Practising (De)assemblage:

Upcoming Black Artists on the South African Scene

(2008-2014)

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By:

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PREFACE:

A PART OF BUT APART FROM THE ASSEMBLAGE

Reading Bhantu Steven Biko's *I write what I like* (1978) for the first time as an undergraduate student was challenging. *I write what I like*, a selection of Biko's writings published between the years 1969 and 1973, contains, amongst others, the articles "Black Souls in White Skins?" (1970a), "We Blacks" (1970b), "Fragmentation of the Black Resistance" (1971a), "The Definition of Black Consciousness" (1971b) and "Black Consciousness and the Quest for True Humanity" (1973). Such articles express the core of Biko's call for black consciousness. Biko wrote on Blackness post-1960, in the period marked by the banning of black political parties and the imprisonment of their leaders on Robben Island. This was a time, according to Biko (1971a:63), when no one could speak for black opinion in South Africa. Biko saw the imprisoned political leaders as having managed to assemble the black population of South Africa as a unit. His call was a call to those discriminated against and oppressed by the apartheid system to maintain this assemblage (Biko 1970a, 1970b, 1971a, 1971b, 1973) and resist all attempts at fragmenting their resistance, namely: "fighting separately for certain 'freedoms' and 'gains' " (Biko 1971a:42).

What was certain to me in my first reading of Biko, as it still is in a re-reading of his work, is that South Africa is a geographical space Biko and I share, but that the dynamics of the times at which we inhabit(ed) it seem different. Biko speaks to a world of unions: African Student Association (ASA); African Students Union of South Africa (ASUSA); African National congress (ANC); Pan African Congress (PAC); University Christian Movement (UCM); National Union of South African Students (NUSAS); University of Natal Black (UNB); South African Student Organisation (SASO) and University Bantu Council (UBO)… . The impact of some of these unions have spanned decades; others have disintegrated.

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If unfamiliar with their multitude, it is easy to get lost between these names; their acronyms are to me a metaphor for a fragmented society in desperate need of a unified voice. Biko rejected "black-white circles" (Biko 1970a:23) and any movement within the apartheid system based on partial freedoms. Biko described such circles as being at best unproductive and at their worst, in direct conflict with the quest for the true emancipation of oppressed people (Biko 1978). Such a position makes me defensive of a perspective I was born into and to which I currently still adhere in many ways – at times voluntarily and at other times involuntarily.

In 2013 the Department of Modern European Languages at the University of Pretoria launched a new master's programme in African-European Cultural Relations, citing "[a] growing need for intercultural mediators in multilateral governmental, non-governmental and business-related institutions" (New MA programme in African-European Cultural Relations launched at UP in 2013). Some might argue that this very study, as an outcome of this programme; is a product of "black-white circles" (Biko 1970a:23) or a generation embracing a questionable form of "integration" (Biko 1970a:26).

> Born shortly before [1994], I have lived all my conscious life in the framework of a reformation towards a free and fair society, or the hope thereof. A free South Africa in this framework entailed the integration of a segregated society, the rainbow nation as it was optimistically termed. My age mates and I read textbooks that propagated South Africa as a 'melting pot'. 'Multiracial', 'multicultural', 'model C', we were the experiment of 'freedom'. My friendships, my love, my education, my thinking and every other facet of my life have been carved and shaped within this context ... In stages during my life I have managed to outgrow some of the things the system taught me. Hopefully what I propose to do is to take a look at those who participate in opposition to the system – not from a detached point of view but from the point of view of backness (Biko 1970b:29).

Being shaped by a system and managing to outgrow the things that that system teaches, is an act of transgression. In some respects Biko and I iexperience South Africa differently. It is, however, in the desire to transgress an oppressive and

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discriminatory system that has shaped his being that Biko's South Africa runs parallel to my own. It is Biko's blackness, his oppositional action to an oppressive system, that keeps Biko, despite our differences, tentatively familiar to my South Africa. I refer to Biko's South Africa as apartheid South Africa and to the South Africa from which I speak (my South Africa), as South Africa post-apartheid, or more pertinently, as post-apartheid South Africa.

Franz Fanon's *Peau Noire, Masques Blanc* (1952) translated into English as *Black skin white masks* (1967), presents an investigation into a condition affecting the carriers of difference (black skin for Fanon) in a system using that difference as a determiner for discrimination and for oppression based on that discrimination. Reading *Black skin white masks* I identified with the masquerade exposed and the condition diagnosed. I was particularly taken aback by Fanon's prescription for this condition and his preoccupation with its administration – helping his patients become conscious (Fanon 1967:74). Fanon's diagnosis and prescription are here in direct dialogue with Biko's black consciousness and its administration to the black population of South Africa. Re-reading Biko in dialogue with Fanon, blackness and Biko's black consciousness can be correlated with post-apartheid South Africa. Nevertheless, dialogue between just Biko and Fanon needs laborious calibration to free it from the confines of the conditions of being, conditions like time and space. Strands of cultural theory preoccupied with the phenomenology of 'being' (Merleau-Ponty 1964; W.J.T. Mitchell 1994) stress the embodied nature of 'being' and implicitly its attachment to conditions like time and space. Such discourse persuades me to believe that a 'freeing' of Biko's and Fanon's conceptions of blackness from time and space through calibration is imprudent if at all achievable or a worthwhile preoccupation.

In an attempt to calibrate Biko's and Fanon's conceptions of blackness to post-apartheid South Africa, I began reading Stuart Hall, who fi ed me with enthusiasm, giving me a new perspective on Biko's and Fanon's dialogue. In its connection of race

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and power and their ever shifting relationships, Hall's project rejects the possibility of a total assemblage of the black unit called for by Biko. As an alternative to the quest for this unit, Hall calls for an understanding of the product of the cultural politics that blackness operates within and as a result of. Hall calls for a study into the practice of blackness. In a collection of writings by and about Stuart Hall, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (1996), Hall's life project is well illuminated by editors David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. In articles such as "The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees" (1986a), "Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity" (1986b), "New Ethnicities" (1989) and "What is this 'black' in black popular culture?" (1992) Hall lays out the grounds for his encouragement of dialogue between various conceptions of blackness. Hall morover reduces the cali-bration needed in such dialogue by embracing the shifting nature of race and power. His understanding and articulation of the movement, change, shift and practices of blackness was the catalyst to this study. Hall's adjunct to conceptions of blackness prompts an enquiry into blackness in multiple landscapes or within a landscape with shifting contexts.

The post-apartheid landscape proved a prime example of this shifting landscape and therefore ideal for an enquiry into blackness in multiple landscapes or within a landscape with shifting contexts. The study that follows is located within the case of blackness post-apartheid; it gives a dialectical reading of blackness and the black voice within such a context. Through Hall's conception of blackness, Biko's and / or Fanon's conception of blackness are jolted into action. In terms of conceptions of blackness, Biko's blackness –because of its formation within the South African context – is the primary voice in dialogue with Hall. My study focuses on the re-use and gives a re-reading of blackness post-apartheid. It also takes place within the framework of a Master's study in African-European Cultural Relations, concerned with mediation, particularly in the field of narratives, visual worlds and symbolic spaces. Neither Biko's nor Hall's conception of blackness alone is enough in such a framework. Biko's and Hall's conceptions of blackness as well as an assembly of other voices are therefore synthesised to gain a

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better understanding of the practice of blackness post-apartheid and, implicitly, practices of blackness in the shifting landscape.

Transgression is an important site in this study. Not only is it a site where conception meets practice, but it is a site where practices can be observed. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994), particularly its third chapter, "The other Question: Stereotype, discriminations and the discourse of colonialism", is a seminal text to understanding the workings of the racial stereotype in this study. In an exploration of the processes of subjectification, the effectivity and productivity of stereotype, Bhabha (1994) advocates for a 'transgression from the space of the other' as an apt process throuhg which to overcome an oppressive and discriminatory system. Bhabha sees transgression as an act of going beyond the limits set by a particular regime of truth. As an oppositional action to the oppression and discrimination of the apartheid system, blackness is apartheid's other. Transgression from the space of the other can therefore be understood as transgression from the space of blackness. This is an ideal site from which the practice of blackness can be observed.

In the act of transgression from the space of the other or the attempt thereof, conceptions of blackness are put into action and therefore linked to practices of blackness. With an interest in practices of blackness post-apartheid, this study is twofold: Conceptions of blackness form one fold, and practices of blackness another. Informed by conceptions of blackness (Biko 1970a, 1970b, 1971a, 1971b, 1973; Fanon 1976; Hall 1986a, 1986b, 1989, 1992 and Bhabha 1994) the study asks how blackness is practiced in the contemporary artistic practice of emerging black artists working in post-apartheid South Africa. As examples of leading artistic practice the works of Nandipha Mntambo, Nicholas Hlobo, Mary Sibande and Kudzanai Chiurai are studied. Blackness in practice – through the study of the above listed artists and their practice – is observed as oscillating between grouping and ungrouping motions. Assembled as a unit in one instance, this unit is disassembled in another.

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Assemblage is understood as the act or occurrence of bringing or coming together. This term is deliberately used in reference to an assembly of persons and / or machinery. Although implied, by the location of this study, in the visual arts, the term *assemblage* was not intentionally used to refer to the artistic form associated with cubism of grouping together found or unrelated objects. This unintended ambiguity benefits the study in its association with the visual arts. The artistic form's emphasis on perspective, multiple dimensions of surface and how found or unrelated objects can be synthesised into a concurrent visual unit, also supports the framework in which blackness is understood in this study. Assemblage, as in the artistic form, may be implied in ways that are beneficial to the study. Its historical contextualisation and theoretical implications are however not engaged with at all. Assemblage in this study is always used to refer to the act or occurrence of bringing or coming together.

(De)assemblage is adopted as a term to describe an oscillation between the actions of assembling and disassembling in practices of blackness. (De)assemblage is used interchangeably with (un)grouping. (Un)grouping like (de)assemblage implies the relationship between grouping and ungrouping currents in practices of blackness. This study asks how blackness is practised in the visual artistic practice of the upcoming black artists post-apartheid. It is for this reason that the study is titled: *Practising (de) assemblage: upcoming black artist on the South African scene 2008-2014.*

Upcoming artist is here understood as a young artist who has demonstrated exceptional ability in the past and continues to show potential to surpass their current success in the future. The artists studied here are examples of upcoming artists and a re. ection of the South African art world, the variety in its art schools and galleries. Mntambo studied at the University of Cape Town and is part of the Stevenson Gallery stable of artists; Hlobo studied at the University of Johannesburg and is also part of this stable; Sibande studied at the University of Johannesburg and is part of Gallery MOMO's stable; L Chiurai studied at the University of Pretoria and is part of the Goodman Gallery stable. The above listed

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artists are not only a good example of the South African art world, but also a sample of its best artistic practice. Mntambo, Hlobo and Sibande have all been recipients of the Standard Bank Young Artist of The Year Award: Hlobo (2009), Mntambo (2011), Sibande (2013). The Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year Award is recognised as one of South Africa's most prestigious awards, recognising and encouraging established young artists who have demonstrated exceptional ability (Mandie van der Spuy 2013). It is also recognised as an authori-tative accolade in the South African art world, able to propel an artist's career (Jean-Pierre de la Porte 2013b).

The years *2008-2014* represent the recent past and an increase in the frequency of black artists winning the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year Award. One may read an increase in black artists winning this award as an inevitability in post-apartheid South Africa. Working in an art world that historically excluded black artists and remains largely dominated by white presence, this increase is significant in terms of this study as a site at which the practice of blackness can be witnessed.

By *black artists* I mean black based on the blackness of their skin, in this way I take the artists dealt with here as an assemblage. Some may ask if the artists themselves identify with this assemblage or whether it is an imposed identity. My position here, informed by Biko, Fanon and Hall, is that yes, they are black, not forcefully assembled by me for the benefit of this study but by the context in which they work. Unlike Hall (1992) who asks, "What is this 'black 'in black popular culture?" and from here asserts a set of cultural politics, race, class and sex, that make (de)assembling the monolithic black subject possible, the artists studied here are seen as an assemblage – black – by virtue of the country they practice in whose systems assemble them asblack based on the blackness of their skin. I accept the inevitability of having to study art and artistic practice beyond racial discrimination and blackness. Black visual artists are, however, being isolated in this study to illuminate the practices of blackness contemporary to the post-apartheid moment. An artist's desire to be seen as an

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artist and not as a black artist is the desire to not be seen through the lenses of a racial discrimination that validates oppression based on that discrimination. This desire is the desire for freedom. Freedom is a predominant force in the practice of blackness. The assemblage of black visual artists is in this study isolated in order to illuminate the operation of blackness – to prove its (de)assemblage.

The application of different 'voices' within this study is a methodological tool that was initially used unconsciously. To describe the shifting nature of blackness a single voice proved inadequate. Taking on several 'voices' was therefore necessary to engage with certain aspects of this study. During the course of the study mostly three voices are used to communicate various positions. The first is a distant analytical voice which is used for the bulk of this study. This voice tries to remain 'objective' and distant to follow a logical argument giving reasonable evidence. This voice can be recognised in phrases such as "In the following argument," "In the study", "To prove this, it is important to". At some points, however, 'I' found it necessary to take on a voice of identification. This voice is 'the I' and 'the me', it is characterised by a poetic and reflective tone in comparison to the first voice. This voice is the voice that, identifies with what Biko when he says, "'*My* age mates and *I* read textbooks that propagated South Africa as a melting pot. 'Multicultural', 'multiracial', 'model C', we were the experiment of 'freedom'". The third voice is the voice of the artists and thinkers with whom the study is, and with whom I am, in dialogue. This voice is characterised by long quotations. Using the oscillation of voices as a methodological tool, I try to articulate the shifting practices of blackness post-apartheid.

This study is woven together as follows: blackness is read as an action opposing racial discrimination and oppression based on that discrimination. An action is practised; blackness is therefore practised. Systems are organised within limits: oppressive systems like apartheid South Africa are no exception; transgression is the practice of breaking through the limit; apartheid order is maintained by groundless discrimination to contain the other; blackness is apartheid's other; transgression from the space of

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the other can be understood as transgression from the space of blackness; transgression is an action; transgression is therefore a site where blackness acts, where it is practised. To witness how blackness is practised one can study how it transgresses form the space of the other.

This study is located within the visual artistic practice of a selected group of upcoming black artists on the South African scene. Informed by conceptions of blackness, the artistic practices of this selected group is studied. Multiple voices are added to support the study. In this way a dialectical reading of blackness post-apartheid is given. The practice of blackness is observed as oscillating between assembling and disassembling motions waning towards equilibrium – freedom – in a system perturbed from equilibrium by a displacing force – racial discrimination and oppression based on that discrimination in the South African case of blackness. Evidence gathered and examples given in this study point to blackness as a practice of (de)assemblage.

Sikho Siyotula

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tozuko, a page for you as promised.

CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

Blackness and oppression based on racial discrimination are opposing forces. Blackness is a reaction to oppression based on racial discrimination. Where racial discrimination is perturbatory in relation to the freedom of oppressed persons, blackness is restoratory. Both blackness and racial discrimination are actions; they are practised. Located within visual artistic practice, how blackness is practised is studied here. Blackness in practice is observed as oscillating between unit and collective, grouping and ungrouping motions, assemblage and disassemblage – (de) assemblage. It is found that the practice of (de)assemblage is a response to discrimination; a response that tends towards an equilibrium in the form of freedom.

1.1 Background to the study

In October 2013 Gallery MOMO hosted a series of lectures titled *Art, Power and Place*. The series of lectures were presented by Jean-Pierre de la Porte, a writer, philosopher and research director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Architecture and Infrastructure. De la Porte (2013a) took a historical perspective with the intention of unpacking South African contemporary art. The eighth and nal lecture titled *Breaking the spell: is South African art South African,* will be taken as the main point of departure for this study. My study will to rebutt de la Porte's argument and to propose more appropriate ways of understanding and framing contemporary art practice in post-apartheid South Africa.

From an African-European cultural relational perspective I found the framing of de la Porte's final lecture, in an otherwise very enlightening series, extremely problematic.

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By an African-European cultural relational perspective I mean an approach to cultural contact that aims to look at moments of connectivity, that understands history as an ongoing and collaborative project, in this way dispelling the myth of origin: See Foucault (1970), Lotman (1990), Said (1978), Hall (1989, 1990, 1992), Snow (1998), Welsch (1999), Mamdani (2001), Longsdale (2002), and Mbembe (2002). My first reservation lies with the title of de la Porte's final lecture *Breaking the spell: is South African art South African?* If it is understood that history is a collaborative ongoing project, and if it is also understood that even the hegemonic moment is not a moment of simple unity, but a process of unification never totally achieved (Hall 1989:437). In the framing of his question, de la Porte sets himself up in a trap, a downward spiral revolving around questions such as, 'What exactly is South African?' 'Can anything ever be South African?' 'Moreover, 'does it matter if an essentially South African identity can or cannot somehow be traced and found, if at all it exists?'

De la Porte's final lecture focused on South African Art History from 1912, the signing of the Act of Unity declaring South Africa as a post-colonial state.[1] De la Porte argues that, in this time, and even more so in the 1960s, with the formation of the Republic, South African artists grappled with finding their own voice in the art world. He lists a number of South African painters he considers the masters in the history of South African art and argues that their work is always linked to some or other great European artist. For de la Porte many South African masters appropriated or even directly copied European artists, but very few, in his words, "managed in the history of South African art to hold their own" (de la Porte 2013a) or exert influence back to the European market. He mentions a variety of South African greats, showing how their work assimilated, appropriated and often copied European artists. He compares the work of Alexis Preller to that of Salvador

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1 As explained by Attwell (2005:1) if we pass over discriminations then, in a formal sense, South Africa became post-colonial in 1912 with the Act of Union.

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Dali, Gerard Sekoto to Pablo Picasso, William Kentridge to Oskar Kokoshka, Karel Nel to Jim Nut and Johannes Phokela to Lucian Freud.

My first counter-argument would be that all artists (Western artists being no exception) are influenced by other artists, specifically those artists that came before them. It must also be taken into account that 'fine art' in South Africa from the Act of Union right up to the years of Republic remained largely dominated by white South Africans who identified largely with the European canon of art as the only canon of art and would, because of this, have tried not to distance their work from what was going on in Europe at the time, in this way affirming their 'Europeanness'.[2] De la Porte (2013b) acknowledges that all artists are influenced by master works of art but argues that, when one studies great European artists, one finds what seems to be an urgency to shake off the style of their masters and find their own style. He argues that, in the case of South Africa, this urgency does not exist, concluding that South African artists lack an anxiety about influence.

The final group of artists de la Porte uses as an example to prove his argument are the Standard Bank Young Artist Awardees in the recent past. He recognises the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year Awards as an authoritative accolade in the South African art world, able to propel an artist's career. Studying the works of the artists that have received this award in the recent past, he argues that these artists also seem not to have an anxiety about influence. I find this argument interesting because I study this exact group of artists with a different reading of what influence

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2   In an exploration into birthplaces, ancestors and ancestral spirits in South African Literature, Midgeley (2006: 81) points out, "South African and social identities remained fluid for the first part of the nineteenth century. Institutional politics took the lead from Britain and most colonial writers followed suit by intentionally writing for European audiences. Always conscious of the lower social status of the colonist, writers tended studiously to avoid associating with the land they described. It is not surprising therefore that many of the writers of the period - like the politicians (and artists as is stressed) turned to Europe, where political liberalism dominated, in their thinking."

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dominates their work. In my reading, more than trying to appeal to some European aesthetic, the work and the group of artists studied as a collective instead tries to affirm and/or challenge its 'blackness', relying on confronting standard anthropological and popular-media constructions of what it means to be, amongst other things, 'Xhosa', 'black', 'South African', 'African', ' woman'.

De la Porte's reading of this group of artists' work has made me more open to the possibility that I may be missing some of the nuances in their work. I am, however also more determined as a result of his argument to explore the complex facets, references and contradictions that make up the works of this group of artists and how these references and contradictions are practised in their work.

1.2 Theoretical approach of the study

In my study I take from Hall, who takes from Gramsci,[3] in an engagement with the deconstruction of the monolithic signifier 'black'. I acknowledge that, to deconstruct this signifier, it is helpful to particularise members of the unit. By exposing the ambiguities and inconsistencies that form the unit, it becomes easier to see that the term in very few ways represents a uniform signifier that can, given the chance, speak on behalf of all black bodies. It also becomes apparent that 'black' identity is an identity made up of a variety of configurations whose combinations are specific and vary in response to cultural flows for various black bodies. In such an under-taking the work of Said (1978), particularly his cross-cultural approach of looking at the east from the west and the west from the east, having been educated in both, is ever present and cannot be avoided. In the study of black bodies, I take from Alcoff (2005) that the variety of configurations of black bodies are expedited by the phenomenology of racial embodiment. In other words, that these configurations are directed by the black bodies' need to adapt to and survive the structures of its environment. Most important for the focus of this study, these configurations

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3 See Morley and Chen (1996) in a reading of Gramsci's relevance to the study of race and ethnicity.

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are not determined by that blackness. Here two descriptions of black as a signifie for identity become important to my study:

> Blacks are "those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against, a group in the South African society identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations." (Biko 1971a:52)

> "Blackness as a sign is never enough. What does that black subject do, how does it act, how does it think politically… being black isn't really good enough for me: I want to know what your cultural politics are" (bell hooks in Hall 1992:474)

Biko's and Hall's brand of blackness should be understood as streams of the larger Pan Africanist movement. Biko's blackness in particular is a Pan Africanist adaptation for South African emancipation from apartheid for a South African audience. Like Pan Africanism, blackness and black consciousness are reactionary terms and a movement that unifies a collective on an experiential basis. Both terms are mobilised as a means to an end – to see Africa regain its freedom from discrimination as a resultant of slavery and colonial rule. Both terms are mobilised or put into action in aspiration of freedom. Blackness in this way is borne from a genealogy of slavery, colonialism, decolonisation and apartheid. Black consciousness stretches back to the late eighteenth century, with the Pan-Africanism formed in Europe, America and the Caribbean. The movement was here used as a form of unity amongst black slaves, a way of remembering and affirming their African heritage outside the continent. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, with the French and American Revolutions and the independence of Haiti, black consciousness was yet again invigorated, used as a means of mobilising black people who at the time lived in oppressive conditions. This solidarity is yet again turned to in the twentieth century in the fight for African independence from colonial rule.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the study

To follow the argument put forward in this study, it is important to appreciate two

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strands in Biko's description of the term Black: first y, "blacks are a group (a collective) who are discriminated against as a group" (Biko 1971a:52) and secondly, "to fight for emancipation this group identifies themselves as a unit" (Biko 1971:52). Institutionalised discrimination continues in South Africa post-apartheid, affecting the economic, social and political lives of black people. Because of the legal fall of the system, however, a time when 'blacks' in South Africa are not discriminated against as a group, and therefore do not as a unit need to fight for emancipation, can be envisioned. To be sure, the position of this study by no means assumes that black people in South Africa are emancipated as a result of the legal fall of apartheid. This study rather takes the position that, with the legal fall of apartheid, the circumstances under which Biko imagines blackness, are altered. The assumption, as a result, is that this alteration should have an effect on blackness. In my study I imagine, as Hall does, the end of the essentialist back subject, in Biko's terms the end of the black unit. The end of the essentialist black subject:

> entails recognition that the central issue of race always appears historically in articulation with other categories and divisions that are constantly crossed and re-crossed by categories of class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality. (Hall 1989: 444)

Blackness as described by Biko articulates the hegemonic moment insightfully. It is timely, however, to expand on this description by recognising the implications of the nuances within the unit. With this recognition, "the hegemonic moment is no longer conceptualised as a moment of simple unity, but as a process of unification never totally achieved" (Hall 1989:437).

By disassembling black experience, that is, by appreciating historical and experiential difference within and between communities, regions, countries, cities, national cultures and diaspora, as well as recognising other kinds of differences that place, position and locate black people, Hall (1992:473) recommends the cultural politics that make deconstructing the monolithic black subject possible. The question asked in my study is how these politics are practised in contemporary post-apartheid art

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made by emerging black artists.

1.4 Research methodology

To engage with the above stated question, this study focuses on the following artists: Nandipha Mntambo, Nicholas Hlobo, Mary Sibande and Kudzanai Chiurai – a group of upcoming young 'black' artists in the South African art scene. The first three artists have all consecutively been recipients of the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year Award. As noted by de la Porte (2013b), the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year Award is authoritative in the visual arts in South Africa. Winners of this award receive financial sponsorshi , critical acclaim and exposure. [4]

Chiurai studied at the University of Pretoria and is currently based in Johannesburg. He is included in the study as a necessary addition to this group first y as part of the continental African diaspora living in South Africa and secondly on the conviction that his practice, like the practice of the artists chosen here, is an example of best contemporary South African visual art practice.

The study grapples with how these particular young artists, who form a collective that can be understood as black (in terms of Biko's description) are practising and negotiating a set of cultural politics (as described by hooks) that make deconstructing the monolithic black subject possible. The artists individual artistic practices and negotiation of cultural politics in relation to the collective's artistic practice and negotiations of cultural politics, are used to suggest the practice of deconstructing the monolithic black subject in the post-apartheid state.

1.5 Visual textual overview

Nandipha Mntambo's and Nicholas Hlobo's work in this study speak to (de)assemble

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4 Chiurai is the only artist in the selected group who is not a Standard Bank Artist of the Year awardee. Born in Zimbabwe, Chiurai is not eligible to receive this award reserved for South African citizens.

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the place of the ritualistic and the earthy. Their work seemingly reinforces the idea of 'native art' as magical, ritualistic and somehow close to the earth. Mntambo uses cow hide as her main medium. Through it she explores the materiality of culture, specifically the connotations constructed around material. Mntambo links what she views as the memory of material to memory in general, explaining that the hide recollects the shape of the previous object around which it was moulded (Makhubu 2012). The Nguni attribution of material value to cattle and their historical use of cattle hide as battle-shield and clothing is an obvious and immediate frame of reference for Mntambo. Anthropological classification and reasoning within this frame of reference is never too far away; hence the work signifies in some way the magical and ritualistic. Mntambo is conscious of this and very often destabilises this link by making references to other cultures that point to cattle in relation to the body. This is done to make a point about material cultures as being constructed. Also concerned with the destabilising of the hegemony of 'culture' is Nicholas Hlobo. Through his work Hlobo has tried to create a world around his identity and sexuality. Hlobo is interested in the ways in which his identity and sexuality connect to his personal inner world and biography. Hlobo expresses the paradox of being Xhosa son, Eastern Cape homeboy, gay cosmopolitan art world rising star (Gevisser 2009:10).

Mary Sibande is the recipient of the 2013 Standard Bank Award. Her work explores the coming to terms with a colonial past marked by exploitation of labour and servitude. Through her work the artist delves into the history and psychology of contemporary South African society. Sibande focuses on her personal experience as a frame of reference. She has worked for a number of years developing the protagonist in her work, Sophie. Sophie is a complex and multifaceted figu e who emerges out of the artist's family's linear inheritance of servitude. Sibande's mother, grandmother and great-grandmother were all domestic workers. Sophie embodies simultaneously Sibande's lineages as well as generations of domestic workers that form part of South Africa's colonial history. Most importantly, she embodies their desires and fantasies, based on memories of her mother's, grandmother's, and all

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her other female relatives' conversations about what they wish they could have had or what they wish they could do. Sophie is always in a state of transforming herself, always trying to go beyond what is expected of being a domestic worker. Her eyes stay closed, refusing the limitations of her reality. Through Sophie, Sibande challenges assumptions concerning belonging, class, race, gender, sexuality. This is done from the context from which she stems and to which she refers (Wiarda 2011).

While Sibande, Mntambo and Hlobo deal with predicaments that are directly linked with the post-apartheid state, and while their work is indicative of a generation of artists shaped by a climate of forgiveness, democracy, multi-cultulturalism and equality, Kudzanai Chiurai's work carries different overtones. In his art work, Zimbabwean born Chiurai grapples with Africanness at large. He adds a different sensibility to this collective of artists. The series of photographic tableaus titled *State of the nation* tells the story of events leading up to the inaugural speech by the first democratically elected prime minister of a fictional African state. Chiurai's images are photographed in his studio by his long-time collaborator, Jurie Potgieter. Chiurai uses a variety of visual images from news archives, art historical sources and the visual language of hip-hop culture as reference. Working with media-constructed images popularised through movies, music and videos, Chiurai is interested in where the visual images that picture and document African history come from – moreover: who has an influence over the images that are currently being produced (Heidenreich-Seleme & O'Toole 2012).

(De)assembling the black subject is not only useful in exposing the cultural politics that are at play when the unit (de)assembles itself, as in the post-apartheid state. Deconstructing the black subject is also an opportunity to study how the postmodern condition is practised. If the postmodern condition is marked by mobility, globalisation, and connectivity, in a world that is now more than ever mobile, globalised, and connected through the internet with people on the move, perhaps this is a practice worth mastering.

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By understanding, as Hall (1992) does, the black subject as the prototype of the postmodern, it becomes a site where the postmodern can be (de)assembled and studied. When black as a unit is (de)assembled, it becomes obvious that the unit is in fact a collective. As an adaptation to moving between spaces that are externally cat-egorised as mutually exclusive, the postmodern condition prompts one to acquire ways of being that are externally seen as contradictory. Fanon (1960:96) diagnoses the condition of inhabiting two contradictory worlds as a "nervous condition". He also points out that this condition, in a system that does not acknowledge this way of being as the norm, spawns illicit desires. Far from being nervous, however, the group of artists in this study seem at times to be at ease with these contradictions and illicit desires, sometimes taking them for granted but at other times acting as "nervous" as Fanon had diagnosed. The question that will inform my ongoing study is: how are the cultural politics that make deconstructing the black subject possible, practised by emerging Black artists post-apartheid?

1.6   Outline of chapters

The study is broken down into three chapters that will engage the above question: chapter two, *The place of the ritualistic and the earthy;* chapter three, *Staging Sophie's death*; and chapter four, *Re-Africanisation, the (de)assemblage of blackness.* The chapters speak to some of the overarching approaches that this group of artists have taken in their work. When examined, such approaches (de)assemble a monolithic black identity: they collect, or bring it together (assemble), but also and at times simultaneously take it apart [(de)assemble].

Chapter two, *The place of the ritualistic and the earthy*, explores the place of the 'rit-ualistic', 'ancestral' and 'earthy' in the works of Hlobo and Mntambo. Here ideas of the invention of tradition, the anthropological project in Africa and the workings of the racial stereotype, transgression and how traditional and the earthy are used by Mntambo and Hlobo in their work, are explored. In the third chapter, *Staging Sophie's death,* it is argued that the staging of Sophie's death is a metaphorical staging

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of blackness.

*Re-Africanisation, the (de)assemblage of blackness, t*he fourth chapter, explores the African diaspora around the world and the difference it brings to the collective 'black' within a South African context. This is done in reference to the work of Chiurai. This chapter is anchored in how the African Union is making use of cultural politics in an attempt to revitalise the Pan-Africanist movement.

The fifth and final chapter concludes the study, synthesising the findings of the previouse three chapters. Because chapters two, three and four can be seen as independent of each other, the final concluding chapter is extensive. This is a necessary step to making sure that all aspects of the study's parameters are made clear. In its findings, the study does not have an exact answer to its question. It does, however, present a theory that can be used as a starting point to understanding practices of blackness.

CHAPTER TWO:

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In the literature, the post-apartheid landscape is widely accepted as one which is porous, disjointed and fractured [See Williamson and Jamal (1996), Mamdani (2001), Lonsdale (2002), Mbembe (2002), Peffer (2003), Hook (2005, 2013), Dlamini (2009, 2014)]. When Biko mobilises blackness as a tool to fight the oppression of the Apartheid of the '60s and '70s, he sees the blackness an amalgamation of a collective united by a cause. Post-apartheid, the agent which amalgamates this collective, namely oppression, at times struggles to hold together and at other times seems to completely disintegrate. To guard myself from projecting the optimism for post-apartheid South Africa which marks my generation, I cau-tiously consider that this agent (oppression) may have disintegrated only on the level of legality. Even so, a change in legality post-apartheid clears a space where a South Africa that is not marked by an oppressive system can be im-agined. At times, however, even within the space cleared for the imagination of post-apartheid, blackness has a way of quickly regrouping itself, as if again in opposition to an oppressive system, so that in some situations a person is as 'black' as Biko had perceived it, and at other times is engaging rather with 'cultural politics'. How blackness is performed by post-apartheid artists through their work is the ongoing question asked in this study.

By deconstructing black experience, that is, by appreciating historical and experiential difference within and between communities, regions, countries, cities, national cultures and diaspora, as well as recognising other kinds of differences that place, position and locate black people, Hall (1992:473) recommends the cultural politics

that make deconstructing the monolithic black subject possible. The question asked in my study is how these politics are practised in contemporary post-apartheid art made by emerging black artists.

2.1 Demarcating the place of the ritualistic and earthy

Propagating the ritualistic and the earthy is a key colonial strategy to maintaining colonial order (Lonsdale (2002), Mamdani (2001), Hook (2005), Hall (1992)). To maintain the idea of Europe as progressive, the other is branded as primitive: closer to the earth, ritualistic and ethnic. Hall (1992) aptly notes that the idea of Europe also having ethnicity is a recent development, and that, during colonialism, ethnicity was reserved for the other. Apartheid South Africa in similar ways indulged difference.[5] Williamson (in Williamson and Jamal 1996) points out that even as recently as 1989 this dichotomy is still employed at the most progressive international group shows.[6]

This chapter is thematically anchored by an exploration of the place of the ritualistic and the earthy in the practice of blackness post-apartheid with particular reference to the works of Nandipha Mntambo and Nicholas Hlobo. Blackness here is understood as the notion constructed as a reaction to processes of subjectification. Such processes as manifested in the apartheid system are borne out of genealogies spanning the enlightenment, the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. The place of the ritualistic and the earthy in this chapter is explored as a means of understanding a more encompassing subject, namely: how, in their works, post-apartheid artists are (de)assembling the notion of blackness

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5 See Peffer (2003).

6 Williamson notes that in 1989 the Pompidou Centre in Paris hosted a show titled *Magiciens de la Terre* (Magicians of the Earth). The agenda of the show was to show "fir t" and "third" world artists on the same stage as equals. In the exhibition, however, most of the artists that can be considered cool, intellectual, and conceptual were Westerners, whereas artists whose work seemed more earthy and ritualistic were non-westerners. The result, therefore, was a propagation of non-Western artists as magician, primitive and somehow close to the earth, and the Western artist, on the contrary, as 'modern', 'progressive' and 'up-to-date' (Williamson and Jamal 1996:8).

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through varied, fractured and porous practices of blackness.

In an engaging critique, Mbembe (2002) chronicles the various modes of writing the self employed by the African imagination. Mbembe argues that, in an attempt to hypothesise African identity, and in response to colonialism, nativist and so called radicals write the self in problematic ways. Biko's mobilisation of the term is not short of such problems. As a means to an end, such problematics can be justified. Post-apartheid the term (black and black identity) is more fractured than ever and functions here as a means without a clear end. Despite the absence or questionability of an end, the term still has its currency, namely: people still identify with the term ,assembling in its name. As a consequence of this now more apparent disjuncture, when blackness is mobilised, post-apartheid, one is never sure which splinter of the fracture it speaks to.

The problem of blackness post-apartheid is unoriginally anchored by fixity and essentialism. Nowhere are the shortcomings of fixity and essentialism that give birth to nativist and radical ways of hypothesising African identity more appreciated than in postmodern and more specifical y post-apartheid academia. Having come out of the South African academic system post-apartheid, the artists I investigate here are part of the generation that studied during the height of the propagation of peace. Some have argued that the rainbow has faded, although its ideals remain intact and are still at play in post-apartheid South Africa. The artists studied here are an example of the manifestation of the consciousness or the grading against essentialism. While these artists try to establish other orders of being, remainders of hypotheses of African identity that are problematic in their essentialism linger in and infiltrate into their work. In his critique Mbembe (2002:258) gives recommenda-tions of how all-purpose signifiers constituted by slavery, colonisation and apartheid, signifiers like 'African' or 'black', for the sake of this study, could creatively be conceived of:

> On a philosophical level, priority must be given to interrogating the

imprisoning model of a history that is already shaped and that one can only undergo or repeat – and addressing that which, in actual African experiences of the world, has escaped such determination. On a more anthropological level, the obsession with uniqueness and difference must be opposed by a thematic of sameness. In order to move away from resentment and lamentation over the loss of a *nom propre*, we must clear an intellectual space for rethinking those temporalities that are always simultaneously branching out toward several different futures and in so doing open the way for the possibility of multiple ancestries. Finally on a sociological level, attention must be given to the contemporary everyday practices through which Africans manage to recognize and maintain the world an unprecedented familiarity – practices through which they invent something that is their own and that beckons to the world in its generality.

Such recommendations can be implemented with bountiful results. However, even in the best practices, remainders of problematic modes of hypothesising black identity do not dislodge. They manage to affect even well-conceived recommendations.

2.2 Black? Who, me? Never!

Skins hang suspended from the ceiling (Figure 1). They seem to dance around the room taking full form only as you yourself move around the room and read them as more than just hanging skins, but carcasses: stiff, fixed into a form, a female form. As much as the stiffness of this form leads you on a tangent, wondering about the forms that once were …, alive … the remainders of those forms that stand in front of you pull you back from that tangent and are what keep you intrigued, questioning your own corporeality; where it starts and where it ends. If it ends.

Dead skins hang from a ceiling.

All your art, your art is very racial, it's impossible to see your images

without immediately knowing or seeing who you are. And it's also regarded as protest art … As time passes will your art transform to be more colour blind than it currently is?
(Transformations seminar 2014).

an American man asks a panel of black artists from South Africa and The United States of America in a discussion organised by Patrick Gaspard, the American ambassador to South Africa at the Wits Art Museum (WAM) (2014). I assume the man is American by the drawl in his voice. He directs this question at all the artists, but I gather that it is a response to one artist's work in particular. As the artist explains, the work was inspired by a racial incident that took place at a "fairly integrated" Jena High School in Jena, Louisiana.[7] In the incident, nooses were strung from a tree referred to as the "white tree" after a black student asked at an assembly if he too could sit under the tree (Flaherty 2007).

Racism-slavery-lynching?
Noose strung from a tree, as a readily available and effective symbol of racism at a high school almost fty years after the Civil Rights Movement in America ….
How seldom this symbol of racism crossed my mind in the daily interactions, in an arguably still racialised post-apartheid South Africa, where subliminal or overt racism can never be totally ruled out.

I am a black female born in Johannesburg (1989).
Lived in Tembisa (1990s).
Moved to Centurion (2000s).
Studied art at the University of Pretoria (2010s).

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7 According to an article (Flaherty 2007) posted in 2008 the incident happened in 2006, but the artist reports 2008.

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Figure 1: Nandipha Mntambo, *Silence and dreams*, 2008. Cowhide, cow's tails, resin, polyester mesh, waxed cord installation of 8 igures, c 245 x 650 cm (Variable Dimensions). (Mntambo 2008).

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Lynching … that seldom crossed my daily interactions.

Looking at Mntambo's works my thoughts hover first y around my own work, a body of work, *Remainders of the ephemeral* (2011): the body without organs, intestines, digestive system, caul fat hanging. Being in and amongst these works I am then reminded of my grandmother's house, the memory of which memory gave birth to my *Remainders of the ephemeral*. I am reminded of the long road to the Eastern-Cape and of ritual. Inevitably, if I am on the N2 south bound, I am on my way to partake, observe, or be an accessory to a ritual. That ritual for me is non-specific. The specificity of that ritual, for now, I trust, is in the hands of those that have come before me. I dread the day I will have to know what to do how and when. What is specific, is the flesh of body that will fall and the remainders of that bodythat will hang: Caul fat in my memory, and in my body of work; skin here, in the work of Mntambo. But it's not just about the viewer. One could argue: why so personal? Give yourself some distance from the image. There is a danger in over identification.

Simbao (2011:15) interviews Mntambo:

> **Simbao:** while some writers attempt to interpret your reference to cows as a direct illustration of certain African traditions and rituals, in your work and in conversations about your work you seem to distance yourself from that. Can you say something about your work in terms of this ambivalence, particularly as someone who grew up in Johannesburg, as someone who is a different generation form your mother who might see the symbol of the cow in a much more cultural context? How does your work speak to you as an urban, cosmopolitan person of a young generation?

> **Mntambo:** In my opinion the issue is that cowhide is a material. I could be a painter, or I could be someone who draws – cowhide is the material that I have chosen as a means of expression, it is a product of my artistic thinking. I wanted to be a forensic pathologist and I really love chemicals and understanding the chemical process … I

don't know if that's the only reason, but my beginning to use cowhide was a very private, strangely spiritual experience of having a dream that I can't really remember. But I do remember there were cows in the dream. This is why I chose the material. I enjoy exploring how a chemical process can give me a certain amount of control over this organic material.

Simbao: How long ago was that dream?

Mntambo: That was seven years ago now. Then I connected the content of this dream to a very superficial linking of chemicals and a desire to understand the material and how it works; how to manipulate it. And so I think for me it's never going to be about a particular culture. I just happen to be black. I could be Chinese or Indian. I think that some writers find it the easiest to speak about black women and *lobola* and whatever, but it's never going to be about that, it never was about that, it's about an interest in dead material and chemicals and the connection that every civilisation in the world has to the cow. We all have an experience of the animal – it's one of the many things that connect us.

How quickly Mntambo runs away from being a black woman – anything but that: Chinese, Indian, a painter, a draftsman, European male. Anything but that which marks her as black. Science, chemical, reason and fact are her drugs of choice. They are used here to drown out the fierce ethnographic stench of otherness evoked by her carcasses. I am reminded of Hook's (2005:705) reading of the depiction of racial otherness in the writings of Hondirus (in Coetzee 1988:12), one of the first Western writings to be recorded in Southern Africa. On the one hand, Hook (2005:701) writes, "one is here confronted with an almost ethnographic mode of exposition … On the other, we have a writing that seethes with anxiety at the radical otherness which it witnesses and which it struggles to contain. So different is the world thus entered … that the text becomes a catalogue of what can barely be believed, a radiant source of otherness, frightened unto itself".

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Mntambo's outright refusal and rejection of the stereotype presented to her as being present in her work, takes on similar undertones.

In a text seminal to the workings of otherness, Bhabha (1994) suggests that the point of intervention in terms of the stereotype does not come from dismissing it as Mntambo's understandably scathing tone does here. Contrary to Mntambo's strategy, Bhabha (1994) emphasises that the stereotype should not be dismissed but displaced, and that this is possible only by engaging with the effectivity of the stereotype. In pursuit of an engagement with this effectivity, Bhabha (1994: 96) suggests that, "In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth, not to subject its representations to a normalising judgment." By hypothesising colonial powers' regime of truth Bhabha (1994) believes that it becomes possible to understand,[8] "that otherness is both an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference, contained within the fantasy of origin and identity". Such a reading reveals the boundaries of colonial discourse and enables a transgression of such limits from the space of otherness (Bhabha 1994:96).

"I think for me it's never going to be about a particular culture. I just happen to be black", says Mntambo (in Simbao 2011:15). Mntambo's is arguably a reaction stemming from frustration, frustration of being fi ed racially, sexually, culturally and historically [9]. Denial is employed as a strategy to escape her work being read through the prism of the racial stereotype: black female artists making work about *lobola*. This strategy, however, does little to reveal the boundaries which Bhabha believes, can

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8 Fanon and Biko would say it becomes possible to be conscious.

9 In the literature the responses of a subject that is denied humanity or is threatened with inferiority is well noted. See Fanon (1967), Bhabha (1994), Hook (2005) and Mbembe (2002). Mbembe (2002: 253) notes that the denial of humanity or attribution of inferiority has forced African responses into contradictory positions that are often concurrently expressed. There is a universalistic position: "We are human beings like any other". And there is a particularistic position: "We have a glorious post that testifies to our humanity"

challenge the steriotype – and in the best scenarios, enable a transgression of the stereo-type from the space of the other, when those boundries are made visible.

In her choice to throw herself into the abyss of cultural ow, Mntambo's skins seem to drag heavily behind her, unable to make the jump. As a result, her strategy serves only to reproduce the dichotomy from which she tries to move away from. This is cemented by questionable statements like "my beginning to use cowhide was a very private, strangely spiritual experience of having a dream that I can't really remember. But I do remember that there were cows in the dream. This is why I chose the material". The quasi-mysticism in a statement like this evokes the anthropological gaze from which Mntambo tries to run away. Similarly, the chemicals used to cure Mntambo's work of its unavoidable material condition – decay, ferment and rot – is read here as an attempt to cure, condition and contain its otherness – its blackness, her blackness.

Many loaves of bread are baked around the world; this number is multiplied when not only space as in geography but time as in history and genealogies are taken into consideration: *i'Loaf white*, ideal for making *i'kotha*, is significantly different from Albany's white and brown loaf; Sasko's low GI brown loaf; the first generation of whole wheat breads; Sasko's new range of seed breads; *umkhupha – umkhupha* made with yellow mielies, *umkhupha* made with mielie-meal; *ujeqe – ujeqe* made with instant flou , *ujeqe* made with yeast; *roti; pita;* the *baguette* and the *pretzel*. Bread-is-bread-is-bread seems to be Mntambo's argument. Mntambo seems to emphasise connectivity by showing how 'we' are all linked to this bread. In an embrace of the universalism of bread, is it necessary to deny the history of the pita with all its religious, geographic and … yes, chemical subtleties? Let us for a moment consider why Krog (2009: 47) bakes *boerbeskuit:*

> The 'plant' appeared to be my mother's bread-yeast plant that she got
> from her mother, who got it in turn form her mother, and so forth,

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back to the Anglo-Boer War – that was the origin of this plant. One bakes bread and *boerbeskuit* form this plant with no more than one spoon of sugar, one spoon of salt, six spoons of fat, ten double hands of flour… es, although it's the twenty-first century, with the biggest variety of breads and *beskuit* available in human history, I bake *boerbeskuit.*

The steps to bake this *beskuit* are usually as follows: I notice that the *beskuit* is finished. I think I will go and buy some. I stand in the *tuisnywerheid* or in front of the Ouma's Rusks at the supermarket and remember my mother saying: '*Jong,* a woman who does not even bake her own *beskuit* …' The silence completing the sentence conveys possibilities ranging from treason to fratricide of rotting fingernails. Then I sigh, and go back home. I take the plant from the shelf, as I do now, add sugar, salt and lukewarm water. I clean the pans, and wait for the yeast to rise up to make a second, bigger, morass-like batch with fat, lukewarm milk and flou . I start to wonder why I am going to all this trouble. But this time, with my head filled with thoughts of murder and betrayal, the baking keeps me busy with safe, familiar rhythms.

The main characteristic of *boerbeskuit* is that it is quite hard and unsoakable. 'You mean hardish,' my mother would sniff. 'But it had to withstand all kinds of weather in a leather *saalsak* while on commando. Your ancestors fought the whole war on this.'

And nally it is time to knead. Knead? 'How can a woman negotiate her own life if she can't knead properly?' my mother would ask. Yes, not pummelling against a hump of dough with skinny red sts, no, but bringing the fists down, slow and purposeful, right from the armpit down into the dough as if to measure the real extent of one's power. I feel how my fists become broad, placing themselves with buttery strategy, and how the texture of the dough generously changes under my knuckles. As I knead I feel how the heat rises blissfully towards

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my elbows.

I put a lid on the bowl and cover it with the bread blanket. 'People don't have bread blankets anymore,' my mother would sigh, 'because nothing grows old in their houses – everything is either new or rubbish.'

By early midday the dough has risen smoothly like a maiden's buttock form the bowl. I roll arms of dough, cut them with a knife, pack double layers in the bread pans and put them into the oven. After half an hour the smell starts to fill the kitchen. It drifts into the neighbourhood. It teaches people the word 'reeling'. It enables them to spell 'salivary glands'. My children, who are home for the weekend, appear from their rooms and games and books and homework to stand in the doorway. I boil water for coffee… 'People don't cook properly any more,' my mother would say. 'In these white kitchens, they only seem to mix cocktails or chop vegetables for the TV.'

…I know what will happen next time. I'll think: this really takes too long. I'll choose a fi e-star recipe with a brick of margarine, two cups of sugar, a house-payment of seeds and fruit, yoghurt and vitamins. And everyone will become sick of it, sick! And then next time … the fruit jar will come off the shelf…

Undeniably, there is a universalism in Krog's nostalgia. This universalism draws you into her nostalgia on a level of 'humanity': the generational dialogue carried in food; the material and the experiential that links one generation to the next, exemplified here in the plant passed from one generation to the next and the physical kneading of dough. In the same breath, Krog's nostalgia is also interlaced with fantasy, myth and legend that is specific to space and time. The specificity of *boerbeskuit* as a symbol: its smell, its physicality, its materiality as well as its mysticism and legend, are flattened in the universalism of bread-is-bread-is-bread.

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In terms of Mntambo's work, how can a viewer be asked to not fully indulge in the memory of a material so engraved into the imagination? Undoubtedly the cow as a symbol has its universal qualities and in a world that has been plagued by cate-gories of difference, commonality is a priority in the world order. Cow hide in a South African context speaks to a vivid group of myths and memories. A viewer could perhaps be asked to be more critical or "conscious", in a Fanonian sense, of the myths and memories that shape an understanding of an image, particularly the construction of such myths and memories; a complete rejection, however, is problematic. In her denial, "... it's never going to be about that it never was about that, it's about an interest in dead material and chemicals and the connection that every civilisation in the world has to the cow. We all have an experience of the animal – it's one of the many things that connect us." , Mntambo rejects more than blackness, but a specificity of time and space in the experience of materiality. Because unlike Mntambo alludes to it, blackness as a term in South Africa has a genealogy grounded by space and time. In not appreciating this (the genealogy of the term, confronting its fixity or exploring its temporality) Mntambo herself fixes the term. By denying blackness, femininity, and ritual, Mntambo denies a part of that which gives her work meaning to (some) viewers in favour of a universalism that may appeal to others. Regardless of how secondary specificity of time and space may seem, surely it has value.[10]

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10 Moshekwa Langa, in an exhibition titled Skins (1996) makes use of the metaphor of hanging skin. Although Langa does not title his work or describe it in any defined terms, citing a fear of fixing the work (Langa in Williamson and Jamal 88:1996), the skin-like objects made of cement sacks, Vaseline, turpentine and creosote hung on a line presented at the show (Figure 2) can be interpreted as a striking description of the abuses of labour.   Similarly, Figure 3 speaks to abuses of the flesh. Williamson and Jamal (1996: 90) explain that, "For Langa, what matters is the articulation of matter, though the work presented is not titled, one is compelled to give it meaning, to read the viscera. Walking through Skins one is reminded of genocide and the mounting up of carcasses". Langa's skins can be linked to Mntam-bo's work visually and possibly in content too.

Gavin Younge is cited (Elliot 2011:26) as an in uence on Mntambo's use of hide. Having been one of Mntambo's lecturers this is an apt observation. Younge has made use of goat vellum and cowhide since the early 1990s, "as a metaphor for a body and the skin on which the wounds and scars of a society with a painful past can clearly be read." (de la Forterie in Younge 2010: 36) as in Figure 4. Elliot (2011:26) adds that, in choosing vellum, Young distances himself from its ritualistic references and uses it rather as a reference to both oppression and atrocity. In the body of work titled Skin, Younge

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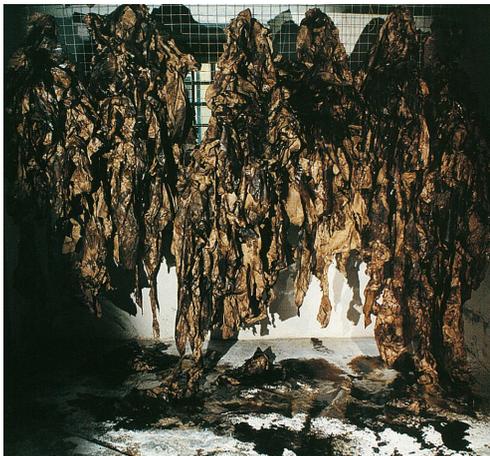
Figure 2: Moshekwa Langa, Untitled, 1995. Cement sacks, Vaseline, turpentine, creosote. Installation view, Langa's home, KwaNdebele, Showing works in progress. (Variable Dimensions). (Williamson and Jamal 2006:88).

Figure 3: Moshekwa Langa, Untitled, 1996. Brown paper, plastic, condensed milk, Jeyes Fluid Installation view, Cape Town Castle. (Variable Dimensions). (Williamson and Jamal 2006:91).

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Figure 4: Gavin Younge, *Guns R Us*, 2007. Vellum, neon. (Life size). (Younge 2007).

Figure 5: Gavin Younge, *Samuel Hendricks,* 2007. Colour photography, ink on cotton paper. 195 x 112cm. (Younge 2007).

Figure 6: Gavin Younge, *Frank Jacob,* 2007. Colour photography, ink on cotton paper. 195 x 112cm. (Younge 2007).

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Perhaps Mntambo's strategy could be used to speak to the American man who asks "As time passes, will your art transform to be more colour blind than it currently is?" (Transformations seminar 2014), Perhaps Mntambo's stratagy could be used to give him a way of entering the work, something to hold on to. For those who experience the work at an altered proximity, what meaning that is worth engaging with, is left or denied for such a viewer? It could easily be argued that a universal point of view does not necessarily interfere or challenge different points of views. A topographical view, however, does flatten a view from the south. Most importantly, the strategy employed here by Mntambo does not speak to her intent, namely, to challenge the stereotype – black, female, making work about *lobola*.

Let us accept Bhabha's (1994) analysis, that it is not possible to displace the stereotype by dismissing it – moreover, that the displacement of stereotype is only possible through an engagement with its effectivity. And let us also accept that Mntambo's denial in order to dismiss the stereotype falls short of its intention of challenging and at best transgressing from the space of the other. Mntambo's denial then does not engage with the effectivity of image, fantasy and fetish – that which, if we follow Bhabha, gives her work currency both as the racist stereotype, and as an image making sense of that which remains from a time gone by or, as that with wich Mntambo identifies, an image engaging with the relationship between dead material and chemicals.

In a context where the multiplicity of histories at play in the present is accepted, there are particular problems which arise. An acceptance of the multiplicity of

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presents a series of photographic portraits of ex-prisoners (see Figure 5 and 6). According to de la Forterie (in Younge 2010: 38), "their tattooed skin bears the stigma of a culture of confinement now engraved on the most intimate parts of the body." Here, once again, Younge uses skin as a site of conflict a surface recording a culture of imprisonment.

Indeed the connection that every civilisation in the world has to the cow may be valid, but again I must stress, regardless of how secondary time and space may seem, surely they have value in the interpretation of material.

histories suggests the possibility that all histories could simultaneously be at play in the present. Mntambo in her intent embraces the multiplicity of histories. In the interview here critiqued, she speaks to at least three of these histories. Firstly, there is the contemporary (2011) present where her work is expected to be on pulse with what is happening in the here and now, not just in geography, but in universal time too. Secondly, Mntambo is also simultaneously speaking to the anthropological gaze (1800s) invoked by the racial stereotype that attempts to fix her identity. Finally she also speaks to discredit the waves of reaction (1960s, '70s or '80s – depending which context of the world you are familiar with) against the anthropological gaze through radical measures, what Mbembe (2002) calls the 'prose of nativism'. In her answer Mntambo desperately tries to address all three histories simultaneously. The predicament faced here by Mntambo is illuminated well by the Xhosa expression, *Ubambamba ngapha ku phume le* – you attend to this and something elsewhere is undone. This expression aptly alludes to the human predicament of capacity, specifically the capacity of the body; having only two hands. As Mntambo fends off fixit , her strategy leads her to fall into the trap of denial.

2.3 Transgression

Bhabha's engagement with the working of the processes of subjectification is brief in its explanation of "colonial power's regime of truth". Hook, expanding on Bhabha's study, cites Bhabha's (1994) approach as seminal but "dogged by a dense clotted and often somewhat baroque style of expression" (Hook 2005:702). He confirms that it manages to show how the racial stereotype functions.[11] In this way, Hook fulfils his aim to illuminate what he sees as an unorthodox intersection of post-structural and psychoanalytic theorising offered by Bhabha's description of the processes of subjectification Along the way Hook also points out some of the loopholes in Bhabha's recommendations and builds on strategies to move beyond the racial stereotype.

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11 Hook (2005) offers an in-depth analysis of how the racial stereotype functions, based on Freud's (1900) understanding of the fetish.

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The processes of subjectification are well illuminated by Hook (2005). One is, however, still left wondering about the next step in Bhabha's vision, namely a transgression of the limits (colonial power's regime of truth) from the space of the other. In terms of the larger study it is exactly this transgression that must be witnessed. If Bhabha promises transgression, then by default such a theory not only puts this study at an intersection of apartheid and its others (blackness as understood by Biko), but also ideally positioned to witness how that blackness is practised, how it acts, how it transgresses. Needless to say, having convincingly illuminated the processes of subjectification, the other – for both Hook and Bhabha – remains unknown. Perhaps the other is unknowable (Visker 1999). Something about this conclusion is unsatisfactory and as a result that eminent question nags: can the subaltern speak (Spivak 1999)? Others have asked: Can the subaltern be heard? (Maggio 2007).

For both Bhabha and Hook the answer to that founding Spivakian question is as simple as Spivak herself implies: No. The subaltern cannot speak because, understood as a "ventriloquist" (Spivak 1999:36), the subaltern would equate the fetish for Freud (1900), the stereotype for Bhabha (1994) and the fantasy for Hook (2005). It cannot speak, neither can it be heard. It does not have the ability to speak because it is not a speaking entity but a fantasy. Unpacking the racial stereotype, Hook (2005:732) insightfully writes: "This is a form of protection against difference – a continual foreclosure of the object of difference – rather than an actual engage-ment with the difference in question." Hook goes on to note that there is a virtual quality about such interactions with the racial other. And from this he concludes that, as a result, it matters little what the racial other actually does or is: such factors will not ease the other's worthiness of hate. We do know that, despite this foreclosure, the black woman, black man and the subaltern woman in Spivak's case do exist – not in romanticised versions of self that are original and must be kept as such to affirm the self as progressive, but as living, breathing, growing, embodied beings. The question therefore persists, slightly altered. Interested in transgression from the space of the other, the study

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 how blackness acts, how it is performed, how it is practised.

Artist Nicholas Hlobo sees his work as anchored by facets of his South African identity. "I constantly look at myself and at what it means to be me and to belong to this part of the world. The nationality I feel I belong to, being South African, and how it relates to the world… I look at all my identities – my ethnicity, my gender, my age, my cultural identity" (Hlobo in Obrist 2012). Taking into consideration the facets of his identity, Hlobo does not shy away from engaging with the 'earthy and ritualistic', his homosexuality, his Xhosaness, his Christian upbringing as well as South Africa's European colonial history. Although this study explores Hlobo's performance of blackness with a particular interest in his treatment of the 'earthy and the ritualistic', his treatment of this subject is included here because of its shift from a romantic nostalgia for the 'primitive', or fixity. In her reading of the *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) group show at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, Williamson (1996) writes that "It would not have been hard to reverse or to balance the categories (native and progressive) by placing more emphasis on work that attempts to bridge the gap … but maybe that is another show and the next stage in the post-colonialist process." In Hlobo's embrace of a multiplicity in ancestry and identity, a practice of this next stage is evident.

In Hlobo's engagement with the earthy and the ritualistic, as with Mntambo, there is a shift from Mbembe's prose of nativism. This shift is largely in intent. Hlobo's intention in exploring ritual is not anchored by a search for a fixed past. His work rather is an indulgence in the fantasy of a past. Hlobo's work does not only indulge in the fantasy of past, but, of present and future too. His work oscillates between these fantasies.[12] In this way Hlobo's attitude towards history, language and identity is in

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12 See Gevisser's (2009) analysis of Hlobo's Umtshotsho.

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line with Hook's (2005:719) view, namely that:

> If we accept that the unconscious fantasy plays a dominant role in structuring our lives, then what is required of us is not just the ability to see the real through the fantasy, but to see the fantasy in the real. If fantasy conditions what counts as reality for us then it seems pointless to try and grasp the true real because it is always already an effect of fantasy.

Perhaps a more operational question to understanding the place of the ritualistic and the earthy in the practice of blackness post-apartheid is one asked by du Preez (2010:394): "how matter comes to matter", prompted by Baudrillard's question (in du Preez 2010: 394), "what happens then to the real event, if everywhere the image, the fiction, the virtual, infuses reality". Du Preez argues that despite the reality principal being relegated to being lost and understood as only a part of simulacrum, the fantasy, the stereotype or the image, the real still does have a pull or, in du Preez' (2012:394) words, the real "at least is still a by-product of simulacrum". Du Preez notes that, as the by-product of simulacrum, the real adds a thrill to the image of terror. It could also be understood as that which gives the line 'based on a true story' currency. If in simulacrum our disbelief is suspended, the thrill added by the line 'based on a true story' is, for du Preez, the oozing out of the real comparable to Mntambo's skins that drag behind her as she jumps into the abyss of universalism. This byproduct reminds us that the limitations of a medium cannot be overlooked and perhaps that our disbelief is never fully suspended. Could this by-product of the simulacrum be the transgression from the space of the other that Bhabha promises?

2.4 Politics of the navel; *Yembelwe phi, inkapha yakho*?

Thoba, utsale umxeba, (bow down and make a call or, humble yourself and show respect) (Figure 7) is a 2008 performance by artist Nicholas Hlobo. Hlobo presented a body of work, of which this performance formed a part, for the Momentum Emerging Artist Series in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Boston. In the

performance Hlobo sits on a mat made of *impepho. Imphepho,* or curry bush, is a spicy herb which is used by traditional healers in a southern African context. The herb is also burned in Xhosa ceremonies as a means of clearing a space of dirty spirits and by so doing ritualistically making it clean. With the work Hlobo tries to make sense of his being, particularly his connection with a space that he is unfamiliar with. According to Hlobo (2008a), the idea with the art work was that he would sit, look inwardly and pray, pray thanking the gods for delivering him and curse the devils. Hlobo sits looking inwardly for the duration of the performance and ends the performance with a song. With this work Hlobo undoubtedly evokes the ritualistic and the earthy. The inward meditation of Hlobo and the outward attachment to the physical space by cord to an unfamiliar place (Figure 7), opens up a channel of exchange where a metaphorical connection to that place's history is represented through the physical connection to it.

Hlobo's artistic practice in relation to the body of work he presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Boston (2008), of which Figure 7 forms a part, is discussed in an article tilted *Nicholas Hlobo Where is your navel?* (Allara 2010). Although I nd Allara's (2010) argument about Hlobo's use of the Xhosa language to title his work fairly inconsistent and for this reason hard to agree with fully, [13]

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13 Hlobo titles his works in Xhosa. Allara (2010), in response to Amy Halliday's comment that contemporary art from Africa is "often either excluded from, or uncomfortably assimilated into an overarching Western narrative", argues that Hlobo's use of the Xhosa language to title his work, avoids having it co-opted into a dominant Western narrative. Allara argues that Hlobo's visuals and linguistic metaphors are expansive but speci c, and do not permit Westerners to absorb/swallow them into their own parochial frame of reference; "he takes meaning from the formal qualities of his native language (Xhosa) pronouncing it, listening to its sounds, while using its proverbs and symbolism to explore his identity" (Allara 2010: 33). Hlobo confirms that he is, " interested in looking at language, how rich it is, how it behaves as secular. How it studies nature" (in Obrist 2012). This is something that I am not disputing. What I am disputing is whether this is proof that, in doing this, Hlobo prevents his work from being co-opted into a larger European narrative. Allara ends her article with a quote by Hlobo: "it is difficult to separate influences … The Xhosa have never really rejected foreign influences. If you can't beat them join them right? Personally I love those influences". In an interview with Obrist (2012) Hlobo says: "The use of the Xhosa language is about the process of trying to rediscover and understand this language. For example, if one were to ask me to go into detail about my work in Xhosa, I don't have a good enough vocabulary. I prefer to talk about my work in English. The language and cultures are constantly

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Allara's article recognises something about Hlobo's work that is not only signi cant to that show in particular but has also remained consistent in his whole body of work. The article hints at this but does not itself make it explicit. Using the title as a metaphor for its stance, the article focuses rather on proving its hypothesis: how through his use of the Xhosa language and visuals Hlobo challenges being co-opted into a European understanding of the world. In the title, *Nicholas Hlobo Where is your navel?* the article suggests an enquiry that would engage with a 'politics of the navel' in Hlobo's work. By a politics of the navale I mean an identification or formation of community around material, geographic and temporal specificity determined by both the corporeal and metaphorical significance of the naval encapsulated in the Xhosa greeting, *Yembelwephi inkaba yakho?* (where is your navel buried?) or *Inkaba yakho iphi?* (where is your navel?).

In a study into birthplaces, ancestors and ancestral spirits in South African literature, Midgley (2006:40) clarifies "Among … *ama*Xhosa … there are two traditional greetings that help to determine origin: *'Nisela mlambo mni?'* (Which river do you (plural) draw (or drink) from?), and *'Inkaba yakho iphi?'* (Where is your navel /afterbirth or placenta?). Both questions establish your ancestry and your social position in the community, as well as your geography. According to tradition, each Xhosa clan drew water from a specific river and by naming a river in response to the first question, one simultaneously reveals one's clan and the geographic location of one's ancestors. The second question refers to a traditional custom by which the placenta is buried outside the homestead at a person's birthplace. Answering the second question could locate a person even more specific y than the first Both questions have the same desired result: establishing ancestry and locating the community of origin. These greetings symbolically tie identity both physically and

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evolving. It is a language that continues to be bolder and bolder, and many cultures are taking it in. When I was still studying I realised I did not know Xhosa as well as I should." Because the above mentioned positions are so different in sentiment to that of Allara, I am not convinced that in using the Xhosa language to title his works Hlobo avoids being co-opted into an overarching European narrative.

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metaphorically to geographical location. Midgley (2006:40) goes on to say:

> A return to the place of your birth, whether physically or metaphorically in a dream or in fiction is akin to returning to ancestors and constitutes an affirmation of your identity and you sense of belonging in and to an integrated community of origin.

The navel or umbilicus is an abdominal scar shared by placental mammals. The navel as well as the placenta or afterbirth have in this greeting both corporeal and metaphorical significance. In terms of corporeality, the navel is the remainder and in this way a reminder of that which ties the fetus via the umbilical cord to its life source, the placenta and uterine wall. A metaphorical connection is extended upon, from this corporeality. The navel scar long after birth, or the physical connection of mother and child metaphorically remains as that which connects a being to other beings, to matter, to a geographic space and time marked by the event of *ukuzalwa* or being birthed. Similarly, the greeting, *'Nisela mlambo mni?'* (Which river do you (plural) draw (or drink) from?) links those that drink from the same life source as community.

Grappling with the connection between material, geography and temporality is a recurring motif in Hlobo's work. In imagery spanning over ten years, variations of this corporeal connection is used to probe into metaphorical connections. With such imagery he is alluding to the corporeal connection between fetus, umbilical cord, placenta and uterus as well as the metaphorical extension of this connection. Hlobo achieves this in his use of line and positioning as well as his use of materials that contain, bind and stretch, and in this way are reminiscent of flesh. In Hlobo's first and subsequent solo shows dealing with birth, death and life, this motif is obvious. It becomes less so in later works. In what follows, I show the recurrence of this motif in a body of work spanning ten years.

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In 2005 Hlobo presented a modified leather jacket with an addition of a hump made of inner tube stitched together with red ribbon (Figure 8). Titled *Igqirha lendlela* Figure 8 is derived from the Xhosa idiom and song, *Igqirha lendlela nguqongqothwane,* literally 'the dung beetle is the doctor of the road'. The song, made famous by Miriam Makeba in the 1960s, is in praise of the dung beetle and its ability to move swiftly across landscapes rolling around a load. So swift and astute is the beetle, it is called the doctor of the road. As the dung beetle moves across the landscapes, so it collects some of the ground it moves across. The ball rolled around by the dung beetle literally carries a piece of the places it has been. Hlobo uses the metaphor in this idiom as a spring board for Figure 8. *Igqirha lendlela* is also a performance piece that requires the jacket's wearer to mingle with people in social situations. In this way the work speaks to the baggage that we carry around but also to how the physicality of the places we have been shapes our being and our understanding of the world.

Umthumbi (Figure 9) forms part of Hlobo's rst solo show titled *Izele,* meaning "someone or something has given birth" (Hlobo in Nicholas Hlobo *Izele* 2006). Hlobo (Nicholas Hlobo Izele 2006:[sp]) points out that the expression *Izele,* "has a double meaning. It could mean, for example, when you go to a tap and fill up a jug – *Izele ijug,* is the jug full? *Izele* means filling something, or adding to something." Figure 9 shows *isibaya* or a kraal, which also reads as a trampoline because of the pink threaded roof-like mesh that covers the top of the kraal. Much can be said about Figure 9 in relation to Hlobo's homosexuality. The use of the pink ribbon, thought of as feminine, in relation to the kraal being a masculine space, in classic Xhosa organizations. Most relevant to the discussion here at hand, is the black ball attached to the pink string at the entrance of the kraal. The placenta and umbilical cord is classically buried *esibayeni,* or in the kraal of a family. It is buried here with the belief that it will bring even more fertility to the family. In the context of birth, on which the show is centered, the black ball in Figure 9 reads as the placenta and the pink string as the umbilical cord.

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Figure 9: Nicholas Hlobo, *Umthubi* ,2006. Exotic and indigenous wood, steel, wire, ribbon, rubber inner tube, 200 x 400 x 730 cm (Variable dimensions). (Hlobo 2006).

Figure 7: Nicholas Hlobo. 2008. *Thoba, utsale umxeba.*
Performance view at Museum of Contemporary Art in Boston.
(Hlobo 2008a).

Figure 8 : Nicholas Hlobo, *Igqirha lendlela,* 2005. leather jacket,
rubber inner tube, ribbon, blouse, bust. 61 x 58 x 67cm. A
biker's jacket modified through the addition of a hump made
of inner tube stitched together with red ribbon.
(Hlobo 2005).

Figure 10: Nicholas Hlobo, *Dubula,* 2007. Performance view at
Liverpool. Dimentions variable. (Hlobo 2007).

Figure 11: Nicholas Hlobo, *Ingubo Yesizwe,* 2008. Leather, rubber,
gauze, ribbon, steel, found ball-and-claw chair leg, butcher's
hook, chain. 150 x 260 x 3000cm. (Hlobo 2008b).

Figure 12: Nicholas Hlobo, *Ikhonkco,* 2010. Stitching on paper.
(Hlobo 2010).

Figure 13a: Nicholas Hlobo, *Tyaphaka,* 2012. Rubber,
ribbon, hosepipe, packaging material. 150 x 400 x 10000cm.
(Hlobo 2012b).

Figure 13b: Nicholas Hlobo, *Tyaphaka,* 2012, Rubber,
ribbon, hosepipe, packaging material. 150 x 400 x 10000cm.
(Hlobo 2012c).

Figure 14: Nicholas Hlobo, *Balindile,* 2012. Inner rubber tube,
ribbons, canvas, hosepipe, steel, 160 x 50cm; Dimensions var-
iable. (Hlobo 2012a).

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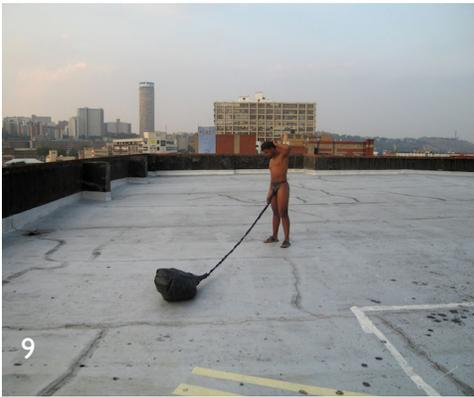
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In the performance, Hlobo drags around what can be read as his placenta, in context of my argument, but also peculiarly as a giant testicle as it extends from his groin and not his navel. The title of the work, *Dubula* or Shoot, adds to the sexual connotation of the work. In keeping to the theme of birth, attachment, matter, geography, space and time, birth and attachment are again here visualized. Hlobo who reads, in the context of this argument, as an overgrown baby still attached to his afterbirth, drags it around like a load as in Figure 8. Unlike in Figure 8, there is some distance in Figure 10, between Hlobo and his load.

Ingubo yesizwe (Figure 11) in 2008, moves away from overt references to birth. Nevertheless, the work still speaks of community, particularly the idea of material or materiality that both physically and metaphorically connects community. The title of Figure 11, *Ingubo Yesizwe*, translates to, "clothing or blanket of the nation" (Hlobo in Ingubo Yesizwe 2008b). It refers to the classic Xhosa ritual whereby cowhide is used to cover a corpse before burial to protect the deceased as he/she enters the afterlife. The linear qualities in both Figures 8 and 7 are also present here, making the blanket, like the umbilical cord, read as a snake-like creature.

Ikhonkco (Figure 12) in 2010 is an example of Hlobo's two dimentional drawings made by stitching onto paper. Here once again the linear qualities present in the performance and installation pieces remain present. Also present is the relationship between two objects connected by a cord or linear quality. *Ikhonko* cements this visual as a motif condensing Figures 8, 7 and 11 into a sign.

For the 2012 Sydney Biennale Hlobo presented *Tyaphaka (*Figure 13). *Tyaphaka* is a Xhosa term referring to a ball with water or an eye. At the Biennale the piece was partially submerged in the Sydney harbor, with an exposure to the elements as an integral part of the work. The work in this context reads as an animal submerged in water with only parts of it showing above water. According to Hlobo the work

speaks of surrendering to the elements like a floating object in water. Describing the work for the biennale, Hlobo (in Tyaphaka and other works 2012:sp) writes, "Tyaphaka is a play on the idea that things can be submerged or brought up from below the surface".

Balindile (Figure 14) is an example of Hlobo's most recent work. *Balindile* translates as "those in waiting" (Hlobo in Frieze London 2013) – in the artist's words, "waiting with anticipation, fully charged with energy ... ready for a command to set them free" (Hlobo in Stevenson 2013). At play again in this work is a relationship with two figures attached by cord, tube, sting or snake-like object which I suggest is still symbolic of the umbilical cord as it was more explicitly in his earlier works.

Figures 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12,13 all make reference to connectivity where the navel connection is suggested visually and/or metaphorically. In this way, two objects or beings connected by cord become a recurring motif. This motif in Hlobo's work acknowledges his multiple ancestries, but also embraces the specificity of place and time manifested in identity and tied to geography and materiality. In its reference to the Xhosa greeting, *Inkaba yakho iphi?* or, where is your navel or afterbirth? – this visual motif ties Hlobo's work to ideas of the ritualistic and the earthy in critical ways. In visualising that which connects two objects physically and metaphorically, Hlobo continually comments on attachment and/or burden. The subtlety in the recurrence of the motif discussed, specifically in the more recent works, ensures an open-endedness to its interpretation. Yet this is not done at the expense of specificity in reference.

Mntambo's and Hlobo's work undisputedly evokes the ritualistic and the earthy. As has been discussed, this is at times used in problematic ways by artists and theorists alike. Mntambo's and Hlobo's work all the same goes beyond a simple nostalgia for tradition, an employment of fixity or an evoking of Mbembe's (2002) "prose of

nativism". Even when the target is not always realised, Mntambo's and Hlobo's work makes a conscious attempt at fulfilling the post-colonial dream, a transgression of the boundaries of colonialism from the space of the other. This is an action that does not only displace the stereotype, in its transgression of boundary, but also destabilises and displaces both the colonial structure and the fixity of blackness. Letting go of fixit , the temporal amalgamation of blackness becomes visible and the unity in the term becomes undone.

After the release of his first book, *Native Nostalgia* (2009), Jacob Dlamini spoke at a number of seminars stimulating thoughts around the book and sharing new developments in his work. The University of Pretoria hosted a series of these seminars. At one such seminar with a smaller group, I was able to ask Dlamini a question that I had wondered about throughout my reading of *Native Nostalgia*: "So, where are you from?" I had been surprised while reading the book (a semi-auto-biographical account) that he (Dlamini) made no reference at all to being from any place other than Katlehong. In South Africa, as in many other African countries, people travel long distances from 'home' to work in the city,[14] the city sometimes becoming a 'new' 'home'. In this way many South Africans are always from somewhere other than 'here' (the city or township in the case of *Native Nostalgia*). Although I myself, having been born in Johannesburg, do not receive this question well, for the same reason Dlamini would imply in his answer, I did however find myself having already asked it. The English "Where are you from?" readily available here as a greeting, can doubtfully be understood as an equivalent, conscious or subconscious substitution of the Xhosa greetings, *'Nisela mlambo mni'* and, or *'Inkaba yakho iphi?'* as the answer to all three of these greetings would serve in establishing ancestry and locating a community of origin. Having grown up in a Xhosa speaking family, this automation in greeting is plausibly an infiltration of my 'Xhosaness' into

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14 Such migratory patterns specifically in South Africa are remainders of Apartheid's structural dividers.

the English expressions I use; a generational habit of tongue; perhaps an easy way out of awkward moments. Nevertheless: Dlamini's unhesitant unswer to the question: "Where are you from?" was simply, "Katlehong".

Dlamini's answer was neither denial nor affirmation of where he was not from, but an attack on the assumption motivating my question. I knew he knew exactly what I meant by this question – typically an answer would be one of the old native reserves. If someone really pushes me, I usually answer, "My parents are from …". But Dlamini simply said "Katlehong", in a way that let me know, gently but assertively, that this was not up for discussion. Although we did end up discussing his stance, probing where Dlamini was from, beyond Katlehong, was the equivalent of asking him for a pass. It was a reminder in the intent of my question, an insinuation on his end, of a 'fact' – you, black, can never be urban. Although Dlamini may have known exactly where he was 'from', in that moment he subverted my attempt at fixing blackness by simply answering "Katlehong". In his answer he both claimed and rejected blackness. Transgression from the space of the other? Perhaps. Embodying that apartheid anomaly urban-black, in his answer, Dlamini detached himself from the umbilical cord I was shamefully tugging at. A simple yet effective strategy. In retrospect I find his strategy pleasantly ironic, since we were discussing how and why he can be nostalgic about a historical space and time.

CHAPTER THREE:
STAGING SOPHIE'S DEATH

Blue overalls soaked in purple, guts spilled out from the abdomen, a starched crisp white apron and headscarf; markers of servitude, becoming undone. The Sophie that has become known to viewers stands before them being undressed by what can be described as an ejaculation of her own guts, some still oozing out of her, others suspended from the ceiling. The animated, black, button-eyed guts surround her: *A non-winged ceiling being* (Figure 22), they are named as a body. The non-winged ceiling being is soaked in purple. It, like Sophie's overalls, has not been sheltered from what can, from evidence, be alluded to as purple rain.

Purple guts hanging out of Sophie; Sophie left for dead? One is uncertain of this becoming. What is certain is that Sophie is under a spell, oblivious to the ominously apocalyptic scene taking place from within and around her. She is somewhere else. Her posture is reminiscent of the ecstasy of a Saint (Figure 37). She and her marks of servitude have somehow missed or been spared the rain – Sophie, we know, is a dreamer, insensible to the laws of the world around her. How her apron and headscarf got through the rain a starched crisp white, however, is a question that hangs in the air: *Terrible beauty* (Figure 15) and *A terrible beauty is born* (Figure 21). This is one of eight frozen moments that viewers climbed into at the Standard Bank Gallery during its showing of Mary Sibande's latest body of work, *The purple shall govern*. Sibande sees these frozen moments as screen shots, concepts or illustrations suggesting how a terrible beauty comes to be born. What this show marks is a new direction in Sibande's work, a direction which she has declared her purple phase.

Figure 15: Mary Sibande, *Terrible beauty,* 2013.
Digital pigment print (Edition of 10), 111,8 x 113 cm.
(Sibande 2013b)

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Figure 19: Unknown photographer, Cape Town, 1989.
(Purple rain protest 1989).

STAGING SOPHIE'S DEATH

In her latest body of work, *The purple shall govern,* artist Mary Sibande takes a drastic change in her artistic practice by exploring ways of "letting go" of the now iconic gure of Sophie. Sophie was created by Sibande early in her practice as a metonym for the generations of black women who have historically worked in positions of domestic servitude. I argue that the ideological and aesthetic shifts in Sibande's now-established artistic practice manifested in *The purple shall govern* are symptomatic of shifts in blackness post-apartheid. By examining selected works from the show, I explore the change in Sibande's artistic practice – particularly her "letting go" of Sophie as a metaphorical (un)grouping of blackness post-apartheid.

In this study, Conceptions of blackness are understood by way of a synthesis of Steve Biko's and Steward Hall's conceptions of the term. Informed by the synthesis of Biko and Hall's conceptions of blackness, as well as Bhabha's avocation of "transgression form the space of the other" as an apt post-colonial dream, this investigation is anchored in practices of blackness. I show the ways in which Sophie is a problematic concept and for this reason she, Sophie, must die. I show how Sibande is well aware of the problematic aspects of Sophie and as a result turns to W.B. Yeats who, under different circumstances, faced a similar predicament. I explore the relevance of Sibande's turn to Yeats's renowned refrain, "changed, changed utterly, a terrible beauty is born" to *The purple shall govern*. Using Yeats's poem *Easter 1916* as a springboard, I show the grouping and (un)grouping motions of blackness post-apartheid. In an engagement with new artistic developments in *The purple shall govern,* I argue that Sophie's 'death' is staged, which I suggest can be seen as a staging of the death of blackness. Sibande's personal conflict with the idea of Sophie as well as a cultural climate demanding alternative ways of writing blackness are argued to be the two main reasons for the staging of Sophie's death.

Sibande focuses in this body of work on contemplating her images and their power in context of the society and history that consume them. Her references are no longer just personal, private moments that by default become political, as in previous

bodies of work.[15] Sibande instead puts Sophie out on the street, simultaneously present at two historical events: the declaration of 1955 in Kliptown, Johannesburg, that "The people shall govern"[16] and the 1989 'Purple Rain Protest' in Cape Town[17] (Figure 19). It is thus that Sibande titles the show *The purple shall govern*. Here, Sibande not only grapples with South African or, specifically, apartheid history as she has in the past, but reaches back to other histories, examining entanglement even in seemingly unrelated histories. The new direction in Sibande's work speaks to her maturity as an artist, particularly her growing anxiety to break away from or reclaim some of the narratives that have come to define her artistic practice.

3.1 Locating Sophie within conceptions of blackness

Before cutting and burying the umbilical cord of old Sophie, a consideration of the creation of the now mythical Sophie is beneficial. . Sophie is the name that Sibande has given to symbolically unify and present the chain of generations of

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15 *Lovers in a tango* (Figure 16) explores Sibande's estranged relationship with her father who worked for the South African defence force; *Conversations with madam* (Figure17) explores the relationship with the woman "Sophie" works for. Both are good examples of how personal private moments tie into bigger political narratives. Figure 18 can be read similarly.

16 The Freedom Charter lays out the core principles of The South African Congress Alliance, an alliance made up of various political organisations operating at the time including the African Na-tional Congress, the South African Indian Congress the South African Congress of Democrats and the Coloured People's Congress. It is characterised by its opening demand; "The people shall govern!" It was adopted by the South African Congress Alliance at the Congress of the People in Kliptown on 26 June 1955. The charter declared that South Africa belonged to all its inhabitants. It demanded a non-ra-cial democratic system of government, and equal protection for all people before the law. It insisted on the nationalisation of major industry, as well as land redistribution. Finally, it sought equal work and education opportunities, and the removal of restrictions on domestic and family life (Davenport 1978: 346, 286, 387).

17 The Purple Rain Protest was an anti-apartheid protest held in Cape Town on 2 September 1989. A police water cannon with purple dye was turned on Mass Democratic Movement supporters who marched into the city in an attempt to protest at the South African Parliament. Attempts were made to intimidate the crowd with the purple dye, so that police would be able to identify protesters afterwards for arrest. The protest got out of control when a protester jumped onto the roof of the water cannon vehicle and turned the jet away from the crowds. As a result protesters, 'peace keepers' and surrounding buildings where all sprayed purple (Purple Rain …1989: 1) (Figure 19).

women in her family who have historically worked as domestic workers: her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Although Sophie largely represents their aspirations, their strife is always implicit. Over the past seven years of 'Sophie's life' she has come to encapsulate the lives and aspirations of many black women following Sibande's tale, united under the figure of Sophie. In the ways in which Sophie has been able to symbolically mobilise a racial group, black women, as a unit, Sophie as a symbol can be compared to the idea of blackness as understood by Biko.

Figure 16: Mary Sibande, *Lovers in a Tango,* 2011. Mixed media installation (Fiberglass & 100% cotton fabric) 944 x 632 cm (Variable dimensions). (Sibande 2011).

Figure 17: Mary Sibande, *Conversations with Madam,* 2008. Mixed media installation, (Variable dimensions). (Sibande 2008).

In this study blackness is understood as the notion constructed in reaction to apartheid borne from genealogies spanning the enlightenment, the Atlantic slave trade, the French and American Revolution, the independence of Haiti, continental African colonialism, the decolonisation of Africa, apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. It is understood by way of a synthesis of Steve Biko's and Steward Hall's conceptions of the term. Biko speaks of a blackness shaped by an embodied experience of apartheid; Hall speaks of a blackness shaped by a different context in terms of space and time. A synthesis of positions of blackness shaped by experiential variety helps to better understand post-apartheid applications of the term.

Because Biko's conception of blackness relies on discrimination as a constant, Hall's understanding of blackness as a process of unification is a necessary adjunct to Biko's blackness, if it is to stay relevant in conditions such as post-apartheid South Africa where discrimination is in flux Through a synthesis of Hall's and Biko's conception of blackness, blackness in a South African context as conceptualised by Biko in the '70s can be examined in post-apartheid conditions. By linking Hall's conception of blackness as a process of unification never totally achieved to practices of blackness as understood by Biko, a study of practices of blackness post-apartheid make visible shifts in conceptions of the term.

3.2 Transgression in practice

As I have previously argued, if "transgression from the space of the other" (Bhabha 1994:96) is located at an intersection of apartheid and its other, namely blackness, then that intersection is an ideal position from where to examine how that blackness is practiced; how it acts, how it transgresses. In my ongoing study to examine how blackness is practiced post-apartheid, I am interested in examining moments that are exemplary of transgression from the space of the other, because, even when such moments are unsuccessful, they do reveal the ways in which blackness is practised. When Bhabha uses the notion "transgression from the space of the other" (Bhabha 1994:96), he uses it to describe the act of going beyond

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Figure 18: Mary Sibande, *They don't make them like they used to,* 2009. Digital print on cotton rag matte paper (Edition of 10), 90 x 60 cm. (Sibande 2009).

the boundaries of limits set by an oppressive authority. Transgression here involves an act that can be considered a sin, an act that may offend. This term takes for granted that the limits themselves cannot be reached, emphasising in-stead a movement going beyond the limits set by an authority. In this way transgression is a conscious disregard for prohibition or an implemented system; it involves death: sometimes physical, but always symbolic.

3.3 Sophie must die

If it is acknowledged that, post-apartheid, the monolithic signifier 'black' is problematised more than ever – moreover, that 'black' as a unit is actively deconstructed, it is helpful to particularise members of the unit. By exposing the ambiguities and inconsistencies that form the unit, it becomes easier to see that the term in very few ways represents a uniform signifier that can, given the chance, speak on behalf of all black bodies. The moment of unity is therefore always already fractured, waiting ominously for schism.

At the 2010 First National Bank (FNB) Johannesburg Art Fair, Sophie towered over visitors at the entrance of the Sandton Convention Centre: A black woman riding a black horse, a symbol of power, control and agency (Figure 20). Sophie later dominated Johannesburg when advertisement-like images were wrapped around various buildings in the city. Again like a giant, Sophie towered over viewers, her power seemingly undeniable. Sophie made her debut to the world alongside the democratic South Africa's return to the Venice Art Biennale (2011), in an exhibition titled *Desire: Ideal Narratives in Contemporary South African Art.* According to the curator of the exhibition Thembinkosi Goniwe (2011:7), the three artists represented in this exhibition (Mary Sibande, Lindi Sales and Simon Allen)

Figure 20: Mary Sibande, *The Reign.* 2010. Mixed media installation, (Variable dimensions). (Sibande 2010)

explore a range of realities, memories and fantasies. Goniwe sees their work as presenting imagery reflecting on democratic South Africa. Sibande's work in particular speaks to the fantasy of an ideal narrative stemming from the desire to attain social affluence and subjecthood.

Reading the catalogue of this exhibition in retrospect, the problems presented in the gure of Sophie are glaringly obvious. In all three of the examples given above, Sophie seemingly convinces her viewers of her power, control and agency. It is in an encounter with Sophie on a more intimate level, an altered perspective, that the image of power and agency portrayed by Sophie as a giant is corrupted. When Sophie is not towering over her viewers like a monument but hung up on a wall, at eye level or slightly lower, in a size one can possess or imagine possessing in a home, office or gallery space, the viewer is forced to meaningfully contemplate the problematic aspects of her as a symbol. Sophie the symbol is propagated to the level of myth, legend and martyr. This is evident in images like Sophie unraveling the Superman jumper (Figure 18). Figure 18 propagates the notion of the martyr: black woman knitting, working hard, in isolation all day, for a spoilt brat like Clark Kent ... yes, with his own problems, but nevertheless living in a 'white' world with 'white'problems. The image is then gravely titled *They don't make them like they used to*.

In celebrating Sophie as a symbol of black women and their aspirations across the age of colonialism, there is something uncritical and ideologically unjustifiable in the facet that, in celebrating Sophie as a symbol of black women and their aspirations across the age of colonialism, the black female body also becomes an object to be owned. Viewing Sophie in a smaller format, it becomes hard for the viewer to miss this. The irony of Sophie as myth, legend and martyr – symbolic of black women across the age of colonialism – hanging in a northern Johannesburg suburban home, is almost unbearable. What is the significance of such an action? Even further than this, what is the significance of the private performance that will repeatedly take place in the suburban home, office or gallery space? In this performance the live-version Sophie will repeatedly clean an image of herself, purchased by the people that purchase her services, hung on the wall for these same

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people to contemplate and for her to repeatedly clean. Surely there is a quiet brutality in this performance. At the very least, there is an irony in such a performance that aptly visualises an aspect of post-apartheid conditions.

It is this sentiment that informed a question by a member of the audience at a group show, which included a panel discussion hosted by the United States Department of State's offic , ART in Embassies and the Embassy of the United States of America (US) in South Africa titled *Transformations,* at the Wits Art Museum (WAM). US ambasador to South Africa Patrick Gaspard attended the panel disscussion (Transformations seminar 2014):

> **Audience member:** There is a sentiment, a section in the community, that felt that what made it (the image of Sophie) so popular, especially with the white community, was because you were reflecting what they thought of black people, and it was true. Was that at all a consideration for you … when you considered to change or transform (Sophie)?

> **Sibande:** I don't know if I understood your question. You are saying I decided to let go of Sophie. Yes, "white" people felt like they owned Sophie; let's be honest. Because she is that person, she is a maid and a maid is someone that you own because you pay her … I think that's exactly what my grandmother used to say. She was owned by other people; my great-grandmother was owned by other people: she was born with two African names but died with one Christian or English name, so that possession of the black female body has always been owned through the centuries … I thought I don't want that anymore because for me it started out – I was in third year… still a student at UJ (University of Johannesburg) – when I envisioned Sophie and at the time I didn't actually envision all the problems that Sophie embodied; I must be honest. And lastly I thought, well, just cut this and, you know, experiment … Sophie, she was my grandmother's stories, she was my great-grandmother's aspirations. I don't know if that answers your question?

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Ambassador Gaspard: It was interesting to hear Mary's response to the question about *A terrible Beauty is born* (Figure 21) evolving from the Sophie piece. You will have to forgive me, Mary, but for a second there it sounded as if you were almost apologising for Sophie and Sophie, I think, should never be apologised for. I think that Sophie is a mythical character, an epic character that represents my mother, your grandmother and I think it is impossible to co-opt Sophie because I think that Sophie is so much bigger than any individual and Sophie represents our aspirations … I think she needs no apology at all.

Although Ambassador Gaspard tries hard in this instance to 'save' both Sibande and Sophie, the question asked by the member of the audience is a question that touches on the heart of the problem in the mobilisation of blackness post-apartheid and also one of the central problems with an uncritical celebration of a figu e like Sophie in this time.

Sophie must die![18]

"What does the black [wo]man want?... The black [wo]man wants to be white." (Fanon 1967:1-2). Sophie must die because, like black aspiration, Sophie's aspiration pivots around inhabiting the status quo and not transgression. This is how Goni-we (2011:7), in his use of the image of Sophie in the exhibition *Desire: Ideal Narratives in Contemporary South African Art* can argue:

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18 I must stress here that 'Sophie' should be read as cultural term like 'black' and 'blackness', 'white' and 'whiteness'. Such terms operate via an amalgamation of a collective under one unit for a cause. Sibande's mobilisation of Sophie, like Biko's mobilisation of blackness, should be understood as a means to an end and not the end in itself. The death of Sophie, in other words, can be read as a call for a change of tools to accommodate the change of circumstance. A calling for the death of Sophie should not be read as a calling for a disregard of (wo)men that have through the centuries worked in positions of service and on whose backs 'black society' is now able to make calls such as 'Sophie must die.' To be sure, I agree with Ambassador Gaspard (Transformations 2014), "Sophie should never be apologised for". As a regulator to the ambassador's over-identification with the figure of Sophie, it is also helpful to summon a more reflective argument, namely Mbembe's (2002) critique of African modes of self-writing, particularly his recommendations.

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Sophie yearns to be free from domestic subordination and to attain not only social affluence but also subjecthood – as a human subject that matters … (despite her disappointments). Sophie is rendered daring and poised, embodying a set of fantasies. She is monumental in size, dressed in elaborate blue costumes that are a fusion of a maid's uniform and Victorian dress. Her bodily gestures and facial expressions are both a combination of seriousness and putting up a front. These characteristics make Sophie a complex figu e, a *sophisticated black woman* [my italics]; she represents the artist's alter ego and desire. In this sense, Sophie exists as a site for dreaming, of becoming something other than subordinate, a servant and failure.

Accepting Goniwe's observation, to illuminate a call for Sophie's death, I must draw attention to Sophie's aspiration itself and the operation of that aspiration. Sophie yearns and aspires to be free from domestic subordination, attain social affluence and subjecthood. In the visual image of Sophie, black female aspiration is linked to the desire to be sophisticated. In terms of the operation of this desire, if size, a combination of decadence and poverty or hard work and an ambivalence of spirit are what equate a 'sophisticated black woman', embodied in the image of Sophie, here 'sophisticated', 'black' and 'woman' are not imagined as independent of each other. When some of these terms are required to stand without the other, 'black woman' in the interest of this chapter for instance, the result is a corruption of the image of Sophie.

In the image of Sophie the aspiration of freedom from domestic subordination, attaining social affluence and subjecthood and being sophisticated, are linked to one another indefinitely, the one as if equated to the other. More than this, the fantasy of sophistication is rendered based on a fantasy of whiteness. This fantasy relies on its fixity to a mythical first encounter with Europe visualised in the image of the Victorian dress. The Victorian dress here operates as a fixed image of whiteness,

effective in its utilisation of the racial stereotype.[19] The first and second wave European feminists would question the notion of a woman needing to constrict herself to the limits of a dress to be sophisticated. Further, given this dress operates as an image of beauty, a woman needing to fit into the parameters of beauty demarcated by the parameters of the dress – to be sophisticated – would also be questioned. African Gender Scholarship would question an acceptance of the dress itself, the Victorian dress in particular, as a normative dress code for women in South Africa.

Sophie's dreams are problematic. They are nonetheless relevant as reflections of black aspiration. Sophie must die because, as a symbol of black female aspiration, Sophie is incapable, as Sophie, of dreaming outside the limitations of the system that inspires her creation. To recall Fanon, Sophie must die because her aspiration in life is to be white Sophie is trapped in a white world. Being black she cannot dream of being anything other than white: This is a consequence of the pervasiveness of a system that privilages white people. Her very exsistence as black is a consequence of this system. It is not ironic then that "white people (think) they own her" (Sibande at the Transformations seminar 2014). Sophie in Sibande's practice is elevated to the level of the mythical. More than being problematic in terms of aspiration, Sophie is also problematic in terms of who consumes her on the level of 'myth'.

Speaking about Europe's creation of a mythical Africa based on fantasy in relation to decolonising gender studies in Africa, historian Edward Namisiko Waswa Kisiang'ani (2004:10) argues: "To be fair every myth has a place and function in the society that created it. Myths support cultural values and mediate points of stress." Indeed, through Sophie, a point of stress is mediated. What, however, is to be said of the problems that Sophie brings about or the stereotypes she maintains? What is to be said of the myth that lives past the time it was created for, or one which operates

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19 See Hook (2005) using Freud (1900, 1908, and 1927) for an explanation of the workings of the racial stereotype.

in societies other than the one it is created for? What is to be said of myths that operate in the divided or patchwork society like post-apartheid South Africa, or the global village, for that matter? Here, as in the image of Sophie, a myth is created to mediate points of stress for one society or a section of society, yet is also consumed by another.

3.4 Sibande turns to W.B. Yeats

I decided to let go of Sophie. Yes … "white" people felt like they owned (her) … I was in third year … still a student at UJ when I envisioned Sophie and at the time I did not actually envision all the problems that Sophie embodied, I must be honest (Sibande at the Transformations seminar 2014). Here is an artist at conflict with herself and her creation. Sibande's personal story of three generations of women in positions of servitude ending with Sibande, in the public sphere, is mythified, and the generations of women and their 'sacrifices' elevated to the level of martyrdom. It is clear that Sibande is aware of the problematic aspects of Sophie. In her position as creator, understanding the gravity of her power as an artist and her ability and participation in the shaping of public perception, Sibande turns to a historical figure, an artist like herself, who, under different conditions finds himself in a similar position.

After the unsuccessful Easter 1916 Rising in Ireland[20] W.B. Yeats found himself conflicted between his personal feelings about this uprising and his ability as an artist and public figure to shape public thought around the revolt. A public figure at the time and an associate of many of the executed revolutionaries, Yeats responds criticaly to the public about the week's events in the form of a poem, Easter 1916. First published two years after the events it commemorates, *Easter 1916*

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20 In Ireland, 24 April 1916 marks the beginning of a weeklong revolt against the United Kingdom of Great Britain to establish an Irish republic independent of British rule, commonly known as the Easter Rising. The uprising was unsuccessful resulting in the surrender of rebel forces and execution of most of the Irish republican leaders for treason (Foster 2003, Brown 2010, Smith 2010).

presents Yeats' poetic musings as a bridge between Yeats's conflicted personal feelings about the Easter Rising and the necessarily public nature of his poetic response [(Foster; 2003 also see Smith (2010) and Brown (2010)]. The poem also explores Yeats' anxiety about public memory, this being a key tension in the poem. In a letter written to his sister Lolly after the uprising Yeats (in Foster 2010:46) writes, "...I know most of the Sinn Fein leaders & the whole thing bewilders me for Conolly is an able man & Thomas MacDonough both able & cultivated. Pears I have long looked upon as a man made dangerous by the Vertigo of Self Sacrifice. He has moulded himself on Emmett." Foster (2010:49) based on this letter and Lolly's reply argues, " Dublin's literati were shocked by the immediacy of what had happened: people they had known with familiarity, and even regarded with contempt, had joined, at a stroke, the mythic company of Emmett, Fitzgerald, Tone ... the 'romantic the 'romantic Ireland' of … sacrificial nationalism".

The central figures in *Easter 1916* are the executed revolutionary leaders. Although the execution of the leaders of this uprising was sureley thought to be the end of the revolution, the leaders grew in the Irish imagination, becoming mythical characters through their public afterlives. By the time Yeats first publishes *Easter 1916* these leaders would have completely changed in the Irish imagination, from the ordinary men Yeats personally knew and wrote about in the first and second stanza into martyrs of Irish independence. It is this Yeats, the anxious, conflicted artist and public figure obliged to respond publicly at a moment of crisis, involving the transformation of ordinary men into martyrs, but unsure of his power as an artist to shape public thought, that Sibande identifies with. Sibande turns to Yeats' renowned refrain from *Easter 1916*, "all changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born".

Close associate of Yeats, Maud Gonne, in a letter to Yeats responding to the poem ,writes (in Foster 2003:63):

> No I don't like your poem it isn't worthy of you and above all it isn't worthy of the subject.... you could never say that Mac Donagh & Pearse

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& Conally were sterile fi ed minds, each served Ireland, which was their share of the world, the part they were in contact with … those three were men of genius with large comprehensive and speculative and active brains… There are beautiful lines in your poem, as there are in all you write but it is not a great WHOLE, a living thing which our race would treasure and repeat, such as a poet like you might have given to your nation and which would have avenged our material failure by its spiritual beauty.

Foster points to this criticism by Gonne as spotting the exact ambivalence of the poem, namely Yeats' refusal to amalgamate the executed men as a unit whose lives stood for a single ideal. In the image of 'old' Sophie, Sibande has turned her mother's, grandmother's and great-grandmother's stories, their dreams and their aspirations, into an amalgamated signifie , "a great WHOLE" (Gonne in Foster 2010:49). In her latest body of work Sibande is in conflict with this amalgamation. In a concluding argument on why she has decided to let go of Sophie, Sibande reasons: "And lastly I thought, well, just cut this and, you know, experiment … Sophie, she was my grandmother's stories, she was my great-grandmother's aspirations." There is a distinct change in Sibande's self-identification in relation to that of her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Although it has always been clear that Sibande is in the first generation of women in her family to not be a domestic worker and by default a deviant from the unit 'Sophie', previous shows have not put an emphasis on this deviation. The premise on which the character of Sophie is based has thus far relied on Sophie as a signifier of black women's aspirations, Sibande, her lineage, and black women in general. Sophie is conceptualised as a hybrid figu e caught between time periods, social, racial and cultural identities. In Sibande's first Sophie exhibition the Sophie sculptures all paraded the name of each of Sibande's family members who she wanted to celebrate. The uniform as a garment, however, works at denying their individuality. More than the uniform, Sophie as the name further represents a suppression of individuality. The way in which Sophie oscillates between individual and collective, in this way distinguishing cultural politics, have not always been explicit.

Figure 21: Mary Sibande, *A terrible beauty is born* 2013. Digital
pigment print (Edition of 10), 110 cm x 321,5 cm.
(Sibande 2013a)

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That woman's days were spent
In ignorant good will,
Her nights in argument
Until her voice grew shrill.
What voice more sweet than hers
When young and beautiful,
She rode to harriers?
This man had kept a school
And rode our winged horse;
This other his helper and friend
Was coming into his force;
He might have won fame in the end,
So sensitive his nature seemed,
So daring and sweet his thought.
This other man I had dreamed
A drunken, vain-glorious lout.
He had done most bitter wrong
To some who are near my heart,
Yet I number him in the song;
He, too, has resigned his part
In the casual comedy;
He, too, has been changed in his turn,
Transformed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.
(Yeats 1922:334)

In this stanza, Yeats explores at least four of the revolutionaries described in *Easter 1916* as anonymous characters, amalgamating them as a unit at the end of the stanza with the refrain, "Transformed utterly: A terrible beauty is born". Before amalgamating the unit, Yeats illuminates the cultural politics at play within this unit. Different cul-tural politics are at play between "that woman" and "this man". "This man … rode a winged horse", while "this other" man "Was coming into his force". Looked at in bell hooks' terms, which discard blackness in favour of a cultural politics (hooks in Hall 1992:475,

hooks 1996), here Yeats differentiates gender, power or influenc , personality and responsibility to himself and his audience. Yeats is clearly aware of the cultural politics at play between the characters he describes. He is also so conscious of the eventuality of his amalgamation and its implication that he acknowledges the possible cultural politics at play in his perception of these characters: "this other man, *I had dreamed* (my emphasis)/ A drunken, vain-glorious lout". In this way Yeats fleshes out the anonymity of the characters in the first stanza ending with the unifying moment, "changed in his turn,/ Transformed utterly".

In the third stanza of the poem Yeats changes his focus from the conflicted individuals he examines in the first two stanzas to explore the moment of unification under one cause:

>Hearts with one purpose alone
>Through summer and winter seem
>Enchanted to a stone
>To trouble the living stream.
>(Yeats 1922:335)

In this stanza, Yeats explores the anonymous individuals with various cultural politics at play as revolutionaries united by one cause "To trouble the living stream". In the fourth and final stanza of the poem the revolutionaries are again ungrouped, individualised, this time by name.

>For England may keep faith
>For all that is done and said.
>We know their dreams; enough To
>know they dreamed and are dead;
>And what if excess of love
>Bewildered them till they died?
>I write it out in a Verse-
>MacDonagh and MacBride

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And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.
(Yeats 1922:336)

In this way Yeats fleshes out the anonymous individual (stanza one), the individual as personally known by him (stanza two), the collective unified under a cause of revolution (stanza three) and final y (stanza four) the individual by name: Mac-Donagh, MacBride, Connolly and Pearse. With the last line they are again grouped. From this grouping the individuals are changed into a single being and a terrible beauty is born.

Blackness as described by Biko articulates the hegemonic moment insightfully, by recognising the implications of the nuances within the unit, however: "the hegemonic moment is no longer conceptualised as a moment of simple unity, but as a process of unification never totally achieved" (Hall 1986a:437). Similarly, Sophie as a tool articulates a hegemonic moment insightfully; she also shows that even post-apartheid there are moments of unity that can be mobilised. Perhaps Sophie even speaks to the power of nostalgia and the ways in which nostalgia is or can be mobilised at this time.[21]

As Yeats refuses to accept the ordinary men he once knew as simply martyrs, a unifying yet also flattening term and as such a term of death, Sibande in her latest body of work recognises the implications within the unit. In *A terrible beauty is born* (Figure 15) a non-winged ceiling being is formed by an ejaculation of her own guts.

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21 See Boym (2001), in her revisiting of post-communist cities like Saint Petersburg, Moscow and Berlin. Boym delves into the currency of nostalgia at such sites and in doing so explores the study of nostalgia. Also see Dlamini's (2009) *Native Nostalgia.*

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The guts that spill out of her are more than her body can contain. This hyperbole by Sibande can be seen as, if we follow hooks (in Hall 1992:1996), speaking to the multiplicity of the cultural politics within blackness. To reiterate hooks' position (hooks in Hall 1992:475), "being black isn't really good enough for me: I want to know what your cultural politics are". In her answer, Sibande says: "I am me" (Sibande at the Transformations seminar 2014). With this recognition the hegemonic moment, that is, the unity of her grandmother, mother and great grandmother's stories symbolised in the image of Sophie, is put into question, and we begin to see both Sibande and her grandmothers as more than just Sophie (a tool) or black (an idea mobilised as a means to and end) or heroes or mythical characters, but as individuals with multiple cultural politics at play within each of them – individuals with names: Mary Sibande.

3.5 Suspending disbelief: A non-winged ceiling being

The installation *A non-winged ceiling being* (Figure 22) takes on different forms in different works throughout the exhibition. It is present in the photographic work as well as some of the instalation. It is the most significant piece in *The purple shall govern* in terms of this paper. It is significant because it charts new territory in Sibande's practice and suggests a direction Sibande wishes to propel her practice into.

In her focus on the body, Sibande's work "evokes an older generation of artists who question identity using the specific human figu e and how it is significant y represented in a 'post-liberation' situation". Wiarda (2011:42) here references particular works in the artistic practice of Tracy Rose, Kara Walker, Cindy Sherman and Yinka Shonibare. "We observe [however] in *A non-winged ceiling* being an absence of the human figu e, an element that is a stable dose of many South African artists, especially black artists" (Goniwe 2013:32). The installation represents a moment of tension. If it is accepted that, "the human figu e is an element that is a stable dose of many South African artists, especially black artists" (Goniwe 2013:32), then

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Figure 22: Mary Sibande, *A non-winged ceiling being*, 2013.
Suspended installation of creatures Polyester fib efill stuffin
and 100% cotton fabric, Varying Dimension.
(du Plessi 2014).

a threat of movement away from 'a stable dose of blackness' must be examined closely as it signals contact with the boundary and as such a possibility of transgression from the space of the other. As I have previously deduced via Bhabha (1994), the boundary promising transgression from the space of the other is an intersection of apartheid and its other. Here, one is ideally placed to witness how blackness (apartheid's other) transgresses, how it acts, how it is practised.

The installation *A non-winged ceiling being* (Figure 22) reads as an incubator where root-like objects, or what can be read as Sophie's guts, hang with fish wi e from the ceiling, a metaphorical border. The installation allows the viewer to enter into it and walk in and amongst the purple black button-eyed objects. The objects hanging from the ceiling are described in the singular as a being. The purple material and black buttons that the being is made of reinforces uniformity in the root-or-gut-like objects, so that it does indeed read as a singule being. The closed-off environment encourages a reading of this space as an incubator. In this way the being reads as an army of soldiers in ominous wait, although I cannot here fully unpack the implica-tions of this ominous wait in relation to this study. I can say that I find it interesting that, more than 25 years after the Purple Rain Protest in Cape Town, the strategy of colour marking protesters with dye to arrest them later is being implemented by several governments around the world (see Figures 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30).

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Figure 23: a June 12, 2008. India, Srinagar. Police use a water cannon and batons against Kashmiri government employees. (Mustafa 2008).

Figure 24: Chung Sung-Jun (photographer), August 5, 2008. South Korea, Seoul. Riot police fi e water cannons towards protesters during a rally against U.S. President George W. Bush's visit. (Sung-Jun 2008).

Figure 25: Dar Yasin (photographer), May, 5, 2008. India, Srinagar. Colored water cannons during a protest by employees demanding regularisation of their jobs and a hike in their pay. (Yasin 2008).

Figure 26: Yawar Nazir (photographer), April 06, 2011. India, Srinagar. Policemen fi e purple coloured water from a water cannon on Kashmir government employees during a protest. Photograph, dimensions variable. (Nazir 2011).

Figure 27: Shuvo Das (photographer), April 5, 2011. Bangladesh, Dhaka. Police use a water cannon during a demonstration. Photograph, dimensions variable. (Das 2011).

Figure 28: James Akena 2011. Uganda, Kampala. Opposition politicians during an attack with water cannon by Ugandan police after their refusal to stop a protest march. (Akena 2011).

Figure 29: Issam Rimawi (photographer), March 11, 2011. Palestine. Gathering for a weekly demonstration against Israel's separation barrier. (Rimawi 2011).

Figure 30: Unknown photographer. 2013, Police fighting protesters with coloured water, Location not mentioned. (Police fighting p otesters with coloured water 2013).

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I also find it curious that Sophie's blue overalls become purple, just as the blue overalls as a symbol of the working class changes in the South-African imaginary, replaced by the blood-red overalls of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)[22] (Figure 31). [23]

In his public lecture *The medium is the message* (1977) McLuhan[24] proposes that, "When People have been stripped of their private identities, they develop huge nostalgia … Levis of the young today are the nostalgia for granddad's overalls. His work clothes now become the latest costume. The costumes worn by the young

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22 The EFF is a South African political party started by expelled former African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) president Julius Malema and his allies in 2013. The party describes itself as, "a radical and militant economic emancipation movement that brings together revolutionary, fearless, radical and militant activists, workers' movements, nongovernmental organisations, community-based or-ganisations and lobby groups under the umbrella of pursuing the struggle for economic emancipation." (About us EFF 2015: [sp]). After winning 25 seats in the 2014 South African National Election, EFF Members of Parliament (MPs) arrived at Parliament in Cape Town wearing red overalls. The women dressed in domestic workers' uniforms, while the men wore one-piece jumpers with hard hats and boots. The dress code of the EFF has sparked an ongoing discussion about what is acceptable and unacceptable dress code for parliament. Parliamentary code of conduct currently advises members to wear clothing that is "clean and decent" and in keeping with the prevailing weather" (Bothma 2014:[sp]).

23 On 22 July 2014 members of the EFF stormed into the Gauteng legislature (Figure 31) in protest against the removal of their MPs during a sitting on 1 July 2014. EFF leader Julius Malema led supporters of his party in protest over the party's trademark red overalls being banned from the provincial parliament. In the midst of the storming, Malema and nearly three hundred of his supporters were forcefully removed from the Gauteng legislature after the sit-in (Zapiro 2014: [sp]). The EFF was yet again removed from parliament during a chaotic State of the Nation address. Following through on their threat to do so, during the 2015 annual South African State of The Nation Address (SOTNA), picking up from the closing of parliament in 2014, Members of the EFF interrupted the SOTNA to ask President Jacob Zuma when he would be 'paying back the money', referring to the paying back of a portion of the money spent on Zuma's Nkandla home – Public protector Thuli Madonsela's 2014 report into the upgrades at Zuma's home in Nkandla found that Zuma and his family had unduly benefited from the upgrades (Public protector South Africa, 2013/2014). Madonsela ordered that Zuma pay for all nonsecurity upgrades done at his home. On the EFF's refusal to heed to speaker Mbete's advice that the SOTNA is not the correct platform to raise such a question, Mbete asked that disruptive EFF members leave the assembly. On their failure to do so, security was ordered to remove disruptive MP's from the sitting; all EFF members were removed from the assembly. In the chaotic scene, cell phone signals where blocked leading to a protest by journalists for the return of the signal; Musi Maimane of the Democratic Alliance (DA) questioned whether the security guards that dragged out the EFF where indeed the security of parliament or members of the South Africa Police Service (SAPS); unsatisfied with the speaker's reply, all DA MP's walked out of the assembly. The DA had all been dressed in black for the occasion. It was indeed another sartorial feast with the red EFF, the black DA and the multi-coloured ANC.

24 Also see McLuhan (2001, 1977).

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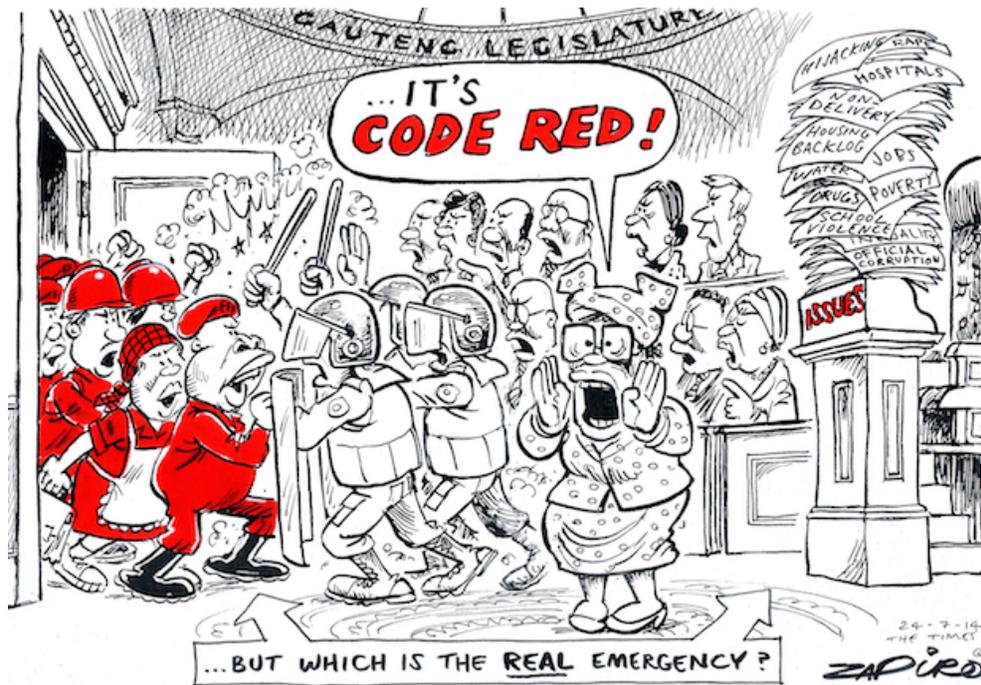
Figure 31: Zapiro, *140724tt – It's code Red! – EFF Gauteng Legislature,* 2014. EFF leader Julius Malema leads supporters of his party in protest over the party's trademark red overalls being banned from the provincial parliament Dimensions variable. (Zapiro 2014).

are nostalgic. The costumes worn by the young today are a kind of international motley, or clown costume, and, paradoxically, the clown is a person with a grievance: [her] role in medieval society was to be the voice of grievance. The clown's job was to tell … royalty exactly what was wrong with the society … The international motley of our time is trying to tell [her] grievance". In extension, if a change of costume equates a change of grievance, Sophie's costume change can be read as a change of grievance. With this reading, Sophie's change of costume being concurrent with the challenge of the blue overall as the symbol of the working class in the South African imagination through the red overalls of the EFF is not serendipitous but is symptomatic of shifts in practices of blackness post-apartheid.

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The installation *A non-winged ceiling being* (Figure 22) takes on different forms in different works throughout the exhibition. The significance of this work, therefore, should be explored by engaging not only with the installation itself, but also its presence in other works too. I will here explore its presence in *The admiration of the purple figure* (Figure 32) and *A terrible beauty is born* (Figure 21).

3.5.1 The nativity of the purple figu e

The admiration of the purple figu e (Figure 32) and *A terrible beauty is born* (Figure 21) make direct references to European canonical art. In this work Sibande engages with the nativity scene, which is a major subject in Christian European canonical art. Engagement with this scene is fairly obvious in both works. Sibande responds specifical y to seventeenth century baroque interpretations of this scene. This is evident in how the material in this latest body of work seems to take over the composition in, Sibande's use of the theatrical, in her choice of an ominously violent narrative, and in dramatic lighting. Sophie's closed eyes in this context supports a baroque attentiveness to character and psychology along with physical presence.[25] In line with Sibande's aims for the exhibition, reclaiming her own voice in the mythic figu e of Sophie, Sibande repeatedly draws attention to the nature of mythification or the creation of myths.

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25 See Adams (2007:628); also see Zamora and Kaup (2010). In an introduction to *Baroque, New Worlds, representations, transculturation, counter conquest* Zamora and Kaup (2010:2) explain that seventeenth century Baroque forms of expression have distinct monarchical, Catholic origins. The Baroque flourishes in seventeenth century Europe as a Catholic response to Protestant insurgency. It was rooted in Rome and adapted throughout Catholic Europe as a recognisable Counter-Reformation aesthetic and ideology. Baroque expanded throughout the seventeenth century. It was also exported to areas around the world colonised by Catholic Europe.

Figure 32: Mary Sibande, The admiration of the purple figure.
Digital pigment print (Edition of 10), 150 x 110,5 cm.
(Sibande 2013c)

Figure 33: Unknown artist, Scenes from the Genesis on the mosaic ceiling, 13th century. Mosaic. Battistero di san Giovanni, Florence, Italy. (Three wise men leaving by sea).

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To respond to the work, attention must be given to that to which the work itself draws attention. *The admiration of the purple figure* (Figure 32) draws attention to the difference between *admiration* and *adoration.* Making reference to *The adoration of the Magi*[26] (Figure 33, 34, 35, 36), the non-winged ceiling being in this nativity scene (Figure 32) does not adore, as is the tradition, but rather admires the purple figure.

The admiration of a figure implies the respect of that figure, or the holding in high regard of that figure. The adoration of a figu e, on the other hand, particularly used in a religious context, implies a form of worship. Adoration in this scene is linked to the mystical. In deliberately admiring the purple figu e and not adoring it, the mythical, god-like quality that calls for adoration is critiqued or taken for granted. Admiration subverts the god-like qualities of the figu e that is to be adored. In admiration the qualities of this figu e are not worshipped, but respected and held in high regard and is in this way perceived as attainable. The admiration of the purple figu e adds to Sibande's campaign to draw attention back to Sophie the human being as opposed to a myth, hero, legend or martyr.

In context of the body of *The purple shall govern,* this differentiation draws attention to the ordinary people that marched alongside those that would become martyrs in the two revolutionary moments appropriated, the Purple Rain Protest and the adoption of The Freedom Charter. On yet another level, Sibande's work can be explored as an engagement of the global South with Western canonical art. Sibande's engagement with Western canonical art can be read as a critique of the global south's engagement with the canon. On each of the abovementioned levels, Sibande's critique remains centred on the tension between iconic figures of history

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26 The adoration of the magi, sometimes called the adoration of the kings or the wise men, is an integral part of European canonical art. The now-iconic depiction of this scene is an example of the workings of mythification (Grigson 1954). Through art, myth and literature the unspecified number of wise men in the Gospel of Matthew mutate into the now-iconic nativity scene of kings from faraway lands, crowds of adorers and elaborate gifts.

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Figure 34: Andrea Mantegna, *The adoration of the Magi,* c.1462. Panel, Tempera. 76 cm x 76 cm. Uffizi Florence. (Mantenta c.1462)

Figure 35: Jacopo Pontormo, *The Adoration of the Magi,* c.1520.
Oil paint on wooden panel. Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti),
Florence, Italy. (Pontormo c.1520).

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Figure 36: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The adoration of the kings,* 1564. Oil on panel. 111 x 83.5 cm. National Gallery, London. (Bruegel 1564).

being mythic beings, and this mythification being a by-product of a staged production.

3.5.2 The Ecstasy of a Saint

The *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Figure 37) is the centre piece in the Cornaro Chapel at Santa Maria in Rome. It is surrounded by winged beings, the most prominent, an angel caught in motion, thrusting a spear of gold into the heart of Saint Teresa, a theatrical moment frozen in time.[27] The relationship between *Terrible beauty* (Figure 15) and the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Figure 37) needs no long explanation: the former relates to the latter both stylistically and compositionally. As has already been discussed, stylistically, the two works reference seventeenth century baroque sensibility, Compositionally, the winged being in the ***Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*** is replaced by a non-winged ceiling being in *A terrible beauty is born* and where the winged being in the ***Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*** removes an arrow from Saint Teresa's torso in *A terrible beauty is born*, a non-winged being removes Sophie's apron and headscarf.

In Figure 16 the non-winged being is used by Sibande to critique the mythification of Sophie. This is done by subverting both the adorer and the adored. To again give attention to that to which the work gives attention, to a step further would be to ask why this being is not only a non-winged being but a non-winged *ceiling* being. Despite *A terrible beauty is born* (Figure 21) being a heavily manipulated image, the strings that the non-winged being hangs from have not all been edited out of the image.

The *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Figure 37) is a shrine for the political, technological and stylistic advancements of seventeenth century Europe. Sculpted in an iconic baroque style, Bernini sculpts the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Figure 37) towards the end of the

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27 Teresa of Avila was a prominent Spanish mystic during the Catholic Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth century in Spain. Teresa was canonized as Saint Teresa in 1622. Bernini depicts here Teresa's famous transverberation: "He was not tall, but short, and very beautiful, his face so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest types of angel who seem to be all afi e … they do not tell me their names … In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fi e. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times … When he drew it out … he left me completely afi e with a great love for God … so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it" (Adams 2007:643) also see Bataille (1986:225).

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Thirty Years' War.[28] With Europe split into Catholic and Protestant countries, and the secular on the rise in the north, the arts during this time are used in service of political agenda. The *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (Figure 37) in particular would have been appealing to a Catholic south because of its counter-reformation mysticism.[29] In terms of the technological advancements, baroque artists are able to achieve a new kind of naturalism.[30] Bernini manages therefore to capture the weightlessness of a cloud, the fl w of cloth, the glow of skin, the delight of an angel and the ecstasy of a saint using unforgiving materials.

Nineteenth century Belgian illustrator Felicien Rops also depicts the transverberation of Saint Teresa. The naturalism achieved by Bernini in his *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa,* differs from that achieved by Rops in his interpretation (Figure 38). This difference is steered by not only stylistic responses, but political intention too. Whereas it is argued in the literature that in the midst of trying to appease the Church, Bernini is still able to subtly imply the erotic, Rops in a different political context with different intentions in his use of the ecstasy of Saint Teresa applies a more explicit naturalism.

Rops's artistic practice is located in the midst of great changes in Europe. The mid to late nineteenth century saw an increase in industry and production, a rapid population expansion and a vast migration of this population into cities to service industrialisation. New markets in the Americas and the launch of colonial expansion into Africa ensured

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28 In 1618 tensions and hostility between Catholics and Protestants erupted into the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) (Adams 2007:626, Zamora and Kaup 2010:2).

29 As a prominent figu e in the Catholic Church, the depiction of Saint Teresa, despite being based on an overtly erotic description of a mystical experience, would have been expected to be one that was discreet, emphasising a transcendental mystical experience rather than the erotic overtones of Teresa's description of it. Bernini is able in his depiction of Saint Teresa to combine the transcendental, religious content of this scene with its erotic implications in a way that would have satisfied the church at the time (Adams 2007:642).

30 See Baudrillard's (1983:88) analysis of Stucco as a material in exhaltation of a rising science and tecnology and its connection to the baroque, particularly its tie to the enterprise of counter reform and hegemony over nature.

Figure 37: Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa,* 1652. Marble, 35.1 cm. Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. (Bernini 1652).

Figure 15: Mary Sibande, *Terrible beauty,* 2013. Digital pigment print (Edition of 10), 111,8 x 113 cm. (Sibande 2013b).

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Figure 38: Félicien Joseph Victor Rops, [sa],
Saint Teresa's ecstasy, undated. Pen ink and pencil
on paper, 54,8 x 34,9 cm. (Rops [sa]).

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growth in markets and new areas of settlement of Europe. Following the age of Enlightenment, which saw the separation of state and the church, modernist and other avant-garde thinkers of this time are far more sceptical and as a result reject the church completely. Sexual liberation, prostitution and explicit representations of women in particular are a big source of controversy in the arts. In a study of such representations in a then less controversial Germany and Austria, Rogan (2005) points to several scandalous representations of "lesbianism" in nineteenth century Paris—Courbet's infamous painting, *Sleepers,* of 1866 being only one of many examples. Paris is undoubtedly the cultural centre of Europe attracting some of the most influential artists of the time. Rops began to travel between Brussels and Paris in the1860s (Young 2000:32), in pursuit of furthering his career as an engraver and illustrator. Employed by the publishing firm of Braquemond and Jacquemort, Rops worked closely with poets and was in great demand for his sacrilegious humor and representations of the femme-fatale (Winchell 1988, Young 2000). *Saint Teresa's ecstasy* (figure 38) is Typical of Rops's approach.

Bernini's Saint Teresa propagates the mystical, whereas Rops's Saint Teresa abandons the mystical as if discarding it as fantasy in favour of a Saint that is a sexual being. Taking into consideration other descriptions of trasverberation, Parcheminey (in Bataille 1986:225) reduces trasverberation to a bodily function, orgasm: "Such considerations lead to the hypothesis that all mystical experience is nothing but transposed sexuality and hence neurotic behaviour". Rops's position and depiction of Saint Teresa falls in line with the views of religious sceptics like Parcheminey. Figure 38 depicts the ecstasy of Saint Teresa as a purely physical encounter. This depiction is telling of both Rops's position and the political context in which he worked.

The political context in which Sibande operates, differs from both Bernini and Rops. In response to the post-apartheid context in which Sibande operates, consistent with a number of post-colonial theorists (Fanon (1967), Bhabha (1994), Spivak (1999), Mamdani (2001), Lonsdale (2002) and Hook (2005)), Sibande draws attention to structures that hold the fantasy together. Here the ceiling, to be precise, the metaphorical

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border from which the being hangs, falls outside the frame, and is therefore not visible. Even so, the viewer is made aware of the ceiling (the border) by the string from which the fantasy hangs. The string here (Figure 21) functions to stress the admiration of the purple figure. As I have already discussed, it draws attention to the myth, to art as artific , to Sophie's death as a staged production and therefore to blackness and its death as a staged production.

Bernini's intention in his interpretation of Saint Teresa is to make the viewer believe in the mystical through a suspended disbelief in the physical. Although Teresa seems elevated from the ground as if frozen in a moment of collapse, she is actually supported by a formation of clouds. Rops uses the same scene to emphasise the worldliness of a saint. Had Bernini had the option of removing the structures that hold up the non-winged ceiling being in Sibande's work he would have done so. With a completely different intention to both Sibande and Bernini, Rops removes winged and non-winged being out of his image completely. This difference in intention is what differentiates Sibande's practice from both Bernini and Rops. Even though Sibande has the technological ability in the medium of photography and the platform to delve as far into the fantastical as she pleases (after all, the fantastical is where Sophie as a character is located) she does not obscure the presence of the string. At the last frontier, Sophie could grow wings and have a spiritual encounter with divinity in this way, cementing her into sainthood. Sibande, however, resists this in favour of drawing attention to the staged nature of the fantastical.

3.6 De la Porte in mind

In the language of Irish revolt, absolutism, saints, martyrs and 'far away kings', de la Porte would find evidence for his theory: very few South African artists "managed in the history of South African art to hold their own" or exert influence back to the European market (de la Porte 2013). When examining Sibande's work, on a super cial level, this seems to be true. Sibande's work highlights a need for an approach to cultural contact that aims to look at moments of connectivity, which understands history as an ongoing and collaborative project and in this way dispels the myth of origin.
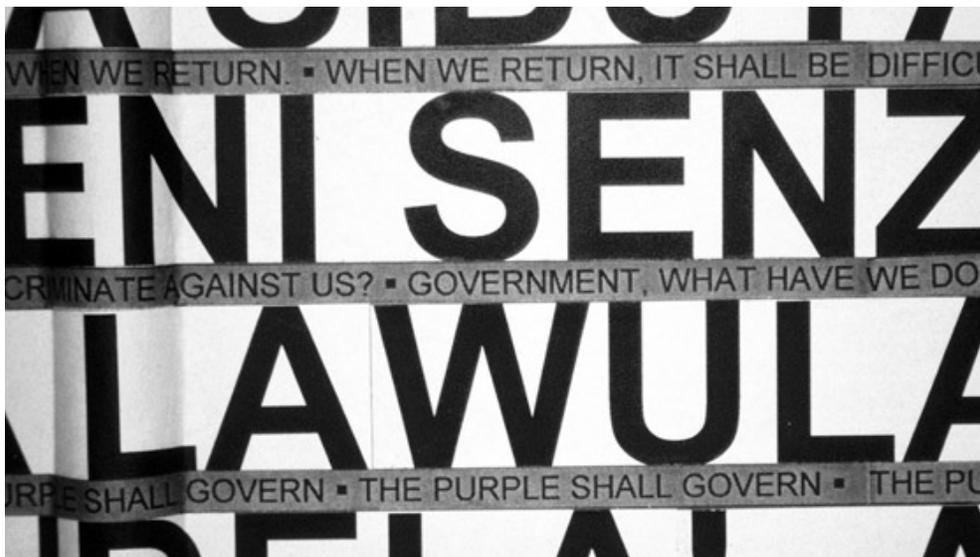
Figure 39a: Willem Boshoff, Abamfusa Lawula, 1997. Printed text on paper, masonite, wood. 366cm (overall length of 3 panels bolted together) X 244cm (height). (Boshoff 1997a)

Figure 39b: Willem Boshoff, Abamfusa Lawula (detail), 1997. Printed text on paper, masonite, wood. 366cm (overall length of 3 panels bolted together) X 244cm (height). (Boshoff 1997b)

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Sibande presents work that benefits from cross-cultural readings, as it is created in a peculiarly self-ac-cepting cross-cultural environment, namely post-apartheid South Africa. In a contem-plation of seventeenth century baroque art and architecture in Italy and speci cally a consideration of the ecstatic figure of Saint Teresa, Sibande deals with more than just blackness or post-apartheid identity, but with religion, femininity and fantasy. Sibande also contemplates her training as an artist, revealing in her references an academy, religion and femininity deeply connected to the western historical canon, but not un-critically so. The same can be argued of her use of Yeats, her personal history and the South African history she references.[31]

3.7 Staging blackness post-apartheid

The installation *A non-winged ceiling being* (Figure 22) opens up multiple possibilities for future works. It is important to this study, as it highlights something of the practice of blackness post-apartheid. Sibande usefully references the staged nature of seventeenth cen-tury baroque sensibility with a different intention than the baroque artist of the time. *The purple shall govern* begins to flesh out ways of killing off Sophie. Old Sophie, however, cannot die, because as Sophie she was always dead. In creating the myth of Sophie, Sib-ande already kills her linage in favour of the myth. Because of the staged nature of this event, 'Old' Sophie is concurrently present as a remainder of the past in this becoming. In Sibande's staged out play, *A non-winged ceiling being* emphasises the staged nature of Sophie's creation and death. It also functions as that which is birthed by Sophie, an ever-present remainder of a past which waits ominously to overthrow Sophie – particularly the monolithic signifier and yth she has become in the public imagination.

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31 In South African art history Willem Boshoff grapples with the Purple Rain Protest in a work titled *Abafusa Lawula*. The work reportedly subverts the norm by privileging previously oppressed voices (Boshoff 1997:[sp]). In the work reported struggle songs as the chant, 'Abafusa Lawula' are written in large lettering and translated into English in much smaller lettering directly underneath. The result is that those who can only read English are forced to go close up to the wall to read translations whereas those who can read the chants in the languages they were formulated are able to immediately recognise them and read them at a distance (see Figure 39a and 39b).

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I have argued that Sophie must die because Sophie as a myth aspires to whiteness. I also argued that the myth of Sophie is particularly problematic when it is consumed by 'societies' outside of the one it was created for. To be clear: Sophie's death cannot be isolated from post-colonial theory and the public in which it operates. Post-colonial theory is highly critical of monolithic signifiers like Sophie. As a commodity Sophie is 'changed' to respond to pressures of the market. I say this with Mbembe, Hall and hooks in mind. Biko is aware of the fractured nature of blackness.

In the introduction of this study I argue that, although unified discrimination in sectors of society continues post-apartheid, because of the legal fall of the system we can start to envision a time when 'blacks' in South Africa are not discriminated against as a group and therefore do not as a unit need to fight for emancipation. Dare I propose, however, that the market at times grows bored of Africa and its tired narratives of servitude and revolution? Dare I say that a change of theory works like a television remote or the refresh button? Or the declaration of a new phase, a purple phase? There is something very calculated about this declaration which adds to the staged nature of Sophie's death. Dare I say the post-apartheid state has not or cannot 'transform' at the rate at which it had imagined, and that the relevance of the black unit as imagined by Biko only emphasises this? If this analysis has currency, even as the black unit remains relevant, it is unravelled in post-colonial theory and in artistic practice in the hope that a fanta-sy of freedom may affect 'reality', or at least persuade the unit to believe in this fantasy. All the while pressure arguably builds in post-apartheid South Africa.

CHAPTER FOUR:

RE-AFRICANISATION,
THE (DE) ASSEMBLAGE OF BLACKNESS

The xenophobic attacks of 2008 and more recently of 2015, are unfortunate allegories for the complexities and inconsistencies in an oscillation between the unit and the collective. Such events in relation to this study take place at an intersection of post-apartheid practices of blackness and their relation to post-apartheid practices of Africanness, Pan Africanism to be specifi . At such an event the ever-shifting configurations of cultural politics become visible as blackness and Africanness butt heads.

The above noted attacks were by black South Africans and were aimed at black foreign nationals of African descent. They did not happen in 'suburbia', with in sightn of the growing black middle class – the shining success of 'integration' post-apartheid. They happened in post-apartheid 'townships', a space historically reserved for and currently inhabited by black South Africans. So explicit was the attack against black foreign nationals of African descent that, post 2008, the attacks have been noted as "negrophobic" (Gqola 2008) in reference to a fear of Negros (Negro understood as meaning a person of African descent). Gqola uses this term to intentionally reference the historical violence and discrimination ingrained in the term. In the most recent surge, the attacks have also been refered to as "afrophobic" (Xenophobia is in fact Afrophobia in disguise 2010; Focuses on Afrophobic attacks in Durban with situation currently stable but tense

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2015). In these attacks the blackness of someone's skin was used as a determiner of discrimination. More than this, because the perpetrators of this violence and those discriminated against both share this blackness, beyond the blackness of skin, cultural politics are evidently at play. Difference is noted between black South Africans and black foreign nationals of African descent. There is either no unity in the assemblage of blackness based on skin or 'race' or this assemblage is suspended or (de)assembled "in the struggle towards the realisation of [particular] aspiration[s]" (Biko 1971a:52).

The obscure relationship between blackness and Africanness is the focus of this chapter. The premise of this study is that blackness as described by Biko, articulates the hegemonic moment insightfully. But this study also argues that, because this hegemony relies on the discrimination of a group by an oppressive system, when that system is transgressed or the transgression of that system is a foreseeable inevitability, as is the situation in the post-apartheid state, then blackness valued in its articulation of the hegemonic moment is threatened and possibly changed. The state of this change or threat of change is in this study examined through an observation of the practices of blackness in the South African visual arts. This chapter links South Africa's post-apartheid musing on blackness with an African musing on Pan Africanism. These two ideas are not synchronised by chance but by default.

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As I have repeatedly stressed, blackness post-apartheid should be understood in context of a history of slavery, colonialism, de-colonisation, apartheid and post-apartheid. An acknowledgement of this history allows for, if we follow Hall, an appreciation of historical and experiential difference within and between communities, regions, countries, cities, national cultures and the diaspora. It also allows for a recognition of other kinds of differences that place, position and locate black people. Blackness, particularly Biko's brand of blackness, should be understood as streams of a larger Pan Africanist movement. Like Pan Africanism, blackness and black consciousness are reactionary terms and movements that unify a collective on an experiential basis. Both terms are mobilised as a means to an end – to see Africa regain its freedom from discrimination as a result of slavery and colonial rule. I have argued that both terms are mobilised or put into action in aspiration of freedom.

Thus far this study has focused on blackness within a South African context. Directed by the Standard Bank Artist of the Year Award, I have focussed on a group of artists that represent the best artistic practice as recognised by the industry they are a part of. Focusing on just South African artists is helpful in examining specificity between communities, regions, cities and national cultures. It does not, however, sufficiently suggest differences within and between national cultures and the diaspora[32]. To ignore this conceptually, would be a circumvention of the history of blackness. It would also only be justified by a misleading assumption that the fall of apartheid affects practices of blackness in South Africa alone. This chapter explores the effects of the oscillation of blackness between the unit and the collective in the artistic practice of Zimbabwean artist Kudzanai Chiurai. A shift away from South African artists is a necessary deviation taken to

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32 For a discussion of the complexities of contemporary diasporic visual cultures, see Jacueline Franis' (2009)

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relate practices of blackness post-apartheid to new developments in the older global movement of Pan Africanism.

Arguing for a recognition of the unravelling of blackness, as has been the case thus far, is at times done at the expense of an understanding of blackness as an oscillation between the unit and the collective. Blackness and Africanness cannot be conflated. The relationship between the two concepts in a study of practices of blackness post-apartheid can also not be ignored; particularly when it is accepted that Biko's brand of blackness (the unit in this case) is a stream of the older Pan Africanist movement (the collective). With no intention of equating the two terms, this chapter's precarious movement between blackness and Africanness inevitably insinuates the complexities and inconsistencies in an oscillation between the unit and the collective. Biased as a result of examples of South African artists and their artistic practice, this study has examined the practice of a South African brand of blackness. Blackness post-apartheid, however, reaches out to, but also stems from, larger and historic global movements. (De)assemblage is in this study adopted to describe the effect of practices of blackness, particularly how they oscillate between the collective and the unit; assemblage and (de)assemblage.

The Standard Bank Artist of the Year awardees have been used as benchmarks for the best practice as recognised by the industry. The Standard Bank Artist of the Year Award is not open to artists who are not South African. Being a Zimbabwean artist based in South Africa, Chiurai is not eligible for the award. Although Chiurai is not a Standard Bank Artist of the Year awardee, he has received a number of other awards, including the 2011 FNB artist of the Year Award, which is open to Southern African artists as opposed to just South African artists. I am, in this chapter, interested in artistic practices that participate in post-apartheid discourse from an 'outside' perspective. Chiurai's work becomes relevant not only because he is a Zimbabwean artist working in South Africa, but primarily because of how his work speaks to 'Africanness' as opposed to or as well as 'blackness'. I cannot here fully unpack Africanness, neither is it my intention to.

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What I am interested in is suggesting the relationship between post-apartheid practices of blackness and Africanness. In this vein, it is my intention to relate Chiurai's artistic practice as a visual component to the African Union's project of re-Africanisation via a mobilization of Pan Africanism. Relating Chiurai's work to the African Union's project of re-Africanisation is rel-evant to my larger study for the dimension it adds to post-apartheid practices of blackness.

4.1 The AU's re-Africanisation project

According to the African Union (AU), the African diaspora refers to "peoples of African descent and heritage outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship … who remain committed to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union" (Yorke 2012:86). In 2006 the African Union enacted the Diaspora Clause. The clause adds the African diaspora as the sixth zone to the existing fi e zones of west, east, north, south and central Africa. The clause, in line with the African Union's vision to involve the African diaspora as an important part of the continent in the building of the African Union, encourages the legal and political participation of the diaspora.

It is largely agreed that the Diaspora Clause remains complicated by political ambiguities and contradictions. Ambiguities are first y in terms of who exactly the clause considers to be the diaspora, moreover in terms of the rights of transnational citizenship and political sovereignty (Yorke 2012, Edozie 2012). What the clause clearly shows, however, is an African continental initiative to participate in the global world. More than this, the enactment of the clause also shows the currency that the Pan African movement holds. Edozie (2012) argues that perhaps the value of the African Union may be its cultural politics displayed in its looming ability to mobilize a reconstruction of a global African world view. Evidenced in the enactment of the disaporan sixth zone in various global spaces, is that Africa is an imagined space that spans outside the borders of the continent.

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With the objectives to promote the unity and solidarity of African states; to defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence; and to eradicate all forms of colonialism and final y to promote human rights, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was conceptualised and originally launched in 1963. The conception of the organisation reaches back to the 1800s and the independence of Haiti and has its origins in the Pan Africanist movement invigorated by slavery, colonialism and decolonisation. With the constitutional ending of apartheid in the 1990s South Africa too had final y reached the elimination of colonialism on the continent, which had been one of the primary goals of the OAU. New challenges on the continent, like HIV and AIDS and conflicts in a number of African countries, however, still expose Africa's economic underdevelopment (see Edozie 2012). Just as systematic discrimination was what had unified blackness during apartheid, apartheid itself kept the Pan African movement relevant throughout the 20th century, after the rest of the continent had gained its independence. As blackness in South African is put into a crisis because of the legal fall of apartheid, so Pan Africanism is put into a similar crisis and is thus forced to reassess that which holds the collective as a unit. The reformation of the African Union in the dying years of the twentieth century and its call for an African Renaissance is evidence of this.

By 2001 the OAU needed a new direction that would invigorate and accelerate Pan African integration and make faster progress in advancing Africa's development (Edozie 2012:277). In 2002 the African Union (AU) was launched as a reformation of the OAU. The African Union was envisioned as an African body that would provide African solutions for African problems. The organisation is advocated by the philosophy of "African Renaissance" (See Mbeki 1998). In 2006 the African Union enacted the Diaspora Clause, which Edozie (2012:27) argues, "represents the way that Pan Africanism has survived as a cultural code that has facilitated circular, trans-millennial, and universal movements of African peoples throughout the world." In the re-appropriation of the idea of Pan Africanism as

used by the African Union, culture plays an important role, as it facilitates unification The curation of Africa and African identity is therefore a key strategy for the African Union's global governance objectives to be realised.

In her concluding argument of the exploration of the African Diaspora and the African Union's Global Era of Pan Africanism Edozie, (2012:297) asks two questions: "Does the concept of AU citizenship exist in Africa or the diaspora?" (and) "Will Pan Africans be conferred with political rights and obligations?" While the latter may be a question best suited to be explored by political and legal specialists, the former is one lodged within cultural studies as well as in politics and the law. African Union citizenship is a question of identity. African identity, like all identity, as this study repeatedly points out, is a curated fantasy. If it is accepted that the AU's power is indeed cultural, then its power lies in its construction and facilitation of a fantasy in the form of an imagined African community. Chiurai's artistic practice is helpful to understanding the construction of 'African Identity' and in answering Edozie's first question (whether the concept of AU citizenship exists in Africa or the diaspora).

4.2 State of the Nation

Chiurai's *State of the Nation* series of photographic tableaus (2011) tells the story of events leading up to the inaugural speech by the first democratically elected prime minister of a fictional African state. The images are created from a collage of visual ideas sourced from news archives, art historic sources and the visual language of hip hop culture. Chiurai channels ideas from a previous body of work, The Black President (2009), a series of portraits of cabinet members from an imaginary African state.

> Asking where these images are coming from is essential; are they coming from the BBC or news or radio, or are they coming from Africa? Do we have an influence over the images that are being produced? I work with, amongst other things, media constructions, images

popularised through movies and music videos. It is important to ask how the images are used. How do we relate to them, what is their function, their purpose and are these images influenced by our culture, how can we change them, how can we make them more constructive? (Chiurai in Heidenreich and o'Toole 2012:91)

In responce to Edozie, Chiurai clearly has a strong idea of who 'we' and what 'our culture' is. He also clearly positions 'African' expressed as 'we' and 'our' in potential conflict with BBC news or radio. Chiurai's line of questioning, in one respect, leads to a conclusion agreed on by a number or theorists already discussed in this study: Said (1978), Fanon (1967), Bhabha (1994), Hook (2005). The image of the other is based on a fantasy of the other. It also, less overtly, points to a history of connectedness. There is a seductive quality to Chiurai's large scale hyper-exaggerated, saturated constructions. The war lord, child soldier, and victim of war are all depicted as 'would like to be' characters; healthy greased skin, fashionable and handsome in spite of war and brave in the face of adversity. The usual stereotypes are also not far from sight: Africans by race legitimised through skin tone and hair texture and the reiteration of the ritualistic and the earthy. The viewer is also overtly confronted with the ever-repeated image of Africa in despair and violence. The superficial nature of the images is ironic. The irony adds a different level to the violence of the image, arguably intrinsic in the violence of depiction. The images created by Chiurai are based on an Africa-in-crisis and popular narratives of horror and despair that span millennia.

A woman stands alert: dark skinned, greased, red-smudged lipstick, blond braids styled to the latest fashion, manicured nails also painted in the latest fashion (Figure 40). She stands in front of a wall. Pinned on the wall is a fan with a cherry blossom tree and a horse print. The fan reminds one of … is made in, or is it a symbol for China? Hanging on the wall is also a piece of cloth with a calabash design. The wall is covered with wall paper. The print on the wall paper is of a design repeating the English red roses. A flag of an unknown country also hangs on the wall. The flag is presumably

the flag of this mythical African state. The woman has a serious expression on her face, and she is wearing a stained white vest. Armed with a slingshot and an AK-47, she stands between Cycads in the foreground. There is no doubt that she is in Africa and that she is African.

Four gunmen stand with their guns pointed at fi e women (Figure 41) in reference to de Goya y Lucientes's, *Executions of the third of May.* The gunmen stand in front of the same background as the image previously described. One of the women is dead. She lies on the ground, eyes still open, gunshot wound to her neck, blood streaming down from her ear. Another of the five women attends to the dead woman, the rest cringe away from the gunmen. There is a sexual undertone to the gesture of the women, specifical y the one who sits in front of the dead woman. This undertone disseminates from the woman's posture as well as her low-cut neckline and lifted dress. All the women wear printed dresses of similar cuts. Of the four woman that are alive, two wear head scarves, one has an afro and the other wears her hair short. They kneel on a Persian carpet. On the carpet, to the side of the women, are two sculls. One of the sculls is perched on a rock and the other on a piece of fabric placed on a grass mat. Crates are scattered around the intimate scene. One is identifiab y branded Coca-Cola. The men, like the women, are black and greased.

In another image, a woman in a suit sits at a table as if she were Jesus with his disciples at the last supper (Figure 42). She is the only one wearing a suit. Her disciples

wear capsulate denims and khaki shorts and vests. On the table, the men eat out of enamel dishes. In front of the table, a man points an AK 47 at another man lying on the floo . Another man spits a liquid out of his mouth as he carries something bloody out of a bowl. The bowl sits on a mat with other ornaments, pointing to the ritualistic and the earthy: a clay pot, candles, alcohol glasses recycled into candle holders, a skull. Two women kneel close to the mat, crying. One holds her stomach as though she sympathises to the pain experienced by the man with a gun to his head, and the other woman is crying, as she appears to be in desperate pain.

In yet another image, three men sit around a table eating (Figure 43). The men sit on white garden chairs. In front of the man on the left, is a bowl stacked high with pap. In front of the man on the right is a bowl of water ready to be used, to wash hands perhaps. The man sits, legs open, slouched on the covered garden chair. He sits staring sug-gestively into the eyes of a woman on his left. Another woman standing behind him holds him just as warmly, her face negating what her hands are made to do. The man and the woman, on the garden chairs to the left seem to be of importance, because a man stands behind them, holding an umbrella above them, and this mans chair is the only one that is covered. The man is also the only one without his shirt on, which suggests that he may be entitled to things to which the others are not entitled. On the table is a meal of spinach, meat, pap and other unrecognisable dishes. Tea is served with this meal.

Figure 40: Kudzanai Chiurai, Revelations v, 2011. Digital pigment print, Ultra chrome ink on Innova photo fiber p per (Edition of 10), 100 x 150. (Chiurai 2011a).

Figure 41: Kudzanai Chiurai, Revelations vi, 2011. Digital pigment print, Ultra chrome ink on Innova photo fiber paper (Edition of 10), 100 x 150. (Chiurai 2011b).

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Figure 42: Kudzanai Chiurai, Revelations vii, 2011. Digital pigment print, Ultra chrome ink on Innova photo fiber paper (Edition of 10), 100 x 150. (Chiurai 2011c).

Figure 43: Kudzanai Chiurai, Revelations viii, 2011. Digital pigment print, Ultra chrome ink on Innova photo fiber p per (Edition of 10), 100 x 150. Courtesy of Goodman Gallery. (Chiurai 2011d).

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Chiurai attempts to use the Africanness of these images to give a post-colonial critique of the images, namely to question who is in control of constructing the image of Africa and, by so doing, relate the image of Africa to European power as Said does in *Orientalism* for the image of the Orient. Unlike post-colonial critiques of depic-tions of the other, Chiurai's images, being a fantasy of Africa, are not here in dispute. This study accepts that "there is no such thing as the ['African']. The [African] is much more complicated, much more heterogeneous and detailed than any ... text's grand generalisations" (Said in Sykes 1986). More than their critique of popular depictions of Africa, Chiurai's images are important to this study as they show how Africanness is practised in popular culture. Moreover, they answer Edozie's (2014) question of whether "an image of an African state exists".

Although far more open ended than the first three chapters of this study, this chapter cannot be left out of this study as it aptly reiterates the relationship between blackness and Africanness collective and unit. More importantly, towards the end of this study, as conclusions are drawn, it allows us to examine the turn that such a relationship can take. Evidence given here includes the AU's re-Africanisation project that is seemingly in stark contradiction with the 'negrophobic' practices evidenced in 2009 and 2015 and attacks on black Africans in post-apartheid townships, a space historicaly reserved for black South Africans.

This chapter should not be seen as an attempt to confla e the practice of Africanness with that of blackness, but rather an attempt to show the relationship between these two practices in its full contradiction. Important for this study is how the significance of this relationship is potentially affected by the post-apartheid moment. This chapter begins to suggest the fate of practices amalgamating collective as unit. Chiurai's images go beyond the blackness that has dominated this study and links it with the larger global movement of Pan Africanism

and the quest by the AU for a re-Africanisation linking it to post-apartheid South Africa. I do not have answers as to how the viewer is to deal with the violence, gender relations and stereotypes depicted and potentially perpetuated in Chiurai's images. It is also not my intention to imply that such images are 'true' representations of Africa. What I can say is that such images, more than proving Europe's power, for the sake of this study prove that an idea of Africanness exists. As images representing a fictional African state they prove that a fantasy of an African state and by default African citizenship exist and that such images can be curated. Perhaps organisations like the AU, which wish to harness the ideal of Africanness, can in future explore with more vigour how to ad-vantageously curate the image of Africa. The curation of Africa opens up posibilities to how Africanness is and can be practised post-apartheid. It potentialy also opens up methodological frameworks in which such practices can be studied.

CHAPTER FIVE:
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This study imagines, as Hall does, the end of the essentialist back subject; in Biko's terms, the end of the black unit. By deconstructing black experience, that is, by appreciating historical and experiential differences within and between communities, regions, countries, cities, national cultures and diaspora, as well as recognising other kinds of differences that place, position and locate black people, Hall (1992:473) recommends the cultural politics that make deconstructing the monolithic black subject possible. The question asked in this study is how blackness is practised in contemporary post-apartheid art made by emerging black artists.

The above stated question has been explored, developed, supported and explained throughout this study. In this exploration, evidence and examples have been given from critical post-colonial theory [Biko (1971), Hall (1989,1990, 1992), Mbembe (2002), Bhabha (1994), Hook (2005, 2013), Spivak (1999), Said (1978), Lonsdale (2002) and Mamdani (2001)] and the artistic practices of artists Nandipha Mntambo, Nicholas Hlobo, Mary Sibande and Kudzanai Chiurai from the perspective of post-apartheid South Africa. This final concluding chapter reiterates the problem and the research question through an iteration of the conceptual underpinning of the study; it synthesises the findings of the study by linking the themes and the findings of chapters two, three and four; grapples with the theoretical implications of such findings suggests ways in which the findings of this study can be developed in future research and final y engages with the limitations of the study.

The leading argument in this study is based on the premise that blackness as described by Biko, despite its apparent construction for a specific moment in history, has currency in post-apartheid South Africa. Blackness as described by

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Biko articulates the hegemonic moment insightfully. The hegemony of Biko's black unit, however, relies on the discrimination against a group by an oppressive system. When that system is transgressed, or the transgression of that system is a foreseeable inevitability, blackness valued in its articulation of the hegemonic moment is threatened and possibly changed. The state of this change or threat of change is in this study examined through an observation of practices of blackness.

5.1 Empirical findings

This study emerges from a musing on theoretical conceptions of blackness; it uses the artistic practice of emerging young black artists to explore and examine practices of blackness post-apartheid. The artistic practice examined here should not be seen as illustrations given as evidence, to prove theoretical conceptions of blackness. Neither should theoretical conceptions of blackness be used to validate artistic practice and the post-apartheid moment. The artistic practices examined here should rather be seen as practice-led research into conceptions of blackness. When this study is understood as such, the tension that holds it together is the relationship between critical theory, artistic practice and the post-colonial moment. In other words, this study should be looked at as an examination of how the relationship between conception and practice is bound to a historical moment, the post-apartheid moment. The findings in an examination of conceptions of blackness necessitates an examination of its practice. The empirical findings of this study are therefore twofold: They consist of findings on conceptions of blackness and practices of blackness.

5.1.1 Conceptions of blackness

The two conceptual propositions that hold this argument together follow the arguments of Biko (1971a) and Hall (1989,1990a, 1990b, 1992). Biko's and Hall's positions are used to explore specific South African concepts of blackness in relation to diasporic concepts of blackness. This relationship is important to both the development and conceptual grounding of this study. Biko speaks of a blackness

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shaped by an embodied experience of apartheid; Hall speaks of a blackness shaped by diasporic experience.

If Biko's argument is accepted and 'blacks' are a group who come together as a unit and identify themselves as a unit because of political, economic and social discrimination, then, according to Biko's argument, if the discrimination could be factored out, 'blacks' would no longer have anything holding them together as a unit. 'Blacks' coming together as a unit is the result of an oppressive system not yet overthrown. Biko's premise relies on two positions: first y, that a group exists and that it comes together as a unit and, secondly, that that unit is discriminated against as a group legally, politically, socially and economically. From this understanding it can be accepted that what pushes 'blacks' into unity for Biko is discrimination in its various forms.

Let us then introduce Hall's argument along with Biko's and equate Hall's essentialist black unit with Biko's black unit. Should there then be an end to the essentialist black unit, this end would require that race always appears historically in articulation with other categories and divisions that are constantly crossed and re-crossed by categories of class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality (Hall 1989:444). If this is recognised, then the unit cannot be seen as a hegemonic moment but a process of unificatio never totally achieved. The recognition that race always appears historically in articulation with other categories and divisions is therefore, for Hall, the end of the essentialist black subject. Inversely, if the black unit holds together, then only race is recognised.

Biko and Hall agree that race is what holds blackness together. If we revisit the inverse of both their arguments: Race is what holds the black unit together for Hall. Similarly for Biko, discrimination is what unifies 'blacks', and race, at least during legalised apartheid, is used as a determiner of that discrimination.

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Biko and Hall disagree on the catalyst that brings about the (de)assemblage of the unit. Although I must admit that Biko does not imply a simple unity but recognises that the unit is made up of a collective, his argument implies that the hegemonic moment of unity ends with the realisation of black aspiration. Biko implies that the end of the black unit goes hand in hand with the end of discrimination. Hall on the other hand argues that recognition of nuance within the alleged unit is the catalyst that leads to the end of the unit. For Hall this recognition throws blackness into an infinite state of unification and in this way is something never totally achieved. Hall does not engage, as Biko does, with the purpose of this unification The process described by Hall implies an action, an action that happens repeatedly, one which is infinit , one which is never totally achieved.

Biko's and Hall's conceptions of blackness are synthesised in this study to gain a more comprehensive conception of blackness. Hall's concept of blackness does not account for the purpose of unification Biko's concept is therefore used to account for this. Biko's concept of blackness accounts for a world where discrimination either exists or does not exist. The post-apartheid landscape, however, is one which is widely accepted as porous, disjointed and fractured [Mbembe (2002), Hook (2005), Peffer (2003), Williamson and Jamal (1996), Dlamini (2009, 2014), Mamdani (2001), Lonsdale (2002)]. Discrimination in such a landscape does not either exist or not exist. Hall's conception of blackness becomes relevant here, as its grappling with blackness goes beyond the existence or non-existence of an oppressive system. Blackness here instead becomes an infinite process of unification Because Biko's conception of blackness relies on discrimination as a constant, Hall's understanding of blackness as a process of unification is a necessary development to Biko's blackness, if it is to stay relevant in conditions where discrimination is in flux Through Hall's recognition of blackness as a process of unification blackness as understood by Biko can be examined in post-apartheid conditions by examining practices of blackness. How then is blackness practised post-apartheid? This is the question that leads this study's investigation into practices of blackness in visual art practice.

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5.1.2 Practices of blackness

Accepting that blackness is a process of unification never totally achieved, this study locates itself within visual art practice. In its probing, the study is divided into chapters that conceptually explore blackness in its different stages in processes of unifications. Chapter two explores the place of the ritualistic and the earthy; chapter three explores Staging Sophie's death and chapter four explores Re-Africanisation, the (de) assemblage of blackness. This section synthesizes the empirical findings from the above mentioned chapters. A synthesis of these findings answers the study's main research question, how blackness is practised through contemporary post-apartheid art made by emerging black artists.

Chapter two, *The place of the ritualistic and the earthy,* explores fixity and the place of the ritualistic and the earthy in practices of blackness post-apartheid. The workings of fixity and the racial stereotype are unpacked via Bhabha (1994) and Hook (2005). Fixity is a key colonial strategy used to maintain colonial order. In this vein, the earthy and the ritualistic are used synonymously with blackness so as to maintain the colonial as progressive and blacks as those who are ever-fixed, tied to the ritualistic and the earthy. Mbembe (2002) attacks African modes of self-writing as problematically employing strategies of fixity. From this argument, he recommends ways to reconceptualise modes of writing the self. How Mbembe's recommendations are practised are developed here in an examination into the problems encountered by artists Mntambo and Hlobo in their implementation of Mbembe's recommendations.

The concept of transgression is developed, in order to assert early on in the argument the idea of blackness as an action. It is argued that transgression as a theory not only puts the study at an intersection of apartheid and its others, namely blackness as understood by Biko (1971a) but that trnsgression is ideally positioned to witness how that blackness is practised, how it acts, how it transgresses. An understanding of transgression, specific y, transgression from the space of the other (Bhabha 1994) as an apt post-colonial dream, is unpacked and from here echoed throughout the study.

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In an exploration of the artistic practices of Mntambo and Hlobo, it is found that the ritualistic and the earthy are recurring motifs that are at times used problematically. A major problem in such practices is the multiplicity of history that 'black' as a term speaks to simultaneously. I argue that Mntambo specifical y puts herself in a corner by trying to entertain too many histories at the same time.

Chapter three, *Staging Sophie's death,* moves away from the ritualistic and earthy into the fantasy world of Sophie. The mythical character Sophie is equated to the concept of blackness. Sibande's (in Transformations seminar 2014) "letting go of Sophie" in *The purple shall govern* is explored as a metaphorical ungrouping of blackness. The staging of Sophie's death gives evidence to the staged nature of blackness. Chapter three proposes that 'Sophie's death' is a result of Sibande's personal conflict with the character of Sophie as well as a response to pressure from critical post-colonial theory and an art market demanding alternative ways of staging blackness. The wide range of Sibande's references in her grappling with the character of Sophie, namely politics, poetry, art history, personal history, religion, feminist theory as well as race theory, is explored. Through this exploration it is evidenced that Sibande draws on more than just race theory. In Hall's conception, I expose her cultural politics.

Chapter four, *Re-Africanisation, the (de) assemblage of blackness,* seemingly contradicts the argument of chapter three. In opposition to the ungrouping motion of blackness in *Staging Sophie's death*, a regrouping motion of blackness is engaged with. By moving outside the South African context and blackness explored in previous chapters, chapter four focuses on the relationship between the concepts of blackness and Africannness. This chapter's movement between blackness and Africanness suggests the complexities and inconsistencies in an oscillation between the unit and the collective. Blackness is reiterated as a stream of the older global movement of Pan Africanism. Practices of blackness post-apartheid are then tied to the African Union's agenda of re-Africanisation. Following Edozie (2012) I take interest in whether the concept of AU citizenship exists in Africa or the diaspora. In response to this question, Chiurai's body of work

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State of the nation is explored. Chiurai's artistic practice is helpful to understanding existing myths of Africa; what they are and how they work. Chiurai's (2011 a, b, c & d) State of the nation series of photographic tableaus tells the story of events leading up to the inaugural speech by the first democratically elected prime minister of a fictional African state. This series of photographs is explored as evidence that an idea of African citizenship exists and can be mobilised. I propose that organisations wanting to mobilise unifying terms, like blackness and Africanness in the case of the AU, focus on how to advantageously curate existing images of Africa. Africa is reiterated as a myth and a curation of that myth encouraged.

5.1.3 How then is blackness practised?

From the findings of an examination into conceptions of blackness developed from Biko and Hall, an examination of the practice of blackness is necessitated. A synthesis of Biko's and Hall's conceptions of blackness as well as the exploration of the fixing ungrouping and regrouping motions of blackness in the artistic practices of Mntambo, Hlobo, Sibande and Chiurai, undertaken in chapter two, three and four, all converge to show how blackness is practised post-apartheid. From the evidence gathered in the three chapters the way blackness is practised can be compared to the workings of a pendulum.

A pendulum is a scientific system made up of a pivot, a string or a solid rod and a weight. The weight is attached to the string and the string hangs on a frictionless pivot. At equilibrium the weight attached to the string hangs vertically down from the string attached to a frictionless pivot. When a pendulum is displaced sideways from equilibrium it is subjected to restoring forces like gravity. This gives rise to a movement towards equilibrium. Compared to practices of blackness, blackness can be seen as the weight of a pendulum, discrimination the force that displaces the weight sideways, freedom from discrimination a restoring force like gravity, the trajectory of the weight the different stages of blackness as it oscillates between the two highest points of its trajectory. The highest points of the trajectory mark the hegemonic black unit. In this system, blackness oscillates between the hegemonic moment of unity on the left

and on the right (Figure 44). Following Hall (1989), the hegemonic moment of unity is in a constant state of becoming, never totally achieved. Blackness in practice is blackness jolted into motion by an oppressive system (Biko 1971a). It oscillates between the highest points of its trajectory moving between motions of (de)assemblage ungrouping as it moves to equilibrium and regrouping as it moves towards the hegemonic moment.
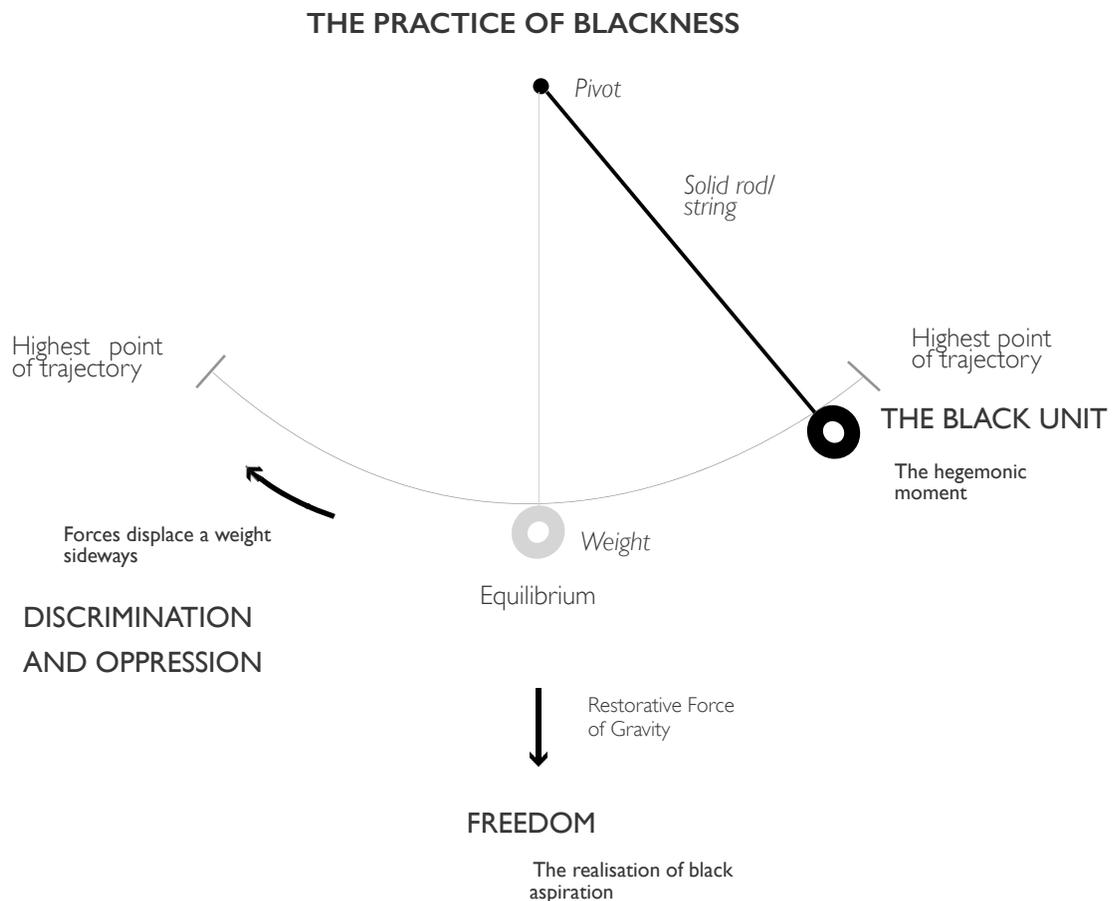
THE PRACTICE OF BLACKNESS

Figure 44: *The practice of blackness*, 2015
Visualisation by author

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A pendulum is a system which, once moved, continues to swing for a long period. Gravity in this system is ironically the force that keeps the pendulum in motion and that which restores equilibrium. Freedom or equilibrium in this system represents the realisation of black aspiration. This position can easily be mistaken as a point of rest. It must be noted however that even when all the forces of a pendulum are in equilibrium forces like gravity are still at work pulling the weight vertically down. Similarly, when blackness is not oscillating between hegemonic moments of unity it remains an active term. Translated, freedom or the aspiration of freedom is both the force that restores blackness to equilibrium and that which keeps it oscillating between hegemonic moments of unity on the left and right.

The system described here is a two dimensional mechanical system. Cultural practice, however, resembles more of a dynamic system where not all elements can be accounted for and/or measured. The oscillation in such a system is not only between two points of unity that represent race but several other points of hegemonic unity like class, gender, historical and experiential unity as well as other kinds of unity that place, position and locate people (Hall 1992:473). An understanding of the two dimensional mechanical system here described, nevertheless makes it possible to translate the workings of this system into a dynamic cultural system visualising how blackness is practised.

5.2 Theoretical implications

The implications of the above explored synthesis with respect to its impingement on the theories of Biko and Hall has been discussed extensively. To study blackness post-apartheid from a South African context, Biko's and Hall's theories of blackness are synthesised, allowing for a theory to study the practice of blackness. An exploration of the practice of blackness, in the artistic practices of Mntambo, Hlobo, Sibande and Chiurai, using the synthesised version of Biko and Hall's theory, supports an answer to the research question. In an exploration of

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practices of blackness, support and evidence is given to substantiate what can be called, for the sake of this study, 'the pendulum theory' namely that the practice of blackness can be compared to the workings of a pendulum.

If the workings of blackness are compared to the working of a pendulum, two fates for practices of blackness post-apartheid are illuminated in two slightly different models of the practice of blackness. In the first model, at equilibrium, on the realisation of aspirations, blackness can be shelved as a signifier ready to be mobilised by anyone in reaction to an oppressive system. In this case, a sentence like, "The blackest people where I am from are Kurds and Serbians" becomes plausible. Blackness here is practiced by an oppressed people to overcome an oppressive system. It is also assumed that an oppressive system is the only force that can displace blackness from equilibrium. In the second model, the momentum gathered by blackness in its relation to the global Pan African movement is harnessed and redirected for reasons related to but not confined to overcoming an oppressive system. The AU's attempt to launch Africa into the global world culture in its global governance objectives would qualify as such a reason. In this case the term is retained as a tool used by Africa to mobilise Africans for the gain of Africans. Here the catalyst jolting blackness towards the hegemonic moment of unity is variable. Such a model fli ts with the reduction of Africanness to blackness. Mobilisation of blackness post-apartheid seems unsure of which model to put into action.

5.2.1 Revisiting de la Porte

De la Porte argues that, historically, South African artists grapple with finding their own voice in the art world. He argues that their work is always linked to some or other great European artist. For de la Porte, many South African masters appropriate or even directly copy European artists, but very few, in his words, "managed in the history of South African art to hold their own" (de la Porte 2013 a) or exert influenc back to the European market. De la Porte acknowledges that all artists are influenced by master works of art, but argues that, when one studies great European

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artists, there seems to be an urgency to shake off the style of their master and find their own style. De la Porte argues that, in the case of South Africa, this urgency does not exist. He concludes that South African artists lack an anxiety about influenc.

When the art of Mntambo, Hlobo, Sibande and Chiurai is studied, nuance and a multiplicity of influence is recognised. The multiple influences that these artists grapple with tie them to multiple histories that are infinite y multiplied by time and space. As widespread as their influences may be, what connects the artists in this study is geography and time realised in the post-apartheid moment. In their grappling with this moment this group of artists participate in practice led research that only an artist with the specificity of their constellation of cultural politics could. In this way these artists draw from but also pour out into the artistic world. More than trying to appeal to some European aesthetic, the work and the group of artists studied here grapple with their constellation of cultural politics. They grapple with their art in relation to the moment they find themselves working in and in relation to other artists that they find themselves working with. They grapple with remainders of histories that span both time and space.

De la Porte's reading of this group of artists has merit. This group of artists do find themselves, launched into the art market at a relatively young age and could find themselves as a result, stuck in terms of style and content. To tie this artistic frustration solely to their 'South Africanness', however, is to disregard the constellation of cultural politics that are at play in their various artistic practices. De la Porte's position is in this way speculative and alludes to Africa as a non-participant in the connected history of humanity. It perpetuates contemporary ideas of African exceptionalism. It denies the South African artist the equal right to the connectedness of humanity and undermines her ability to add to this history. It also relegates this artist once again to the prodigal child of history by replicating colonial ideas of Europe as progressive and Africa as ever-fixed, or in de la Porte's estimation, ever-lagging.

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5.3 Considerations for further research

As a collective the group of artists practising blackness in this study come together to form a genre. I reluctantly call this genre 'post-colonial pop'. Further conceptual research could focus on this collective and their relationship with each other beyond their practices of blackness. Such conceptual musings could further the idea of 'post-colonial pop' as a genre and tie it to other global trends. Participants in the above mentioned genre are largely involved in subverting colonialism. The post-apartheid moment particularly looked at as fulfilling aspects of the Pan African dream of an emancipated Africa, demands enquiry that stretches beyond an immediate past, the present and foreseeable future.

Afrofuturism as a discourse is making strides in opening up futures beyond the foreseeable. Studies linking the works of African masters to contemporary art practice are needed. A lack in the literature, however, is a vigorous historicising of visual cultures that delve further back than the colonial, into ancient histories from a southern African context in particular. In this regard I am interested in the remainders of ancient visual cultures and their contemporary visualisation. With a few architectural exceptions, research into the ancient histories of southern Africa is largely dominated by historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and sociologists. The visual arts, in practice led research, could make a meaningful contribution in this field Such research would not be scientific accounts but rather fantastical visual re-imaginings of ancient histories located within the landscape, with the agenda of relating the remains of such landscapes to the contemporary. Such a study would take an approach in agreement with theorists concerned with, like the current study, practice. The study would ask, "Not what landscape is or means but what it does, how it works as a cultural practice" (Mitchel 2002a:1).

5.4 Limitations of the study

This study is limited by its parameters. By studying only the best practice this study already limits its scope of blackness as a result. The artists studied here attended

the best universities in the country and are a representation of the most productive galleries in the country. With its reliance on literary texts the study is limited by available research, which is not very extensive. Research is limited not necessarily in terms of critical theory but to the artists that had been chosen. A vigorous historicising of blackness as a term would have also been beneficial to this study. In terms of argument this study is limited by two underlying assumptions made in the problem statement and research question. The first assumption is that the legal fall of apartheid and the post-apartheid moment have an effect on the concept of blackness. This assumption is motivated by the conviction that, if blackness is conceived as a reaction to the apartheid system historically linked to slavery, colonialism and de-colonisation, the legal fall of apartheid should surely have an effect on concepts of blackness.

The second assumption made in this study is that the artists chosen here are 'black'. In other words, the argument assumes that Mntambo, Hlobo, Sibande and Chiurai are all black based on race. This assumption is made following Biko and Hall who both agree that race is what holds the black unit together. Studying practices of blackness, the assumption of blackness is necessary for the arguments put forward in this study to work. Blackness determined by race is in this case a reaction to a history whose determiner for discrimination is race (Biko 1971a). As with Biko and Hall isolating the black unit is a necessary step to illuminating the collective (Biko 1971) and nuance or the cultural politics (Hall 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1992), that make up the unit. This is not a contradiction to the argument put forward in this study, namely that blackness is a process of unification never totally achieved. Assuming the artists here chosen are black based on race is a necessary step to prove this argument.

5.5 Conclusion

This study set out to examine practices of blackness in post-apartheid art made by emerging black artists. From an observation of the workings of fixity, the

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ungrouping and regrouping motions in practices of blackness with regard to the visual arts, this study accepts that blackness is a myth created as a means to an end. On this acceptance and drwawing on observations of practices of blackness, the pendulum theory is suggested to explain how blackness is practised. The observations made in this study are significant or southern African art made post-apartheid but also to movements wishing to mobilise a collective as a unit: 'black', 'African', 'South African'. If it is accepted that culture will play a significant role in such movements, then the visual arts will be looked to more and more for direction on what it means to be, 'black', 'African', 'southern African'. These are myths whose practice can be mobilised by a displacement from equilibrium or brought back to equilibrium by restoring forces. An acceptance of this sets the artists free in their practice to curate these myths in both consultative and critical ways with an understanding of how they are practised.

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