitation of Western practice, but represents the engagement of contemporary African, particularly urban, society with the rest of the world in an unrelenting process of exchange.
and dialogue. This dialogue does not exist on equal terms as yet and will not at any time in the immediate future. However, significant progress has been made in reaching a point of more equitable cultural transactions, deriving from a greater awareness and respect, in general, on the part of the centre for the margins.

This exposure puts artists in the vanguard of those trying to put a face on the ‘new’ South Africa, a burden of community representation that some have chosen to reject as an apartheid vestige. The dangers in being seen to ‘speak for’ communities can be seen in many of the debates that surrounded the second biennale;\(^{235}\) but it is a recognition of the reality of contemporary South Africa where politicians represent ethnically defined constituencies. Some artists, like Kentridge and Koloane, have articulated the views of their particular communities in response to the demise of apartheid, the memory and memorializing of that era, and the subsequent transition to the new order, benchmarked by events such as the TRC and issues of transformation. Other artists, like Langa, Rose, and Seejarim, have focused their exploration of identity at the subjective level, negotiating their particular place in society in terms of community, race, gender, sexual orientation, nation and beyond, advocating through their art a challenge to the need to be identified as a representative of a particular group.

It is probably no coincidence that the difference between these artists can be articulated in age terms as those who became artists during the apartheid years and were active in the establishment of the canon of ‘Resistance Art’ and those who have come to prominence subsequently. Apartheid may have impinged as greatly, or more, on those individuals, but they have not had to contend with the strictures placed on content by both the regime and the ANC. It was not possible to produce art that avoided a political interpretation and was not seen to provide messages about something or someone and on behalf someone or something. Without the burden of political engagement, it is easy to understand why the need to continue to identify oneself as part of a particular nationalist community is lost on those seeking to support the rapid ‘normalization’ of society.

\(^{235}\) Discussed in previous chapter.
Cape Town is the second city of South Africa. A major urban conglomeration of more than two million people, it stands at the head of the Cape Peninsula that divides the Atlantic Ocean from the Indian. Interest was established in control of the circumnavigation of the Cape in the sixteenth century but it was not until 1652 that the area was settled by Jan van Riebeeck and his cohorts. There, they encountered the autochthonous Bushmen or Khoi-San, who were facing increasing geographical marginalization. Cape Town – or Kaapstad in Dutch – became a major settler outpost as trade increased around the Cape. Population expansion was minor, however, compared to other contemporaneous colonial societies and the British were able to usurp Dutch control without great difficulty in 1806. Development of the area continued throughout the nineteenth century as the limits of the settlement were expanded and the city became the capital of the Cape Province, which encompassed the western half of what is today South Africa. Its strong Anglophone orientation led to it establishing an oppositional status to the Boer Republics. It followed the British colonial paradigm that focused on the maximisation of economic benefit for the settlers and the motherland. Benefits to the local population largely consisted of infrastructure and educational improvements that enabled them to become more economically productive members of the colonial society. As opposed to the explicit use of race as a means of classification, discrimination was enforced through property rights, which held out the possibility of equality over an extremely lengthy historical period.

The marginalization of Cape Town in a South African context dates from the discovery of the massive mineral riches on the Witwatersrand in the second half of the nineteenth century. Almost overnight, its status as the most important financial centre in Southern Africa – due to its control of trade and status as the largest settlement – was lost. The subsequent so-called (Second) Boer War led indirectly to the establishment of the Union of South Africa and the incorporation of the Cape Province within it. The legislative racial barriers that were standard in the former Boer republics and stronger in Natal

---

236 The perceived marginalization of the Boers and its relationship to the emergence of a distinct Afrikaner identity is explored in detail in the second chapter.
became increasingly applied in the Cape, though its reputation in a South African context as a bastion of White liberalism remained throughout the segregationist era. After the Nationalist Party victory in the 1948 general election, the Cape’s previous semi-autonomous status was eroded within the increasingly unitary state. As the seat of parliament and location of the notorious Robben Island, Cape Town became increasingly an expression of the separatist ideology. Coloured and Black areas were established on the other side of the mountain. This was a key signifier in denoting the socio-political hierarchy. Directly outside Cape Town lay the Coloured areas, such as Mitchells Plain and the Cape Flats, whilst further afield was Langa, the Black township. These areas were viewed only by the overwhelming majority of Whites on their way along the N2 to the airport or to the Afrikaans spiritual heartland of Paarl and Stellenbosch.

A Bitter Almond Hedge
Stellenbosch was the site of the Broederbond, a quasi-masonic body of leading Afrikaners, that played a key role in the linguistic and cultural emergence of Afrikaans with links into the political establishment of the National Party and the rugby establishment. This was overlaid on an intellectual level with the presence of the major Afrikaans medium university in Stellenbosch and the presence of legitimizing monuments, notably the Taal (language) monument in Paarl.

The process of occupation of land and the removal of occupants’ rights had been a defining aspect of the settler engagement with the Cape since 1652 and the planting of the bitter almond hedge to delineate a border between White land and the territory beyond. However, the reclassification of District Six as a White area called Zonnebloem in 1966 heightened awareness of the political and personal trauma that was experienced by the majority under apartheid. Coming at a time of raised international consciousness about the colonial projects of the European powers and the politicisation of many through the struggles for independence, the District Six removals appeared even more anachronistic than they would have done a decade or two previously. District Six represented the antithesis of the apartheid dream in that White, Coloured, Asian, and Black families co-existed in a societal framework that thrived in many ways and held a
reputation for cultural production similar to that of the already removed Sophiatown in Johannesburg. This was expressed most famously in the Cape Jazz phenomenon which had produced a vibrant and culturally significant local interpretation of the Caribbean/southern United States inspired sound, (re)contextualizing the music for South African consumption. Figures such as Hugh Masekela and Miriam Mokaba made their names here. Situated immediately to the north of the city centre and adjacent to important legitimising icons such as the Castle, this was not a situation that could be tolerated by the regime, but the decrees of dispossession of the land and the relocation of many of the inhabitants to the other side of the mountain popularized the abhorrent practice of the regime both at home and abroad.

By the time of the impending demise of the apartheid state and the holding of free elections for the first time, the Northern and Western Cape presented a vastly different picture of the population of South Africa than the country as a whole, with less than 1 in 4 people being classified as Black, 1 in 4 as White and a majority of Coloureds – presented as a homogenous entity when the label masked a myriad of competing identities.

The bizarre conceptualization of Cape Town as the ‘Mother City’ has continued into the post-apartheid era. Bizarre in that the nomenclature is not deconstructed or problematized, although it patently references only the White population. A narrative could be articulated that represented the city as the place of the formation of a Coloured identity. This is not generally perceived as a positive fixity; though it is being reinvented as an enabling construct. Moreover, the presence or non-presence of a Black population in the Cape was one of the major contested histories of the apartheid era with the Nationalist Party orthodoxy ruling that the land had been uninhabited by Blacks at the time of van Riebeeck’s arrival. It is clear from archaeological evidence that the extent of the so-called Bantu migration had penetrated well into what is now the Northern provinces of South Africa by the end of the first millennium. What is less clear, though largely irrelevant in the post-apartheid era, is the extent to which the migration had led to
the settlement of people of the west side of the Orange river and consequently in the Cape Province itself. For this purpose, it is sufficient to establish that in no sense could Cape Town be perceived as a ‘Mother City’ or place of origin for the Black population and the continuation of the use of this name would seem to be divisive. However, the status of the Cape as somewhat (self) marginalized from the mainstream of South Africa and its location on the geographical periphery means that it may struggle to retain its cultural status. There is arguably a moral, and certainly a political and economic need, for the city to reinvent itself within the context of the ‘new’ South Africa.

This applies to the function and status of its cultural institutions. The debate – that started in earnest before the 1994 elections had even taken place and has continued up to the present day – references clearly the contest between the two competing nationalist dialectics in South Africa and their employment in the service of current political discourse and party politics. The ‘reverse’ nation construct of the ‘rainbow’ has been manipulated to an almost exclusive identification with the ‘struggle’ era of the ANC in a collapse of distinction between state and party that serves current political objectives. The ‘Africanist’ slant proposed by the ANC in the rest of the country is politically played down and culturally absent in the Western Cape, primarily because it would exclude more people than it included. The construction of the ‘rainbowist’ history and its exclusive identification with the ANC is contested by both those excluded from a historical position in that narrative construct and, also, by those subscribing to alternative regionally and ethnically based nationalisms that are excluded by the totality and fixity of the ‘rainbow nation’.

The importance of this debate is highlighted in cultural terms by an examination of institutions in the city and the choices made, by politicians, in deciding which are to receive funding. These choices are indicative of how the new order represented by the ANC chooses to (re-)present itself and to which audience(s). It is interesting to compare the differences between these institutions to analyze
which have been selected to produce a mediation of the formation of a national memory and identity, as opposed to being left to the local community to produce a resonance for itself as well as those that fall somewhere between the perceived and received local/global polarity.

Those that are selected to represent the formation of national consciousness are also those selected for an outside audience. This audience is perceived as crucial to the construction and understanding of South Africa outside the country. The reasoning behind this belief is that the Cape is the one urban area that is experienced by the vast majority of tourist visitors to the country. Whereas the urban centres of Gauteng continue to attract the large numbers of economic migrants from the African continent, overseas\textsuperscript{237} visitors tend to confine their experience outside the Western Cape to the game parks of the north, and perhaps the battlefields of KwaZulu or the beaches of the Natal coast. Cape Town’s responsibility to this audience is understood by both the authorities and the intended audience as providing the consumable experience for the outsider. It must provide a truth narrative of South African history that fulfils the expectations of visitors. Simultaneously, it must produce a national consciousness through the project of nation-building and reflect the specific resonance and importance for the local communities that form the bulk of the audience, and perhaps more pertinently the voting constituency.

This multi-purpose function is reflected in the establishment of the Southern Flagship or \textit{Iziko} consortium of museums. This is a counterpoint to the Northern Flagship\textsuperscript{238} located in Gauteng. It co-opts the apartheid cultural institutions into a

\textsuperscript{237} ‘Overseas’ is the normative euphemism for Western visitors, though the East Asian market is also increasingly important to the tourist economy. This should not be confused with a vestige of racism since a significant component of the market are Black Americans and Europeans. For many, the appeal of South Africa is that it enables a visit to the continent while presenting an easy familiarity to the Western visitor. The First World veneer that exists in the society means that the tourist experience is often removed from the difficulties that can be encountered when traveling in some other parts of the continent.

\textsuperscript{238} Although originally intended as a national network of key cultural institutions that would include five places in Gauteng and five in the Western Cape, the Northern Flagship has become a loose umbrella for eleven institutions. This network lacks institutions such as the MuseumAfrica and JAG. \textit{Iziko} has remained
new body, key to the production and negotiation of memory on a national scale. It includes the Slave Lodge (formerly the Museum of Cultural History), SANG and the South African Museum. All of these are located within a small area within the centre of the city, which reflects the Western approach to the siting of culture. It is almost a microcosm of the Museum Mile in New York, orientated in a similar way around a park with a neo-classical Roman style employed to reflect the place and seriousness of the contemplation of culture.

Robben Island versus District Six

Iziko is dwarfed in national focus and funding by the establishment of the Robben Island Museum. This is the location chosen by the ANC to negotiate for South Africans and foreigners, the key aspects of the formation of memory as a narrative for the process of nation-building. Significant funding has been directed to allow for engagement with the experiences had on Robben Island, and more particularly the struggle and self-sacrifice personified by Mandela. This is most clearly demonstrated by the amount of central government funding made available to particular institutions. In 1996, Robben Island received R 24.2 million as opposed to R1.2 million for the Voortrekker Monument, R86, 000 for the Afrikaanse Taal (Afrikaans language) Museum, and R200,000 for the District Six Museum.\[239\]

Robben Island represents a site of struggle that epitomizes the political action against the regime. There are not many places in South Africa that are identified as locations of the struggle, though, of course, they exist in the memories and consciousness of many of the population.\[240\]


\[240\] Perhaps Sharpeville and Soweto are the only other places that could be said to evoke the period of struggle as strongly.
Criticism of the choice and presentation of Robben Island began even before the 1994 elections. In 1993, the South African Museum and the Mayibuye centre staged an exhibition entitled ‘Esiqithini’ (on the island in Xhosa and Zulu) which sought to engage the public in the debate as to what status the island should have under the new political order. Annie Coombes lists a number of comments in her analysis of the representation of visual culture in post-apartheid South Africa. Interestingly, many of the cited critiques mention the hijacking of the struggle space by the ANC. This is a common articulation by members of other groups that opposed apartheid.

It is understood that the control of contested histories is important in order to gain historical currency in contemporary political debates. This can and has been seen in many countries in the southern African region. Of course, there are many other factors in all these cases – not least the normative collapse of the distinction between party and government that enables access to resources and patronage. However, it should not be underestimated what effect the control of the independence or struggle legacy can have in authenticating the right of an individual and/or party to an oligarchic position. The clearest difference that can be seen in African countries as opposed to those elsewhere is the period of establishment of the nation state. The artificiality of the colonial territory is well documented. Its emergence in its designated peoples’ conscience occurred often only when the campaign for independence began. In Southern Africa, this was characterized by violent struggle and insurrection against settler regimes that sought to retain power. The impact of prolonged struggle on the formation of national consciousness was to take ownership of the colonial territory and to provide a lasting association between the liberating party and the state that was,

231

---

241 Although independence was won nearly thirty years ago in the ex-Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique, the parties of liberation have retained continuous control of the government since 1975. Although they have not chosen to submit their authority to the test at the ballot box on a frequent basis, there is little doubt that they remain respectively the most popular parties in those countries. In Zimbabwe, the situation is even more acute where decades of misrule and corruption from ZANU-PF have failed to undermine their support in the rural areas of the country. A more contemporary example can be seen in Namibia where in the fifteen years since independence there has been no meaningful challenge to SWAPO’s authority.
and is not, present in many other African countries. A contextual example is Botswana where independence was gained without violent struggle. There, regular elections have seen regular changes in the party in power. This can be ascribed, at least in part, to the fact that the liberating party was not able to establish a psychological and emotional hold on the people in the way outlined above.

Therefore, the perceived exclusion of histories that detract from the exclusive association of the ANC with the struggle has been fiercely opposed by those who feel marginalized by this narrative. This includes many of the other parties who fought for liberation, such as the PAC, Azapo and the members of the Black Consciousness Movement, associated primarily with Steve Biko. There is also the real question of gender discrimination in terms of the privileging of the Black male experience of the struggle at the expense of the cost to women and families.

Due to its status under apartheid as a Black male prison, the hardships and suffering faced by political prisoners in other gaols and the difficulties experienced by those left behind are articulated through the voice and memory of the Black male, if at all. The state is represented by prison officers, White and male. This filter of experience means that the visitor can leave with the impression, conscious or unconscious, that the struggle was fought between Black males and White males. This excludes the role of women on both sides of the divide and marginalizes other communities as well as presenting an exclusive identification of White with apartheid and Black with resistance.

The importance of control over the reception of struggle histories both inside and outside the country is married to the difficulties in producing an agreed face to public representation in South Africa that is discussed at length in chapter three. The attempt to cater for the dual nature of the audience for Robben Island has been criticised within South Africa in terms that identify the territory of the debate as the field of contested nationalisms. Entitled ‘Past forgotten in rush to satisfy international cultural elites’, Xolela Mangcu wrote,
Robben Island is a classic example of how our obsession with foreign investments and markets distorts our political culture ... the triumphalist chimera of ‘reconciliation’ has become our biggest cultural export. Cultural institutions such as Robben Island are marketed as symbols of this miracle...(if) our cultural institutions are nothing more than saleable products for the consumption of international cultural elites, who shall provide us with the self-understandings, symbols and meanings that are the basis of modern nationhood.242

Mangcu highlights the difficulty faced in the production of national identity and consciousness in an increasingly globalized world where the nation state seems more a vestige of a past era than at any time in the recent past. Its function is no longer integral to the needs of capital and its attempt to achieve its presencing is undermined by an array of networks and connections that extend to a plethora of diasporas. National identity and nationalism often have a negative perception in many quarters, though as noted before even ‘progressive’ writers such as Bhabha and Said wanted to specifically hold a place and value for the emergence of a South African nationalism. This is perhaps indicative of the amount of emotional capital that was invested by outsiders in the apartheid struggle. The difficulty in establishing a ‘truth’ about the history of the period at a time when the individual experience, memory, and account is privileged is readily apparent. In South Africa, the difficulty in finding ‘truth’ was seen nowhere more clearly than the TRC. The TRC faced many criticisms243 from some quarters of its privileging of the cause of the struggle and specifically, the blanket amnesty agreed for the leading members of the ANC. Robben Island faces accusations of favouring the ANC and misrepresenting the histories and stories of others. This is accentuated by the importance of the site in terms of the production of national memory and the resources devoted to it that emphasize its pre-eminent position.

242 Quoted in Coombes 2003a, pp.68-69.
243 Discussed in the previous chapter.
The Museum makes use of personal narrative in its employment of former inmates as guides. Inevitably, the persona of Mandela dwarves the attention given to other inmates. This has led to feelings of exclusion with regard to figures such as Robert Sobukwe, the founder and longtime leader of the PAC, who actually spent more time on the island than Mandela. Others, such as many traditional leaders who were amongst the earliest opponents of colonial rule and amongst the earliest prisoners on the island, have also been glossed over. Perhaps this is inevitable. The association of Mandela with the struggle was so total outside the country that it is a fair bet that many of the (non-Black) visitors to the island have never heard of any other figure, even ANC grandees such as Walter Sisulu. Inside the country, the almost complete absence of photographs or accounts of Mandela sustained his transcendent reputation and presence as the ultimate signifier of the struggle. His conduct since his release has only added to this. His standing and reputation in South Africa far exceeds that of the ANC. It would be strange not to use this to political benefit in an area of the country where support for the party is at its weakest. Indeed, it is the comparison with other institutions that shows what importance is being given to ownership of the legacy of the struggle.

The most obvious point of comparison, both locally and nationally is District Six. As Combes states,

District Six has assumed an iconic status, taking it beyond the local register and moving it into the national league so that in a sense it has become metonymic of all those dehumanizing instances of forced removals that were an integral part of apartheid’s master plan from the 1950’s onward.244

As a signifier, District Six is potent in its metonymical representation of forced removal, one of the worst iniquities and excesses of the apartheid system. The

244 Ibid, pp. 116-117.
history records the effects on ordinary day to day living. This was not about those, such as Mandela and Sobukwe, who chose to openly attack the system. This was about those who by their very existence in the same place and community were perceived by the regime as a threat.

The use of personal narrative is the basis for the construction of memory in the District Six Museum. The use of a former church, situated on the edge of the district where many were counselled in the aftermath of the removals and which provided a base for anti-apartheid activism, ensures a particular poignancy. The dominant exhibit is a map of the district onto which has been marked old houses, churches, mosques and community centres.

The map exists as a hyperreal representation of a lost city, made more poignant by personalised accounts of life in the district, domestic narratives that (re)turn the viewer into the district. It is an archaeological retrieval of a past, enhanced by the presence of found objects from the district, including the street signs, which were kept by the official entrusted with dumping them into Table Bay. It is a nostalgia of place and of time that signifies the clash of the personal and the political that was emphasised by apartheid. The removals were so notorious that the space remained a ghost of its self, unsullied by any colonisation of the space. It marked only the destructive nature of the state and a graveyard of peoples’ lives, stories, and existences. It was only with the building of Cape Technikon that a significant entry was made into the haunted space. It has stood alone in the space for nearly twenty years, disorientated and unrelated to the environment around it. Following the end of apartheid, there has been an ongoing political and legal struggle to have the district rebuilt with the recognition of the rights and tenure of its former residents and their descendents. It seems clear that in some shape or form, a ‘new’ District Six will be created. It is almost inevitable that those charged with the reconstruction will be faced with a microcosm of many of the difficulties faced by those chosen to (re)present the ‘new’ South Africa.
The status of District Six as a microcosmic signifier for the loss and suffering faced by the people of South Africa would appear to be persuasive for the recognition of the site in a similar manner to the focus on Robben Island. As Coombes argues, the possibility of the utopian future after the healing process is inscribed in the presence of the site and the messages it conveys.

Given the specific context provided by the TRC of a very public remebering of loss, separation, and violation, it is easier to understand the way that District Six has come to serve what we might appreciate as a ‘necessary’ paradigm of prelapsarian wholeness – a concept of ‘community’ that not only denied apartheid, but also presumed at times, an (impossibly) harmonious and unified population prior to apartheid and possibly colonialism. The museum proposes nothing less than a utopian moment and, by implication, future.245

However, in contrast to Robben Island, the District Six Museum has received scant recognition or funding from official sources. This amounted to one per cent of the amount received by Robben Island in 1996 and in some years, the Museum has received no state funding at all. In addition to this, when the decision was made to reorganize the national institution into the ‘flagships’ listed above, District Six was excluded. As Coombes highlights,

The concept of ‘community’ invoked here seems, then, to embody the ‘rainbow nation’ of Mandela’s first government. This makes exclusion from the nationally recognized heritage trail even more remarkable.246

There are important differences that reflect the change that was happening at the end of the Mandela Presidency and the beginning of the new Mbeki era. The decision as to what was included within the Flagship grouping was made shortly

after the 1999 election, although discussion had been ongoing for some considerable time before that. The decision that was taken to exclude the District Six Museum can be read as a political one. The exclusion was motivated to move from the desired ‘rainbow’ representation of the Mandela era to the Africanist focus of Mbeki’s presidency. Excluding District Six from Iziko prevented the rise of a nationally sanctioned struggle site to compete with the focus on Robben Island. While the District Six site appears to embody the apartheid struggle and specifically the conceptualisation of the reverse ‘rainbow’ nation as an oppositional vision, it lacks the political association with the ANC that is so clearly present at Robben Island. Moreover, as discussed above, the privileging of the ANC association and connections collapses the distinction between party and apartheid opposition in a way that is inimical to current political ends on a national scale. The national voting constituency of the ANC is almost exclusively Black, whereas a variety of other parties make up the predominant support representation of the non-Black population. The association of the struggle with the Black male against the White male provides a powerful signifier in the present, in respect of the political fight of the ANC against the Democratic Party and the New National Party (both led by White males). This is important outside the country, but politically imperative within it. On a local level, the dynamics are very different. In order to win power in the Western Cape – a stated ambition of the ANC – the ANC needs to attract support from the non-Black population who make up nearly eighty percent of the electorate. For this constituency, District Six is a powerful signifier of the supposedly non-racial utopia to be achieved by an ANC government. On a local level, the ANC is content for the Museum to exist since it serves its ends without endangering the careful construction of the officially sanctioned national version of the struggle.

Both sites present versions of ‘struggle’ history, but they offer very different ways of embodying it. In particular, the concept of ‘community’, which is so favoured in the rhetoric of transformation and reconstruction and which has been mobilised by both the District Six Museum and
Robben Island, is interpreted distinctly. The most important distinction is that the Robben Island version of 'community' is allowed to stand for the 'nation', while the District Six version is systematically relegated to an idea of 'community' that remains intractably local.\(^{247}\)

Another site that was included in *Iziko* provides further evidence of this local/national split in the approach to heritage, particularly when it relates to colonialism, apartheid and their opponents. Slaves in the Cape were transported there from Indian Ocean territories. Cape Town was not really linked into the transatlantic slave network. Although the number of slaves (35,000) was small compared to numbers involved in some other African countries, they formed a majority of the local population until the nineteenth century. UNESCO’s decision to initiate an international Slave Route project saw the restoring of the name ‘Slave Lodge’ to the building, which had later become the South African National Cultural History Museum. However, the desire to commemorate slavery and acknowledge its part in the development of the region has encountered problems. As Nigel Worden points out,

Local researchers and tour guides saw the ‘Slave Route’ as a public commemoration of the specific institution of Cape slavery, particularly designed to empower local communities of slave descent. However, central government representatives insisted that slavery be seen as part of a broader ‘South African nation-building exercise’ and that it should include ‘such issues as indentured labour, forced migration, convict and farm labour … The current stress of the South African government on ‘nation-building’ means that any heritage which is only local could be anathema, particularly when it might be interpreted as an evocation of ‘Coloured’ ethnic identity which is widely believed to have led to repeated ANC electoral defeats in the Western Cape.\(^{248}\)

\(^{247}\) Ibid, pp. 120-121.
\(^{248}\) Quoted in Coombes, p.204-5.
The connection between the emergence of a Coloured identity, its politicisation, and the NNP rebirth has already been analyzed in the second chapter. Here, clearly there was a desire to remove the exclusively local focus on the specific historical instance of Cape slavery and the possibility of an enabling identity for the descendants of that history. Instead, there was a desire to focus on the wider instances of oppression that enables the narrativising of the difference between the historical period and the euphoric present and future. It is clear from the decisions made to devote such significant political, cultural, and economic capital to the establishment of the Robben Island Museum that it is intended to embody the legacy of the struggle and the mediation of that legacy into contemporary politics in the country. This vision is supported and supplemented by the other institutions in Iziko. National funding means playing to a national constituency and local narratives and histories are submerged beneath the level of the totalizing vision. The fact that this vision has undergone a transformation from the articulation of the ‘rainbow’ vision to one that focuses on the Africanist ethno-nationalist interpretation is symptomatic of the wider disjuncture between the Mandela and Mbeki presidencies. A casualty of this vision is the District Six Museum, which receives little support to develop as an institution with relevance beyond the local community.

Interestingly, there were two exhibitions held almost contemporaneously in 1997 in the spaces of District Six and Robben Island. Entitled respectively, the District Six Public Sculpture Project and Thirty Minutes, they involved some of the same artists though there were only nine in the Robben Island exhibition as opposed to ninety-six in the District Six project. The brief for work for District Six was relatively open. Artists were asked only to be sensitive to the environment in which they were working, and, if they were not from District Six, it was suggested that they spent time with some of those who were displaced. The project was about reclamation and occupation of a loaded space.
A particularly poignant piece was produced by Randolph Hartzenberg, a local artist who teaches at the Techikon. *Salt Tower* (1997) involved placing sixty bags of salt around the bell of the church. Hartzenberg regularly employs salt as a medium in his work. The salt draws on connotations of trade and its role in the establishment of the Cape, its use as a healing substance, its religious associations and its employment as a figure of speech – ‘salt of the earth’, ‘a pinch of salt’. In this case, there is also the context of ‘salted earth’. Land that has been laid waste and them marked so as to prevent its occupation. In the piece, the effect of the salt masks the sound of the church bell. The church (and the mosque) were the only two structures to remain when the demolition was carried out. Hartzenberg’s piece works on the removal of people from the sounds and sights that orientate them in life and enable the feeling of familiarity and ‘home’. There is a sense in the stopping of time – an inability to hold celebrations or mourning – which references the effect of the removals but also the illusion of the effect of return, repossession, and redevelopment since it will never be possible to recreate what was lost or to recover the lost years. Sue Williamson, another local artist, created a piece *Viewpoints* (1997), which set up isolated window frames that mapped on in etching representations of what was lost in the removals. These then acted in a hyperreal sense, as with the map in the museum, to provide a ‘viewpoint’ of what might be seen today if the removals had not taken place. The piece works in reorientating the view, but also makes ironic reference to the touristic practice of contemplation of beauty, which occurs frequently in and around the city. Here, the viewer is asked to contemplate what is not there.

Hartzenberg and Williamson were also two of the artists involved in the *Thirty Minutes* exhibition. The title references the length of time prisoners were allowed to see visitors for. Sometimes, biannual visits were all that was permitted. Williamson’s piece, *Is anybody...?* deals with the constant presence of surveillance that existed during the apartheid years, and obviously particularly so in prison. Warders accompanied each visit and it was impossible to have private times. Visits were built up with expectation to the extent that they almost
inevitably disappointed and acted as an increasing aspect of difference rather than bringing families closer together. Williamson speaks of her own experience of harassment as a White opposed to the system,

Knowing that the police were trying to make you nervous, but that what they were doing to those that weren’t White and middle-class went far, far beyond that. Feeling rage. Feeling watched.249

Willie Bester produced *Die Bybel* (Bible in Afrikaans). Bester’s production is analyzed further on, but here he makes clear his distaste at the perversion of Christianity that the apartheid state represented.

Thanks to Christianity, we were brought up with the idea that all men were created equal … Outside the church, within the community we regarded ourselves as brothers, but outside with the White man it was a different story. We were taught there was another heaven for us…

The Bible was used to keep the aspirations of Black people at bay – instead of praying for the downfall of this vicious government, you have to pray to give them strength, to run the country. You get scared to pray for the downfall, because the scriptures prevent you from questioning your rulers.250

Bester’s Bible has been cut away to reveal the machinery of a bomb. Amidst the wiring lies a child’s shoe. It works powerfully as a signifier of innocence corrupted. Bibles were of course readily available to the detainees, but the readings here infer the violence that was perpetuated in the name of Christianity and one of the preferred ways of assassination by the security forces, such as the bomb that killed the writer and activist

---

Ruth First, wife of Joe Slovo – the long time leader of the South African Communist Party.

Another one of the artists involved in the project, Lisa Brice, used police reconstruction techniques to portray the evolving aging features of Mandela as his captors and fellow inmates would have seen. The desire was to create the illusion of seeing the change in the features of the man that an insider would have been able to see. Restrictions imposed by the state meant that there was only one picture released of Mandela during his time in jail. The iconographic Rivonia trial photograph was how the world came to know the image of the man who personified that anti-apartheid struggle. The transformation over the twenty-seven years in incarceration to the man who walked free, fist aloft, in February 1990 was obviously immense. Brice tried to recreate some of that process based on the images from the trial and on release. Brice has recorded that though the police department aiding her were very co-operative with the project, she was unsatisfied with the images of the intermediate period, which seemed to not resemble what Mandela might have looked like. This interrogation of the image of an icon in order to recreate the changes between the two images of global familiarity is telling. While the image itself created may be unsatisfactory, it acts as a reminder that South Africa is not a First World country with access to the latest technologies. Even in this area of continued high levels of state funding from the apartheid era, police are unable to make a 'true' reconstruction. This indicates some of the difficulties facing those now charged with ending the spiral of violence in the country that has become one of the defining issues of the post-apartheid era, but that so clearly and evidently has its origins in the inequalities and iniquities that were and are the legacy of the regime.

These exhibitions marked an attempt by local artists from the Cape to engage with the difficulties involved in transformation. These two spaces, Robben Island and District Six, have a resonance all over the world as representative of the oppression of apartheid. What is more problematic is how this legacy is
reinvented in the present and for whose ends. The contrast between the scale and focus of the two institutions is marked by the contrasting local/national scale works that were produced by artists for the two contemporaneous exhibitions. Whilst the District Six exhibition deals with the site-specific dimensions of the local space, the Robben Island space is interpreted on a national level, with works referencing the apartheid system itself. It is uncertain whether this was intended through the brief given to the artists, a reflection of a recognized significance for Robben Island’s status in national memory, or an understanding of Robben Island’s *uber*-status in the construction of post-apartheid memory. Whatever the reasons, the difference is evident and is evidence of the difficulties inherent in the construction and (re)invention of history.


**Jane Alexander**

One of the artists who has best managed to understand and react to the challenges of being a cultural practitioner in this society is Jane Alexander. Alexander’s
representation of the darkness that lies beneath the normative construction of society and its inter-relationships has continued from the apartheid era into the new dispensation. Rather than explicitly criticize the state, Alexander draws attention to by-products of the construction process. Her continued engagement with South African society and its self-presentation to the outside world mark her practice as supportive of the vision of the imagined transformed society of the 'reverse' nation.

Any visitor to SANG encounters *The Butcher Boys*. A nasty shock for the unsuspecting visitor, the work has the effect of immediately contextualizing the space around it to the South African experience. It shatters the easy contemplation and consumption of the art object in the reassuringly neo-classical museum setting. Situated amongst the work designed for wall spaces or decorative addition, it haunts the museum to the extent that, anecdotally, many visitors struggle to recall (m)any of the gallery’s other pieces. The artist responsible for the sculpture is Jane Alexander. Alexander is a Johannesburg born White woman with a German Jewish heritage who has been resident in Central Cape Town for many years and who teaches at Michaelis Art School. *The Butcher Boys* was created in 1986 at the time of the imposition of the State of Emergency. Since then, it has generally been at home in the National Gallery though knowledge of it was brought to a wider audience by its inclusion as one of the key works in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994*, which travelled between Germany and the United States in 2001-2 to critical acclaim. Further knowledge of the work was achieved by their appearance in Alexander’s photomontage work. As such, it is without doubt the most infamous contemporary South African artwork, an icon of its era and a signifier of Resistance Art. Although Alexander has never produced another piece of such significance, her oeuvre is a fascinating mediation of lived experience in South Africa. Alexander is renowned as being reticent about her work and retiring from publicity. It would be fair to say that she prefers her biography, comment and personality to not be employed in readings of the work and to leave it to the
viewer to inscribe the ‘meaning’ on to the piece in a subjective way. One critic bemoaned the way in which

There seems to be no real questioning of Jane Alexander’s work in South African art-criticism and academic circles. From what has been produced it seems that curators, critics and academics think that questions surrounding one of Africa’s most important artists have been settled. Typical criticism normally centres on the fact that she is reticent. That her art is political, that her art is enigmatic and difficult to define, spooky and scary. I believe that closer scrutiny of the uniqueness and innovation of Alexander’s newer works can potentially unearth a wealth of other interesting meanings.²⁵¹

In one of Alexander’s rare public offerings on her work, she stated,

My work has always been influenced by the political and social character of South Africa. My themes are drawn from the relationship of individuals to hierarchies and the presence of aggression, violence, victimisation, power and subservience, and from the paradoxical relationships of these conditions to each other. The content I work with is derived from a combination of observation, media information and the experience of interaction.²⁵²

Alexander’s work can be considered alongside that of Boshoff and Kentridge in its privileging of the technical and formal, alongside the political and conceptual nature of the work. Alexander’s formal artistic inspirations are interesting. In her sculpture, the obvious debt is the work of the American Superrealist work of the late sixties and seventies, and specifically the sculptors, Duane Hanson, Edward Kienholz and George Segal. There is definite formal inspiration from the first of

²⁵² Jamal & Williamson, p.22.
these using the plaster moulding around the skeletal frame that is not fully concealed by the covering, offering evidence of method, truth to materials, and traces of the process of creation. All these artists were engaged with the socio-political context of their time, as can be seen in works such as Race Riot (1969-71) by Hansen and Kienholz’s State Hospital (1966). Segal, whose German Jewish heritage may have been a point of empathy with Alexander, was responsible for the Holocaust Memorial in San Francisco, as well as a series of work exploring the power/control relationship between the state and the individual in work, such as Walk, Don’t Walk and Rush Hour.

As a source of formal inspiration, these artists provide an apt imagery for addressing issues of state prejudice. It offers a language that enables a naturalistic narrative to be communicated to the viewer, but that also permits the formation of subtle readings multivalently. The Butcher Boys have an overt unnature. The figures are masculine, as referred to in the title, in body shape and definition and have hirsute marking but are without mouths to speak or genitals to sexualize them. Their heads have horns that twist unnaturally from their heads, marking them as a hybrid that is neither human nor animal. J.M. Coetzee wrote

The deformed and stunted relations between human beings that were created under colonialism and exacerbated under what is loosely called apartheid have their psychic representation in a deformed and stunted inner life. All expressions of that inner life, no matter how intense, no matter how pierced with exultation or despair, suffer from the same stuntedness and deformity.²⁵³

This statement lucidly captures the usual interpretation of the work as reflecting the warped and unnatural society into which it was conceived and born. The figures are located in the socio-political context of the time, when the easy life of the Whites was being disturbed by the violence in the country that was spreading

²⁵³ Ibid. p22-23.
from the high-density urban areas – where it had been an increasing feature over
the decade following the Soweto Riots. This began to take the form of an urban
terror, where crime, and violent crime, became a normal part of the White South
African lived experience in the same, although not as acute, way that had existed
in Black areas for some time. Much of the violence was inflicted by the State and
its agents, but it was specifically at this time that the growth of shadowy ‘Third
Force’ violence began to impact on people. This was the beginning of the regime-
sponsored terror that was evidenced by attacks on hostels and areas known to
support or be sympathetic to the ANC or the UDF. ANC attacks on White urban
areas, though sporadic, increased the paranoia of the Whites. The fear of unknown
forces began to impact on the psyche of the population as a whole. *The Butcher
Boys* are the personification of this fear. They realise the conception of the
bogeyman that is current within most cultures, giving form to the collective
nightmare that stalked South Africa at the end of the apartheid era.

In addition to the actual physical form of the sculpture, Alexander used the figures
in a series of photomontages. Again, the formal inspiration is interesting for its
evocation of an historical moment that paralleled the South African situation.
Photomontage was a technique pioneered by the Dadaists in the aftermath of the
First World War. It seems that the initial experimentation was done by the Zurich
cell, particularly Raoul Hausmann and Richard Huelsenbeck, but that it was
developed by their Berlin counterparts, including George Grosz, Hans Richter,
and John Heartfield. Richter described the motivation as being to

> Confront a crazy world with its own image.  

The purpose was to be the anti-artistic form of photography, focusing on
alienation (Ger: *Verfremdung*). Heartfield, especially, developed the form as a
propaganda tool. He employed the form to ridicule the Nazi use of propaganda
and became an increasingly militant Communist. For Alexander, the use of the art

---

form would have had an obvious parallel with the South African context. Although her work has never attempted to be construed as didactic propaganda, it was clear in its insinuation of the unnatural, demented construction of the regime, its social order and the evil created by it. Some of the most powerful examples of this photomontage series are *Ford, Shepherd, and Landscape*. In *Landscape*, Alexander references the landscape tradition of South African art. As discussed in the context of Kentridge’s work, the South African landscape and its depiction have played a key part in the construction of identity in the country. It has been employed and perceived as an indication of the civilizing project of the settler. It has been seen as a ‘Promised Land’ signalling divine backing for the rule of the imperialist. It has also been used to affirm the place of the Black population.
Many White artists depicted the native in the land, happy in demeanour and at one with her/his surroundings. This indicated the contentment of the Black population to continue in its constructed idyll that preferred to leave the matters of power and control, outside the ‘tribe’ and ‘tribal lands’ to the Whites. Alexander shows the post-apocalyptic vision of the landscape. The civilising ideals, or their employment in the service of colonial hegemony, have been debased and destroyed. Not only have they themselves crumbled from their pedestal; but they appear to have brought widespread devastation with their own fall. In the epoch of Mutually Assured Destruction, visions of a nuclear apocalypse were familiar to many. The microcosm, on a global scale, of the South African situation offered an extreme dualism between the forces of right and left. The regime, given economic and moral succour, by those such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, who opposed Communism at all costs, portrayed itself as a bastion of Capitalism in a continent increasingly under the ideological control of Moscow, Beijing or Pyongyang. For many who opposed Capitalist orthodoxy, South Africa represented the embodiment of exclusion and class war that justified all actions that threatened the regime and its agents. The struggle and possible descent into war are captured here in a future time, populated only by those who were able and suited to live in the landscape, the shadows made real, *The Butcher Boys*.

The use of the term *Shepherd* evokes the biblical connotations of Jesus as a ‘herder of men’. Here the shepherd is armed with a crook that could also be read as a weapon or means of torture. There is no flock to be sighted because of the evident location in an abattoir. It is possible to read the piece as highlighting the sinister way Christianity has been invoked to justify the initial occupation of the Cape, the imperial project and apartheid itself. The established church of the country was the Dutch Reformed Church, a Calvinist Protestant church that until the eighties maintained that there was a biblical justification for the policy of separate development, based on the Blacks being descended from Cain and the Whites from Abel. A biblical dimension evoked in the construction of the Boer Republics as the ‘Promised Land’ with the Afrikaners designated as a ‘chosen
people’. An interesting analogy is taken from the title juxtaposed with the image of the Black boy. Herding is the fundamental tradition of boys throughout the Black population in South Africa. It is their key role in the village unit. The importance of the herded animal, particularly cows, in many African cultural systems cannot be understated. It was and is the basic unit of wealth, currency and prestige, with a social exchange function in activities such as the settlement of disputes and marriage. To depict a Black youth in a scene of mechanistic slaughter is to reference the imposition of the Western order on Africa and its people. What was presented as a civilizing force of education, health, and religious morals has in fact resulted in the ugly transformation of the way of life of the people that has brought exploitation, misery and the sense of alienation in their own land. The presence of *The Butcher Boys* provides a sense of the post-apocalyptic scene as well as the obvious play on butchery and the abattoir. What is to be hung here? Is it the corpses of animals or a darker reference?

*Ford* offers more political readings. Here the violence is dominating the frame, disrupting the frame in an echo of the shattered windscreen. The obvious contemporaneous reference would have been to the violence of the township areas, where outside South Africa, an international audience became accustomed to watching the unequal battle between stone-throwing youths and helmeted, uniformed security forces. The menace and threat of violence is clearly indicated. The work recalls that of Hans Haacke’s *Land Rover* series (1973) that used similar images, albeit drawn from news footage and accompanied them with text that played with Land Rover’s advertising slogans. The works carried an unambiguous didactic message about the greed and exploitation of the company in its South African operations that played a part in the raising of public awareness which eventually caused the pullout of the then British Leyland. Here, the Ford branding is clearly seen. It re-emphasises the role of private companies as crutches of the regime, sustaining the terror that could yet be unleashed and envelop them.
The most celebrated of the photomontages is By the end of today you’re going to need us. This image which appears to be located in a subway or other underground cavern lacks the political references of the other images but strongly reinforces the perception that just below the surface, unseen at ground level, were sinister forces waiting to run amok. Alexander’s inference here seems to be to the fact that many Whites were ambivalent as to the extreme repressive measures of the regime that they saw as justified by the sustenance it provided for their way of life. This encouragement of a spiral of violence also led to South Africa becoming the most violent area of the world that was not directly involved in warfare. The dramatic rise of the murder rates led to the emergence of a climate of fear in the townships and the White suburbs. The ‘demons’ unleashed by the regime came
back to haunt the very interests of capital and social groupings that it had sought to serve. The very basis of White interest in the country was destabilized not by the actions of the incoming ‘Black’ government which in general terms allowed the economy to evolve to the socio-political requirements of the new dispensation; but by the spectre of crime that had its roots in the inequalities and cycles of violence that were the result of the policies of the apartheid regime.

The shadow of violence and its manipulation to its own ends by the regime informs *Jamboree*, another photomontage in this series which foregrounds a White man and a skull mounted on a pedestal in front of two clothed mannequins set against the background of an AWB flag. The AWB flag utilizes the three-
legged swastika as its emblem in the same colour scheme as the Nazi swastika though the photomontage itself is rendered in black and white. The skull piece resembles a Gothic memento mori and is a powerful representation of death and the danger of death. The fear of the AWB was very real at the onset of the State of Emergency, though in reality their support never amounted to more than a few extremists. The obvious self-identity with the Nazis was a device of fear in a climate of increased repression and violence. The formal composition of the work is repeated in many of the German inspired works that are discussed below.

Another theme in Alexander's work that is clearly articulated in this series is the critique of religion and its role in the subjugation of the population, though its interface with apartheid and colonialism. This is most vivid in the titling of one of the photomontages Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow (Psalm 51, verse 7). The image depicts a darkened image of a doctor with a portable hospital bed in front of a profile of a naked boy. He seems to be gesturing to The Butcher Boys, who provide a sinister backdrop to the work. The construction of the association of Whiteness, Cleanliness, and Godliness is strongly propagated here. The critique of the meta-narratives deriving from this collapse of discourse into a totalising ideological construction is a major interest and subject in Alexander’s work and recurs from this period right up to the series African Adventure (1999-2004).

In the latter part of the eighties there was a heady mix of this fear, anxiety, hope and expectation. It is interesting that a country that had never been united came together in the shared experience of fear. It is for this reason that so many identify with The Butcher Boys as an expression of the time and a construct or aide memoire of the formation of a national memory.

The construction of memory and the destruction of the past form a key part of Alexander’s work that draws on German imagery. The series is one with blatantly significant personal connotations given her German Jewish heritage and was inspired in terms of content and imagery by visits to Germany, notably the former
East Berlin, which was the pre-war location of her family home. The series brings to mind Milan Kundera’s statement that

The struggle of man against tyranny is the struggle of memory against forgetting.\(^{255}\)

A sculptural assemblage entitled *Erbschein: An den Bergen* (Inheritance document: At the mountains) of 1995 is perhaps the central work.

Jane Alexander - *Erbschein: An den Bergen* (source www.arthrob.co.za)

The piece is dominated by the figure of a central half man, half bird. It has the head, wings and talonned feet of a bird of prey and the torso and legs of a man. It bestrides a raised platform, goose-stepping (a further aviamorphic reference) across. It is, of course, unnatural in form and grounded in that its wings would not support it to fly. It clearly references the eagle used as the national symbol of the United States and Germany. It appears to be controlling the construction scenes around it, evidenced clearly by the web formed by the three large cranes. For anyone who visited Berlin, and particularly the eastern part in the nineties, the cranes offered a powerful signifier of the change in order. The new Western capitalist order was replacing the Eastern Bloc totalitarian vision and in its process of takeover was reclaiming the united German past. This included re-orienting the city around the central area formed by Potsdamer Platz and the Brandenberg Gate, destroying the Wall and re-concreting over the site of Hitler’s bunker, as if to ensure that all evidence of the vile period was obliterated. Most significant politically were the return of the capital to Berlin and the return of parliament to the Reichstag. Potsdamer Platz provided the temples of the new order with the massive neo-Modernist style buildings of Sony, DaimlerBenz, Braun and other multinational giants. In the assemblage, the platform is formed by the top of an arched structure, which replicates the station arch of a village outside East Berlin that was the home of Alexander’s family. Depicted in the background seen through the arch is the house itself with a Trabant parked in the foreground. Dominating the arch is a sculpture, which Powell explains:

There is set on an octagonal sculptural base, an obscene creature, somewhere between a dragon and a toad. It is derived from a monument erected in Berlin to the dubious memory of the anti-Semitic poet, Theodor Fritsch. In the original the dragon/toad is only part of the sculpture. It represents in gross personification, the Semitic race, and is imaged as being slain by the heroic personification of Aryan Manhood. On the sides of the original monument two quotations are inscribed, both from Fritsch. Rendered in English they read as follows:
When it has been proved that the lower
Race despoils the higher, then the higher
Must command sufficient sense of
cleanliness and relentlessness to keep the
lower away from it.

No health for humanity (or for the people) before the
elimination of Jewry.

On the outside back wall of Jane Alexander’s construction is another
German text, a local proclamation of 1935, signed by the mayor, decrying
and prohibiting the lease or sale of property to Jews. In Nazi officialese it
orders the inhabitants to unite in defence of the blood purity of the parish,
‘the small cell of the State’. It particularly singles out and warns against
‘disguised non-Aryans’, assimilated Jews, Christian converts and those by
marriage related to Jews.256

The convergence and intertwining of the personal and the political is a key theme
of Alexander’s work in the post-apartheid era. This intensely personal work
begins a body of work that continues into the present that reflects the perspectives
of individuals in response to the systems that surround them. These works often
focus on those who are excluded from the picture a society paints of itself.
Alexander puts forward the individual or excluded group’s perspective in order to
question the meta-narratives that society establishes for itself as given truths. In
this series, the significant allusion is to the nature of inheritance. A reading of the
work could centre on the personal history and physical inheritance that has been
denied to her by the historical events. This is not really a question of property but
of the memories being buried beneath the onset of the new order. There is the
element of irony in the reversal from being involuntarily a member of a group that

256 Powell I.: The Angel and the Catastrophe in Jane Alexander: Sculpture and Photomontage, The Video
Lab, Cape Town 1995.
was oppressed and excluded to the extent that the State policy was the total elimination of that group, to being an involuntary member of those excluding and oppressing another major societal group. The language used on the ‘poem’ on the monument seems like a historical document of another time, but with the exception of the last sentence/couplet, it could have transferred easily into the South African context as a statement of official policy. There is also the reference to cleanliness, an issue that Alexander picks up on in another photomontage containing a portrait of her Jewish grandfather with the slogan ‘Sauberkeit ist Gesundheit’ (Cleanliness is Health), which was found inscribed at a concentration camp. This othering of people by constructing them as ‘dirty’ or ‘unclean’ in contrast to the cleanliness and purity of another group was something that translated easily into the language used by the apartheid regime to ‘other’ the non-White population. The pseudo-religious construction of cleanliness being next to godliness again relates back to the use of Christianity as a tool of oppression, and particularly in the South African condition as a means of polarised division between good/bad; clean/dirty; beautiful/ugly; pure/impure true Christian/non (wrong)-believer; civilised/native; White/Black.

Alexander shows that the parallel between the systems of racial hatred employed in Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa goes beyond ideological inspiration. The inheritance mentioned can be interpreted on a personal level as relating to the inheritance received from her family that identified her as a member of particular groups, but also the one bequeathed by the end of totalitarian regimes in Germany at the end of the Second World War, at the end of the Cold War, and in South Africa at the end of apartheid. In all these cases, there is a desire on behalf of many, not least the State itself, to forget the past and begin afresh, to remove the physical trappings of what has past and concrete over the evidence of past deeds. The new orthodoxy that triumphed in these instances was the Liberal Democratic Western model that offered a series of new orthodoxies and given truths. There is a questioning of the wisdom of receiving this as a new truth, as the eagle emblem of Germany can also be seen as the national emblem of the United States with
whom the capitalist triumph is most clearly identified. The use of this bird image as an analogy to a predator or predatory system can be seen most obviously in the contemporaneous work Landowner in which the bird sits as in a Baroque portrait, the owner and controller of all it surveys. Alexander points clearly to the continuation of individual histories and memories as an oppositional counterpoint to the new meta-narratives, an individual inheritance that cannot be wished away or forgotten or concreted over.

The alienation of the individual from society and the structures of power and its exclusionary, uniform nature is perhaps the dominant theme in Alexander’s work of the post-apartheid era and the thematic aspects of the German influenced work can be identified in the body of work dating from the period around the elections. These are entitled Reintegration Programme or draw on similar themes and are considered together here.

The title of the series is taken from a programme adopted in New York State in the early 1980s that released all but the most dangerous mental patients onto the streets. This was justified in terms of allowing the patients to find their own way into the society from which they had been removed. The scheme was motivated by financial concerns and resulted in dismal failure. Its relevance here is that it signifies the status of the excluded individuals; people who have not been classified as insiders by the system and are removed from its norms. The works question the role of the state and its classification of people. The construction and mainstreaming of totalising discourses fails to take account of those who refuse or are unable to enter into society’s construct. In South Africa in 1995, when the works date from, there was the establishment and existence of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ that filtered all experience, politics, culture and sport. Alongside the use of the uncritical and unqualified naming of the era as ‘post-apartheid’, it strangled and refused to allow the emergence of any other discourse to understand the context. What Alexander focuses on in the Reintegration Programme pieces is the status and perspective of those who are unable to identify with ‘Rainbow Nation’
and the euphoria of the time. The relationship to construction of madness is an interesting one. Refusal to accept the historical moment was so contrary to normative perspective, that the exclusion felt and perceived bore some similarity with the feelings of rejection that the classification of mental illness can bring.

The most well-known of these works is *Integration Programme: man with TV* which featured on the cover of Jamal and Williamson’s *Art in South Africa: the future present*, which is probably the standard text on post-apartheid art production in South Africa in the way that *Resistance Art* was seen as the definitive glossary of the apartheid era production. The sculpture features a Black man seated awkwardly on a stool dressed in a suit and hat with a plastic sports bag at his side. He is watching a white television placed atop a white box. There is a powerful colour contrast between the darkness of the man and his suit and the whiteness of the box and television. The man can be seen as representative of a rural migrant coming to the urban areas to look for work. The suit and hat is generally associated in South Africa with the clothes received following initiation. The hat acts as a throwback to a different more formal era and may be covering scarring received during initiation. The suit marks him out as different from the usual wear of the urban population. The hints at the initiation procedure again set him out as different from the urbane city dweller. The sports bag is typical of something used by a migrant to carry a few basic possessions. What he has materially and emotionally is left behind. He has a slightly vacant, fixed look about him as if he is trying to understand the messages that are coming to him, but he is not receiving. The television plays a loop of a man standing on a street corner continually straightening his tie, as if preparing for a job interview.

The piece can be read as questioning in whose interests the new order was working. There is now a common perception in South Africa that the rewards of the post-apartheid era have been captured by an urban middle-class that began its formation in the apartheid era but that came to prominence with the ANC. High levels of unemployment and poverty are testament to the fact that not all have
been included in the transformation that has occurred in the country. The colour of the deletion and its box suggests that the messages been given out are those in the interests of the Whites, the established order. The terms of this 'transformation' are undoubtedly ones that alienate and discomfort a number of the population. The rural values that register as a constructed guardian of tradition in the country are not reflected in the construction of the new order, as shown by the man watching and the man on the television. Even though the discourse is being spoken by Black leaders, it has looked to a largely unreformed private sector for its tone and its solution to provide a better future for the people. This Orwellian thesis is developed in other contemporaneous works, such as *Portrait of a man with landscape and procession (Bantu Stephen Biko 1946 – 1977)* 1995. In this work Alexander employs her sculptural work *Something’s going down* of 1994 as a backdrop to a portrait of the Black Consciousness leader.

In the ‘original’, four figures motion as if to an unseen event occurring to the right of the piece. The group consists of two men, one of whom appears to be an albino, a balaclavaed child denoting his status as an activist or radical and a woman who leads the others. Behind the group is a billboard with a stylised representation of an angelic White girl depicted with her hands held together in prayer. On the back of the billboard is written in English and Xhosa

WE ARE HERE TO:

Search for stolen property
Search for unlicensed firearms and ammunition
Identify suspects and arrest them

This is necessary to maintain law and order and to protect you from troublemakers.

You have no reason to fear us

Thank you for your cooperation

This language is taken from the standard card handed out by police at roadblocks at the dusk of the apartheid era. The absence of Afrikaans is significant in that it was one of the first official documents of the regime to omit the language. This evidence of imminent or impending change is referenced in the title. It was clear that the old was dying but the new had not been born. The uncertainty as to what form and shape it would take was threatening to those who lived only with the clarity of right and wrong that apartheid presented.

The landscape depicted is marked by electricity pylons, their cables stretching towards the horizon. The inclusion of the Xhosa version references the arrest and detention of Biko at a roadblock in the Eastern Cape. The Eastern Cape is the
traditional base of the Xhosa people who have provided most of the great Black leaders of South Africa in recent times, including Mandela, Biko, and the Mbekis. Here, Alexander both commemorates and questions the ‘sacrifice’ of Biko. The Something’s going down title can be read as referring to the transformation that was taking place from the apartheid to the post-apartheid era or to suggest a betrayal in that transformation of the sacrifice and struggle of so many people to create the ‘new’ South Africa. A hypothetical question that many commentators and radicals have asked is what would Biko have made of the transformation. After his death, the Black Consciousness Movement fell away to the strident left-wing ideologies of the late seventies and early eighties. The ANC, PAC and Azapo all laid claim to the legacy of Biko without really reflecting his views and positions in their ideologies. As two of these had almost entirely fallen away at a national level by the 1994 elections, it was left to the ANC to represent and claim his legacy. To invoke Biko’s ghost is to question the status of the transformation and what it has done for the people. Here again, Alexander questions the image that is being held up for people to digest and strive for. The juxtaposition of the girl with the four figures can be read as interrogating the image that is given to South Africans or reflecting the fears of the entitled that the constructed innocence, purity, and Christian nature of the country would be overturned. The fundamental question being posed is whether or not to overturn what is there and begin again or build on what is there. What would Biko do?

There are two other works that can be viewed as part of this series. One, simply entitled Integration Programme from 1992 and Integration Programme: man with wrapped feet from 1994. In these pieces, there is a further questioning of the use of people by the state. In the former, a man who is identified by his clothing as a worker (overalls and Wellington boots) stands fixed on a trolley with attached rope so that he can be pulled in whatever direction. He has no option but to follow. The more striking is the later work where a man lies upside down on a bed or board, a gold halo acts as his pillow. His feet have been bound to form a single entity. His hair is marked with shards of broken glass. The work gives ambivalent
readings. The formal inspiration of the Baroque renderings of St. Peter’s crucifixion is clearly referenced but his status is unclear. He seems to be asleep and untroubled; but this is problematized by the binding of his feet. Does this mark him as a homeless individual without shoes struggling for protection or does it signify some degree of captivity and coercion? It is probably most apt to see this as simultaneous understandings that signal him as a martyr for the individual. It is uncertain if he has forsaken being reintegrated and is left to find his own way in an alienating society or whether he is being reintegrated by the state on its own terms. The binding of the feet means that he is unable to walk on his own, which is consistent with either of these readings. The wrapping of parts of the body or objects is something that Alexander has employed as a theme. The constancy or stability of the signifiers is unclear. Jacqui Nolte related the dragged parcel in *Something’s Going Down* as corresponding to the wrapping of feet in *Integration Programme*.

The wrapping of the ‘integration’ man’s feet evokes that same ominous black parcel featured in Alexander’s *Erbschein: An den Bergen*, 1995, and in *Something’s Going Down*, 1994. These concealed presences serve as signifiers of selective decontaminations of self, which, nevertheless, are displaced into eternally recurrent noxious feelings of terror, now split from their original context. Alexander’s figures drown from the weight of these ominous black parcellings, they drag them behind them as they attempt to ignore the invasions of their psyches, they stumble across them in the excavations of personal and social histories. Once recognised, these clinging memories cannot be effaced, they may be parcelled but their presence will persist.  

Individual dislocation is again a central theme in Alexander’s *Pastoral Scene* ‘series’ of the same era. The central piece is a sculptural diorama of three human figures and a dog arranged around a park bench. Two Black women are seated on

---

the bench. One on the left of the composition is clearly identified by her uniform as a domestic worker. The central figure is a mother breastfeeding her baby. She is rendered in a black robe with a halo. On the right is a White woman. She is clearly aged and dressed in clothes that identify her as a widow of Continental origin. In a South African context, she would be likely to be viewed as either East European or perhaps Portuguese. In her hand she holds an open sandwich with three sardines. In the foreground is a bitch, clearly identified by her swollen teats. She has the ears of a jackal or wild dog that give her the appearance of a mongrel, but she could be any African street dog. All four look straight ahead but seem to be focused on points in the distance except for the dog whose look directly engages with the viewer. They are depicted together but have no relationship or interaction in the piece with each other. Each figure seems to be alienated by society, left out and displaced.

Their depiction as a trinity inverts the traditional religious iconography of the male Holy Trinity – references reinforced by the title that can be read as a reference to a rural scene or to the role of shepherds. Clergymen are often referred to as having pastoral responsibilities or pastoral care for their ‘flock’ and, indeed, a pastoral staff is held by senior clergy to denote their position. The question of who is the shepherd and who is the flock and the question of where the duty of pastoral care lies and whether that duty is being exercised are the inferences from the work. Evaluating the piece in the context of Alexander’s oeuvre, it is possible to see this double coding as an allusion to the role of the state and the Church and its failure to make proper provision for its people. The Christian signification is further developed by the widow holding a piece of bread with three sardines stretched across it in a contemporary recreation of the loaves and fishes parable. Here, clearly the food on offer is insufficient sustenance for the four to eat. There is a need for a miracle for adequate provision to be made. The gesture of the widow seems to be an indication of this lack with an unarticulated question of who will provide the difference. The bitch and the Madonna figure are giving of themselves to be suckled by those who rely on them for nurture – yet they
themselves cannot be sure of continued sustenance. For the older women, they have given of themselves in the past but have been left destitute. The widow has lost her husband whilst ‘Beauty’, the name of the domestic worker figure, gazes into the far distance perhaps recalling the family she had or has in a far off rural area. The widow can even be read as a further reference to the status of the Church as ‘the bride of Christ’. The link has been broken. This is Alexander in empathetic mode, providing a commentary on the nature of society. The all female composition hints at a suspicion of continuing patriarchy. There is no doubt that Alexander’s work from this period offers many feminist readings. However, these are not, for the most part, heavy-handed and clumsy in the way of some of her peers. There is also an absence of the self-justificatory, retrospective gender solidarity criticism that many White female artists have adopted as a means of positioning themselves in a marginalized grouping.

The representation of the Madonna as a Black woman would still have been perceived as controversial in 1995. The opposition established in the White mindset between themselves as a god-fearing body dedicated to civilisation and a Christian order, and the secular non-religious ‘Communists’ meant that this image would have been problematic. As mentioned before, it was the doctrine of the Dutch Reformed Church until the late seventies that the Blacks were the children of Cain. This depiction again questions the tenets of societal order and the relationship of those excluded to that order. This is reinforced by the photomontages that utilise the figure of ‘Beauty’. Most notable is Beauty in a landscape: born Aliwal North 19-?, died Boksburg 1992. In this work, Alexander presents a foregrounded Beauty against a backdrop of what appears to be a military exercise, involving armoured trucks, a line of soldiers and a helicopter. In the middle is a shadowy representation of a monkey/dog-like figure that bounds across the work. The contrast between the sympathetic portrayal of ‘Beauty’ and the violence and unnaturalness of the setting provides a reading to the viewer that focuses on the corruption of the natural landscape and order by the state and its exercise of power and control. The dignity of individuals is held up as a contrast
to the conduct of the state, who turned the beauty in the landscape into a tool of control and occupation through their operation of power. The desire to retain power at all costs means that the landscape has become a battleground at the expense of nature and ordinary people. The effect of the system and its disregard for the interests and concerns of people are revealed by the uncertain birth date and the location of birth and death. The recording of births is a prime role for the state, the type of basic bureaucratic task that is used to justify its existence, but it is unable to perform its basic function, preferring to focus on continued control. Alexander interrogates the need for the state at all, if it is unable to achieve even this most fundamental task. The location of 'Beauty's' birth in Aliwal North, a rural town in the Cape, and her death in Boksburg, a satellite town of Johannesburg that offers neither the benefits of urban life nor the attractions of rural existence, references the migrant worker status of so many of South Africa's population and their divorce from their home with the comforts that implies.

The representation of the excluded and marginalized is readily apparent in another series of Alexander’s work, *The Bom Boys* (1998). Although there is an alliterative recall of her most famous work, the focus here is more of what society has neglected to take on and acknowledge. These are the explicit failings rather than a manifestation of the demons that lie below. In a methodological departure from her previous practice, Alexander rendered the works in fibreglass cast from a single mould. The works have an observed quality deriving from Alexander’s watching of the games and interaction of the street children who live in the vicinity of Long Street, one of the main thoroughfares of Cape Town. The characters have a zoomorphic element, referencing both Alexander’s previous work and the themes explored in pieces such as *Landowner* and the toys of children. This is clearly demonstrated in *Street Cadets with Harbinger: Wish, Walk/Loop Long* of 1997-8.

The grouping is made up of a child-like figure with a rabbit’s head seated on a rudimentary trolley pulled by another slightly larger figure with a monkey-like
head. It pushes another larger trolley on top of which is a girl figure, identified by a dress and shoes, who wears what appears to be a mask of a cat. The references to the action of play and the tradition of story telling are clear in the use of the animal features. When viewed, the status of the group seems unthreatening and innocent, but en masse there is a stranger other quality to the work that works on imitating the viewers’ response to street children and their supposed threat that they pose to people. This is emphasized by the title including the term ‘Harbinger’ which invokes connotations of ill and doom. The specific local context and reference are clear in the title as well. Loop Street is the parallel road to Long and identifies in geographical location the specificity of the environment of where the work is set. That area of central Cape Town is what was once considered to be the centre of the city in cultural, financial, and social terms. Its status as the orientating area of the city has been removed over the last fifteen years by the decision to rebuild large parts of the main shopping and market areas underground in what is generally considered an ill thought out example of city planning.

The changes in the decentralisation of Cape Town towards the increasing economic importance of suburban centres and tourist attractions such as the Victoria and Albert Waterfront mean that there can be a redundant feel to the centre outside working hours, though it has none of the ghost town feel of central Johannesburg at night. The neglect of the street children is analogous to the neglect of the zone they inhabit. The rendering in the zoomorphic way allows them to be seen as alien and divorced from reality. Alexander works with the dual nature of this perceived feeling of alienation in terms of the reactions that street children and the figures produce and their own alienation from a society in which they are marginalized and discarded. This is reinforced by the use of photomontage, as in so much of Alexander’s work. A prime example of this is a piece such as Bom boy with workers and traffic where the characters seem so small and insignificant that they hardly register in the frame that sets them in the open sky of the landscape but situated by the road and traffic. The stationary nature of the figure is contrasted with the captured motion of the traffic. This can
be read as a commentary on the dynamic progress of the nation that fails to bring everyone on board.

The central piece of Alexander’s recent shows has been *African Adventure*, which was originally conceived for a show in 1999 at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town where it was exhibited in the room known as the British Officers’ Mess. The room is located in the oldest section of the castle, which dates back to the time of Jan van Riebeeck. In its original conception and function, it was the first church established in Southern Africa. Given the multitude of largely negative allusions Alexander makes in her work to the role of religion in South Africa and its ideological backing to the discourses of colonialism and imperialism, and later apartheid, this is a particularly significant setting for the installation.

In physical form, the work consists of thirty-seven photomontages, fifteen sculptures, and a video triptych. These elements all form part of the overall
installation that was sited in the castle. The installation also employs a refugee from Kinshasa, who appears in some of the other pieces, in a live performance. The floor of the Officers’ Mess has been covered in a clay coloured soil that is formed from earth taken from the land allocated to the Bushmen in the north of the country.

The overall conceptualisation of the installation is so layered and multi-faceted that meanings and readings are constantly in flux. The recurring presence of the sculptures in the videos and photomontages questions the status of the sculptures as the ‘original’ and ‘real’ objects. The relationships between the figures in the main body of the installation are haunted by the juxtaposition in the photomontages and the movement captured in the videos. These are framed by the context of the display and the other elements introduced by the artist. In the installation, none of the figures visually engages with any of the others. They stare out, eyes wide, at the viewer integrating them into the conception of the piece. The unity is established by the location within the Mess and simultaneously distanced by the use of the earth to create a separation between the piece and the viewer. Whilst the establishment of a multitude of sub-readings and asides is constantly unstable, perhaps a more informed reading can be put forward in the context of the codification and signifiers present in her oeuvre. A central thrust was captured in a comment made by Alexander in an interview with the South African Big Issue.

I’ve been interested in trying to understand Africa because we were so cut off from it for all that time, and we didn’t have access to anything. Now we have access to Africa and Africans.258

The terms of the European and White relationship with Africa from both a historical and contemporary perspective provides a dominant theme. Captured in the title and expressed in the diverse art works that make up the piece are a series

of questions about the ongoing penetration of the body of Africa by Whites in a
continuingly one-sided relationship predicated on the continuing binary economic
situation that inform it.

The lack of substantive change in the type of engagement has an important
microcosm in the local and national situation in Cape Town and South Africa.
The lack of change in the apartheid geographies imposed on the city and the
country and the continuing inequalities that scar the social fabric of the society are
reflected in the physical manifestation of the city and, to a more uneven extent,
the country. There is a transparent desire to engage and establish dialogues with
the rest of the continent. This is partly to inform the authentication of the national
culture, or its re-authentication from a continental standpoint, but also to find
markets for South African business to exploit in terms not far removed from the
types of motivation for the British colonial project. There are also similarities in
the mix of desire and fear that is present in this engagement. The xenophobia that
is now being expressed in South Africa reflects much of the latter. Immigrants are
held as being responsible for the majority of crime and drugs in the country as
well as taking the jobs of locals by their willingness to work for low wages.
President Mbeki is regularly criticised for the perceived imbalance of his focus
between national and international concerns.

The largest figure is the sculpture known as Pangaman. Alexander explains the
nomenclature,

When I was a child in Johannesburg, children used to frighten me by
saying ‘the panga man will get you’ inspired by a serial killer of the
1960s. When a lone ‘Black’ man walked in our smart suburban street, they
would say ‘there’s the panga man’, whoever he was, whatever he was
doing. The White suburban dweller had conjured up the imaginary panga
man who became the swart gevaar, the black danger, the communist, an
unidentifiable and ominous presence, a constant disquiet and threat perceived in ordinary men and women.\textsuperscript{259}

In the installation, the \textit{pangaman} is not Black. He is deracialized to a certain extent but rendered in a grey colouring that brings him closer to White identification. The inability to classify him clearly refers to the farcical classificatory system imposed on the country. The lack of the panga in hand – a machete used for harvesting and bush clearance – deprives him of the use of his eponymous tool and focuses on the 'ominous presence' mentioned by the artist. He wears an overall dragged down to his waist, as if he has finished his work and in his wake he drags a series of pangas, bricks, trolleys, tractors and sickles. These are bound to him by rusted wire connections that wrap around him to form a belt. A reading here is that the real fear was that caused by the arrival of the Whites, with their alien, more exploitative tools that they employed to use the land for their own ends. They did not consider the effect left in their wake. The Bushmen are noticeable by their absence from the work. They have been removed from their land and restricted to the land that provided the earth for the installation. They are unseen, reduced from their status as the indigenous people of the land to a marginalized community, whose culture is so threatened that it needs the tourism to sustain it.

The original 'African adventure' in this region was not even focused on Africa. It only happened to secure the trade route to another land. Now the damage inflicted has been so serious and totalising that the inhabitants the Europeans found there, are sustained by the continuing 'African adventures' of Western tourists, who flock to the country to indulge themselves in a contemporary re-enactment of the original engagement with the local people. The ambivalence between the economic value given to the priority to have economic development driven by expansion of the service industry and the cultural value lost by the simplistic and

\textsuperscript{259} Quoted in A.Miki: \textit{Making Invisible Relationships Visible: Jane Alexander and the act of Sculpting}, in DaimlerChrysler AG (ed.): \textit{Jane Alexander}, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit, p.27.
reductive nature of the engagement is key here. A rhetorical question posed by the artist in the work centres on the question of whether this positioning for culture is worth having at all. The dichotomy is complicated by the fact of the need for the tourist industry money to preserve the ability of these types of traditional cultural practitioners to engage in cultural performance. However, the transition from a vibrant live tradition to one sustained by the life support of the tourist industry introduces a static fixity that distances the tradition from its place in a contemporary society and removes it to a location of cultural kitsch.260

Some of these readings are reinforced by a dog/hyena figure that stands staring out from the installation from behind the wake of the Harbinger. The rendering of the animal in a patchy industrial grey removes it from its natural domain and reflects its unnatural origins. The skin on its back builds on this. It is an animal skin of perhaps a duiker or other small antelope that has been removed from its original owner and cleansed ready for commodification in a tourist shop. The cleanliness of the skin masks the killing and processing that must have been required for it to reach this state. There is also the reference to the type of ‘African adventure’ that was so commonplace in the imperial epoch of the colonial domination. Many Europeans visited to hunt the livestock and capture a trophy head or skin that could be used to authenticate the adventure. The trophy was an essential piece of colonial interior decoration, but marked a devastation of livestock that damaged the ecology and impinged on the local population, who were unable to find food in traditional ways. Now, the type of ‘hunting’ most likely to be seen is the pursuit in four-wheel drive vehicles armed with Fuji and Canon as opposed to Smith and Weston. Yet despite the different type of ‘adventure’, most of the tourist shops still offer skins as a recorder of the experience though faux patterning is seen in equal measure. The process of commodification is highlighted by the price tag that is still attached to the skin. The hybridity and uncertain status of the animal recall themes from Alexander’s...

260 I am using the term in the unproblematised Greenbergian sense, rather than in relation to a Post-Modernist celebration of pastiche.
work that are revisited here. The positioning of the animal in the wake of the devastation wrought by the *Harbinger* is significant. The status of dogs in the culture as the signifiers of security and fear is part of the significance. The hyena element refers to the scavenging nature of the animal. Taking the two together, there is an understanding of what is used to protect what the Whites have brought by their presence and the damage that has been wrought. Even that which is left is subject to a justification in terms of the market and values of the Whites.

Also, situated in the wake is a flightless bird that bears some resemblance to a heron. This recalls the birds that Alexander has used in other works to refer to the role of nationalism and oppression, as in *Erbschein: An der Bergen*. The disempowerment of the bird is interesting. A reading of the creature as a signifier for national identity could be seen in terms of the impossibility of building a national identity from the detritus of apartheid and the colonial legacy. The time for the nationalism to be employed as a mobilising tool of national expression has gone, South Africa has been left with a version disabled by history.

The strange hybridity is seen also in the other sculptures in the installation: *Settler, Harvester, Radiance of Faith, Girl with gold and diamonds, Doll with Industrial Strength gloves, Custodian* and some strange familiars who have a monkey-like quality to them. The *Settler* figures have heads that cross between dog and monkey with the bodies of adolescent boys. One is seated in a toy version of an army car, the other stands atop an oil barrel. They are naked except for brown shoes. The shoes constitute a status symbol, an identifier of wealth in African society. These are values that have been formed since the arrival of Europeans. The car and the oil drum relate to the type of exploitation that interested and interests Europeans. Africa has always been seen as a supplier of raw materials that can be transformed in Europe into goods, such as cars that are then sold on including back to Africa. This quest for raw materials is seen in the other six figures that are grouped together. The three figures who make up *Radiance of Faith* resemble businessmen but with zoomorphic profiles. They are
stood on top of some wooden boxes that are labelled ‘Dangerous, Explosives’ and are identified as American produce. The three are watched over by a Custodian figure and are adjacent to the Girl with gold and diamonds. This figure draws on some feminist themes from Alexander’s other work. She is depicted as a sort of horned cat with outsized ears. She wears a white frock and covering shawl that relate to traditions of Afrikaner dress. This seems to establish a purity; but the jewels of the title are on her head in the colour of her horns whilst a large diamond ring sits in what appears to be a slot like that found on a piggy bank. Her hands are formless, undefined into fingers. Her compliance into the ‘adventure’ has been bought with the lure of the bounty.

The last sculpture in the installation is a man in a suit who appears to be arriving on the edge of the installation. He is clearly shown to have oriental features. Alexander explains,

Japanese people were classified as ‘non-white’ under apartheid law. At the beginning of the 1960’s a Japanese jockey was excluded from riding at a major South African race meeting on grounds of racial classification. This incident caused an international outcry and consequently raised concerns in the apartheid government regarding the potential economic consequences for their trading relationship with Japan, particularly the lucrative exports of steel and coal.

In 1962 the South African Minister of the Interior announced that Japanese people who were predominately employees of large Japanese businesses, would not be classified as a separate group in terms of the Population Registration Act but would fall under the heading of ‘Other Asiatics’ because of their small numbers. For the purposes of this Act they would be treated as ‘Whites’, and would have access to areas and premises reserved for ‘Whites’. They were popularly referred to as ‘honorary
Whites’. Chinese people and other Asian groups continued to be classified as ‘non-White’.  

A reading of this figure’s presence in the installation again draws on the power of capital. Despite a religious zeal for the minutiae of race classification that invented an entire pseudo-science in the differentiation of people, the apartheid regime was still prepared to undermine its own ridiculous logic for the sake of financial gain. The only other ‘honorary White’ reclassification were reserved for foreign Black politicians, entertainers, and sportsmen who were prepared for whatever reason to take the rands on offer. The most celebrated and notorious group were the ‘rebel’ West Indies cricket team that toured in 1984 and 1985.

The ‘Japanese’ figure first appeared with a top knotted counterpart in Racework – in the event of an earthquake (1999) which worked with the same central theme and looked at the cultural change effected in the adoption of modern, for which read Western, standards. Both figures also appear in the photomontage series that develops many of the thematic aspects analysed above. The contrast between the binary poles of rich/poor, foreign/local, tourist/homeless are explored in a series of works shot in the city centre. The commuter journeys undertaken by many workers on their way into town are also documented with the aid of superimposed sculptures. These photomontages provide an interesting contextualization of the work in disparate locations around the city, but lack the extraordinary impact and power of TheButcher Boys series. What is more engaging is the video triptych entitled African Adventure: Meal with Harvester and Grain/ Congo Honeymoon (1999). The first piece contains a video of a man eating what is identified as Beef Wellington. The scene contains a pile of grain sacks surmounted by the sculpture of Harvester. On the wall is a picture above the table. The man eating the meal is White, the man serving the meal is Black. He has been identified as the Kinshasa refugee who forms the live performance part of the African Adventure installation. The second part consists of a wind-up doll monkey-like creature who bangs

---

The third part is archive footage taken of a trip across Southern Africa undertaken by a White couple in 1943. The trip extends through Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) and into southern Congo.

The readings here relate to the situation in Congo and South Africa in 1943 and 2001 and the significant transformations that have taken place in some aspects and, conversely, the lack of transformation in other areas. It is still an economic reality that Whites travel across Southern Africa in search of ‘adventure’ whether on honeymoon or not. It is still the case that the economic power relations are such that it is an option open to few Blacks to undertake as a leisure activity. Of course, many people ‘choose’ to undertake the trip from the Southern African region to South Africa to find work. The historical situation in Congo changed so dramatically in this period that the term ‘Congo honeymoon’ is paradoxical in itself. The war that began in the country in 1996, and which reached some sort of macro-settlement in 2003, was sometimes called ‘Africa’s First World War’. It involved troops from nine countries at one point in 1998 and has led to the death of an estimated 3.8 million people – more than any other conflict since the end of the Second World War. As conflict continued to rage in Angola, Burundi, and Sudan, many longtime displaced refugees who had sought safe haven in Congo were forced to move on again. Many, who were able, made journeys to seek work in other countries and South Africa was the target for many. The refugee shown in the footage provides a continuity of power relations that demonstrates that the quest for economic parity is further away now than it was in 1943. The refugee’s presence in the artwork signals a continuity of unequal economic exchange, in that he is so destitute he has been forced to take on the work as part of an artist’s piece. His presence brings into focus the continuing inequalities that have pervaded the country and the wider region ever since the arrival of van Riebeeck and the establishment of the Castle and the Mess.

South Africa has also played a defining role in the reaching of a peace settlement and, subsequent to this artwork being produced, signed a massive deal to exploit
the mineral resources of the Congo. Integrating South Africa into the regional economy is both the desire and fear of the other states that recognise the need for capital investment; but are concerned at marginalization and loss of sovereignty. The desire and fear of the unknown and the historical and contemporary invention and play with those sentiments is a key aspect of the artist’s work. Alexander’s oeuvre presents a continual reworking of themes and concepts that critique the dominant meta-narratives of the time and the structures and actions employed to service them. From the targeting through studies of fear and brutality of the machinations of the apartheid regime to the highlighting of the plight of those marginalized by the ‘new’ order, Alexander has consistently produced works that interrogate the values that are imposed as normative by the state and the dominant cultural structures. The truth to materials seen in the formal realisation of the work adds a quality of realism and identification to the sculptures that allows and, indeed, coercion the viewer into an engagement with the work. The lack of a didactic meaning in many of the best works allows the viewer to take what they are faced with and address it to a personal set of issues and values.

Though a Johannesburger by birth, Alexander’s work often makes transparent the importance of a local context and understanding for many of the pieces. Her identity as a Capetonian is clear from an examination of the practice. Further expressions of her identity are perhaps most effective when she articulates the desire and fear felt by many Whites in their experience of the ‘new’ South Africa. Other expressions relating to the critique of patriarchy are clearly evident and often work more effectively than many White South African women artists in that they focus on the oppression faced by White women as opposed to attempting to postulate and negotiate a ‘sisterhood’ across racial lines.

Alexander is unstinting in her critiquing of the colonial project, the apartheid project, and the totalizing aspects of the ‘new’ South Africa. Yet her continued identification with the project of national identity and national representation is clear both in terms of her continued revisiting of the subject and its context, and
her continued participation in ‘South Africa’ shows that mark out the adherence of her work to the construct of the imagined nation of the ‘struggle’ and the importance of its inclusivity for all.

**Willie Bester**

Another important contemporary South African artist based, in the environs of Cape Town, who has retained a consistency of vision and focus is Willie Bester. Bester’s received identity as a Coloured has had a shaping effect on his life and the opportunities or lack of them that he has been afforded.

Bester has often been viewed purely as a ‘struggle’ artist working within the discourse of Resistance Art. Interestingly, his reputation overseas far exceeds that in South Africa. It would be easy to postulate that this is due to his continued presentation of the ‘struggle’ themes that continue to have an artistic and economic currency abroad, but which are perceived to be outdated in the ‘new’ South Africa. There are, however, more sophisticated reasonings to better understand his enhanced value outside of his country. On the one hand, his art presents the articulation of legacy issues that inform South African society in the present. His excavation of memory and power structures is a telling reminder of how the situation the country finds itself in is a product of its past. The recollection of the events of the apartheid era is an uncomfortable reminder for some in the buying market for South African contemporary art in the country of their own role and/or complicity in maintaining the structures of the previous regime. This is exemplified by the corporate collections that have become fashionable for companies to have as a badge of national pride and an articulation of a unified future identity construction built on a weaving together of the disparate strands of apartheid era history. Bester’s apartheid era works fit

---

262 A campaign was launched in the late nineties for South African companies to display a ‘Proudly South African’ logo alongside their brand. This has been adopted by most of the major companies in South Africa – interestingly at a time when many of the largest companies, such as Anglo-American and SA Breweries, have delisted themselves from the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in favour of London.
comfortably with the model and indeed form a key component of the ‘resistance art’ discourse that collections aim to represent and take ownership of. What is more problematic is that many of the works continue to engage and (re)present ongoing themes from the apartheid era, which for Bester, and many others, continue to have a present and everyday reality that sits uncomfortably with the representation of transformation and its construction as a part of the meta-discourse of the ‘new’ South Africa and the ‘rainbow nation’.

On the other, Bester’s struggle credentials and his place in the canon of ‘resistance’ art impart his work with an increased value in the Euro-American market that seeks an ‘authenticity’ in African art. The struggle against apartheid was one that had a considerable amount of overseas engagement and publicization. Owning a Bester piece allows the buyer to feel an empathy and immediacy with the South African political environment. The display of bright primary colours and use of urban detritus in many of the works conforms to the Western perception of contemporary African art. Tellingly, it was one of Bester’s works from that collection, *Semikazi*, which engaged with the life of a migrant worker in Cape Town and his fear and yet security in relations with the apartheid state, that achieved a then record £11,000 for a contemporary African artwork when it sold at auction in 1999.

Another reason for the undervaluing of Bester’s work in South Africa is that he produces many ready saleable pieces in short timeframes. This does not conform to the Modernist Eurocentric avant-gardism that is viewed as a correct artistic image and practice by many working in the gallery scene in the major urban centres. The image of the tortured and troubled bohemian, constructed through the discourse of avant-gardism, is one that still resonates. Artists as different and diverse as Kentridge and Zwelethu Mthetwa have faced criticism for their engagement with the market and media.
In contrast to the privileged background experienced by some artists in the country, Bester's personal history provides some understanding of the positioning of his work and his relationship to the market. Bester was born in the Western Cape town of Montagu in 1956. As his parents were unmarried and classified as a 'mixed-race' couple (his father was a Xhosa migrant worker and his mother Cape Coloured), Bester was classified as 'Other Coloured'. After his parents marriage, their three subsequent children were classified as 'Black'. Such was the way the state divided even families with its bizarre classificatory system. Having been othered by the system, the family were compelled to live in informal accommodation situated at the back of other houses, as there was no family housing for Blacks. This was because they were regarded as migrant workers throughout the then Cape Province, so the only housing available was single sex hostels. Bester has described this,

My parents experienced many of the indignities other Black and Coloured families experienced under apartheid. We were forcibly removed from our homes, and suffered all kinds of humiliation from the police, the farming community and the White inhabitants of our town. I got out of there as soon as I could, but this didn't protect me from abuse. I was forced to spend a year in a special camp for unemployed Coloured youths, and I worked as a dental mechanic for a man who treated me like a lowly inferior. It was only towards the end of the 1980s, when my works began selling well, that I was able to leave this job and devote myself to art.263

Much of Bester’s formative arts training took place at the Community Arts Project (CAP) in Cape Town. Bester was surprised by the political messages that were put out by his contemporaries at a time when the machinery of state repression was at its height. It inspired him to translate the bitterness he felt about the inequities of the system into a didactic practice that defined the late ‘struggle’

263 Interview with Sandra Klopper, Beyond the Magazine, di Alessandra Galasso. Available at www.undo.net/cgi-bin/undo/beyond/view.pl?msy=16.
era art resistance movement. The failure of the authorities to clampdown on cultural activities in the way that they did on direct political protest meant that CAPs were able to engage in popular printing of slogans on t-shirts and banners. The powerful imagery that was seen in many of the protests at the end of the eighties had its origin in these projects. The lack of scrutiny was used to direct political advantage as well since it has subsequently became known that the CAPs were used to channel significant amounts of funding from outside the country to the UDF and internal ANC organisations.

As a Coloured youth, Bester had been forced to work as a policeman in the high density areas. This gave him a direct insight into the effect of the system on the poorest people to complement his own personal suffering at the hands of the authorities. The oppression caused by the system provided a key cathartic motivation for his art.

I was very bitter (about apartheid) and it also had a very negative impact when I had to bring up my children. In some way I felt responsible because I would be exposing them to this mess. By doing art, I overcame a lot of my bitterness.264

The exclusion and otherness felt by Bester led him to define himself in terms of his community in the way that was normal under apartheid. Bester’s mixed origin, understanding of Xhosa, and politicisation set him apart from many working-class Coloureds. Bester identified with the solidarity that could be achieved by working across racial lines. This was not a straightforward exercise. Many Coloureds were inclined to accept the ways of the system that put them on a secondary level to Whites, but ahead of the Black population. This was in part due to the fear of the unknown, which was used by the authorities to gain acceptance of the system and the incessant use of *swart gevaar* (Black fear). This problematized the process of cross-racial identification and caused faultlines in the ‘reverse rainbow’ identity.

264 Quoted in SABC documentary, *Scrapyard Art*, broadcast 20/10/02.
Against this background, it is understandable that many of Bester’s family were reluctant for him to pursue his artistic vocation in a way that challenged the dominant culture of the time.

Because of my colour I was never really allowed to be a South African artist during the apartheid years. This denial fed my creativity, but I had to look elsewhere for inspiration and a sense of belonging. So, I am still trying to work out what it means to be a South African. In the end I think it will be by looking at people elsewhere in the world that I find a way of defining my own identity, of developing a sense of pride.265

Understandably, the experience of the apartheid years and the troubles that have and are been encountered in the move to a normative society are an important source of subject matter for Bester in his work.

The experience of apartheid is central to the themes I focus (on) in my art. Many of my works deal with the horrors of the past, the ways in which people’s lives were destroyed by an inhuman system. But I am also interested in the present, in the realities of industrialisation and the sense of dignity people manage to retain in the face of grinding poverty.266

Bester has stated that his more recent work engages in

Issues of transformation and reconstruction, not transfer of power. This is a government we have brought to power. It gives me no pleasure to be critical.267

265 Interview with Sandra Klopper, Beyond the Magazine.
266 Ibid.
267 Interview with the author in Kuils River, Western Cape, 11/05/99.
Bester’s way of working is to engage in direct tangential criticism of practices that he sees as undermining the transformation of society. The legacy of the struggle and the residues that continue within South African society have provided an approach for Bester. His work has a direct appeal to the immediate communities, on whose behalf he sees himself working, and a message that is easily comprehensible to an outside audience. As with Koloane, some South Africans find this focus on the aspects of society that remain untransformed, and, in Bester’s case at least, on the failures of the new dispensation in its quest to develop the country, distasteful, and unworthy of highlighting in the desire to have a critical art practice that engages with the rest of the world in exploring the issues of the international moment, be it globalisation, citizenship, alienation, terror or Post-Modernity.

Bester’s art practice is well captured by Michael Godby and Sandra Klopper when they describe it in the following terms,

An exploration of the depth of Willie Bester’s works involves the literal re-creation of perspective distances through the media of photography and illusionist painting, and the forward extension of these fictive spaces through the incorporation of three-dimensional objects on the surface. In some places, and for some purposes, this extension will appear continuous with the illusion, while in others, Bester achieves dramatic effect through a radical discontinuity.²⁶⁸

Bester’s formal antecedents can be seen as mirroring European and African art traditions as well as relating to a dynamic that exists in contemporary African art practice of the continent and in the diaspora. Bester’s use of materials draws on the collage and assemblage traditions of early European Modernism. The Synthetic Cubist work of Braque and Picasso with its incorporation of objet trouvé and contemporary textual sources, such as brand names and newspapers,

can be cited as a point of origin. The collages of the Dadaists, in particular Kurt Schwitters, employing waste as a formal material, provide an obvious parallel to the work with their emphasis on the detritus of urban civilisation. The practice of Robert Rauschenberg in the late fifties and early sixties, which itself drew on the formal techniques of the aforementioned artists, provides a more contemporary parallel, particularly in its popularisation of these methods – with a desire to break with the fine art tradition and the utilize everyday materials to postulate a relationship to peoples’ lives. These motivations were key to the emergence of the Pop Art movement, with which Rauschenberg was identified, in reaction to the high intellectualism of formal introspection of Abstract Expressionism. The greatest and most famous Pop artist, Andy Warhol, described the use of waste materials in artistic practice as an exercise in recycling,

I do not mean to say that peoples taste is bad, and that everything discarded by bad taste is good; what I mean is rather that scrap is probably a bad thing, but if you manage to work on it in such a way to make them look good, or at least interesting, you get less waste.269

This motivation and the celebration of the skills of poor people in the high density areas, of using the waste material of the richer population in the construction of the physical architecture of their lives – be it in housing, leisure products – and as a tradable commodity, is an important source for Bester.

The apartheid regime had no interest in these townships beyond the fact that they were sources of cheap labour. For most White South Africans the townships were like massive dormitories where people slept before going back to work, day after day, month in and month out. My images of township life are certainly not made with the idea that one should accept the conditions in which people live, but I recognise that townships remain an economic reality. Despite the present government’s attempt to renew

and upgrade them, changing the realities of township life is a very difficult and slow process. By using waste materials in my works, I pay homage to the inventive and creative ways in which people have responded to the need to house themselves, now and in the past. Even though a lot of new houses have been built since the ANC came to power in 1994, people continue to flock to the cities, where they are forced to use all sorts of materials – cardboard, corrugated metal, plastic sheeting – to construct their homes.270

This use of materials places Bester in the vanguard of a group of African artists who work with waste materials and, as is recognised by the critic Achille Bonito Oliva,

Are looking over the huge dump of objects and forms in order to reconvert them into paintings, sculptures, and installations. Without regressing to tribalization or claiming copyright of an attitude of usage towards objects, but also without slipping into a cultural globalization.271

Bester identifies his own practice with the work of some of these artists. In particular he cited the work of El Sy from Senegal, El Anatsui from Ghana, Ronald Hazoume from Benin, and the Zimbabwean Keston Beaton. Perhaps unsurprisingly all these artists are unified by their urban existence and the emergence of a practice that seeks to interpret the lives of the increasingly large urban African population. As Oliva acknowledges, this is not in general an attempt to establish a global or globalized language that will be understood in the artistic market centres of the West, but an identification of practice with the concerns and reality of everyday high density living.

Two South African contemporary artists who have had a significant influence on Bester are Billy Mandindi and Norman Catherine. What unites the two artists is

270 Interview with Sandra Klopper, Beyond the Magazine.

285
an urban grounding, a bold visual imagery, a strong use of primary colours, and a belief in the power of humour to convey dark messages about the state of things. What separates them is background and recognition. Catherine is a middle-class White Johannesburg based artist who has shown in a range of overseas locations, employing a personalised visual language to reveal the depths of depravity that have been and are encountered in the country. Mandindi is from the Cape Flats, an artist whose refusal to conform to the gallery system and art world norms have led to under-recognition of the value of his work and influence. Bester always cites him as the primary influence on his work and it is he who originated the concept of ‘bad medicine’ that Bester sees as central to his ongoing practice. Mandindi’s conceptualization of issues and their representation in art is a way of working that has had an important role in Bester’s artistic development, whilst Catherine’s imagery offers a source of local formalistic inspiration.

Bester also cites the importance of more immediate sources as precursors for his work. He compares the use of found objects and discarded material to the use of found wood in the African art tradition. The ability to visualise found objects such as wood, stone and waste material as an unrealised artwork unites disparate traditions from across the Southern African region. This type of cultural and artistic practice brings together diverse ethnic cultural traditions that in Southern Africa was required to conform to the needs of a non-settled community. This can be seen in works such as the headrests and utensils of the Shona and Nguni groups, the contemporary tradition of Zimbabwean sculpture and, most importantly for Bester, in the San rock painting of his own ancestors.

Historically, African art was always made for a purpose: it was never produced for commercial gain. It gave expression to shared values and it therefore played an important role in creating bonds between people.

My own work is made with tradition in mind. Like the San rock painters who left images for posterity all over South Africa, I try to document the
past, one needs to look at their art. It shouldn’t really matter that my works are now sold for commercial gain, but it worries me that people often focus on the commercial value rather than the meaning of artworks. Then again, it is very unfortunate that few public institutions in South Africa have budgets to purchase the work of contemporary South African artists.272

This identification of his artistic practice with the tradition of rock painting bequeathed by the (Khoi)San is fundamental in the contemporary developments that are changing the construction of Coloured identity. There is a desire amongst politicised Coloured thinkers to move away from a stress on the relationship with the Afrikaners, and to a lesser extent Afrikaans itself, and to identify themselves as the present day descendents of the autochthonous people of the country, the Bushmen or KhoiSan. It is undoubtedly true that many of the ‘original’ Coloureds were the product of relationships between Dutch settlers and the inhabitants of the country they had invaded.273 Alienated in many ways from the European side of their ancestry and with a history of exaggerated difference from the Black population, the establishment of an identification linking the Coloureds with the indigents enables a historicity and sense of place. This is key in the establishment of self-worth and belonging, at a time when many Coloureds are feeling as alienated by the new dispensation as they felt under the previous regime.

An important work from the late eighties is Forced Removals (1988), which draws on the ‘township art’ tradition that commenced with the works of artists such as Gerard Sekoto in the forties and reached in zenith in the early work of Durant Sihlali. In Forced Removals, the scene is presented in a two-dimensional manner with an element of depth supplied by a mountain, which could be interpreted as Devil’s Peak or Lion’s Head, both of which stand on the edge of

---

272 Interview with Sandra Klopper, Beyond the Magazine, di Alessandra Galasso.
273 There is clearly a question of the power relations that governed these relationships. Nearly all of the relationships were between Dutch men and Khoi-San women and contemporaneous records of the Dutch
Cape Town. This pictorial device demonstrates the proximity of the area depicted to the city and provides a contrast between the immediacy of the action depicted and the distanced city that is unaware of events taking place on its doorstep. The line of township building is ruptured by the dominant presence of a JCB that pushes what is clearly a demolished dwelling into the pictorial space of the viewer. This has the effect of bringing the viewer into the scene where the people, perhaps the occupants of the house, stand behind the machine diminutive by comparison. To the left, a person attempts to salvage something from the wreckage. This work captures one of the most iniquitous aspects of the regime in the lives of everyday people. The infamous district demolitions of Sophiatown and District Six have already been discussed in this and the last chapter, but here is an example of the more regular limited demolitions that were used by the authorities to remove unlicensed settlements from specific areas. Often this was done due to the presence of people classified as Black in a Coloured area or Coloureds in a White area, but it was also employed as a means of undermining morale in informal settlements. These had often existed for a considerable period and were seemingly tolerated, but crackdowns were used to suppress political activity where it was suspected and also just to reiterate the power of the regime.

Willie Bester – *Forced Removals* (source – www.library.org)

and their subsequent treatment of the population do not suggest that these would have been the product of mutual respect and consent.
Although the scene depicted is clearly local, there is a global dimension to the work in the presence of a number of multinational companies such as BP and Pepsi as illustrated by their slogans adorning walls. The painting of logos and slogans on the sides of buildings is common practice in South Africa and, indeed, throughout the Third World, but in this work they take on a more sinister role. They are evidence that these companies were non compliant with international sanctions against the regime. The support and sustenance offered to the regime by the presence of multinational enterprises in the country was part of way in which the Nationalist Party attempted to portray itself and its system as a bulwark against Communism. The advertising of these companies acted as a form of propaganda for capitalism and South Africa’s place in the global economy. The perceived threat to these interests from the ANC was advanced as a justification for the continued relations between the regime and Western powers such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom. The UK is referred to again in the work in the use of sackcloth emblazoned with the term ‘Made in England’. One reading of Bester’s employment of the term in this piece would be that the inequities of the system, particularly in the Cape, have their roots in the system of colonial power relations that was imposed on the province by British settlers. The motivation for the establishment of the settlement was an economic one (in order to safeguard the shipping route to India around Cape Point) and it was similar motivations that dictated the position of the UK in its tacit support of the regime.

The increasing politicisation of Bester’s work is seen in *Open-Door Policy* of 1990. This work also marks a change in the style of artistic practice in his work in that he moves away from the semi-naturalistic depiction of scenes and events to a form of simultaneous narrative. This dispenses with the recreation of the illusionistic focus and juxtaposes different elements and media in a way that was to define his practice until the late nineties. This change in presentation was contemporaneous with the significant changes that happened in the country in 1990, most notably with the release of Mandela and other long-term detainees and the unbanning of the ANC and other organisations long illegal under the regime.
Bester here refers to de Klerk’s statement around the time of these events that his door would always be open to anyone who wanted to negotiate peacefully with the government. Bester’s interpretation of the ‘open-door’ is a prison door opened to see the security forces at work. This is contextualized with the use of the paraphernalia of oppression: handcuffs; nooses; barbed wire. The overall impression is one of a closed society where the protection of minority interest takes precedence over all other concerns. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the eighties had seen a massive rise not only in the level of overt repression by the police but also the creation of ‘Third Force’ vigilantes tasked with the elimination and intimidation of hostile elements in the country. This was augmented by the regional activities of the army and secret services against frontline states and the rise in the private security equipment used to defend property and persons from the perceived rise in crime and insecurity.

Willie Bester – *Tribute to Chris Hani* (source www.artthrob.co.za)
In the period of transition that predated the holding of the first democratic elections, Bester undertook three commemorative works that celebrated the role and legacy of opponents of the apartheid regime as well as critiquing the activities of reactionary forces, state or otherwise, that lead to their deaths. These were *Homage to Biko* (1992), *Tribute to Chris Hani*, and *Craddock Four* (both 1993). Although all three of these works are commemorative of martyrs of the ‘struggle’, they had a different context and inspiration. The legend of Biko and his murder by the state in 1977 had already become an incident of defining focus both inside and outside the country. His legacy was claimed by a variety of political actors. Bester returns in his work to the actual events that surrounded his death and the inquest that followed. A painted face of Biko is placed at the centre of the work surrounded by a collage of newspaper texts describing incidents, a graveyard marking that Bester employs as a memorial device. Fragmentary elements that reference the historical process began with his detention at a roadblock, to his death in custody and the inquest that followed. The presence of a homemade guitar at the bottom of the work is interesting as Bester reemploys the signifier in the Hani tribute. A relevant art historical precedent, given Bester’s adoption of collage as his primary means of expression, would be the frequency of the object’s appearance in the Analytical Cubist work of Braque and Picasso. It can also be read as a microcosm of Bester’s art practice in his assemblage of waste into something that supplies value, but is probably more significant as an indicator of the role of music in the lives of people as both an escape from the struggle and a weapon in it. The reggae songs from Jamaica, particularly Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, and the homegrown styles of groups like Stimela and the Cape jazz of Hugh Masekela and Miriam Mokaba, spoke directly about the struggle and provided a rallying point of national and international solidarity for those fighting against apartheid. Some of these songs commemorated those who had died in the struggle and continued a tradition of oral history that spoke of the deeds and acts of past heroes. Including the guitar motif acts as a way of indicating that the sacrifice of Biko and Hani will always be remembered.
The absence of the guitar or an alternative musical signifier in the piece *Craddock Four* supports the above interpretation. The history of the event involves supposition and unsubstantiated account. Matthew Goniwe, a prominent activist was travelling with three friends Sicelo Mhlawuli, Sparrow Mkhonto and Fort Calata, when they disappeared and were never seen again. Their burnt-out car was found later. Foul play on the part of the security forces was always suspected, but it was not until the TRC hearings (subsequent to this work) that a fuller picture emerged. Bester represents the burnt out car as the predominant signifier in the work. The gravestone markers are seen again conveying a sense of remembrance and dignity that was denied to the activists. The nature of the struggle is reinforced by the use of textual references to the system with terms such as ‘Whites only’ and ‘Reserved’. The presence of the half-concealed face of a typified state agent and the image of Koevert mercenaries refer to the type of war being waged by the state on its own people. The mention of Koevert recalls the suspicions that surrounded the whole question of state sponsored vigilante activity which was significantly responsible for the climate of fear that existed in the townships and is a common theme in Bester’s work.

The death of Chris Hani was a defining moment in the transition between the demise of the old order and the birth of the new democracy. Shot by a Polish immigrant, Janus Walusz, who had come to South Africa because of its racist policies, and organised by elements in the Conservative Party, most notably its deputy leader Clive Derby-Lewis, its aftermath represented the moment when the political NP oligarchy realised they were powerless to prevent an uprising in reaction to the assassination. They turned to Mandela to use his influence to prevent further bloodshed, and perhaps an all out revolution, as violence and disorder spread in the wake of the killing. Hani was as significant a leader as Biko. He was the head of the South African Communist Party with a strong support base in COSATU (the Trade Union movement) and a former leader of Umkhonto ke Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC. This gave him credibility with all branches of the ANC, and indeed with the overwhelming majority of the Black
population in the country. He had not spent the struggle period in a comfortable
exile in London or Lusaka, but as a commander in the bush, and since his return
had allied himself strongly with the situation of the urban masses. His natural
charisma was disarming and, in the period leading up to his death, stressed the
need for reconciliation and healing as opposed to revolution. He was already
spoken of as a natural successor to Mandela and it is certain that his popularity
amongst the grassroots would have made him a favourite in a leadership contest
against Mbeki. The decision to specifically target him seems to have been made
primarily due to his position in the Communist Party, which for many apartheid
supporters was associated with every nightmare scenario that could be imagined.

In his tribute Bester draws on many of these elements. A clear heroic portrait of
Hani is depicted, foregrounded against a march that was staged to protest against
his death. Media cuttings are used to refer to the national six day mourning
period that was declared after his death as well as photographs of mourning and a
portrait of the killer. Towards the edges of the frame area are a series of motifs
that focus on his ideology and role in the struggle. These include an AK-47
overlaid with a dove, a depiction of a miner, and a banknote – possibly referring
to the role of capital in his demise. The presence of a target and the text ‘Top
Secret Hit List’ reflect the common view, certainly at the time, that this was a plot
organised at the highest levels of the political establishment. Even if their guilt
was not directly established, the signifiers condemn them for their demonization
of Black leaders and history of political assassination, linked to the two other
works in this series.

The most predominant feature other than the protrait of Hani is the tyre that
surrounds his face, framing him from the rest of the work. On it are the prophetic
words spoken shortly before his death, “I’ve lived with death most of my life.
Nobody wants to die. I want to live in a free South Africa and I’m prepared to lay
down my life for it.” At the base is the Xhosa valedictory farewell ‘Hamba Kahle’
(Go Gently).
Godby and Klopper interpret Bester’s use of the wheel as reclamation of the tyre as a signifier of socialist intent and industrial progress. This seems improbable. The immediacy and highlighting of necklacing had been so recent and so common that to attempt the establishment of a different meaning would have been fruitless. A more multivalent option is to see it as a critique of the way in which normal functionality and associations had been corrupted and bastardised by the legacy of apartheid. What was known as a clear sign of human ingenuity and developed as a definitive signifier of the progress of the industrial society had been debased to become a weapon used by people against their own people. Its significance as a reference to the totality of violence and the all-embracing nature of the struggle is revealing. It explains why many people of that era have found it difficult to move on and ‘let bygones be bygones’.

The series that Bester worked on around the time of the 1994 elections signals a shift in his practice that reflected the changes happening in the country. Although his working method had always had a sculptural quality to it, through his use of found objects in his framed two-dimensional work, his move to realising sculptural expressions of his pieces dates from around this time. These sculptural installations have a presence and occupation of space that is naturally lacking in the wall hung pieces. There is also a formalisation of signifiers as a coded language. A bed and miner's blanket are identified by Bester as referring to the imposition of the 1936 Land Act that segregated people into specific areas and deprived them of living rights in places where they had been for years.

A transitional series was the one that centred on the life of Semikazi, a migrant worker who had been employed by a company in Cape Town for his working life, but who was unable to support himself in his retirement on the meagre state pension. He should have been entitled to a pension from his company of employment that would have enabled him to retire to his place of origin in the rural Eastern Cape, but was told that he had been registered as deceased, an
irreversible process that prevented him from claiming his due and left him destitute in the city. The nature of the bureaucracy that had for so long defined his existence as an alien in his own country had now alienated him again in a Kafkaesque process over which he had no control. The two important works that date from this series are *Semikazi* (referred to above), which attained the then record for a contemporary South African artwork at auction and *Semikazi’s bench* (both 1993). The bench where he had slept formed an element of the two-dimensional work but Bester chose to render it also in three dimensions as a sculptural installation.

The bench was Semikazi’s ‘home’ and the work ‘speaks’ evocatively of the difficulties of the status of a migrant worker, a status that is all too common in
Southern Africa and directly related to the defining nature of the needs of capital. The need to pay colonial taxes removed people from their communities and drove them to seek employment in the cities and mining areas. After the onset of apartheid, the process was worsened by a continuing process of state alienation and ‘othering’, which severely restricted mobility and reduced the ability to find competitive jobs elsewhere. The Pass system was used as a documentary tool of dispossession in that it deprived people of usual citizenship rights, even relative to colonial regimes, in their own countries. The system put people at the mercy of their employers and facilitated exploitation, both economic and social. The Passbook became an acknowledged and common signifier of the indignities of the oppression foisted on the majority of the population and a defining example of the bureaucratic control exercised by the state in its dealings with people. This is well captured by Bester in his work with the chain attaching the book to the ‘home’. The use of chain refers to the binding nature of this control and also to the story of how Semikazi found himself unable to give up his Passbook, even after its removal from the statute book as a mandatory document in 1986. This indicates both the abuse he had suffered at the hands of the authorities when found without it and also the perverse security it offered as a totalistic defining of his existence. It not only defined his status in the country but where he could work and live. It was what kept him chained to his bench.

Migrant workers often saw their families on only an annual basis, since the families were not permitted to join the man in the urban areas. This has had a devastating effect on the breakdown of social structures. The absence of parents often places considerable burden on extended families and is a prime factor in dysfunctionality, increased by the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic whose spread has a direct relationship to the level of migrant labour. Living for such long periods away from home can cause feelings of dislocation and alienation on return, which is alluded to by Bester in his work. People come from the rural areas and are defined as outsiders in the cities because of that status, but at the
Bester’s move to sculptural work saw the development of a new range of signifiers to be added to his existing artistic vocabulary. These can be seen in two works dating from 1995, *Apartheid Laboratory* and *Industrial Society*. The former exemplifies many of the new directions taken by Bester in his work around this time. The viewer is confronted by a large construction that stands some two metres high and three across. There is an overall medical feel to the construction with bedpans, old hospital beds, pipes and the presence of drip-feeding apparatus and bottles. A chair of sorts is placed at the front of the work marked with a sign that states ‘Streeng Privaat’; two books are chained up on the left of a screen that displays a series of numbered painted figures. Around the screen are daubed faces, caspirs, a ruler, graffiti and splatters of paint. The impression is of a grand experiment that is sick and going horribly wrong. The drips and other medical associated instruments exemplify the illness of the laboratory. The machines and devices of oppression are clearly referenced. Categorization is represented by the division of people into numbered categories. An arrow points to a scale that is nonsensical. The chair is non-functional. A chaos reigns. Clearly, this is a strongly didactic piece that employs signifiers that are relatively straightforward to read. There is not a great deal of subtlety but the form is nonetheless imposing and creates a strong visual impression. The medical paraphernalia are particularly effective as a signifier and Bester’s recognition of this is obvious by his decision to reuse them in a number of other pieces. This is perhaps Bester’s clearest articulation of the concept of ‘bad medicine’ that he frequently refers to in discussion of his art.

*Industrial Society* marks a beginning of the use of another signifier that was to become commonplace in Bester’s work, the satellite dish. The satellite dish is a representation of outside influences that Bester claims not to understand or trust. The suspicion of international influence is something that has been apparent in
earlier works already discussed. The context here refers more to the unknown forces that impact on change in the country, and specifically the process of industrialisation. There is also the question of the perceived failure of the people at the other end of the dish to take action in response to the events that they had been witnessing. Bester explains it as,

A thing linked up to forces I don’t know about. (It shows) involvement in being aware of this oppression ... one wonders why they did not stop them.274

Although the use of the image of the dish is effective and interesting, the rest of the piece lacks an engagement with the issues that were contemporaneous at the time or a visual quality that would justify it. Bester uses text to highlight the restrictions that had been in force to control the movement and employment of Black labour in the service of White capital, in contrast to the Whites’ ability to choose their place of work. However, the representation of the figures in the boxes set out to polarise the situation is weak and the tendentious nature of the message is rather undermined by the fact that the Pass Laws had been abolished almost ten years before this piece. One interesting visual aspect that relates to identity is the depiction of Bushman-like images all over the work. The threat of industrialisation is most keenly felt by those who continue to pursue nomadic lifestyles. It would be fair to say that their marginalization has continued under the new government, although the establishment of rule of law has gone some way to providing a platform for their claims of land dispossession and protection for their way of life to be addressed. The use of this imagery supports the contention of Bester postulating a personal identity that portrays himself as a descendent and representative of the Bushmen. As discussed in the second chapter, this is an important means of justification and belonging for some within the Coloured community.

274 Jamal and Williamson, p.139.
Ox Wagon (1996) makes use of this development of artistic vocabulary in a more sophisticated way. It is a remarkable construction to look at, resembling something that seems to have its formal inspiration in a vehicle taken from an apocalyptic future vision, as realised in some Hollywood films. It is constructed from a bed similar to that used in other works, medical drips, a gun, a satellite dish, a siren and a consortium of objects at the front that appears as a threatening representation of a mix between cow bars and an excavator. The use of a grey metal throughout gives it a cold look, one that Bester says is to differentiate it from the explicitly threatening camouflaged vehicles that were a daily presence in the townships.

The importance of the ox wagon as a signifier of the self-perceived and constructed ‘pioneering’ spirit of the people in their conquest of the land and as a mark of the togetherness displayed by the community, most notably when attacked, cannot be underestimated. A visit to the Voortrekker Monument outside Pretoria shows how important the ox wagon is as a signifier in the construction of Afrikaans identity and the belief in their divinely ordained right to rule the country. The monument not only contains an ox wagon modelled on those used in the Trek but also displays figurative representations of the wagon all around the site in a rhythmic pattern designed to recall a convoy on the move.

This clearly evidences the importance of the ox wagon as a signifier of Afrikaans identity. Its relationship to the definitive process of the founding myth from the leaving of the Cape, the Great Trek itself, and the Boer Wars make it a key identifier of culture and the politicization of that into a movement that resulted in the NP victory of 1948 and the imposition of apartheid. The representation here is highly effective because it deals with the received perceptions of how the concept and meaning of the ox wagon was received by the general population. It becomes the signifier of the experience of state culture, synonymous with the experience of White Afrikaans culture. The ox wagon is transformed from a signifier of cultural pride and the resistance of threat to a machine that is a purveyor of threats to the
general population. Its realisation here by a Coloured artist is perhaps particularly significant since the Coloureds are overwhelmingly Afrikaans speakers. Their exclusion from this identity and any pride in the status of the language inverts the status of the ox wagon in their perception to an object of shame. It emphasizes the difference that was constructed by the chosen political and social course of the White Afrikaners from a people that shared their heritage and language.

Bester’s artistic rendering of works in recycled metal gives an unnatural post-industrial dimension and aspect to many of the works. This conceptualization of the unnatural society breeding unnatural products has a particular potency in the artist’s depiction of animals and how they act as signifiers for a range of societal aspects and constructs. It is well documented how many pastoral societies in Africa have regarded cows as a currency, signifier of wealth and status. Even now, in rural areas it is not uncommon for transactions to be made in livestock. The status of the cow in societies has led certain anthropologists to construct an entire cosmology around its importance and place in defining self-identity. Other animals have been important societal signifiers of status and power. Three works that show this interest in the role of animals in society, and specifically their transformation by the political power relations are Head North (1997), P.W. Botha’s dog (1998), and The Dogs of War series (mainly 2001).

*Head North* revisits the status of the ox as a signifier. Bester reworks now familiar parts of his repertoire and vocabulary, such as the drip feed, and develops his interrogation of the unnatural transformation of the natural body. Most striking here is the addition of a turreted gun hidden from a front view of the work by its hump. The animal is constructed on wheels to suggest an easy mobility and trails in its wake an excretion of barbed wire into which are interspersed with a number

---

275 There are a myriad of African examples of the personification of animals as signifiers. The political relationships in the kingdom of Benin are one point of reference as is the status of the cheetah as a signifier of kingly power in a wide range of Central and West African societies. The continuity of the use of these identifications into the modern era is shown in Mobutu’s cult of the leopard that he used to collapse the distinction between himself, the people, the land and national associations in Congo (Zaire).
of coffins. The most ready analogy for the work is in the conquest of the hinterland by the Afrikaners after they left the Cape and headed north to what is now the Free State, Gauteng, and Limpopo Province. Their chosen method of interaction with the local population they found on the way is clearly referenced by the gun and the coffins that resulted from their actions.

Willie Bester — *Head North* (source — www.people.brandeis.edu)

The title can be read as a clever play on both global and national power dynamics and the processes that are at work in transforming societies in the series of events and actions conceptualized as globalization. For South Africa, there is also a process of Africanization taking place. It is received wisdom and common belief that the series of processes known as globalization represents an exchange that is taking place on unequal terms between economies and cultures. This is often reduced to a dichotomy between the Northern and Southern hemispheres. One of the reasons for this unequal status is colonialism through its impact on state and capital formation and its relationship to the economic centres in the West. *Head North* articulates this relationship in that the process is perceived as being at the
direction of, and for the primary benefit of, the Northern hemisphere. Many critics have sought to identify this as a recolonialization or neo-imperialism that preserves the power relations structure of colonialism under a new guise. Bester’s work has long shown a suspicion of the role of outside influences and their effect on the lives of everyday people. The identification of north with the head points to an identification of the south with the backside and excretion. The result is shown in the work in the deaths that have been caused, but also in the barbed wire, which signifies a demarcation of property and interest that arrived with the imposition of Western systems on the continent.

A more national reading would look at the desire of South Africa to head north in structuring its relations with the rest of Africa. The long time separation from many types of engagement with the rest of the continent has isolated South Africa from its neighbours. Now this process of re-acculturation is standard policy of the ANC government and the African focus can be seen in the foreign policy of the government and in Mbeki’s commitment and articulation of the ‘African Renaissance’. This desire to ‘head north’ seems the inverse of the Afrikaner occupation of the country, but is motivated by a similar set of survival instincts, even if better intentioned. South Africa needs to create regional markets if it is to make a success of its chosen method of societal transformation. Much of this depends on the ability of people in the rest of the continent to buy products. This requires a degree of economic stability and prosperity. This type of stability also allows South African capital to establish bases in these countries that could benefit both parties. Furthermore, South Africa’s status as the regional economic powerhouse means that people continue to try to enter the country from points of origin all over the continent. The process is changing the face of South Africa and redefining it as the key economic centre in Africa, although it is not unproblematic as the number of attacks on foreigners in urban areas shows. This engagement with Africa is also viewed culturally as a process of re-authentication. For too long the ‘national’ culture was defined by its engagement and relationship with Western culture. Now Africa is seen as offering and preserving aspects of culture that have disappeared or been marginalized in the past and are part of the vision of what an African Renaissance might involve and
resemble. Evidently, the proposal for this type of engagement falls within the vision of the 'ethno-nationalism' proposed by the 'Africanist' inflection of 'rainbowist' vision.

*P.W. Botha's dog* is another one of Bester's large sculptural pieces. It is again realised in recycled metal that is mostly grey, broken up visually with the presence of a drip and what appears to be a rocket or missile. This is placed at the point where a St. Bernard or similar would carry, at least in legend, its barrel of brandy to provide succour to the needy. This reinforces the image of what the political establishment, of which Botha was a key part and a key figurehead, offered to its people. Instead of succour, the population received a violence and,
often deliberately constructed, conflict that engulfed the country and whose legacy is still felt all too keenly in the violence in the society today. The drip in this work is filled with a urine coloured liquid that acts as a flippant allegory of the type of ideology and ideals espoused by the former President. The timing of this work was made particularly poignant as it corresponded with the period of the standoff between Botha and the TRC. Botha refused to appear – citing ill health – but also making it clear that he had no interest or belief in the concept or apologising for the system and the terrible iniquities that it inflicted on so many. Interestingly, the piece now stands in the Billiton (formerly Gencor) corporate art collection. Gencor was a mining company that had stronger than usual connections to the apartheid political establishment; but which has made a strong effort to reinvent itself as a flag bearer for the ‘new’ South Africa. Its investment in its contemporary art collection is one of the means being used to change its image and Bester’s work has a prominent place in its main foyer in Johannesburg.

The status and cultural place of dogs is a distinction between Eurocentric and Afrocentric societies. In addition to this, in Southern Africa, a dog is regularly used as a line of security. Although this is not confined to the White population, there is a strong common perception that dogs protect property against those who would seek to damage it, setting up a normative distinction in perception between White and Black. Again, it is possible to read this in the context of the unnatural products of society where animal actions and behaviour have been twisted into the service of a political order. Views of dogs are reinforced by the history of being associated with state law enforcement and specifically the police. It had been assumed that the political shift would result in a less partisan police force committed to fostering the development of a more equitable society in respect of rule of law and treatment by the police. There is no doubt significant steps have been taken in this direction, but there remain areas where the composition and attitude of police is unreconstructed from the previous regime.
A telling piece of evidence to support this was provided by the police’s own video footage of dogs being encouraged to attack handcuffed men as they lay on the ground. This was broadcast across the world and caused many to question the extent of the alleged transformation. For Bester, who has continually challenged the nature of the transition and been criticised for has unwavering focus on apartheid and its legacy, this provided vivid source material. His series of Dogs of War, including Who let the Dogs out? (a piece that specifically recreates that event sculpturally), interrogate many of the issues raised by this incident. Following the evolution of style shown in Bester’s earlier works, these pieces are constructed in recycled metal but finished in a more detailed and naturalistic manner. The faces of the figures are clearly identifiable to avoid any sense of the depersonalisation of the dog attacks. One screaming figure lies on the ground being attacked by an enormous dog whilst two identifiable police figures encourage the attack and look on. This combination of racist sadism being related to the voyeuristic pleasure that motivated its filming is again a commentary on the nature of society and authority in twenty-first century South Africa. The use of the title of a contemporary dance track as the title of the work enhances the immediacy of the work and its concerns and prevents an easy dismissal of it as an isolated incident or a hangover from the past.

The term ‘dogs of war’ is seen as referring to mercenaries and has a particular association in an African context with European mercenaries who fought for reactionary causes and leaders in the decolonisation era. The anti-colonial struggles in Zimbabwe and Congo were two notable examples, but the most infamous were the repeated coups, successful and unsuccessful, in the island state of the Comoros. Bester’s conceptualisation of the issue can be seen as an evolution of some of the forms and ideas in his Head North work. The dog is realised as oversized and threatening and displays many of Bester’s familiar

---

276 Though the recent trials of Mark Thatcher and others, for their involvement in the planning of a coup in Equatorial Guinea, show that it remains a current issue.

277 Bob Denard was the motivating force behind many of these insurrections and the model for Frederick Forsyth’s Dogs of War which popularised the term.
stylistic conventions for relaying his message. A new development drawing on the unnatural rendering of animals is the presence of wings and inside the piece, there are a quantity of weapons stored in its belly. Bester's focus here is not so much on the activity of European mercenaries in the past, though it is possible to read a continuing critique of the actions of Western nations and some of their citizens in the anti-apartheid struggle, but more on the activities of those who threaten to undermine the new order by their mercenary actions.

I don't know what one can talk about in South Africa except a war on poverty. And I don't think one can address that with F-16s. That's where the wings come in; and the doorway where people file in to get 'places' for the purchases. And to promise big Mercedes cars to political hotshots.278

Bester here is referring to the kickbacks that were involved in an arms deal to purchase aircraft. Close scrutiny of the deal by an inquiry revealed that people high up in the ANC and also long-time business associates had structured the deal to allow themselves corrupt payments and sweeteners such as the Mercedes cars. Unfortunately, this conforms to an African practice seen commonly in areas of defence procurement where the vast sums of money and relative secrecy that accompany these deals are used by politicians and officials for self-enrichment at the expense of the state. This has lead to the political demise of Tony Yengeni, a cabinet minister, and a widespread climate of suspicion around several senior figures including Jacob Zuma, the Deputy President. The decision to spend considerable sums on defence procurement in a climate where evident outside threats to the security of the nation are difficult to identify, has been questioned by many. Bester uses a zoomorphic analogy to express this.

278 Quoted in Scrapyard Art.
It’s like a Trojan horse situation. Because we were expecting a political solution where there would be a better life for everyone. And when the horse’s belly opens up, we see weapons and stuff.\(^{279}\)

Issues such as this and the TRC continue to provide source material for Bester’s political critique. Bester’s work and practice provide a continuing commentary on the transformation of the society infected by apartheid into one that would be considered normal in the rest of the world. The lack of transformation in many areas and the continuing severe inequalities that continue to leave a significant number of the population in poverty remain ongoing concerns for the artist, as does the failure of many privileged by the old order to come in terms with the democratic transformation.\(^{280}\) The dissatisfaction felt by many in South Africa with the process and uneven treatment in the TRC, and the failure of the government to pay the level of reparations recommended by the Commission, is articulated by Bester.

What I try to get behind is why it is so difficult for people to change from their old ways. It hasn’t worked out the way I imagined. People who thought they were superior before haven’t really changed. I try to find out through studying history what gives people the right to think that way. I try to find a solution, not to be disappointed, to reach an understanding. The Truth Commission seemed to be one of the answers, but now I find that even the Truth Commission is a trap. It has done more damage than good, because the ANC was favoured over the Afrikaners. I want to do a series about it.\(^{281}\)

\(^{279}\) Ibid.
\(^{280}\) Bester’s recent Cape Town exhibition in 2003 was dominated by an enormous metal sculpture entitled *Monument vir die Agterblewenes* (Monument for those who have stayed behind) – a piece ‘dedicated’ to those South Africans who, having supported the previous regime, remain unwilling or unable to accept the new order.
\(^{281}\) Quoted on [www.artthrob.co.za](http://www.artthrob.co.za)
It is possible to regard the industrialisation and urbanisation of society in Africa, as Bester does, as a foreign imposition to service the needs of capital that has led to an obvious transformation from the pre-colonial era in society and the way in which value is perceived and transacted. Bester’s working methodology takes what is not judged to be of value in society and undertakes a transformative process with local, African, and European formal and conceptual antecedents to give it value in a contemporary African society. The fact that this value is reflected in the sale of his works at a level that compares to Kentridge, and which even the most renowned other South African artists are only approaching, means that within local art circles there is resentment at this success and clever marketing. The difference in value of the works overseas and nationally means that an increasingly small number of Bester’s important and significant pieces remain in the country. That is unfortunate, since Bester provides an articulation of contemporary and historical issues that can be understood and related to by a wide section of the population. His treatment of issues and concerns is resolutely ‘ethno-nationalist’ in his insistent community focus and its continuity of practice and focus from the imagined ‘reverse’ nation to the present. At a time when many cultural institutions are struggling to justify themselves in terms of the added value that they bring to the process of nation building and the construction of post-apartheid South African identity, Bester offers an articulation of present concerns that generally remains as relevant now as it was in the late eighties.

Berni Searle

One of the artists who has emerged onto the national and international art scene since the demise of apartheid has been Capetonian Berni (Bernadette) Searle. Born in 1964, Searle experienced the discriminatory nature of the apartheid state on a personal level, as well as its impact on the society around her. She was not, however, a ‘struggle’ artist and only graduated in 1994 when the change in power was taking place. Perhaps because of this, her work is an articulation of her personal mediation of the identities imposed upon her rather than an interrogation of the impact of her (so-called) community. The essentialism of that community is
questioned and her formal strategy of inserting herself into the work is aimed at transforming the power relations that subjugate individuals within imposed identities. This subjectivity is symptomatic of a civic nationalism that focuses on the relationship between the individual and the state.

Her early work was mainly sculpture and she exhibited in a series of relatively minor group shows until her inclusion in the *Life’s Little Necessities* section of the second biennale. Her participation in *Isintu*, an attempt to postulate so-called ‘south – south’ networks between Australian and South African artists, enabled her to have the time and space to make a distinct juncture in her work and move to becoming a performance and video artist. The showing of *Isintu* at SANG marked a dramatic upward curve in her recognition as an artist. In 1999 alone, she won the top prize at the Cairo Biennale, held her first major solo exhibition at the Mark Coetzee Gallery in Cape Town, participated in *Emergence* (the major retrospective for the Grahamstown festival), participated in *Truth Veils*, an exhibition centred on the contemporaneous hearings at the TRC, and debuted in New York as part of the collective *Postcards from South Africa* at the Axis Gallery. Since that time recognition of her work has continued to the point where she is now one of the ‘faces’ that curators, South African and non-South African, now select to put on contemporary cultural production in South Africa. It is interesting to explore the themes and expression present in her work to understand if the identifiable zeitgeist has moved to include Searle, or if the change in her work embodies the South Africa that is now chosen to (re-)present the nation.

Clearly, the transformation in Searle’s media of expression had led to a significant change in the reception and acclaim for her work. Whereas Searle’s earlier work has focused on questioning notions of belonging and identity by using formal sculptural techniques to interrogate the received expression of those concepts, her newer work centred on using her own body as a medium to explore these concepts.
Being a so-called ‘Coloured’ woman, this offered a powerful challenge to the rather cosy gallery world of Cape Town used to political critiques of apartheid and society through formalised expression and often deliberately didactic practice by some, and the interior decoration by others, as is found in many provincial environments.

The two primary registers that can be identified in Searle’s practice concern race and gender. By using her body as the space of expression, she questions the received notions of both, in a South African and local, Western Cape environment. However, the work is not limited by its contextualization, using ‘languages’ of artistic expression that have a wide currency as challenges to the Enlightenment and Modernist paradigms that dominated Western cultural practice until the 1960’s. Searle states,

> Without providing any definite answers, I think my work raises questions about attitudes towards race and gender. I think it operates on different levels and reflects different racial and political experiences – but I don’t think my pieces are limited by that. I hope they transcend and go beyond that, and provide a space for illusion and fantasy. They reflect a desire to present myself in various ways to counter the image that has been imposed on me. Race is inevitable in South Africa.²⁸²

Understanding the attitudes that surround race and gender at the level of the local Western Cape context, and more widely, is a complex navigation. The importance of the received identity of ‘Coloured’ and the significant baggage that the term brings is key to a comprehension of the negotiation with the term that Searle undertakes in her work.

> I use the term with reservation, as a way of indicating a resistance to the imposed hierarchical racial classifications under apartheid. Interestingly

²⁸² Artist’s statement on www.artthrob.co.za.
enough, there are tendencies by various groupings in post-apartheid politics, particularly in the Western Cape, to claim the term ‘Coloured’ in reference to an ethnic minority which I find problematic. Apart from many concerns, one of the problems within this ‘ethnic minority’ framework, is that identity is often viewed in static terms which reinforce stereotypes about who we are.\textsuperscript{283}

As with Bester, there is an ongoing exploration of the essentialist and reductive nature of the identity as well as its imposition as a criterion of differentiation by the apartheid state. As Searle’s statement makes clear, there have been efforts dating back to even pre-apartheid times and certainly more prominently in the last years of apartheid and after to see an enabling aspect in the identity. Some of this relates to questions of authenticity and autochthonous status that has led some in the Coloured community to identify themselves as part of the KhoiSan tradition\textsuperscript{284}. As a person coming from a Cape Malay heritage, Searle is only too aware of the artificiality of these identity constructs, but realises that it is inevitable that racial issues and identity will be foregrounded in the South African context for the foreseeable future.

The issue of gender is obviously very much to the fore in Searle’s work. The naked representation of her body, as a reversal of the gaze, references a tradition of feminist work that can certainly be traced back to the early seventies work of American feminist performance artists, such as Laurie Anderson, but also potentially back to the work of artists such as Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti in Mexico in the 1930’s. Seale’s position as a ‘Coloured’ woman offers a confrontation to those who would use the new order to impose patriarchal restrictions on women. Coming from a Cape Malay background, Searle would have a ready awareness of the types of social conservatism that are being preached amongst some in the community, often using religion as the justificatory tool. This is mirrored elsewhere in the country by those who advance Christianity

\textsuperscript{283}Coombes 2003a, p.250.
\textsuperscript{284}See second chapter for a fuller discussion.
as a reason for restricting gender related freedoms. The naked representation of
the body in Searle’s work was particularly challenging in 1999 in the Western
Cape since it happened at a time when many, particularly in the Muslim
community, were campaigning against the lifting of restrictions on pornography
that had accompanied the death of the apartheid state. At the opening of her first
major solo show in Cape Town, Searle faced an inquisition as to the
‘pornographic’ nature of the work. Her responses on this question have
recognized the difficulties in reversing the gaze. This is exacerbated by her
position as a ‘woman of colour’ whose appearance may be viewed as representing
the exotic available ‘other’ that was the essentialist construction of the non-White
female in European and American society.

I see my work as challenging the static essentialist conception of identity,
but sometimes the way the work is received is totally contradictory to
that.\textsuperscript{285}

Searle … is acutely aware that audiences in Europe and the United States
may find her image exotic. “Using my body is a tricky thing to do because
it can reinforce stereotypes,” … explaining that to ward off simple
voyeurism she intentionally inserts an element of confrontation into her
self-portraits\textsuperscript{286}

This type of power reversal has been engaged with by Black American women artists
such as Jocelyn Taylor, Pat Ward Williams and Lorna Simpson whom Searle references
as influences on her work.

A clear reference point, both ideologically and formally, is the work of the Cuban
artist, Ana Mendieta. Mendieta was an artist who worked with the presence and
absence of the body as a means of interrogating gender, identity, and religious

\textsuperscript{285} Interview with the author in Cape Town 03/06/99.
concern and constructs. This can readily be seen in works such as *Silueta Works in Mexico* (1973-77), which precede similar types of practice in the United States and elsewhere and now seem remarkably ahead of their time. Mendieta's investigation of the significance of presence and absence through the use of pigment as a marker of the presence of the body with reference and allusion to blood and violence, and the role of societal constructs in supporting this, is evidently a major influence on Searle's practice. Mendieta's work was included in the 'Important and Exportant' section of the second Biennale in South Africa as part of her growing posthumous recognition (discussed in chapter three). A local artist whose work made headlines at the biennale was Tracey Rose, who was discussed in the previous chapter. The impact of her *Span I* and *Span II* and the investigation of the reversal of the colonial, apartheid, and patriarchal tradition led to a widespread recognition of her pieces as representative of the best of a new generation of artists from South Africa. Her use of her body to reference the imposition of racial categories by apartheid and its connection to the pseudo-Darwinist pornographic gaze of nineteenth century Europe as embodied in the experience of Saartjie Baartman, was a significant development in the context of contemporary South African art. This led the way for artists like Searle to produce her own work centring on similar themes. Although both 'Coloured' women artists, Rose's base of Johannesburg is more a space of negotiation and mediation between the international art circuit and South African cultural production than Cape Town or the Western Cape, despite the large discrepancy in the amount of overseas visitors. Searle's work is firmly contextualized within the local historical, political and social environment of the Cape. Her pieces reference the international connections that have defined the city since its founding and make explicit aspects of the creolization that is more readily apparent in the culture of the Cape than elsewhere in the country.
Searle’s work from 1998 and 1999 includes the *Colour Me* and *Discoloured* series, including works such as *Red, Yellow, Brown: To Scale*. Most of these works consist of depictions of Searle’s body in a horizontal position, parodying the normative genre of the ‘reclining nude’. In *Off White: Back to Back* (1999), Searle goes one step further and erects the ‘reclining nude’ in a confrontational way that challenges the passive depiction of the woman – available for the visual and sexual consumption of the man. This assertion is a powerful signifier of the changing order in South Africa that is releasing more non-White women from the patriarchal restrictions of traditional systems, often codified by apartheid.
The use of spices provides a rich and dynamic colour to works. Employing spices as a material is a clear reference to the reasons for the establishment of Cape Town as a stopping point on the route from Europe to the east and the goods that motivated that trade. One of the ‘by-products’ of the spice trade was the arrival of slaves from Asia in the Cape. The work draws a clear link between the value placed on the commodities and that on people and the commoditization that they were forced to undergo in the service of economic exploitation. The perception of spices as ‘exotic’ is collapsed with the exoticism bestowed on non-White people, including the process of semi-mystic sexualization that non-White women were constructed to possess. This process of sexualization existed in Europe, but was also replicated within the colonial society of the Cape. The construction of sexual difference was accentuated by the system of racial classification that reached its extreme with the apartheid system. Searle’s work and the title of the series are a clear challenge to the viewer to understand the process of category imposition and their own relationship to it.

Placing myself or my body in the work exposes other aspects of my identity, for example gender. Exposing myself therefore involves a process of claiming, and points to the idea that there are a range of axes that inform identity which are inter-connected, determining relationships of dependency and domination in any given context ... Agency is executed in what one chooses to show or not.287

While engaging with the debates around ‘community’ and group identity through its interrogation of the classification process and the historical and contemporary status of ‘Coloured’ and gender as marks of identity, Searle consciously individualizes its construction to problematize the tradition of received group identities.

287 Quoted in Murinik T., More than skin deep, in Mail&Guardian, 30/04/99.
Working with images of the self offers a necessary and important stage in the deconstruction of cultural and gendered identity.\(^{288}\)

The self is explored as an ongoing process of construction in time and place. The presence and absence of the body in the work points to the idea that one's identity is not static and constantly in a state of flux.\(^{289}\)

While Seale herself is present in the majority of the work, she also undertook a series of ‘Ghost’ pieces that were created by using her body to mark the space, but then leaving only outlines. As she states above, the absence of the body acts as a powerful signifier, visually resembling body outlines at a police site and focusing emphasis on the body as an artistic tool. In 1999, Searle contributed *The palms of the hands, the small of the back, the nape of the neck, under the belly, the soles of the feet* to the *Truth Veils* exhibition at the Gertrude Posel Gallery, which was shown from 11 June – 9 July 1999. The series of works from artists explored some of the issues and concerns that were emerging from the TRC. Searle’s piece consisted of five framed digital prints of the respective parts of her body placed below five smaller framed photographs of the same image. Her skin had been stained with Egyptian henna to take on a bruised appearance, showing the experience that

One of the legacies of colonialism and apartheid has been the self is or has been experienced, more often than not, as a site of conflict. The testimonies that have emerged from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission glaringly demonstrate this point.\(^{290}\)

The discolouring of the skin questioned the status of the seen truth and the skin-based classificatory system of apartheid. The bruising refers to the process of uncovering or reaching a ‘truth’ as well as showing the effect on three levels of

\(^{288}\) Interview with the author in Cape Town 03/06/99.
\(^{289}\) Artist’s statement on www.artthrob.co.za.
the brutality of the system. First, there is the violence towards the individual both in terms of the received treatment and degradation under the categorisation of the system. Second, the gendered aspect of the violence, both literal and metaphorical, against women in a country where abuse and even rape is commonplace. Metaphorically, considering the spatial dislocation from families caused by the high level of migratory employment, it is generally women who bear the brunt of the burden in terms of being left to cope with the family responsibilities while the man is away. Third, there is the aspect of the body as representative of the country and its people as a whole. This can be viewed positively in that there was a need for the extent of the bruising and damage to be revealed before the healing could begin.

Coombes identified a further relationship to the perception and construction of ‘truth’ in the process involved in the creation of the work.

The chosen section of the body is pressed up against the glass, it is distorted so that the flattened surface takes on the quality of a specimen between the glass slides offered up for microscopic inspection – held up for view, almost opened out, but not quite … we are never offered the whole body. It is always fragmented and faceless … more is withheld than elaborated.

There seems to me to be a dialectical relation established between the component parts of this installation and the assumption of verifiable racial hierarchies promoted through apartheid legislation and the so-called scientific scrutiny that underpinned it. By on the one hand appropriating (visually) the language of science assumed as an elucidating discourse designed to make the ‘truth’ visible but on the other hand only hinting at rather than stating ways in which such ‘evidence’ could be read, Searle draws attention to the spurious ‘visibility’ and ‘transparency’ (objectivity)

---

290 Berni Searle: Color Matters, unpublished paper.
of scientific investigation – in this case where it specifically relates to questions of race and ethnicity. 291

The intimacy of the photographs and the naming of the body parts represented suggest a carnal knowledge that would normally be available to someone very close to the subject – a mother or a lover perhaps. Here, the public display signifies the intrusion of the state into peoples’ intimate space. The quest to establish a ‘scientific’ basis to the system led to all types of physical examination being justified in the service of the classificatory system. The relationship to and understanding of the self was therefore problematized by the repetitive insistence and totality of the state structure. No matter how much individuals tried and try to assert an individual identity and subjectivity removed from the apartheid defined ‘community’ or ‘group’, the filter of racial classification continues to be the primary register on which South Africans are viewed and judged by those inside the country and those outside the country. As Searle states, (quoted above) “In South Africa, race is inevitable.”

Searle re-exhibited this piece as The darker shade of light at the ‘Staking Claims’ exhibition staged at the Castle Granary in Cape Town. Coombes describes the process of the changed object,

Taken as Polaroid photos, the images were then floated off the backing by submerging the photographs in hot water so that the images then seemed to reproduce the same qualities as skin itself – creasing, folding, and wrinkling. Finally, this delicate texture was scanned, digitally encrypted, and reproduced on translucent paper, laminated between sheets of perspex, and boxed. The resultant images, seen through the light boxes, recreate the sensation of medical investigation, but instead of a negative image that reproduces the shadowy interior of the body through x-ray, the positive visible through the light box captures every detail of the body’s surface. 292

The changed context of the work and the exhibition offered up new readings. The Granary is part of the Castle in Cape Town – the oldest European building in South Africa and symptomatic of the type of European engagement on the continent. The name of the granary itself masks a history of multiple uses of the space – many of which were significantly more sinister and restrictive in purpose than the implication of a grain storage area. The space had functioned as a court, a police station and a women’s prison. The contextualization of the work in the space suggests again an unnatural type of intimacy with the subject’s body that is predicated on the power relationship between the state and the individual. In South Africa the added dimension to any such consideration is the hierarchical stratification of society in a totalizing fixity that prevented the social movements seen even in the most class divided societies.

An interesting contextually located piece that was contemporaneous with the work for the Castle exhibition was Julie Moet Nou Trek (You must move away) for the Bloedlyn exhibition held at the Oudtshoorn Festival. Oudtshoorn is located in the strongly Afrikaans part of the Western Cape where the population is almost entirely made up of White Afrikaners and Coloureds. Any Afrikaans cultural event has been viewed in the context of the aggressive centring of White Afrikaans culture that occurred under apartheid. Oudtshoorn’s location in the Klein (Little) Karoo amplifies its status in relation to the conceptualisation of the relationship to the land that was one of the founding myths in the emergence of a distinct White Afrikaner identity. The constructed differentiation between ‘White’ and ‘Brown’ Afrikaners was fundamental to the separatist identity that emerged in the early part of the twentieth century and had its zenith in the election of the NP and the imposition of apartheid in 1948. The alienation of the Coloureds was a subject of some focus amongst Afrikaner intellectuals and liberals towards the end of apartheid. The healing process to restore a more linguistic based identity has started; but the process will undoubtedly take a

293 See discussion in relation to Kentirdge’s work in Chapter Four.
number of generations to reach a point of collective identity and may be undermined by the marginalization of the language since the demise of the old order. Exhibitions such as Bloedlyn are part of this process of identity negotiation. Searle’s work was made in collaboration with the poet Anoeschka von Meck. Searle used a ‘Ghost’ piece of her body with the marking done by the dust of the Klein Karoo desert. The two images were placed either side of a glass case containing von Meck’s Trekslet poem.

Likening the Afrikaans language to a cheap woman (slet) who moves around the land. To ‘trek’ is not just to move around though – it involves taking everything with you. Within the South African context, the word has a strong reference to the Great Trek.294

The piece is accompanied by a recording of a Bushman, //Khaku, from 1936 who tells the story of a hunt – a fundamental construct of KhoiSan culture – and how

294 Quoted in Coomes 2003a, p.252.
he is told by the farmer to leave the land because he is scaring away the farmer’s livestock.

Apart from the rather stark contrasts between Afrikaans and indigenous languages, there are also ... connections. Survival, for the KhoiSan people, involved abandoning their cultural and linguistic identity, many of whom, if not the majority, shifted to Afrikaans, bringing dynamic variations to the language.295

Readings offered by the installation centre on the binary opposition that was constructed in the service of racial categorisation between the White Afrikaners and the KhoiSan. In the bastardised concept of evolution that was invoked, these two groups were constructed as the polarities of the system of racial classification that contained all other groups between them on the evolutionary scale. In reality, the history of the emergence of the ‘Coloureds’ is one of mixing between these two groups. This was not a heritage that was acknowledged by many Afrikaners, at least until post-apartheid styling made it fashionable in some quarters. The title clearly references the social stigma and embarrassment that was felt by some Afrikaners at the proximity of this heritage. The title has a gendered implication through the use of the term ‘slet’. Again, there is a clear connotation of the ‘loose’ woman who is a social embarrassment and must move away. Yet in essence, as referenced here, it is the language and culture of the Afrikaners that is the product of the intermingling between the two groups and the usual Afrikaans spoken on the street contains much evidence of this heritage. Certainly, there were attempts in the apartheid era to ‘clean’ the language of these signifiers of origin and replace them with Dutch derivatives, but this generally was confined to the dictionary and not the vernacular expression. The interplay between the texts of the speech of //Khaku and the inscribed poem with the imagery of Searle refers to this hidden history of KhoiSan linguistic and genetic descent.

Yet the KhoiSan influence is integral to the emergence of the language and indeed the culture of Afrikaans speakers. Of course, it was not an equal mixing between the cultures based on the power relations of the time and with the further aspect of unequal gender relations that were the basis of many of the ‘relationships’ between Afrikaner men and KhoiSan women. As Searle sets out, many KhoiSan felt compelled to adopt Afrikaans in order to survive in the new order that denied them a place on their own terms. The ‘Ghost’ element of the piece offers the reading of an absence. This highlights the absence of the KhoiSan in their autochthonous area, which included the Karoo, as evidenced by the rock paintings and archaeological finds in the area. A contemporary relevance exists in the ongoing land claims that are being made by the remnants of various KhoiSan groups. Despite the egalitarian nature of many of the institutions and legal frameworks of the ‘new’ South Africa, there remains a cultural and political alienation from the nation in KhoiSan communities.

The ‘trek’ part of the title has the obvious connotation and baggage of the so-called Great Trek. As discussed in the second chapter, this event is integral to the formation of the imagined community of the Boer and in particular the differentiation from the Anglophone Whites. The mythic construct of community is juxtaposed with ‘slet’ to indicate the falseness of the holistic structure of imagined community and its purity. There is a clear connotation of moving around in the ‘meaning’ of ‘trek’. The linguistic juxtaposition infers an entirely different reference to the founding myth – the implication of a people without fixity looking to create a sense of home in places where they were unwelcome. This can be read as a comment on the departure from Holland due to their religious extremism, followed by a departure from the Cape due to their inability to accept the end of slavery.

In the video *Snow White*, the artist sits under a drizzle of flour until she is covered, then scoops up the white powder and kneads it into a loaf of bread, a performance that can be read either as a mediation on the subjugation of women or as an ironic comment on the current politics of reconciliation in South Africa, which asks its citizens to blithely build a future out of the ashes of apartheid ...296

![Berni Searle – Snow White (still) (source – www.artthrob.co.za)](image)

The piece makes references on several levels. The title refers to a popular fable of innocence and perhaps virginity. The associations of the name of the main character with these values propose a normative, in Western culture at least, relationship between whiteness and purity. This association takes on a more sinister meaning in a South African context, with its recall of the marking of difference favoured by the apartheid regime. This is highlighted by the presence


323
of the naked ‘non-White’ woman (Searle) in the work. A contrast is drawn between the construction of White innocence and non-White sexualization that was the stuff of many European ideas of fantasy during the nineteenth century. Some feminist critics have argued that the display of the Black female body is evidence of sexual experience in itself – for example bell hooks. This is premised on the assumption that the display is not understood on equal terms and that the alienation of the Black woman from the structures of White patriarchy prevent this performance being understood outside the construction of sexual experience.

The other usages of ‘white’ in language are interesting here. ‘Whiten’ often refers to reducing the taste or impact of, for instance, coffee; ‘Whitewash’ can refer to the making clean of an object, but is more usually used as a metaphor for hiding or not revealing evidence whilst pretending to undertake a thorough investigation. This can be read as a reference to the conduct of the state authorities under apartheid, but, also given the date of the piece the work can be seen as a commentary on the TRC.

Searle’s work offers a comment on the nature of the process and, also as Pollack points out, on the need to attempt to rebuild the society from the detritus of apartheid. The transformation of the received material into a useful output is seen in the piece. By using a gendered activity such as bread making, Searle offers a comment on how the efforts to rebuild society will be founded on the activity of women, as indeed societal reconstruction has previously in the local context. There is a sense of making the most of the situation in order to try to create something beneficial and worthwhile. The positive element of the work is then undermined by the destruction of the bread by the artist at the end of piece. This can be read as an ‘ashes to ashes’ commentary on the possibilities for the renewal of South African society. Each positive attempt leads to a destruction caused by the legacy that lies behind the society itself.

Some of Searle’s more recent work has moved away from the incessant focus of body politics, body politic and performance to look at issues concerning heritage
and the understanding of home. This focus is explored through photographic or video media and examines normative and received constructions of concepts, such as home and family in the mediation of understanding (self-) identity in the way that the post-1997 work had explored the interface between the received construction of identity and the self-assertion of personal identity. Three pieces that concern these aspects are Relative (2002), Uitsug (2002) and Home and Away (2003). Relative is a collection of digital prints that presents a family album with a difference. Of the eight frames, only four are filled with images. Of these, only one is in colour. The other three have the appearance of old photographs – taken in the sixties perhaps. Beneath the images are a series of plaques that offer a name of the family member and a brief comment. Some of these are descriptive of their position in the family or occupation, but two have more subjective judgements. One is referred to as ‘mom’s favourite’ whilst another is said to be ‘at odds’. This personalizes the work and offers a greater intimacy to the viewer, but tantalizes with the suggestion of family strife. The absence of the family members and the age of three of the photos contradict the intimacy of the exposure and suggest separation of lack of contact. In the Fresh catalogue, for which the work was commissioned by SANG, Coombes states,

Transparent like Barthes’ spectres, they haunt the surface. These are family members who have been ‘lost’ to Searle since her mother’s marriage to Searle’s Catholic father over thirty years ago. Subsequently disowned by her family, there has been little or no contact between them and Galiema.297

This hidden trauma is also the basis of Uitsug, a short video piece that the viewer is required to experience through a viewfinder. Coombes describes the piece.

The effect is similar to the experience of gazing in pleasurable anticipation through the lenses of panoramic binoculars found on seaside piers. The

297 Coombes 2003b: ‘Memories are Made of This’ in Bedford E., (ed.): Fresh (Berni Searle), p.23.
film sequence begins with the sound of the call to prayer from a mosque, invisible except for the loudhailer. The camera pans across an uneventful terrain of bland housing and playing fields. The scene becomes bleached of colour and a close up of a house softens to an indistinct vignette as if viewed through vaseline and the distance of nostalgia. A clear image of Muslim women moving their palms in unison over their faces in prayer, shifts to a soft focus image of a child from some other time. The sounds of the wind and the sea accompany a pan of glorious coastline over hills. This changes into the scream of a siren – darkness – and the call to prayer beckons once more.  

Coombes points out the linguistic slippage between the Afrikaans *uitsig* meaning outlook or view and *uit* (out) and *sug* (sigh). The coastline viewed though the video is that of Simonstown, a location situated on the Indian Ocean coast. This was from where Coloured communities were relocated in 1973 to the barren land shown in the video, and named inappropriately as Ocean View (there was no view of the ocean). This relocation presented many of the same issues of loss that pertain to District Six. In this work, Searle uses the familiar sound of an imam’s call to prayer to show the disruption caused by the changed circumstances and the loss of the sense of home and place that define an individual’s relationship to a location. The comforting familiarity of the call to prayer is replaced by the siren that signifies the control of the state and the problems of crime that have beset relocated communities. The removal can be understood within the perverse ‘logic’ of the apartheid system, but was, in all probability motivated by the presence of the South African navy’s base at Simonstown. The need to free up space for the housing and support structures for the base would have been a powerful incentive for the regime to ‘colonize’ the land. This history of dispossession references a personal trauma for the Searle family as well. Removed from their home in Constantia, there is an empathy with the narrative of relocation seen in this work. Constantia is now associated with luxury and, in

---

particular, vineyards. One of the most famous of these is *Constantia Uitsig*, paralleling the reference in the title of the work. The beauty of the area and the vineyards mask a history of land dispossession and slavery that is only being acknowledged now.

Tracing this heritage is an ongoing process, often hampered by a reluctance of relatives to talk about where they come from, especially those who were re-classified White. Often, amongst ‘Coloured’ people, tracing this heritage is avoided because of the negative stereotypes surrounding indigenous people and slaves that were brought to the Cape. A further complication is the lack of official documentation such as birth, death and marriage certificates, which forms an essential part of this process of ‘tracing’.

*Home and Away* is a video piece that centres on the sea channel of the Straits of Gibraltar. More than perhaps any other geographical boundary between Africa and Europe, this channel signifies the cultural and economic gap that exists between the two continents. Although linked for centuries by the Moorish empire, the separation is now a key signifier of migration and the desire for migration. This has a personal resonance for Searle’s understanding of her own heritage, which includes Arabic, Indian, Malay, Mauritian and other elements. In the piece, Searle is clad in a red and white dress that contrasts dramatically with the blue of the sea. The choice of these particular colours creates a religious element to the work drawing on the stylized depiction of the Virgin. The collapse between the idealisation of the Virgin and the personified qualities associated with the sea are undermined by the knowledge of the location and the traumas of the in-between situation of the departure from the known life to the unknown promise of the new. Searle’s appearance alone in the sea emphasizes the fragility and vulnerability of the migration. Especially as the means of transport are often so risky as to lead to a high probability of death, or at least serious injury.

The development in Searle’s work from a sculptural approach to the interrogation of identity constructs to the insertion of her own body into the art to question notions of identity has led to a dramatic rise in her profile. The correspondence to debates around
the body and the visual impact of the dramatic performance works have made her a key artist in the presentation of post-apartheid visual culture in South Africa, and, indeed, mediations centred around post-colonial identity more generally. Although her recent work has moved to look at issues of heritage and home, her work retains an incessant subjective focus that clearly marks her as a primary exponent of a ‘civic nationalist’ approach.

Conclusion
Searle’s art is a negotiation of identity in the relationship between, self, community and nation. The work is explicit in its highlighting of the imaginary nature of these constructs; but also, conversely, their currency and importance in the South Africa of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Capetonian artists are faced with strange dilemmas. The Western Cape is significantly different from the rest of South Africa in its population make-up and income level, yet it is also the site of Parliament and the bulk of national cultural institutions. It is marginalized from the economic powerhouse of Gauteng, yet is the face of South Africa that the vast majority of tourists experience. It has little of the real battlegrounds of the ‘struggle’ like Soweto and ‘King’ (King Williams Town), yet is the location of the definitive site of the ANC’s mediation of the ‘struggle’ in Robben Island. If Johannesburg is the place where the transformation of South Africa must take place, perhaps Cape Town is where it must display its official face to the nation and the world at large.

The contrast provided by the political funding for the museums of Robben Island and District Six is indicative of how the ANC wishes to indelibly link itself – to the exclusion of others – with the defeat of apartheid and to which constituencies (Africanist and overseas audiences) it wishes to focus its political appeal. The political change in emphasis by the ANC has drawn a boundary between sections of the population that are no longer offered the inclusive vision that ‘rainbowism’ imagined.

Artists, such as Searle, have seen the demise of the old order as the opening of possibilities that reinvent the relationship between state and individual in terms of the
‘Euro-nationalist’ conception of the relationship that focuses on subjective understandings of identities in an imagined global context. They reject the imposed community focus and representation that both apartheid and its counter discourses proposed. Attempting to achieve a subjective understanding of how they, as individuals, have been affected by the historical forces that have positioned them to be who they are – rather than who they have been told to be – at this time in history and what relationship they can have with the constructs of community and nation that have been imposed for so long.

Artists, such as Alexander and Bester, who have favoured the ‘ethno-nationalist’ focus on community and national introspection, have continued their articulation of the legacies of apartheid and the questioning of the totalising aspects of the new order. This involved very different approaches to challenging the apartheid regime. Alexander focused on making explicit the terror in the system and its historical connection to totalitarianism and a jaundiced interpretation of Christianity. Bester employed the slogans and graffiti style of the urban streets to present an explicit challenge to the regime and its workings. In the post-apartheid era, these artistic strategies have been redeployed to focus on the legacies of apartheid and certain totalising tendencies within the ‘new’ order. The difference in method can be ascribed in part to their relative positions in apartheid society. Alexander is an art school trained artist who was able to engage with emerging practices that occurred in the United States. Bester was an untrained artist who was initially only able to draw on his immediate environment for inspiration and certain mega-artists like Rauschenberg and Warhol whose work was available in reproduction. The key reason for difference was and is race and the entitlement or lack of it that the classification brought. Yet what unites them is a shared commitment to an imaginary vision of a better and more equitable South Africa that remains located over the rainbow.
Conclusions

This thesis has aimed to analyze the attempted process of nationalist identity formation in South Africa through an examination of its representation in South African art and by South African artists inside and outside the country. This has focused on the art and artists of the two major urban and cultural centres, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Some commentators have explored the process of nationalist identity formation in the post-apartheid period from a political standpoint, others have examined how the state has supported a national identity formation that privileges certain groups through decisions about institutional support. However, I am not aware of any attempts to bring these processes within a particular theoretical paradigm, locating contemporary art production in South Africa within the post-apartheid political context and detailing its relationship to particular discourses of nationalist (re)invention. The thesis explains the perpetuation of apartheid divisions, manifested in the political and cultural domains, as exemplary of the failure of the rainbowist project; and the desire of the ruling elite to turn to an alternative nationalism to embed their position in the political landscape of the country.

Chapter Two set out the process of racial identity formation in South Africa by discussion of the manipulation of communities by the colonial and apartheid regimes to the extent that the state definition of race became a totalizing filter of individuals’ and communities’ lives and their relationships to each other. The invention of racial hierarchy was challenged both by those, such as Biko, who rejected the superiority of the Whites proposed by apartheid through an avowal of Black Consciousness, and by the ANC who established a ‘reverse’ discourse committed to non-racialism.

With the demise of the apartheid state, the reverse discourse proposed by the ANC, and imagined by many inside and outside the country became commonly mediated as the ‘rainbow’ nation. The desire to overcome the oppression and discrimination of the former era was so strong that the creed of non-racialism became so totalising inside the country, it excluded those who in anyway challenged its validity and currency as a project. The attempt to establish the ‘reverse’ nation as the post-apartheid nation was complicated by
the historical moment when it was attempted, since the ends of capital no longer required the nation-state as a means. The ability to focus on trans-territorial markets prevented the type of nationalist capital formation process that had been integral to the formation of the nation-state in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and to the economic growth and national identity formation that had taken place in many Asian economies in the post-war era. Like many African countries, the essential period of cohesion for the ‘reverse’ identity had been the struggle against the colonial/apartheid regime. Once that obstacle had been overcome the binding nature of the identity began to unravel, exacerbated by the collapse, in many African countries of the distinction between liberation party and state, and between the notion of the leaders as representative of the country to a similitude of it. In order to preserve their dominant position and to establish a break with the ‘rainbow’ nation project so closely associated with Mandela, the ANC have moved to occupy the ‘Africanist’ advancement ground whilst continuing to emphasise their role as the party of liberation. This has continued to be successful electorally, as evidenced by the 2004 elections, but has resulted in South Africa’s clear political (re)racialization along the lines of apartheid racial distinction.

Tensions emerged between those who favoured an immediate move to a meritocratic society that took little or no account of the legacy of discrimination and those who believed that South Africa must have a process of internal dialogue and identity formation that recognized the inequities of the past. The former view proposed a formation of the relationship between state and individual based on Western individualism that transcended ethnic and national communities and focused on subjective understandings of identity that enabled affiliation with globally constructed identities. The opposing view proposed a nation-centric identity that would begin to engage with the outside world on a gradualist basis, concentrating on a re-establishment of links with the African continent, which for so long had been devalued and from which South Africa had been largely isolated since the 1960’s.

Artistically, these tensions clearly manifested themselves in the 1995 and 1997 Johannesburg biennales and the debates that surrounded them. While the first biennale
had replicated the standard national pavilion approach of Venice and other major biennales, the second proposed a non-national focus on the evolution of history of increased globalisation and trans-national networks. This innovative approach received critical acclaim, but alienated those South Africans who sought a nationalist celebration and affirmation of what the country had to offer on a collective basis and who rejected the global individualism that the biennale espoused. The tensions between the competing nationalist visions of how South Africa should culturally represent itself – both domestically and abroad – manifested themselves in the nationally branded exhibitions that have been held. The commonly felt need to have an artist selection that related at least in part to the relative population of the country led to strange juxtapositions between neo-conceptualist video art and traditional beadwork, Post-Modernist interrogations of artistic value and pottery. Whilst these extremes were perhaps indicative of the diversity of cultural practice that existed in the country, their continuing value was uncertain once the paradigms had been deconstructed. Outside the country, these displays conformed to the expectation of what contemporary African art with a rainbowist inflection should look like. It acted as both advertising to Western, and to a lesser extent Asian, tourist markets, as well as being comforting to an outside audience that they could continue to understand South Africa based on the global awareness that had been raised by the anti-apartheid struggle.

The distinctions in understanding and value of South African art can be seen in the differing views on South African artists like Willie Bester, William Kentridge and David Koloane that were held inside and outside the country. Artists who continued to focus largely on the apartheid era in their work continued and continue to be seen as valuable and interesting by certain constituencies outside the country, but in South Africa, such focus was seen to be raking over old ground and pandering to an overseas market.

In Johannesburg, a city whose existence is uniquely financially driven, the display of artists was almost exclusively in privately owned galleries that sought to either establish their own place in the post-apartheid art market or by corporate collections looking to advertise their commitment to post-apartheid ideals. In Cape Town, much of the
negotiation of what contemporary South African art should be and represent took place within officially sanctioned structures. This debate was fundamental in that it showed not only what the new order was inclined to favour and support to represent the post-apartheid nation; but also because Cape Town is overwhelmingly the urban face that South Africa shows to the rest of world.

The representation of the post-apartheid nation has divided artists who identify with at least an interim project to promote a South African nationalism and those who would prefer to be considered solely on the basis on their own artistic output – uninfluenced by their perceived race or gender or sexual orientation. The desire to frame artistic debates and representation in identity terms has led to an exodus of young artists who see the apartheid heritage as an unnecessary burden to achieving their artistic goals. Others have remained to engage with the quest to achieve a post-apartheid national identity.

The discussion of these debates in South Africa has been marked by hostility on the opposing sides who have sought to position each other as reactionary hangovers from the previous era. Some critics, like Ashraf Jamal and Colin Richards, have at times desisted from this and sought to contribute to the nature of the debate as to what post-apartheid nationalism and its cultural manifestation should be. However, the small community of the South African art world means that few are able to transcend personal allegiances consistently. Tellingly, the most valuable and insightful contributions to the discourses that concern South African art have come from 'outsiders', like Okwui Enwezor and Annie Coombes, who have been able to spend time in the country understanding the terms of reference whilst drawing on the experiences of having been cultural commentators elsewhere. Following those examples, I have attempted to bring the benefit of having an outside perspective on South African art with the fortunate position of having been able to spend a considerable proportion of time both in South Africa and the southern African region. The analysis is no doubt framed by my own subjective positioning and taste as to what constitutes value in art generally, and in South African art in particular.
South Africa is a fascinating country with intriguing diversity that is trying to locate its place within the globalized interstices of the twenty-first century world from the ruins of common community left by apartheid. Its artistic production represents those dilemmas and helps negotiate what that place will be in the future. To find that place will be the quest for the pots of gold at the end of the rainbow.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Art Ventilator*, No.1, September 1994, Johannesburg.
Babb G. (commissioner), 1993: *Incroci de Sud – Affinities*, Grafica Internazionale, Rome


Coombes A. 2003b: ‘Memories are Made of This’ in Bedford E. (ed.): Fresh (Berni Searle).


Friedman H. 1996: ‘Is this an insult to black women?’, *Mail & Guardian*, 16/08/96.


Lodge T. 2002: *Politics in South Africa (From Mandela to Mbeki)*, David Philip, Cape Town.


Rosengarden R. 1996: Entre Linhas (Don’t Mess with Mister In-Between), Lisbon, Culturgest.


Sassen R. undated: Kentridge’s Colonialist Encounters, unpublished text.


Tadjo V. 2002: David Koloane, David Krut, Johannesburg.


343


**Website sources**


Klopper S. Interview with Willie Bester, Beyond the Magazine, available at
www.undo.net/cgi-bin/undo/beyond/view.pl?msv=16

O’Toole S., ‘Tracey Rose – “Ciao Bella” at the Goodman Gallery’, review on
www.artthrob.co.za

www.cincypost.com/2004/01/12/langa01-12-2004.html

Waberi A. 1999: ‘Moshekwa Mokwena Langa’s re-enchanted world’, review of 7th
Stuttgart Biennial on Africultures, available at
www.africultures.com/anglais/articles_anglais/Yengo.html


Unattributed sources

Bernier-Eliades Gallery, Athens, Greece, press release, available at www.bernier-

Economist Intelligence Unit Country Reports

Nation Formation and Nation Building, ANC policy paper 1997

Institution of Race Relations, quoted in The Star 10/09/98

Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill 1996

Press, Durban.


Website for 7th Havana Biennial, www.universes-in-
universe.de/car/habana/bien7/fototcea/e-alexander-2.html