TRACING THE IDEA OF AFRICAN VERNACULAR-ROOTED ART: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN AND NIGERIAN ARTISTS (2007-2016)

By

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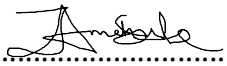
Signature.....  ..... Date: 28 November 2019

ABSTRACT

In this study, I seek to explore how contemporary art created by Nigerian and South African artists can be described to be rooted in an African vernacular. To this end, I conducted a comparative analysis of the cultural imageries and symbolisms of four Nigerian and four South African artists. For each of the artists, five of their works produced between 2007 and 2016 were purposively sampled. Thus, the study investigates forty works within the ten year period. The comparative analysis focuses on visual hermeneutics theory and art historical methodologies (formal analysis). Accordingly, the analysis examines the artists' personal influences, training, frames of reference, knowledge base and philosophy as well as reception of their works.

Given the fact that most of the selected artists are excluded from mainstream art historical research because their works are said to be outside the normative contemporary art standards, this study establishes that the trend of their art is significant and should be researched. For that reason, the selected artists were included in this study so as to contribute a mainstream art historical discourse on their artworks. In the theoretical underpinning of this study, it is argued that although vernacular arts were produced in historical African arts context, nevertheless the contemporary modes of cultural appropriations in artworks by the selected academically trained artists are not a continuation of the historical African. Therefore this study establishes that the adoption of the term African vernacular rooted in narrating contemporary African arts produced by Nigerian and South African artists is a rethink in the use of the old term in opening up new discourse on engagement with cultural imageries and symbolisms. As a result, this research argues that their ideological trends in appropriating cultural imageries in arts are not a different form of contemporary African art. The significance of this research lies in the contribution of knowledge to the existing literature on global contemporary African art, and in initiating the exercise of documenting visual culture of artists from both countries.

Although the study provides a wider insight into appropriations of cultural symbolisms in the works of these artists, it shows that some of the artists focus their visual narratives on specific dominant vernacular tropes or cultural imageries and symbolisms in narrating experiences from past and present occurrences in both countries. However, many of the dominant cultural symbolisms are basically depictions of either young black African children or compositions showing African men and women. However, they narrate different experiences and aspects of African socio-cultural life. Significantly, the depictions in the artworks of the contemporary artists demonstrate, in different heterogeneous ways, African identities through cultures, heritage, history and identity. Furthermore, most of the African vernacular rooted arts discussed in this study reveal influences from environmental factors such as migration, homelessness, African humanism, socio-cultural ceremonies, cultural and racial unity, oppression, ritual murders, and family life.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

In Anitra Nettleton's (2011:13a) words, "In almost all instances, contemporary African artists on the 'high art' circuit were engaged in a search for an African identity, framed in the universalising forms of Western modernism, often similarly reliant on adaptations of [not only] historical African forms" but cultural imageries and symbolisms. However, as Nettleton further notes, an art-historical narrative on contemporary appropriations of cultural imageries and symbols in the works of selected Nigerian and South African artists, can only be written when close attention is paid to the works of an individual artist. Therefore, although contemporary African artists from Nigeria and South Africa appropriate cultural imageries in artworks in the twenty-first century, the vernacular imageries depicted by South African artists appears rooted in personal and shared experiences on "'identity, memory, history" and killings of black South Africans, nevertheless their invocation of their perceived lost past "is deeply implicated in the construction and reconstruction of past in and for the present" (Richards 2011:47). While in Nigeria, artists articulate "aesthetic expressions ... [of] socio-cultural and political themes that align with the aspirations of the society" (Filani 1998:34).

This art-historical narrative does not merely focus on narrating the figurative renditions of individual contemporary African artists from Nigeria and South Africa but deems them as African vernacular rooted symbolisms because they appropriate and articulate cultural forms (Greaves 2015:7) which have their roots in indigenous African cultures or urban contexts. In this study, the researcher pays close attention to reading five works from each of the eight academically trained artists working in particular media and explores not only the formal elements but how the vernacular rooted art (symbols and cultural imagery) which they consider African are represented. Even though these artists are marginalised in studies of contemporary art because they continue to appropriate indigenous symbols and cultural motifs in artworks, the researcher establishes during interviews with them the reasons such motifs feature prominently in their representations. Thereafter, their views were used in the thematic interpretations of their oeuvres in this research. This study also establishes that contemporary African vernacular rooted paintings and sculptures of academically trained artists from both countries are not continuations of the historical African art forms or a different aspect of contemporary art practice, but a demonstration of the search for significant forms in visual culture (Ogbechie 2009:136). In this study, the personal influences, training,

frames of reference, knowledge base and philosophy of these artists and the reception of their works were also narrated.

As the study focuses on two principal countries in Africa, a comparative approach is utilised not merely by comparing works and ideas of artists between Nigeria and South Africa but also works of artists from the same country. As Hantrais (1995:2) notes, a cross-national comparative approach is applied to this "study [by] ... examin[ing] particular issues or phenomena in two ... countries with the intention of comparing their manifestations in different socio-cultural settings". This comparative analysis not only cuts across nationalities but also compares diversities. Furthermore, as Ragin (1994:1) argues, "In comparative research on diversity, by contrast, the category of phenomena that the investigator is studying is usually specified at the outset". Thus, the category of phenomena that this research compares is not just the vernacular-rooted symbols and imagery in the contemporary artworks of South African and Nigerian artists, but the aims or ideas their interpretations convey.

1.2 Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to critical analysis of five artworks from each of the eight artists selected: four South African and four Nigerian artists who represent images of people and symbols in their contemporary artworks produced within the last ten years. Even though the numbers of artworks by individual artists are limited to critical analysis of five works each, the study interrogates forty in all within the ten year period of analysis and compares them. A reason for this limitation is, as Ragin notes, one of the concerns of comparative research, which is establishing familiarity with each case (artworks) included in a study. Therefore, the artworks studied are paintings and sculptures, with specific focus on two painters and two sculptors each from South Africa and Nigeria. The choice of artworks is delimited to 2007-2016 so as to ascertain the vernacular-rooted and indigenous elements that characterised the representations of imageries and symbols used by the selected artists within this period in their particular regional and global frames of reference. The decade long period is also important for the expansion and globalisation of contemporary African art, during which its focus shifted considerably to international tendencies, such as new media and installation art. The fact that there are African contemporary artists who, within this new global orientation, still focus on indigenous and local symbolisms is notable, and is sometimes described as retroactive or reactionary. This project does not merely establish the

reasons for such focus but clarifies how the uses of vernacular-rooted symbolisms are narrated as part of African contemporaneity.

Purposive sampling was employed in identifying relevant artists that fit into the phenomena identified above. In Teddlie and Yu's (2007:5) view, purposive sampling is defined as "sampling which involves selecting certain units or cases based on a specific purpose rather than randomly". They argue that this broad category includes "sampling to achieve representativeness or comparability". Therefore, the four South African artists selected are two painters: Nelson Makamo (b. 1982) and Lebohang Sithole (b. 1989), and two sculptors: Pitika Ntuli (b. 1942) and Sinethemba Ngubane (b. 1991). The four Nigerian artists selected are two painters: Shonibare Olatunbosun (b. 1976) and Chinedu Ogakwu (b. 1975) and two sculptors: Ijisakin Yemi Olaolu (b. 1957) and Fidelis Odogwu Eze (b. 1970). Although paintings and sculptures may be considered retroactive in view of new media and installation arts, the study identifies reasons why these artists still use these mediums in a contemporary context where most artists work in new media, which accounts for the adoption of purposive sampling. The selected artists from the two countries are academically trained, have experience in producing professional contemporary artworks and exhibiting their works nationally and/or internationally, which possibly contributed to the diversities of vernacular-rooted arts interrogated in this study.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is a comparative study of selected contemporary African artists from South Africa and Nigeria, which identifies similarities and differences in terms of vernacular-rooted ideas that are translated in the media they use, their philosophy, influences, and representations of symbols and cultural imagery which they consider African. Furthermore, the outcome of this research creates a narrative of contemporary African arts that is African-centred in a global age. More specifically it highlights, investigates and documents contemporary African artists, and how their ideological stances frame the production of contemporary African artworks.

The research objectives are guided by the following questions: What are the kinds of symbols and cultural imagery adapted by selected artists in contemporary African art? What are the sources of the symbols and cultural imagery in the works of the selected artists? Are

their imageries associated with the social life of African cultures? How similar are the sources of inspirations of the selected South African and Nigerian artists in representing symbols and cultural imagery in artworks? What are the similarities and/or differences in the representations of symbols and cultural imagery in the works of the selected South African and Nigerian artists? Accordingly, this research;

i. Traces and selects five artworks from each of the eight academically trained artists (four from South Africa and four from Nigeria) that represent their ideas about vernacular-rooted symbols and cultural imagery that are considered African in contemporary art.
ii. Analyses and evaluates the forms, contents, media and subject matters of symbols and cultural imagery (vernacular-rooted art) considered African, represented in the contemporary arts of each selected artist using visual hermeneutics theory /critical theories and art historical methods.
iii. Evaluates and compares the similarities, differences, discrepancies and divergences in the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbolism of contemporary artworks of the selected South African and Nigerian artists.
iv. Critically interrogates the ideas each artist represents in the contexts and contents of their works and compares them for similarities and differences and the factors responsible for the similarities or differences.

1.4 Background and identification of research problem

The appropriations of cultural forms in African art experienced a drastic shift from traditional to modern African art during modernity in Africa, which predates the emergence of nations. Most nations came into being through colonial fiat from 1920 onwards but achieved independence from colonial rule later, such as Egypt in 1922 and Ghana in 1957, with most others reaching independence from 1960 onwards. Modernity already made significant inroads into Africa during the colonial period, from 1890 onwards. There was however a new form of modernity with the emergence of nations, acknowledged by Bhabha (1990:1), when he argues that "despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a more transitional social reality." The efforts to define a post-colonial position within the transitional social reality that Bhabha identifies caused contemporary African artists to represent cultural motifs in their arts during the postcolonial era. Okeke-Agulu (2010:506) asserts that artists in Nigeria for example reinserted "the aesthetic resources of pan-Nigerian

traditions within the contemporary conditions of post-colonial subjectivity then in ascendance in many parts of Africa". Nettleton (2011:14) observes that contemporary South African artists Sydney Kumalo (1935-1988) and Ezrom Legae (1938-1999) both "developed their versions of [representing] African forms" in artworks. Commenting on how the contemporary practice of Ghanaian artist, El Anatsui represented symbols from his culture as well, Jegede (2010:82) states that "Anatsui's impressive work *Duvor*...drew… salient characteristics of the Kente,[1] the primary source for the work". Within this development, Nettleton (2011:13) argues that modern African art, like traditional African and Western arts, often reflects the artists' representations of cultural imagery. Therefore, the representations of the urban context and other non-vernacular specific imagery also count as cultural representations in this study.

In this study, the researcher traced the ideological stances on representations of symbols and cultural imageries which are deemed vernacular-rooted symbols in contemporary African art of selected South African and Nigerian academically trained artists, with a focus on works they produced between 2007 and 2016. Although the choice of the period is narrow, the essence is the examination of the artists, trends, and influences in representing contemporary art with symbols and cultural imagery that they consider indigenously African. According to Mudimbe (1988:17), the trends refer to "ideological concerns … [of] an individual's projections of consciousness, the norms exemplified by one's society".

The choice of conducting the research among selected South African and Nigerian artists is to identify legitimate markers of similarities and differences in their contemporary art practices. The two countries were selected to explore a wider continental understanding of diversity in the scope of this study. Even though literature abounds on artistic developments in South Africa and Nigeria, there is no known study that compares their artistic activities and documents such contemporary realities; this study fills the gap in knowledge by documenting case studies and the similarities and differences in contemporary art. This study, therefore, documents and evaluates the vernacular-rooted contributions of some South African and Nigerian artists to the global contemporary within the stated ten year period.

[1] Kente cloth originates from the Ashanti people of Ghana. The tradition of kente cloth is said to have been developed in the 17th century and stems from ancient Akan weaving techniques dating as far back as the 11th century AD (this is one of Africa's textile traditions)

Since the study has to do with two nations, Bhabha's theory offers a perspective for the narration. Bhabha (1990:4) argues that the "nation as narration will establish [its] cultural boundaries … so that they may be acknowledged as containing thresholds of meaning that must be … translated in the process of cultural production". Renan (1990:11) defines a nation as "a historical result brought about by a series of convergent facts". This is why the study is conducted bearing in mind that South Africa, as an emergent community, was narrated by Nelson Mandela (Redemption Television Program 2015) as "a nation of many races". In contrast, Kasfir (2010:88) argues that "In South Africa, citizenship, not race or ethnicity, is the currency", but ethnicity is not absent in South African identity politics. According to Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:10), the problem with ethnicism is that it "alludes negatively, to tribalism, [and was] 'a propagation of apartheid". Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:18) also affirm that "culture may be transmitted, without significant slippage, into ethnicity". On the other hand, Nigeria is a multi-cultural nation with multiple ethnicities and three major ethnic groups, namely Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Kashim and Adelabu (2010:1) affirm that "Nigeria consists of many ethnic communities, with a great diversity of people, culture, and arts". The narration of the nation in this study also notes that the idea of South Africa and Nigeria as nations unfolded differently, despite the fact that both processes unfolded in the aftermath of British colonial rule. The principal difference between the Nigerian and South African nations is that Nigeria was not a settler colony for Europeans, and an overwhelming presence of white settlers' colonists was not as significant a factor in Nigerian nation building as was regional, religious and ethnic differences.

As Benita Parry (1994:14) defines Homi Bhabha's notion of cultural difference adopted in this study, it is the "momentary extinction of the recogni[s]able object of culture in the disturbed artifice of its signification, at the edge of experience". This accounts for Bhabha's enunciation of the concept of hybridity as "the recognition that society cannot be defined through fixed and static identities but through the hybridi[s]ation of interstitial passages, ambivalent spaces and cultural difference that is ... the true location of culture" (Bhabha 1994:17). Thus Bhabha's cultural theory implies that the intersections of original cultures blend different cultural elements and knowledge of people into new ideas of culture. In Bhabha's (1994:3) view, the articulation of cultural differences in a society creates "on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation". However, hybridity in post-colonial studies occurs when nations, cultures,

and individuals intermingle and unconsciously adopt many foreign ideas and ways of life that were not part of them before, "without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 1994:5).

Bhabha's cultural theory enunciates the idea of ambivalence in post-colonialism. As Bhabha (1984:131) notes, "The ambivalence of mimicry–almost but not quite–suggests that the fetishi[s]ed colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal". Bhabha's argument evokes the idea that while the colonised may not completely oppose the coloniser, their relationship is ambivalent because it hints on "the complex mix of attraction and repulsion" (Ashcroft et al 2000:10). Consequently, the colonised appears "complicit" to colonial culture on the one hand, but on the other hand, they seem to be resistant. Therefore, the researcher argues that Bhabha's theory on hybridity and his idea of ambivalence are relevant to this research, as it relates to narrating how post-colonial African societies represented as cultural imageries in vernacular arts demonstrate complicity to colonial culture and how they, in turn, resisted such cultures. Additionally, the researcher argues that the ideas embodied in the paintings and sculptures of the selected South African and Nigerian artists contain cultural meanings or vernacular-rooted ideas that can be interrogated and compared. Zimmermann (2015:1) defines culture "as the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and arts". The implication of defining culture in this study is to trace the idea of African culture as expressed in the vernacular-rooted artworks of the selected artists. This view is supported by Gillian (2002:14), who argues that "culture is the range of meaningful social practices in which images' effects are embedded", in artworks.

In describing the practice of embedding images by representation in artworks, Hall (1997:10) asserts that it is "the embodying of concepts, ideas, and emotions in a symbolic form which can be transmitted and meaningfully interpreted". The disposition or ideology of each artist in terms of assessing a uniquely African symbolism is acknowledged in this proposed study, which seeks to examine how these artists represent symbols and cultural imagery that they consider indigenously African in their contemporary representations. According to Crossman (2014:1), "an ideology is a set of cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes that underlie and justify either the status quo or movements to change it". In contrast, Barnard-Naude (2011:1) states that philosopher Slavoj Zizek defines ideology as "anything from a contemplative attitude that misrecognises its dependence on social reality to an action-oriented set of

beliefs". The study adopts the definition of ideology by Crossman, to analyse the ideological stances of each artist within their cultural beliefs and values represented in artworks by reflecting on the symbols and cultural imagery of African culture.

Although this study traces the ideological stances in contemporary artworks of South African and Nigerian artists within the last decade, it also examines the trend of vernacular-rooted art produced by some contemporary artists of past decades in art-making complexes. A vernacular-rooted art, according to Greaves (2015:7), "draws on appropriations and re-articulations of cultural forms". These artists were nevertheless also contemporary artists, and their so-called reliance on "vernacular" art forms is also an ideological position since most of them actually lived in complex urban societies. The selected artists were trained in art-making complexes, namely; Polly Street Art Centre in Johannesburg and the Osogbo Workshop Complex in Nigeria. Purposive sampling around vernacular-rooted representation has been employed in selecting works for analysis and comparison. To determine works for comparison, the researcher contends, as Ragin (1994:1) postulates that, "those aspects that are relevant to the investigation [should] fit together". This can be seen in examples of works produced by South African artists Ephraim Ngatane and Sydney Kumalo, and Nigerian artists Twin Seven Seven and Buraimoh Gbadamosi, who all adapt indigenous cultural forms into their works. Since artworks of meaningful cultural practices and life contain thresholds of meanings that deserve interpretations, the artworks sampled are analysed and contextualised in the light of each artist's representation.

Although the study adopts a comparative analysis, to create richness in the interpretations, art historical methodologies and visual hermeneutics theory are applied to analyse the works in Figures 1 to 44. According to Davey (2001:4), one of the contributions of hermeneutics to art is the argument that "seeing and understanding are not merely passive. The spectator is a condition of what is held within a work coming forth and, furthermore, that revelation can effectively change the subject matter it discloses". Chapter two of this study presents detail discussions on these methods and theories. In presenting the critical analysis of artworks produced by artists trained in art-making complexes in Nigeria and South Africa, it begins with a painting titled (*The Street) Township Scene with Dog and Bicycle* (1968/9) (Figure 1) produced by Ephraim Ngatane. This title draws attention to a site of black cultural identity in South Africa, but also to a segregated settlement created at the beginning of mining

explorations at Witwatersrand in the 1880s, and subsequently during apartheid (Peffer 2008:176).

Ephraim Ngatane studied art under Cecil Skotnes at Polly Street Art Centre (1952 to 1954) where he developed his own style of self-expression through experimenting with different media. This painting of a Soweto township milieu is not rooted in a particular indigenous South African culture. According to *South African History Online* (2011:1), Sydney Kumalo, in a lecture, told his students "that in their urban and township milieu their African heritage was not easily accessible". This is a problematic idea that African heritage is based on rural cultures: it does not take into consideration the fact that urbanism—i.e. living in large towns and cities—is a longstanding African tradition. The researcher proposes that the images of urbanised Africans form part of a vernacular-rooted symbolism precisely because the experience of urbanism has been rooted for a large part in African heritage in general.

Figure 1: Ephraim Ngatane, *(The Street) Township Scene with Dog and Bicycle*, 1969. Oil on board, 75 x 100 cm. (Smith 2014:1)

Ngatane's painting embodies representations of houses and shacks in the background, and people, a bicycle and a dog in the immediate foreground of this expressionist Soweto landscape. This style of representation of black life in urban Soweto dates back to the works of painter Gerard Sekoto (1939). The artist applies a range of colours in depicting people, the dog, and the foreground. Houses are painted in white, yellow, blue and orange while other houses in the background are rendered in red, blue and black. The application of dark colours on images in the background negates the principle of perspective, except the painting, was done to capture a specific moment, which then implies that thick clouds must have gathered

in the sky over the houses in the background and results in shadow. This painting was featured with other artworks in an exhibition titled *Ephraim Ngatane: Symphony of Soweto,* (2010).

Ngatane's *(The Street) Township Scene with Dog and Bicycle* represents life in the black township in Johannesburg, according to Marvellous Art Museum (2010:1), with the intention of showing the "gritty realities of the black township experience, more specifically life in Soweto during the apartheid years". The painting portrays the bustling lifestyle of black South Africans within their urban environment, in a city that is the largest black settlement in South Africa. Gunew (1990:101) asserts that "place [is one] of the ... permanent elements of a culture and the place is even more important ... in giving that culture its direction". Besides place being a permanent element of a culture and important in giving the people of the culture historical frame of reference and socio-cultural directions, Gunew (1990:102) adds that "painters rather than writers have captured the spirit of place". Ngatane's representation of the activities of the people in Soweto captures the spirit of the place or translated the place in vernacular-rooted symbols.

The spirit of place in this street scene is re-echoed in the sociological milieu account of Smith (2014:1), who states that "Ngatane captures the warmth of township people, even with a tinge of nostalgia, yet never glosses over the hardship and degradation represented by shacks, dirt roads, and stray dogs". This painting can be described in Okediji's (2015:123) words "as not simply African but also as cultural connection beyond the contemporary and traditional cotyledons". Similarly, another landscape rendition shows a stylised painting by Twin Seven-Seven titled *The Blessed Family* (2006) (Figure 2), but it unfolds differently. Although the rendition is a landscape, the title highlights the concept of a blessed family from the Nigerian cultural perspective. To introduce the artist, in Glassie's (2010:1) view, "although Twins Seven-Seven was given a conventional Yoruba name at birth, he subsequently took the name Twin Seven-Seven in acknowledgement of the fact that he was the sole survivor of seven sets of twins; and after he learnt that his family was of royal linage, he added Prince to his name".

Nevertheless, his artistic carrier began at the Osogbo art workshop. The expression "Osogbo School" identifies a cluster of artists who emerged from several workshops located in Osogbo during the 1960's and does not imply that there was an actual art school in this

location. Glassie (2010:1) states that Twin Seven-Seven "showed up one day, at the age of twenty, at an artistic event in the town of Osogbo, where for the first time in his life, he got an opportunity to draw and paint pictures". His training in art-making at Osogbo workshops began with that encounter. The subject of this painting introduces a viewer to the socio-cultural concept of a blessed family.

Figure 2: Twin Seven Seven, *The Blessed Family*, 2006. Digital Pigment
(Twins Seven-Seven Artworks)

Twin Seven-Seven's painting; *The Blessed Family* is a representation of a mother and her two daughters. Considering they are carrying calabashes on their heads in a clearing ringed around buildings, one may assume they are actually in a market square. Alternatively, the structures hint on a mother and her daughters standing in front of *Rugan Fulani* (Fulani settlement), perhaps attending to everyday domestic activities. However, the artist depicts the mother in the middle of the painting wearing a traditional dress made from *Ankara*; while her two daughters are also depicted with sleeveless blouses and colourful skirts made of *Ankara* on the left and right sides to create a balance. *Ankara* is a patterned textile fabric that is often embraced by the young and elderly Yoruba people in daily dressing. It is noteworthy that this fabric is produced in the Netherlands based on Indonesian style batiks and sold in West Africa, which makes it a true global commodity. Its identification as "African" fabric shows the kind of slippage that emerges in essentialist definitions of culture. The fabric has wide acceptance and usage among other cultures in West and Central Africa as well. The mother and her daughters carry calabashes on their heads, which are designed with linear

patterns for aesthetic appeal. The representations of their forms depart from classical principles of proportion; their legs are shortened in proportion to their bodies and their feet are unusually large. Twins Seven-Seven depicts the daughters in *The Blessed Family* with pestles (a key item of domestic life in the rainforest region), while the mother is bearing a covered calabash bowl—an element associated with Fulani culture. In the background of this painting are multiple huts and the women in the painting wear nose rings and earrings that are a part of Fulani women couture. Combinations of elements from Yoruba and Fulani cultures are used in representing the mother and her daughters. According to Grimes (2011:1), Prince Twins Seven-Seven's paintings are "brightly coloured, [but] intricately patterned". This seems to account for the application of bright colours on the forms, content, and background of this painting.

The context of this painting is a representation of the artist's idea of how a blessed family appears as an invocation of the idea of motherhood as a state of grace. The purpose is to show a family that is blessed within their cultural milieu with attires and other cultural elements or vernacular symbols that they use regularly. In a review of Twins Seven-Seven, Magnin (2017:1) observes that "with exception of a few paintings which represent "profane" themes, the universe of Twins Seven-Seven is thoroughly rooted in the Yoruba imagery, both religious and folkloric". Notwithstanding this position on his artistic ideas and adaptations being rooted in Yoruba imagery, the analysis of *The Blessed Family* cannot solely be credited to Yoruba culture because most of the elements reference Fulani culture.

The analysis of the works in figures 1 and 2 above reveals that there is a cultural difference in the context of the images represented in the two landscapes. The Soweto Street painting portrays the realities of the South African township milieu, while *The Blessed Family* projects a family within the traditional cultural context of the Fulani. This simply implies that both artists represent immediate quotidian realities, which cannot solely provide basic identification of their specific cultural identity, because the narrative signals hybrid identities. The styles employed by Ephraim Ngatane and Twins Seven-Seven are different; Ngatane executed his painting in an expressionist style while Twins Seven-Seven employed stylised figuration. Ngatane's ideological stance in this painting is the socio-historical preservation of the African sensibility in an urban settlement. Twins Seven-Seven's ideology is represented in his belief in what the value of a blessed family entails. *(The Street) Township Scene with Dog and Bicycle* painting is rooted in the urban culture of black South

Africans living in Soweto, with no particular identification with any specific African heritage other than their identity as black South Africans, but *The Blessed Family* directly references notable cultural elements of Yoruba (pestles) and Fulani (calabash and earrings) culture. From the analysis of the two works, both artists adapt African vernacular-rooted symbols within different stylistic tendencies.

The researcher also narrates the trends of adapting indigenous cultural forms in sculptures of contemporary South African and Nigerian artists trained in workshops. Figure 3 is a stylised figurative free-standing sculpture produced by Buraimoh Gbadamosi (1921-2013), titled *Dedicated to The Yoruba Goddess of Fertility* (1969). The title of this sculpture introduces a viewer to Yoruba cultural belief in deity, despite the fact it is a depiction of a mother and her child. In an exhibition campaign launch titled "Save Our Art" (2015:35), Buraimoh Gbadamosi was introduced as "Susanne Wenger's closest friend and a great creative collaborator... a master artist working in wood and in stone". This free-standing sculpture was created from stone and represents a mother and child. The mother is depicted in a seated posture with a triangular shaped head, enlarged spherical eyes in fitting sockets, a small nose, and an elongated and her mouth agape. Regarding the function of enlarged eyes in Yoruba sculpture, Okediji (2015:125) states that "in Yoruba sculptural iconography, the eyes are the central point of attraction… [and] the rendition of the bulbous eyes places emphasis on these elements as the most prominent part of the head". The mother's head sits on a broad neck and her hands were carved with three thick bangles on each hand. Her hands are used to hold and support the baby that she is carrying on her bosom. The baby's hands are both raised, perhaps typical of children's playful tendencies. According to Bhabha (1990:2a), cultural representation should be of "the social life" of the society. The sculpture can be read as evidence of the social life relationship between a mother and her baby in Yoruba society and culture, a motif visible in other cultures as well. The large head and particular proportions of the figure are explained by Lawal (1985:91), who asserts that "the Yoruba of western Nigeria regards the human head (ori) as the most vital part of a person. Hence it is the biggest and the most elaborately finished part of Yoruba figure sculptures.

The context of the sculpture is suggested by the title, *Dedicated to the Yoruba goddess of fertility*. The artist's deep attachment to and rootedness in the Yoruba cultural beliefs and practices are revealed in the adaptation of mother and child forms in sculpture, not just for the affection that binds them but in terms of the religious rituals and reverence dedicated to

the goddess of fertility. According to Folarin (1993:1), "most Yoruba towns…possess a guardian goddess or god. The goddess of Ibadan is "Yemoja"; that of Osogbo is "Osun", of Oyo the god "Sango", and of Ire is Ogun". This goddess does not live in the society but in forests from where she is believed to control fertility. Buraimoh Gbadamosi's "figures depicting Yoruba deities blend perfectly into their forest environment" because it is located in the shrine complex of Osun, Osogbo's guardian goddess (Save Our Art 2015:35). This blending situates the sculpture in the forest grove that the deity of fertility is believed to inhabit. Folarin (1993:1) asserts that "Osun has been linked with the direct line of transcendental procreation. She is the mother of the city of Osogbo and all her inhabitants. Osun is the possessor of the beneficent water of life that assists women to bear children".

Figure 3: Buraimoh Gbadamosi, *Dedicated to The Yoruba Goddess of Fertility*, 1969. Stone Sculpture. Osun Sacred Grove, (alamy.com)

There was a conscious concern for fruitfulness among Yoruba peoples; for this reason, the sculpture is dedicated to the goddess believed to be responsible for fertility so that fertility will continually be experienced in families. This can be likened to similar concerns represented in sculptures by the Ashanti of Ghana called Akuaba. Buraimoh's ideological stance is therefore rooted in the cultural practice and indigenous Yoruba traditional belief in ancestors or the goddess of fertility. Figure 4 is a sculpture titled *Mother and Child* (1966). This title hints on the relationship that exists between a mother and her child. It was produced by Sydney Kumalo, who was one of the South African artists trained at Polly Street Art Centre in Johannesburg. According to *South African History Online* (2011:1),

Kumalo had "deep rooted Zulu pride and respect for the legends and ancient stories of a tribal people. This mix of old and new cultures was reinforced when he began his studies at Polly Street Art Centre". The mixture of old and new cultures in the works of Kumalo reveals the hybridisation theorised by Bhabha. As Anitra Nettleton (2011:155b) states Kumalo uses "stark stylisation of form that draws on African prototype", which places his works within a basic arc of modernist appropriations of African art in painting and sculpture already evident in the works of Picasso and other European modernists, the African American Harlem Renaissance movement, and Senghorian Negritude. This inspiration from African forms is visible in Kumalo's representation of an African mother and her child. The artist depicts the mother carrying her tender child with both hands holding the child in place with the child's right hand clutching the mother's arm. The mother is represented with her face gazing upward into the sky. The facial features appear distorted with no detailed treatment and her head appears hairless.

Stylisation characterises the sculpture with its elongated neck that can hardly be distinguished from its shoulder. Her elongated semi-naked body uses peculiar proportions: from the waist down to her knees, which unusually bends backward, and her legs are shortened from the knees to the feet. The importance of the standing posture of Kumalo's sculpture is suggested by Okediji's (2015:124) assertion that "in African art iconography, "standing is a task". Okediji refers here to the performative importance of gesture in African cultures, where particular modes and stances communicate states of mind and a subject's location within cultural hierarchies.

Kumalo's *Mother and Child*, depicts a mother gazing upwards. She may simply be enjoying a sunny day or gazing at an object in the sky. However, an upwardly directed gaze is linked to supplication in art, to prayers for intercession. Since the child holds on to its mother with a firm grip, the child is strong and healthy and the mother is likely encumbered with other concerns for which she seeks divine intervention through her upward gaze. The researcher concurs with van Robbroeck's (2011:6) affirmation that this work is rooted in a vernacular aesthetic because this South African "artist actively pursued an indigenous artistic expression" in the years between 1945 and 1975, in the face of significant political and cultural complexities. This sculpture reveals the artist's recognition of the plights of African mothers and their care for their offspring. Love of mothers for their offspring is a universal trait; what makes Kumalo's use of this motif specifically Zulu or African is the adaptation of

the cultural form of the half-naked body of the mother, which is a culturally distinguishing factor in images, associated with "cultural ceremony" (Thompson 2017:1). On the other hand, it also serves to reinforce an idea of African woman's culture of resisting tyranny, oppression, and domination (Smith 2015:3; Mwangi 2013:1), perhaps of apartheid. Another factor is his concern and identification with the suffering of black people by creating Afro-centric art similar to that of Zulu sculptor Zondi who, as Kirsten (2004:47) notes in "works including mother-and-child depictions, portrayed 'his' people's aspirations and a marginalized people's humanity and in doing so, also his own" within the apartheid era.

Figure 4: Sydney Kumalo, *Mother and Child*, 1966. Bronze, 38 x 11 x 10 cm. Private collection. (Mutualart.com)

The reading of the two sculptures above reveals that both represent the mother and child motif. The mother and child depicted by Kumalo are rooted in Zulu culture through his Afro-centric adaptation of the semi-naked body of an African mother typical of Zulu sculptors of his days, while the mother and child portrayed by Gbadamosi are rooted in Yoruba traditional belief and cultural practice in their worship of deities and ancestors. Kumalo's work exhibits the affection and concern the Zulu mother has for her child while Gbadamosi's sculpture extends that universal affection to the sculpture's focus on reverence and dedication to the goddess of fertility. The ideological stances of these two artists are not the same. Kumalo's ideology is rooted in an Afrocentric belief in the struggle of black South Africans who were marginalised, while Gbadamosi's ideology is rooted in the belief in

traditional worship of the deity of procreation. In this regard, Kumalo's sculpture is more politically oriented even though the themes of both sculptures are Afrocentric. To add to the differences, the mediums employed in making the sculptures differ: Kumalo used bronze while Gbadamosi used stone to make his figures.

1.5 Literature review

The literature review has been organised under the following sub-headings; contemporary African Art, South African Art and Nigerian Art. A detailed review is provided in chapter two and traces the progression of cultural representations of symbols and cultural imagery in African art as employed by contemporary African artists in general, as well as in South Africa and Nigeria in particular. This forms the literary framework for identifying and analysing the selected artists' representations of cultural motifs.

1.5.1 Contemporary African Art

There was progression in art practices across the continent of Africa from art of the pre-colonial era which was documented in most studies as "African art", and often highlighted indigenous and rural based cultural production. Sidney Kasfir (2013:1) refers to African art as "pre-colonial art forms." The forms identified were mainly sculptures, as expressed by Adams (1989:55), who argues that African "sculptural forms in wood and metal [were] mainly figures and masks". However Adams also argues that the focus on sculpture reflects a particular colonial interest in the type of African artworks that influenced European modernists. Other viable African art forms were thus marginalised in this process. Meier and Silverman (2013:76) argue that "many African cultures have developed traditions of figuration that present the human body as medium and metaphor for understanding the passage of time and temporality more generally". Notable examples of such traditions include the bronze plaques of the Benin kingdom of Nigeria, which according to Musa (2008:40), "depict the people's life style, achievements, royalty, and legendary stories" and also portray the rich history of Benin interactions with Europeans from the 15th century onwards.

Developments in contemporary African art continued in different countries on the continent during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Cultural representations of images and symbols of social life in contemporary African art were produced by artists in different African regions

and nations. Mudimbe (1994:154) opines that "there is no such thing today as African art. Senegalese trends are different from Nigerian, Tanzanian, or Mozambican, and each is immersed in its own socio-historical context". This is not unusual: trends in European and American art differ from region to region, and each region is equally immersed in particular socio-historical contexts. This does not preclude analysis of European art as a totality, even if such analysis sometimes traffics in generalities (see, for example, *Gardner's Art through the Ages*). Mudimbe takes the extreme position that all positions are relative and ideologically constructed but fails to note that this is not a peculiar trait to Africa alone. Artists who sometimes work in groups or as individuals are influenced by factors such as education, culture, local politics, and market forces among others. This process of cultural representation in artwork is wide spread in Africa. For example, Makonde art has recently received significant global coverage mainly as a mainstay item of Tanzanian and Kenyan tourist art markets. As with many African cultures, most publications on Makonde art highlight its unique mask forms. Martin (2007:38) asserts that "Makonde sculptures comprise face masks with impressive scarification and ventral masks with jutting out breasts used for ritual feasts". However, many Makonde sculptures are fractal representations of human, animal or fantastic figures; masks are simply a subset of Makonde art.

The use of cultural symbolism was thus widespread in indigenous and contemporary African art. From Ghanaian artist, El Anatsui is a sculpture installation inspired by Ghana Kente symbolism, which Ogbechie (2009:133) suggests highlights the cultural resonance of Ashanti aesthetics in a global black world. In a similar manner, Kellner (2007:24) asserts that Kwesi Owusu-Ankomah, born in Ghana, represents "Ghanaian culture of the Akan people using adinkra symbols in his acrylic canvas paintings". Martin (2007:39) describes the work of Mozambican artist Malangatana Ngweya, stating that "his vividly coloured paintings [represent] piling up crowds of bodies and faces [which] embody the emergence of an African culture". While describing the work of Ethiopian artist Skunder Boghossian, Okeke-Agulu (2010:522) argues that "Boghossian's 1960's works, such as *Night Flight of Dread and Delight* (1964) and *Juju's Wedding* (1964) [represent] abstract patterns and … masks forms that bear traces of selective engagement with diverse…African sources". What are the forms of contemporary representations of symbols and cultural practices in the artworks of South African and Nigerian artists? What is the nature of their cultural representations? The proposed study is not seeking a comprehensive study of all such representations in contemporary African art but rather focuses on South African and Nigerian art in particular.

1.5.2 South African Art

There have been long traditions of art production in South Africa. Yates et al (1993:59) argue that apart from being of a significant age, "… rock art in Southern Africa … [was] wide spread, both as engraving and paintings", and also notes that some representations of rock art "consist of depictions of cattle raids by San with horsemen retaliating with muskets or rifles". San depiction of horsemen and rifles places these images within the colonisation era of South Africa in the past 400 years, and are therefore more recent. In a related review, Williamson (1989:24) states that rock "painting was central to the San people, that the images often referred to the state achieved in the trance dance when man would be imbued with the strengths and skills of the animals he hunted". Aside from the rock art depictions in South Africa, there was also a form of cultural representation in sculptures in Zulu Society. Nettleton (1988:49) asserts that the "identification of many of the sculptures … as Zulu has rested on the fact that the male figures often wear a head-ring, a hairstyle to which only seasoned warriors among Zulu groups were entitled and which was the absolute sign that a man had reached marriageable age". A further example of the sculptures found among Zulu peoples centres on staffs with carved human heads, of which Nettleton (1988:50) notes "related objects have been collected in Zulu areas. Other staff with figures of baboon or women with traditional Zulu hairstyles have been accurately documented". The staff are believed to have been produced by Zulu carvers, Tsonga carvers and/or blacksmiths who worked for Zulu patrons.

Reviewing the history of black South African art practices of the colonial era brings to bear the activities of Township art which continued into the post-colonial era. The development of contemporary African art among black South Africans during the 1950s and 1960s were through township art, art centres, institutions, and self-training. According to Uche Okeke (2011:x), "the 1950's were regarded as the crucial turning point in the establishment of fine arts institutions, with the establishment of the Polly Street Art Centre in South Africa". Artists that emerged from this context include South African artist Gerard Sekoto, who portrayed "Street Scene, [and] bustling African figures … placed in the context of their denuded environment" (South African Art 2014:1). Another artist, George Pemba (1912-2001) produced "naively styled works focused on the simple lives of poor black people, humbly and sometimes humorously evincing their fundamental humanity" (South African Art 2014:1). During this period, there was a dearth of art materials so black artists used materials

available to them for their representations. Nettleton (2011:15a) asserts that "many of Dumile's works in South Africa were done on butcher paper or in ballpoint pen on paper from school exercise books". The artist's works during this period were characterised by figures depicted with strange and thus expressive proportions (Nettleton 2011:16, 17a). In a description of the artwork of Manana Joseph which represents imagery of a colonial scene, Williamson (1989:15) posits that "the scene in Manana's painting shows king Cetshwayo carrying elephant tusks, with which he tried to appease the British". The painting thus signifies a call for peaceful co-existence in Zulu land.

South African post-colonial art is characterised by representations of African forms showing resistance, oppression, and forms of imagery that depicted other subjects. One artist who used sculptures to express forms of oppression is Paul Stopforth, Williamson (1989:112) argues that Stopforth's "sculptures in wire, plaster and gauze of naked figures [were images] in tortured poses of suffering: cringing, waiting to be assaulted, hooded, trussed, handcuffed and strung from a pole". These representations depict the oppression that characterised the social life of black South Africans of the period. Other artists produced artworks of social life other than oppressive imagery. Simon Mnguni adapted Zulu forms in paintings. Xakaza (2015:3) asserts that "Mnguni's Portrait of an elderly gentleman shows an old man in both Zulu traditional and western dress. He wears a military coat overlaid with beaded necklaces and suspended medicine and snuff containers". The detailed review of works produced by other artists in South Africa which shows cultural representations of images and symbols of social life are adapted in contemporary South African art futures in chapter two of this study. Another question engaged in the literature review is: what are the different forms of cultural representations in paintings and sculptures of South African artists? The review focuses on the symbols and cultural motifs depicted in the paintings and sculptures of postcolonial South African artists.

1.5.3 Nigerian Art

Art practice has long been part of Nigerian societies. This ranges from the production of traditional art forms to contemporary art forms. Art practice in a traditional Nigerian setting is known from Nok, Benin, Igbo-Ukwu and Ife pieces of art among others. Wangboje (2005:1) argues that "Nok terra-cottas', consisting of human and animal figures and believed to have been made between 500BC and 200AD is reputed to be the oldest sculptures in

Africa, South of the Sahara". According to Kitson (1983:185), "the representations of [Nok] human head show a great variety of form. Many details, such as those of the hair styles depicted, also hints at a society of considerable sophistication and internal complexity".

Aina Onabolu and Akinola Lasekan are notable artists of the colonial era. According to Filani (2013:1), "Akinola Lasekan painted images based on the Yoruba myths scenes". Another artist whose art activities spanned the colonial era and post-colonial era is Ben Enwonwu. Ogbechie (2008:1) states that Enwonwu's paintings represented cultural scenes of the Benin Kingdom and northern Nigerian urban contexts, such as Hausa musicians playing indigenous musical instruments. A different form of cultural representation is the Yoruba statue of Queen Victoria, which appropriated indigenous Yoruba proportions and forms to describe her physical features.

Contemporary Nigerian art progressed during the post-colonial period with the activities of pioneering artists who were graduates of the Nigerian College of Science, Arts and Technology, Zaria. Their legacy in art practice became a foundation for others who used cultural imagery in their works. The researcher distinctly argues that the use of vernacular-rooted imagery in Nigerian art predates the Zaria artists. Representations of cultural imagery seemed to be widespread among Nigerian artists. Elebute and Dakyes (2016:13) state that Onabrakpeya represented "a young Fulani nomad who [was] observing the seven day Geerewol ritual. The young nomad is shown wearing a white turban on the head with elaborate jewelry on his ears". Another artist who represented images of Fulani in artwork was Enwonwu, who according to Ogbechie (2008:91), "represented [Fulani] milkmaids and Hausa traders" in paintings that predate the Zaria experiments.

The representation of masks in artworks was another prevalent aspect of contemporary art practice in Nigeria. Ikpakronyi (2008:6) asserts that Joe Musa "worked extensively on mask… [in paintings, in which] he shows ... the human phenomenon where people smile at you but have venom in their hearts". Masks were represented as sculptural forms as well. Ogbechie (2009:133) describes an Igbo Mask called Ijele represented by Michael Chukwukelu, which at over fifteen feet high… is easily one of the largest Mask ensembles ever created in any … African culture". Modern masks are not only worn by masquerades but also depicted as imagery, which suggests Nigerian artists see them as aspects of culture that must be represented in a different form and preserved. What other forms of cultural

representations of images and symbols of social life appear in artworks from Nigeria? Are there other contemporary Nigerian artists that represented indigenous images and symbols in artworks? These will be reviewed in detail in chapter two of this study.

1.6 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research is drawn from the cultural theory of Homi Bhabha (1990:5a) on cultural differences in the construction of the cross-national study. The research analyses the ideological stances of South African and Nigerian artists who use symbols and cultural imagery which they consider African in their art. The researcher aims to study such representations within the cultural boundaries of South Africa and Nigeria and through this, evaluate the meanings of such vernacular-rooted imagery.

1.7 Research design

The study adopts a qualitative research approach that uses phenomena and interpretive paradigms within the framework of a case study. Lor (2011:14) states that "qualitatively-oriented authorities tend to consider few country comparisons on their terms as insight-generating [and] in-depth studies of cases as whole". On the other hand, Gillian (2005:3) argues that "the emphasis on meaning and significance of [cultural representations] suggests that qualitative methods are more appropriate". In addition, in Hanula et al's (2005:38) view, when aiming to understand the world, it is possible to combine methods as basic premises for perception and visual analysis of the selected artworks so as to narrate the experiences reflected upon in each context, as well as to guide analysis and interpretation. Therefore, in addition to visual hermeneutic theory, formal analysis, cultural histories and comparative methodologies will be combined in critically exploring African vernacular rooted artworks produced by each of the eight artists identified for the case studies. Formal analysis is employed in this study to confront the visual elements of each vernacular rooted work, the particular style(s), and how they convey the intended meanings to viewers. This is significant as David Summers (2009:479) observes, "styles present very different historical and art-historical" contexts. Then, the cultural history is employed to focus on narrating a history that is Africa-centred or Euro-centric as represented in the context of each work. Given the fact that form in a work of art is not sufficient for determining how an artist reacts to issues, the

themes of the artworks will also be explored to establish the ideas expressed in each context (Filani 1998:33).

Purposive sampling was the method employed in identifying the eight artists for this research and has been used to select the artworks to be studied. The data for this study is obtained from primary and secondary sources, from interviews with the eight artists and through Visual Hermeneutics theory, critical theories, formal analysis and cultural history of the visuals and contents of their artworks. Interviews will be used as a research tool to understand the socio-cultural representations in these artworks. Magee and Grabski (2013:1) argue that "we use interviews to generate and acquire perspectives, gird our interpretations, [and] authorise our claims". Five artworks have been sampled from each artist to form the basic data of the research. The secondary sources of data for this research are drawn from a review of literature on contemporary African, South African and Nigerian Art. These include literary materials like internet sources, books, journals, newspapers, exhibition catalogues and magazines on the subject of representations of symbols and cultural imagery.

1.8 Original Contribution

Although several studies on contemporary art in Nigeria and South Africa have narrated the representations of cultural images, there is no known study that narrates African vernacular rooted symbolism in the visual cultures of contemporary African artists, not only in either country but in the continent as a whole. In addition, while some art historical studies may have narrated works of selected modern African artists in both countries, there is no attempt at comparative analysis of such renditions. An example is the seminal article by Olu Oguibe titled *Appropriation as Nationalism in Modern Art* (2002), which is not an exhaustive study of artworks, aside from the fact that it was focused on the twentieth century. This research conducted a close critical case study narrative on the appropriations of cultural imageries and symbolisms which are deemed African vernacular rooted art, not merely as a rethink in the use of old terminology in contemporary African art discourse, but because the imageries and symbolisms are rooted in African cultures, especially in the works of eight academically trained artists from both countries.

Furthermore, while some art historical studies may have narrated the contemporary artworks of artists from both countries, there is no study that examines the cultural imageries

appropriated in the oeuvres of South African artists Nelson Makamo, Lebohang Sithole and Sinethemba Ngubane because they are deemed outside the normative standard. Similarly, the cultural imageries articulated in the oeuvres of Nigerian artists Olatunbosun Shonibare, Chinedu Ogakwu and Yemi Ijisakin have not been studied or compared in any study. Two artists whose depictions have received close readings are Pitika Ntuli and Fidelis Odogwu, however, those studies were not focused on the period this research documents and the narratives were not framed around African vernacular rooted symbols.

1.9 Summary of chapters

In Chapter one, the narrative consists of the introduction which presents the broad categories within which the experiences of the vernacular rooted symbolisms in the artworks of artists in both countries may be situated. While the works of contemporary South African artists in the twenty-first century narrates past and present social issues on identity, history, memory, and killings, the works of Nigerian artists relays socio-cultural and political subjects. In addition, the purpose of the study is not just the critical examination of vernacular rooted arts, but it also establishes reasons why contemporary African artists continue to reference cultural imageries in artworks in an era of new media and installation arts. It also presents a background of the study, which traces the appropriation of cultural imagery to historical African art but with a major shift to modern art with modernity in the African continent. The chapter also discusses research issues, aims and objectives, a theoretical framework, and a literature review on contemporary African art which discusses the practice of appropriating cultural forms in the works of artists in some countries in Africa, specifically South Africa and Nigeria.

Although the research methodology adopts a qualitative method, given that the study examines critically the contemporary artworks of Nigerian and South African artists, a cross-national study which focuses on comparative analysis of the aims represented in the artworks of the artists were employed. However, for close reading of the case studies and art historical methodologies, formal analysis, cultural history methods, and visual hermeneutics theory as well as critical theories were adopted. The chapter also presents a summary of chapters in this research. In Chapter two, the theoretical frameworks on African vernacular rooted art and the theoretical bases for narrating ‘Africanness’ in the artworks of contemporary Nigerian and South African artists are interrogated. In this chapter, the researcher conducted close thematic

analysis of works under "African vernacular symbolisms in pastoral landscapes" reveals *Zulu Mother and Child* (1960) by Durant Sihlali, which shows abstracted imageries of an African mother and child walking but intercepted by a third individual on a farmstead path in the Kwazulu-Natal countryside. Ben Enwonwu's *Nigerian Port Authority Mural* (1962) depicts men and women adorned in cultural attire that reflects Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Igbo cultures at independence in Nigeria. They are standing against natural vegetation and national wealth in relation to the seaport, but resonate with cultural unity. *Looking in [Padda Vlei] Kliptown* (1975) shows a depiction by Durant Sihlali, which reveals vernacular imagery of a black South African woman articulated from a township during apartheid. Landscape photography entitled *Council flats, Kewtown* (1979) by Paul Albert (1946-2010), unfolds a scene of young South African children playing in an unsafe environment.

In contrast, *Zimbabwe* (1980), by Thami Mnyele, a black man emerges from crumbling stone walls, with animal carcass and thorn-tree branch on the left side of the drawing, which allude to the wall of Great Zimbabwe. But *Cattle Rearer* (1988) reveals articulation of a Fulani herder and his cattle grazing in a countryside scene in Nigeria. Sandile Goje depicts a black man and a white man as houses in *Meeting of Two Cultures* (1993), on a farmstead in South Africa. In Mario Pissarra's (2011:3) words, it signals the "end of the Cold War" between South Africa's rulers and the local indigenous people. *Freedom from Force* (1995), by Jerry Buhari is rooted in the Nigerian socio-political context but shows several people depicted in silhouette rejoicing on the street in an urban area, perhaps for the release of a political prisoner. In *The Night has a Thousand Eyes* (2007-2008) by David Koloane, some black South Africans identified as churchgoers are foregrounded walking in a township scene.

Furthermore, *Evening Mood* (2008) as depicted by Kazeem Olojo unfolds some African men dressed in cultural attire walking in different directions in a scene that evokes villages in the Yoruba cultural group. The second broad theme is "Social issues in African vernacular paintings". It focuses on social problems in the vernacular oeuvres of Nigerian and South African artists. *Maiden's Cry* (1962) by Uche Okeke, articulates an African maid wailing in the public, with her hands raised and placed on her head evoking the idea that she is perhaps a victim of violence. In contrast Yusuf Grillo's painting titled *Mother and Child* (1979) shows a mother dressed with *gele* (headgear) and *buba* (blouse) and her child in a posture that suggests bowing his head to his mother signifying, in Patsy Graves' (1965:54) view, "a very formal and mannered" family training to avoid insult.

The narrative continues with Matthew K. Malefane's depiction entitled *Nelson Mandela* (1983) reveals Mandela carrying a spear in his left hand, reaching out to the iron bars for freedom from prison, most likely at Robben Island. In *The Broken Home* (1984) by Craig Master, a township scene shows a father attempting to force moral values into his son, who was possibly accused of wrong doing, but the son appears to resist his father's decision publicly. In contrast, in *Mama Let Me Go* (1986), by David Hlongwane (b.1963) a scene unfolds in which a mother, whose son relentlessly pleads with her to allow him join in a struggle on the street, refuses to grant his request. Kagiso Pat Mautloa in *Letters to God* (1988) depicts symbols which include toyi-toyi, the dance of freedom, smouldering, and burning of tyres in the streets, ubiquitous placards carrying slogans of revolt and a police patrol vehicle.

In contrast, Azaria Mbatha's vernacular rendition, *Announcement* (1990), portrays two male figures–a white man and a black man on a television broadcast about to make an important declaration, while another male figure is seated in the comfort of his home watching. *Reconstruction* (1994), by Kagiso Pat Mautloa, depicts symbolisms of a devastated environment, a newly built house in a collage of painted wood fragments and the new South African flag. Gani Odutokun reflects the Nigerian political context during mid-1990 in a painting entitled *Police Brutality* (1994), which depicts a police officer manhandling two female figures. In *Eruption 1* (2012) by Abraham Uyovbisere, the context shows a lone semi-nude young black woman, who uses her hands to cover her chest suggesting that she does not give viewers permission.

The third thematic grouping is "African vernacular imagery in sculptures with socio-cultural themes". *Sango* (1964), by Ben Enwonwu, depicts a masculine African man attired with a waist cloth wielding a double axe appropriated from Yoruba traditional religion deeply rooted in south-western Nigeria. Sydney Kumalo's *Dancer* (1965) depicts a dancer rooted in Zulu culture dancing with both hands raised above the head, which symbolise the expressive posture of the dancer. Conversely, Ezrom Legae's *Young Man/Youth* (1968) portrays an athletic body of a young man, whose head is turned skywards to symbolise a praise song to God. *Iya Ibeji* (1970) by Erhabor Emokpae unfolds an abstracted mother bordered by her twins rooted in Yoruba culture. The sculpture entitled *Mask* (1987) by Ben Osawe reveals a stylised imagery with an elongated neck rather than a mask. In *Nigerian Woman Shopping* (1990) executed by Sokari Douglas, the work unveils appropriation of a faceless woman

dressed in cultural attire with bold stars and crescent patterns holding her purchase and a hand bag.

In a different context, Willie Bester's sculpture entitled *Thobeka Leaving* (2011) portrays a young woman rooted in Xhosa culture, dressed in a gown that flows down but does not reach her knees, walking away with a metal box on her head supported by her left hand. The fourth thematic section is "African vernacular symbolisms in socio-political thematic sculptures". Although Ben Enwonwu's depiction *Anyanwu* (1954-1955) references an indigenous queen dressed in royal regalia rooted in Benin Kingdom in Nigeria, the title is given in Igbo language suggesting dual cultural influence on the artist. *Chief Albert Luthuli* (1968) by Dumile Feni depicts an elongated and mask-like portrait of a political personality individuated with his name. Michael Zondi's *Socrates* (c. 1975) references a renowned European philosopher, but in Borgatti's (1990:37) view, he did not merely individuate the imagery with his name but Africanised him.

Additionally, Isaac Makeleni's portrayal titled *Mandela and De Klerk* (c. 1990) shows two strategic personalities in the political climate in South Africa during the 1990s. Mandela is animated holding the microphone, while De Klerk's arms are joined (Pissarra 2011:11). *Adekunle Fajuyi* (1999) by Olutunde Makinde unfolds differently, as it depicts a full standing African man dressed in military uniform. Willie Bester's representation entitled *Who Let the Dogs Out?* (2001), shows a metallic sculptural installation of four separate figures, an African man being attacked by a police dog, a police officer who handles the dog and another police security officer who was filming the attack (Ledimo 2004:50). The sculpture *Hope for World Peace* (2003) by Olabisi Onawale Fakeye, articulates a kneeling African woman whose hairdo is neatly carved (Bardi 2017:6a), with both hands joined in a posture that suggests prayer rooted in Yoruba culture, south-western Nigeria. Conversely, a sculpture entitled *MKO Abiola* (date unknown) by Familehin Sola, reveals the imagery of a full standing African man, adorned with African dress form worn by elites in Yoruba culture animated with both hands raised as though waving to waiting multitudes during a political rally.

In Chapter three, the focus is on critical analyses of works produced by two South African painters–Nelsons Makamo and Lebohang Sithole. Nelson Makamo was born in 1982 in Nylstroom (now Mondimolle), in the Limpopo province, but moved to Johannesburg where he trained as an artist at the Artist Proof Studio and obtained a diploma in Printmaking,

Marketing and Product Design in 2006. His rendition titled *Somewhere I Belong* (2010) (Figure 5), contrasts two living conditions in urban areas. The background shows three black youths sleeping in different postures under a roofless corner of a street, while the foreground depicts houses. In *Moment Alone* (2011) (Figure 6), he references a black girl standing, back to the viewers, as Makamo (2017) notes, returning home with a bulging plastic bag containing provisions she bought from a mall. *Smiles* (2015) (Figure 7) depicts a black lady laughing alone rather than smiling as suggested by the subject. It reflects on the one hand beauty and on the other beast in humorous facial responses.

In addition, another rendition by Makamo unfolds with the title *I Belong to the World* (2016) (Figure 8), but shows a lone black girl dressed in a fitting flowing gown, foregrounded walking away from viewers. Makamo (2017) observes that the aim of the depiction is a call for collective upbringing of the young girl. The last of his five works is titled *Young Soul* (2016) (Figure 9). It depicts a boy seated on the ground with earphones placed over his head. Makamo's (2017) work recalls memory of childhood once lived by adults. On the other hand, Lebohang Sithole, born in Kwazulu-Natal in 1989, studied at the Artist Proof Studio from 2009 to 2013 and graduated with a diploma. As Colin Richards (2011:47) notes, his depictions articulate the memory and history of his childhood experiences rooted in rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal. His rendition titled *From the Tap* (2012) (Figure 10) depicts a young African boy with a bucket on his head, wearing a torn shirt while returning from the tap. It echoes not merely suffering in the search for water but poverty in rural areas. A depiction of a musician performing African jazz with a saxophone unfolds in *Kuze Kuse-Till Morning* (2013) (Figure 11). It hints at an era when black musicians were not allowed to sing to mixed races because of apartheid exclusion.

On the other hand, a different portrayal echoes the title *Gone Too* (2015) (Figure 12). It depicts a black African boy pushing a suitcase in front, as he walks away from viewers in the centre of the picture plane. The work invokes wandering in search of accommodation. *Bongumusa-Giving Thanks for Blessing* (2016) (Figure 13), depicts a portrait of a black African boy, wearing a jacket perhaps to warm him, covering up because of the cold winter. Sithole (2017) argues that he is a symbol of thanks for giving the opportunity to stage their first solo exhibition. His last work titled *Thousand Kisses* (2016) (Figure 14) evokes a lonely black African boy bordered by two imageries Sithole (2017) identifies as angels kissing him on both sides. It hints on the hurts and comforts of a lonely child. Pitika Ntuli and Sinethemba Ngubane are the two contemporary South African sculptors which are focused

upon in Chapter four. Pitika Ntuli was born in Springs, east of Johannesburg in 1942. He is a Professor of Fine Arts and the History of Arts as well as an adjunct Professor of Sociology.

The visual narratives in his works reveal stories and experiences of black South Africans who were victims of suffering, as evident in *The Torture of A Woman Giving Birth in Prison* (2015) (Figure 17), who still delivered a healthy baby. *Mandela and The Rainbow Children* (2015) (Figure 18), narrates Mandela's effort at unifying the races in South Africa into a non-racial nation, notwithstanding his suffering in prison. Other sculptures reflect on black South Africans who were killed as victims of different struggles. *Marikana* (2012/13) (Figure 15) is an installation that reflects mine workers protesting over wage disputes before they were massacred. It echoes the greed of the mine magnets. While *Silverton Three* (2013) (Figure 16) depicts a monument with three faces that invokes the siege that led to the death of the young black African men, it also signals the struggles against apartheid. Another depiction references a historic personality of Zulu culture, a traditional ruler, warrior and conqueror in the work titled *Shaka Zulu* (2015) (Figure 19). Sinethemba Ngubane was born in 1991 in Durban, South Africa. Ngubane is currently studying Masters in fine art at Durban University of Technology. She has participated in many group exhibitions.

Her installation sculptures introduce the viewer to what Colin Richards (2011:49) narrates as acts of "inhumanity" to intersex children rooted in black rural areas of Kwazulu-Natal in the twenty first century. *Rebirth of Bio-Politics* (2015) (Figure 20) depicts imageries of eight mutilated bodies of intersex children, appearing like zoological specimens. In Ngubane's (2017) view, they were killed by their relations and others in their community. *Nonkiloyi* (2016) (Figure 21) reflects paraphernalia employed in witchcraft to inflict sicknesses and kill young black African children. Rather than the paraphernalia, witchcraft happens with the help of supernatural forces (Harnischfeger 2000:102). In *Impaired* (2016) (Figure 22), two bodies of young intersex children are arranged inside a pot like twin images in African art, but Ngubane (2017) notes that it hints at cooking those bodies for *muti* (charm) rituals.

Similarly, *Gaze of Disfigured* (2016) (Figure 23), reveals another kind of ritual murder and dismembering of a young intersex people, as Rob Turrell (2001:23) observes, the "flesh ... [is] cut out of the victim's body while he or she [is] alive". Lastly, a buried intersex child is exhumed from the grave with earth covering the lifeless body in *Excavated* (2016) (Figure 24). Though it echoes grave desecration, the goal is the removal of internal organs from the body. In Chapter five, the researcher will discuss the African vernacular rooted paintings of

two contemporary Nigerian painters: Olatunbosun Shonibare and Chinedu Ogakwu. Shonibare was born in 1976, in south-western Nigeria. He attended Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he obtained a bachelor of fine arts degree in painting in 2006. His rendition *In Expectation* (2007) (Figure 25) portrays an array of African men, some on horseback while others are standing but all are gazing in the same direction in front of an architectural construct that suggests Emir palace in northern Nigeria. It hints at loyalty to the emir. *Her Backbone* (2010) (Figure 26) depicts a black woman with a wrapper loosely tied around her body but exposes an imagery portrayed in silhouette. In Shonibare's (2017) words, the "husband is the backbone of his wife". A different scene references, as Shonibare (2017) claims, royal personalities on horseback rooted in Hausa/Fulani traditional kingdoms in a painting entitled *Durbar* (2012) (Figure 27). The rendition gives clues to a procession of royal personalities rather than a performative display during durbar. *Kosefowora-Priceless* (2015) (Figure 28) articulates a mother smiling humorously to her young child. It is a scene that signifies play time, which Shonibare (2017) notes is priceless.

In contrast, a different depiction by Shonibare reflects hair braiding as a form of beautification or body adornment, as well as a significant profession practiced by women and men. In *Onidiri-Hair Braider* (2016) (Figure 29), a woman is depicted braiding the hair of a young lady. Chinedu Ogakwu, born in 1975, in Enugu, trained as an artist at Institute of Management and Technology in Enugu, where he obtained a higher national diploma (HND). *Hawkers' Meeting* (2010) (Figure 30) depicts six people, five women and a man hawking different goods in a place that appears to be a street, which hints in Ogakwu's (2017) view at the need for planning. Conversely, in *Chief and Lolo* (2012) (Figure 31), the aim reflects the cultural value of recognising and honouring contributions from an individual family to the development of their community as a whole. The abstract portrait portrays an African man and woman adorned in cultural attire rooted in Igbo cultural group. *Once Upon A Time* (2014) (Figure 32) recalls memories of past childhood play time rooted in the Igbo cultural group. The context shows representations of six young African children, four of them seated inside a wheelbarrow whereas two are pushing them. In *Ikemba* (2016) (Figure 33), the reading unfolds an aim that reflects the cultural value of looking up to a hero, in Ogakwu's (2017) view, for leadership, strength, and courage in Igbo culture. It portrays a masculine African man, adorned with waist cloth looking up as if to invoke power for battle.

Conversely, his depiction *Wazobia* (2016) (Figure 34), hints upon bonds among the diverse cultural groups in Nigeria. The composition shows an array of men and women closely

bonded and adorned in different styles of African dress forms. In Chapter six, this research will examine the works of two contemporary Nigerian sculptors: Ijisakin Yemi Olaolu and Fidelis Odogwu Eze. Yemi Ijisakin was born in 1957. He trained as a sculptor at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, where he also works as a sculpture lecturer. The reading of *Embrace* (2009) (Figure 35) traces ambivalence in embrace, which Ijisakin (2017) argues appears to elicit love, but unveils suicide bombing. It depicts a male to female couple embracing. *The Thinker* (2009) (Figure 36) shows a seated African man dressed in cultural attire in a posture that signifies thinking. It also hints at the theme of worrying over issues in his personal life. In *The Priest* (2010) (Figure 37), Ijisakin (2017) notes that it reflects the significance of a traditional priest performing rituals for his Yoruba society. It portrays an African man dressed in a flowing gown, carrying a calabash. A mother is portrayed carrying her child in a swaddle cloth sitting outside her house in *Mother and Child* (2013) (Figure 38). Lastly, in *After Labour* (2015) (Figure 39), an African man is articulated in a sitting position, holding a small serving calabash bowl in his left hand and a gourd in his right hand, as he pours out a liquid substance that signifies palm wine.

Another artist whose works were interrogated is Fidelis Odogwu, born in 1970 in Agbor, Delta State. He studied sculpture at Auchi Polytechnic, Edo State and obtained a National Diploma (ND) in 1988 and Higher National Diploma (HND) in 1991. As Kunle Filani (2018:19) argues, his sculptures reflect different "aspects of indigenous, traditional and contemporary" Yoruba cultures. *To the Dance* (2007) (Figure 40) is a metal rendition that references an African man adorned in African dress carrying two traditional drums in a posture that suggests movement to a socio-cultural event. *Fertility* (2013) (Figure 41) depicts a non-representational painted relief sculpture embellished with linear and geometric shapes, which Odogwu (2017) claims are a symbolic representation of a healthy male and female couple. Self-discovery is echoed in *Who Am I* (2014) (Figure 42), where it shows appropriation of a stylised but standing African man in a contemplative posture. In *Together Forever* (2015) (Figure 43), the reading reflects not just a couple, but the marital bond between a male and female in Yoruba culture. Although it presents a painted relief sculpture, it unfolds an African man and woman adorned in cultural attire of the same colours and designs standing together. *Custodian* (2016) (Figure 44) depicts a mask with a staff of authority. Rather than signal masquerade, in Odogwu's (2017) words, "Eyo traditional Yoruba masquerade of Lagos State is entrusted the culture". The chapter ends with a comparative analysis of the aims in the works of both artists.

In chapter seven, a summary and conclusion are provided which summarises the study succinctly and briefly reports the results. It will also attempt a comparative analysis of the aims that unfold from the reading of African vernacular rooted paintings and sculptures produced by contemporary Nigerian and South African artists, as well as to explicitly discuss the implications of the results in relationship to 'Africanness' in the theoretical framework

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CHAPTER TWO

Interrogation of African Vernacular-Rooted Art in Nigeria and South Africa

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a reading of vernacular symbolism and the ideas represented in the contemporary African arts of Nigerian and South African artists. Although vernacular arts were produced in indigenous or traditional African arts context, there are still several forms of vernacular art practices jostling for space with canonical modes in contemporary art in various African contexts. Nevertheless, the contemporary mode of artistic appropriations of cultural imagery and symbolisms, in the themes, motifs, myths and narratives of artworks produced by contemporary African artists in Nigeria and South Africa are not, in Ogbechie's (2009:136) view, a "continuation" of the same traditional African art or part of the several forms of vernacular art jostling for space with canonical modes in contemporary art. However, as Gupta and Adams (2018:2) observe, it signifies "using the insights suggested by vernacular to rethink what a broader understanding of [vernacular art] might be" in writing about contemporary African art.

This study focuses on contemporary African artworks in which Nigerian and South African artists appropriated symbols and cultural imagery, but are excluded by art historians from mainstream art history narrative. This is because, in Portia Malatjie's (2011:10a) words, they are works considered to be "outside of the normative contemporary art standards". Thus, as Geoffrey Batchen (2000:262) notes, they "represent[s] the troublesome field of vernacular [art] ... for which an appropriate history must now be written". Although it may appear controversial to narrate contemporary engagement of academically trained artists in Nigeria and South Africa as vernacular, the researcher contends, as Gupta and Adams (2018:2) argue, that the idea of "vernacular [is] the act of returning to the basic term of debate [to] open up new ones, or make [a] rethink [of] old categories in new ways". Hence, this study seeks to redefine such practices as a different context while in Ogbechie's (2005:62) words, narrating them as "the emergence of contemporary forms of art in those contexts" of engagement with cultural imagery. And, as Gupta and Adams (2018:2) note, the narrative appears to "look for leaks in contemporary African art as silent but productive, as actively blurring genres even as they are offered up under a heading of vernacular" art. Thus, I would like to resist a narrative of vernacular art as a separate form of contemporary African art or a continuation of canonical mode in contemporary context, but as Ogbechie (2009:136) argues, it signifies a

modernist vernacular mode of "engagements with local and global culture". And, as Okeke-Agulu (2010:507) reiterates, it hints on "vernacular modernity".

Similarly, after the Second World War, South African art practice was categorised as "primitive art", a view Anitra Nettleton (2011:141b) critiqued in her article *Primitivism in South Africa,* maintaining that artists in the South African context were engaged with the exploration of "modernist styles" rather than primitive art. Likewise, Pamila Gupta and Tamsyn Adams (2018:2), in their article *Vernacular Photography from Africa: collections, preservation, dialogue,* proposed a narrative that "rethinks" the use of the term vernacular in a broader understanding in photography. Thus, it is necessary to situate the contemporary practice of artists in both countries, given the fact that they continue to appropriate symbols and cultural imagery from their affiliation to specific indigenous African cultures in the concepts and contexts of their artworks.

This chapter presents a critical methodological framework that is not merely made up of key methods in art history canon but is also suitable for the formal and comparative analyses and interpretations of vernacular imageries and symbols articulated in the contemporary arts of Nigerian and South African artists. The researcher argues that such an approach is significant, as Victoria Rovine (2016:4) observes, "to read the visual world, to analy[s]e creative acts, to reach across and into cultures to gain understanding of diverse ways of viewing and knowing the world". Thus, the researcher adopts a combination of formal analysis, cultural history and comparative methodologies for the study. To justify the combination of methods in this study, it is argued in Mika Hannula et al's (2005:38) view that "different methods [are] used in order to achieve richness" in interpretations. Consequently, a formal analysis, as Andrei Pop (2008:17) argues "focuses on the perceptible aspects of a work of art". In each artwork, therefore, formal analysis is utilised to analyse the visual elements–vernacular imageries and symbols and their possible effects on the viewer. However, in Monica Visona's (2017:5) view, to present wider understandings of the vernacular tropes and symbols appropriated in paintings, drawings, photography, and sculptures, it is necessary to move beyond formal analysis. Therefore, the study adopts the cultural history methodology for the interpretation of either an African-centred or Eurocentric history. Geoffrey Batchen (2000:268) observes that "the proper role of [cultural] history is to search for the true identity of ... [the vernacular imageries], for original or actual meanings found primarily in their past".

Given that the study focuses on a cross-national narrative, comparative analysis is adopted, as Stefan Berger (2008:3) argues, to interrogate the differences and similarities in "the stories ... [artists] tell [in] each [artwork] about ... national belonging and being [which] constitutes the nation. [Even though such] ... stories change over time and place and are always contested". In addition, as Gevin Griffiths (2017:491) observes the comparative analysis must establish "the likenesses and differences, and as far as possible explain them". Therefore, the comparative methodology is employed in narrating not merely the "national differences" and similarities that manifest in the "vernacular genre" (Batchen 2000:262), in which vernacular imageries are appropriated and their heterogeneous African identity revealed, but the ideas represented in each work and what they reveal as well.

In addition to the methodologies employed for the analysis of artworks in this study, the study is also guided by theoretical frameworks and visual hermeneutics theory which are relevant for the interpretation of phenomena in each artwork. Mika Hannula et al (2005:59) observe that "the hermeneutical study of experience begins by looking at the interpretation that always exists of some form of experience". Hence, this study adopts the hermeneutics proposed by Tolia-Kelly and Morris (2004:158), who argue that the interpretation of cultural forms in artworks "is not merely a retrospective position, nor is it simply a rewriting of black and/or white cultural history: more accurately it addresses that there can, therefore, be no single return or recovery of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present". While the researcher agrees with Tolia-Kelly and Morris's view that there may not be a single return of the past, as Tolia-Kelly and Morris further observe, the vernacular symbolisms and stories invoked in the works of the artists may require "a return to history", given that they may have "join[ed] up past and present, near and far" in each context. Therefore, Tolia-Kelly and Morris's argument is employed to engage with the disparate experiences of specific symbols and cultural imageries appropriated by contemporary Nigerian and South African artists in each artwork under specific themes.

Though the present experiences of heterogeneous African men and women that are evocated in artworks are unique and distinct from the experiences of the past, it can be argued in Ogbechie's (1997:10) words, that "cultural history [is a viable approach] while resituating contemporary African art in a third-worldly, primitiv[e] context where stories (as oral traditions) become the basis of knowledge about its tendencies and contexts of practice". Nettleton (2011:143b) reiterates that historicising an artwork signifies "a lost past that needed to be recovered for [the construction of] an authentic identity in the present" and, as Charles

Ngwena (2018:19) notes, "identities are constructed within a given historical and cultural contexts". In supporting this view, Hermer (2004:389) maintains that "the presentation of art from ... the point of view of those cultures" helps in giving "context or relevance to the artworks". To effectively present art from the point of view of African cultures, this study employs a theory of African philosophical concepts as Ogbechie (2016:93) argues that "indigenous African philosophical concepts and languages [should be employed] in the interpretation of African art" in specific case studies. However, the researcher contends that in using ethno-linguistic concepts for interpreting artworks, as Homi Bhabha (1990:293b) notes, there must be interpretation of such metaphors to unravel the cultural significance thereof. Therefore, to interpret the subject matter and context of a specific artwork that requires understanding with relevant indigenous African philosophical concepts and languages, Ogbechie's theory of critical exploration is employed.

This study also seeks to establish, as Ngwena (2018:5) maintains, "the discursive construction of African identity". Given the fact that Africa, as Ike Udogu (cited by Ngarson 2016:223) notes, is a continent of "multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-racial societies", I focus on narrating in the artworks of contemporary Nigerian and South African artists how Africanness is constructed. Therefore, the study seeks to narrate how African cultures or ethnic identities signify Africanness, however not in a homogenous sense as narrated by the colonialist, but as George Sefa Dei (2012:49) notes that African identity may be constructed through references to "indigenous cultures, histories, spiritualties and languages". In Anitra Nettleton's (2011:10a) view, it narrates how the visual narratives invoke "African realities and histories", which are framed around African heritage, African experiences, and other ideas about Africa. Additionally, a depiction that reflects African multi-racial societies is narrated as George Sefa Dei (2012:46) argues, on how the cultural imagery suggests "collective identities" of being "indigenous to 'African' both as space and a concept". As Anitra Nettleton (2011:10a) notes, it is "an African context beyond that of the most reductive of all definitions of identity: as an indigenous inhabitants of the continent, thus of race". Likewise, Charles Ngwena (2018:117) advocates for an "inclusive Africanness [as] ... that Africanness [which] can be imagined less in terms of an overloaded biological race and more in terms of belonging to Africa". Yet, the researcher contends, as in Nettleton's (2011:10a) view, that while seeking to narrate an inclusive Africanness, "the importance of blackness as a marker of African identity" cannot be denied. Neither is doing so reductive but rather establishes how the identification of heterogeneous vernacular imageries belongs to Africa.

Similarly, in narrating not merely Dumile Feni's African identity but of his art in her article *Writing Artists into History*, Anitra Nettleton (2011:9a) notes that they "belong to the continent", notwithstanding the fact that Africanness in Dumile's life and works was "dealt with as essentially a matter of his blackness" (Nettleton 2011:10a).

On the other hand, given that a contemporary African artist may, as Nikos Papastergiadis (2005:40) observes, represent "multiple cultural attachments on identity or the process of cultural mixture" of Africans or Africans with others in the context of a work in which "hybrid identity" occurs. In John Peffer's (2005:340) view, such a notion of hybrid identity may "highlight ... European, Arab and other diasporas of persons, objects, and ideas throughout the continent". Therefore, this study's critical theoretical interrogation employs the theory of hybridity as Nikos Parastergiadis (2005:40) proposes, when he suggests that "hybridity refers to the visible manifestation of difference(s) within identity as a consequence of the incorporation of foreign elements". The notion of incorporation of foreign elements as argued by Parastergiadis implies not merely the mixture of foreign and local elements in a work but may include the mixture of two or more different cultural or local elements in an artwork.

Although Pooke and Newall (2008:34) argue that in formal analysis, "if possible the painting [or sculpture]'s subject matter should be disregarded", the researcher argues that the subject matter and the vernacular symbolisms appropriated are significant in constructing not only the cultural identity but the African identity in each work. Therefore, the researcher draws upon Mitchell's (2002:1) view as theory to establish either or both "subjective identities" and "cultural identification" in the subject matter of each artwork being interrogated in this study.

Consequently, in constructing identity in the interrogations of vernacular appropriation in each artwork in this research, Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural difference is used to contextualise the narratives; this is to avoid the slippery path of essentialism in the discourse. In Bhabha's (1990:293b) words, "such cultural movements disperse the homogeneous, visual time of the horizontal society because the present is no longer a mother-form around which are gathered and differentiated the future (present) and the past (present) ... [as] a present of which the past and the future would be but modifications". Perhaps, as Bhabha further points out, it entails a present and future that is modified because of a link with "lived historical memory and subjectivity [deployed as] its appropriate narrative authority" and, as Ogbechie

(2009:138) notes, it "is never about the past, it is always about interpreting the present in relation to possible futures".

In conclusion, this study provides a critical engagement with contemporary appropriations of vernacular symbolisms in themes, motifs, and myths of artworks produced in late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. To establish and situate the vernacular forms appropriated from South African and Nigerian spaces in artworks of contemporary artists from both countries, the following questions will guide the interrogations. What past African cultural symbolisms were articulated in the contexts of the paintings and sculptures executed by contemporary South African and Nigerian artists? What are the present African cultural forms, symbolisms, and ideas appropriated in the themes, motifs, mythologies, and narratives of contemporary South African and Nigerian artists?

2.2 Articulation and Motivation for Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural differences as the theoretical framework for narrating the vernacular arts of contemporary artists from Nigeria and South Africa. As Bhabha (1994:2) argues, "we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion". As a result, Bhabha's theoretical narrative of cultural differences thinks beyond originary and initial subjectivities but focuses on "initiat[ing] new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society" (Bhabha 1994:2). Consequently, as the crossing of space and time produces "in-between spaces" or the emergence of what Bhabha calls "interstices" "minority identities" are produced (Bhabha 1994:4). It is the presence of these minority identities either in an individual or people's ways of living, as they "mov[e] in-between cultural traditions and ... hybrid forms of life" (Bhabha 1994: xiii) which is known as cultural difference.

In defining this concept, Homi Bhabha (1994:34) posits that "cultural difference is the enunciation of culture as 'knowledge', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of identification". Therefore, this theory of cultural difference is relevant to this study, because its appropriation is necessary for the understanding and interpretations of the African vernacular-rooted arts while locating the culture or identity that is evident in each representation.

2.3 Methodology

The study adopted interviewing as a primary research instrument for extracting and producing understandings, and an indispensable resource for the interpretations (Magee and Grabski 2013:1) of the selected artworks from the eight artists. Field research was conducted to visit each of the artists at their studios in Nigeria and South Africa at different times in 2017. Before the commencement of the interview, each artist was given a copy of the informed consent form to sign. The fieldwork resulted in obtaining literary materials such as exhibition catalogues and articles written on some of the artists and these were utilised as secondary data for the interpretations of the artists' oeuvres.

The analysis of the artworks was informed by the interviews (Magee and Grabski 2013:3), along with art historical methodologies and visual hermeneutics theory. To this end, formal analysis was used in interrogating the formal elements of the paintings and sculptures by situating them in the contexts of their cultural histories. The visual hermeneutics theory was adopted in narrating the experiences that each work focuses on relaying by returning to their occurrences in the past.

2.4 The Concept of African Vernacular-Rooted Artworks

The concept of "vernacular" artworks is defined as the "appropriation and re-articulation of cultural forms" (Greaves 2015:7). This definition suggests that the cultural forms that are considered vernacular rooted arts include imageries or symbolisms drawn from rural and urban areas in African cultures. To contextualise the idea of African vernacular rooted artworks, the researcher argues that, as shown in Ogbechie's (2009:136) words, "it might be more useful to consider all contemporary engagements with ... forms of appropriation that adapt cultural concepts, signs, and symbols for use in thoroughly contemporary concerns". This view expressed by Ogbechie (2009:136) further suggests that there is a "difference between indigenous art and contemporary appropriations" of symbols from indigenous African cultures. It can, therefore, be argued that Ogbechie's argument signifies that contemporary African arts are not the same as historical vernacular arts, but hints at contemporary appropriations of cultural forms, concepts, signs, and symbols from either indigenous African cultures or urban African heritage embedded with meaningful narratives.

In situating the discourse on contemporary cultural appropriation of imagery and symbolisms in African art, Bhabha (1990:292b) suggests that it should "provide a perspective on the

disjunctive forms of representation that signify a people, a nation, or a national culture". This argument by Bhabha thus establishes that the appropriation of cultural forms of heterogeneous experiences of individuals rooted in an African culture represents not only the cultural identity referenced but also the national identity whether of South Africa or Nigeria in particular. It is against this background that E.J. de Jager (cited by Simbao 2011:41) argues that "in a highly original and often individualistic manner, black artists draw from Africa, its peoples and experiences" when creating artworks. This stance is supported by the position of Ogbechie (2008:224), who affirms that individual African artists in "contemporary/modern African art produce diverse context ... of African and cultural expressions". Therefore, the interpretation of the diverse and disjunctive African cultural expressions of contemporary African artists suggests, as Bhabha argues, "the mark of the ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy — and an apparatus of power — that it produces a continual slippage into analogous, even metonymic, categories, like the people, minorities, or cultural difference".

Consequently, the contemporary artworks selected for analysis in this study are not just representations of cultural imagery or symbolisms, but they also embody ideas, which suggest that "art can be uniquely expressive of ideas" (Pooke and Newall 2008:16) about particular experiences in African cultures. Therefore, the particular ideas expressed in the context of each contemporary African artwork identified in this study will also be interrogated, as Bhabha (1990:292b) notes, for "particular meanings within different" discursive construction of cultural appropriations. Such discursive construction, in Kunle Filani's (1998:34) view, is done from the form of the structure of the artwork and the content which is its subject matter. Therefore, "the viewer's interpretation and appreciation of the artwork will depend upon the combination of both the form and the content".

It can be concluded that the reading of each contemporary artwork executed by South African and Nigerian artists focuses on their personal experiences, or experiences of Africanness lived by others, which constitute the sources of ideas they represent (Rowe 1988:18; Simbao 2011:41). Aside from the notion of Africanness in artworks, it can be argued that there are no collective representations of ideas in contemporary African art, but rather disjunctive ones, which are immersed in the historical contexts of each country in Africa (Mudimbe 1994:154). Therefore, if diversity of trend is acknowledged in the representations of imageries and ideas about Africa in contemporary artworks from each African country, Mudimbe notes "the variety of their histories would be clear" in each context as well. Then, as Bhabha (1990:292b) argues, it is in each context "where the telling of the individual story [will

evolve], and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the collectivity itself". Although it is argued that there are no collective ideas in African art, Bhabha's stance suggests that the different stories artists tell in their works make up the collective contemporary African art.

In this chapter, the researcher also focuses on situating the cultural forms appropriated in contemporary African arts of South African and Nigerian artists and traces their ideas in the subject matters, motifs, and narratives classified under particular themes. This seeks to lay the theoretical and interpretative frameworks for the study. In concluding each broad theme, the researcher will compare and contrast the ideas or aims which artists from both countries have represented to gain insight and a wider understanding of how similar or divergent those ideas reflect the present experiences of heterogeneous people in indigenous African cultures. The primary criterion for the selection of the artworks in this chapter is the manifestation of cultural imagery and symbolism appropriated by contemporary South African and Nigerian artists. Their artworks have been selected using purposive sampling technique.

Furthermore, the study acknowledges that the historical contexts of late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, from which contemporary South African and Nigerian artists drew inspiration and references for executing artworks, differ because of their different cultural and political landscapes. The themes and motifs of the artworks executed by contemporary African artists from both countries were appropriated from cultural identities rooted in their individual countries. The theme of a work of art relates to the meaning, whether in painting or sculpture. In arguing what constitutes the meaning in a work of art, Danto (2000:132) observes "works of art are always about something, and hence have a content or meaning". This means that the narratives or meanings in works of art are deduced from the subjects, identifiable figures and objects represented, whether in paintings or sculptures and the ideas they embody and seek to convey to the viewers. Therefore, the identifiable forms and symbols represented in contemporary African art relay their meanings through their contents and contexts. On the other hand, to elicit the meaning of an abstract art piece depends on the interpretation given to it. To support this stance, Danto (2000:133) argues that "what the content of a Box as a work of art might be [is] a matter of interpretation". Danto's view suggests that the interrogation of the context of an abstract artwork and its subject is significant in reading the content in relationship to the broad themes of the pastoral landscapes, social issues, or socio-cultural and socio-political themes.

A theme of artwork, according to Przybylek (2018:1), "relates to the meaning ... rather than the subject". The narrative may include several subjects classified and discussed under a particular theme for broad understanding. This means that the theme is not the same as the subject, which is specific and basic. Such an attempt to differentiate the subject from the theme is important because each specific cultural appropriation by an artist presents a title or subject that embodies the meaning and may be situated under a particular broad theme for meaningful interpretation. However, a theme is deeper and broader and conveys a pervading idea that is more universal (Przybylek 2018:1). Some of the major themes explored in contemporary artworks from the two countries include politics, family life and interaction, landscape, everyday life, social commentary or issues, and relations, identity, portraiture, and country life. In this chapter, the researcher focuses on reading not just the African cultural appropriation but also the ideas in artworks executed around themes such as pastoral landscape and social issues or commentary in paintings and socio-cultural and socio-political themes in sculptures. The choice and arrangement of the subjects thematically is to interrogate the ideas in the selected paintings and sculptures by providing narrative and understanding of their contents and contexts.

2.5 African Vernacular Symbolisms in Pastoral Landscape Paintings

To interrogate the vernacular symbolisms and ideas represented in the context of modern/contemporary pastoral landscape artworks executed by South African and Nigerian artists, the questions below will guide the analysis. What are the formal qualities of the vernacular symbolisms and ideas contemporary African artists represented in the contexts of their pastoral landscape artworks and their purposes? What is the cultural history of the vernacular symbolism appropriated? How did the depiction of vernacular symbolisms in the pastoral landscape arts signify African identity or Africanness?

The aim of this section is to explore the vernacular symbolisms articulated in pastoral landscape paintings produced by contemporary Nigerian and South African artists, with particular focus on the narratives, aims or meanings they communicate. In Mitchell's (2002:14) words, pastoral "landscape is best understood as a medium of cultural expression, not [merely] a genre of painting". Thus, Mitchell's argument establishes that pastoral "landscape may be represented [not merely] by painting, [but] drawing, or engraving [and] by photography". Yet it is not merely of the "scenic beauty" of "African landscapes" (Manaka 1987:13, 14), but in John Jackson's (1986:5) view, the pastoral "landscape could mean

depiction of scenery not only of rural ... spaces, countryside but also of township", "containing human element[s]". Nevertheless, the contemporary art practice of post-colonial African artists took different forms of representations in articulating indigenous symbolisms in the context of pastoral landscape paintings; this for many artists was the key to creating an instantly recognisable indigenous African ethos (Meintjes and Pritchard 1991:73).

It might be argued that, while the history of landscape painting in modern African art is traceable to colonial influence, the post-colonial discourse on representations of cultural symbolisms and ideas in pastoral landscapes produced by contemporary African artists, questions the Euro-centric bias in landscape discourse, and "subvert any claims for the uniquely modern or Western lineage of landscape paintings" (Mitchell 2002:9), which rather highlights landscape paintings as a global phenomenon. The researcher further contends this argument with John Mohl's[2] response to a critic of his African-centred pastoral landscape, noting that, "But I am an African and when God made Africa, He also created beautiful landscapes for Africans to admire and paint" (Oguibe 2002:250). Therefore, the post-colonial interpretative approach to landscape paintings proposed by Mitchell is adopted in this section. WJT Mitchell (2002:1) argues that post-colonial landscapes are "treated as an allegory of psychological or ideological themes". And, as Mitchell (2002:8) further argues, pastoral landscape themes may be "ideological class views to which the painted image gives cultural expression". Therefore, in this section, the interpretations of the works are done within their cultural and historical contexts.

To establish the contemporary mode of appropriating cultural imagery and symbols in pastoral landscapes, it is argued that they are anchored on an artist's affiliation with indigenous African culture or heritage in contemporary art. As an art tutor in Ghana, George A. Stevens (cited by Kwami 2013:222) maintains that articulation of cultural symbolisms in "art forms ... must form the basis of any vital modern African culture". This stance by Stevens draws the attention of contemporary African artists to the need of seeing the representations of cultural imageries in their artworks not just as a contemporary style of producing art, but as a vital practice. Consequently, the artworks of contemporary African artists are described as vital modern African culture when they portray aesthetic concepts, which contribute in the long run to the histories of African art.

[2] This was the humble response of modern South African artist called John Mohlankana, but popularly known as Mohl's to a white admirer of his art, who criticised him for painting African landscapes instead of people.

A pastoral landscape painting represented in the 1960's in South Africa, entitled *Zulu Mother and Child* (1960), reveals a rendition by Durant Sihlali (1935-2004). Although the title hints at the ethnic identity of an African woman and her child, it introduces a specific African culture that influenced the depiction. However, it not only locates the possible influence of the artist but his identity as well. Even though the artist was born in Germiston, Transvaal, which is now the Gauteng province, and grew up in Soweto, his name, "Sihlali", is rooted in Zulu ethnicity, thus signalling his Zulu cultural identity. As John Peffer (2005:340) notes, he is part of Zulu "diaspora", who had a strong affiliation to his indigenous ethos as demonstrated in this "ideological" rendition (Mitchell 2002:1).

The depiction articulates a mother, child and a third person in a countryside scene; all the shapes are abstracted into facets reminiscent of Lionel Feninger or J.H. Pierneef (Miles 2004:129). Although the imageries are abstracted, the African mother is carrying a pot on her head, as she refuses a collector from helping her carry the African pot in a dramatic scene, which suggests that she is in a situation of contested ownership. Aside from that, the composition, in which her young child is walking beside her does not look symmetrical but shows the effect of smooth texture. In John Peffer's (2009:233) words, "the Zulu [mother and child] are intended to be seen as a 'natural' part of the [pastoral] landscape". However, the researcher would argue, as Nikos Papastergiadis (2005:41) observes, that this is "unlike the essentialist theories that claim that cultural identity is rooted in a particular landscape", because there are no cultural elements within the landscape to signify it as Zulu cultural milieu, even though it maybe implied to be a pastoral landscape in the KZN province. Although there are no cultural elements that appear rooted in Zulu culture, the African pot conveyed by the woman indicates, as Carol Hermer (2004:389) argues, a symbol with cultural relevance. To demonstrate its relevance in Zulu culture, certain indigenous African philosophical concepts (Ogbechie 2016:93) are used to identify three pots and their functions. In an online article titled *More than meets the eye* (2017:1), a pot for brewing beer is *imbiza* and is usually bigger, while the pot for serving is *ukhamba* and the pot size is used for cooking meat, storing grain or water and drinking sour milk is *umancishana*. Therefore, given that the African woman might be returning with water, the pot on her head symbolises *umancishana*, not *imbiza* or *Ukhamba*. This is because, *imbiza* is a bigger pot than she may be able to carry, and *ukhamba* is a smaller pot used for serving beer. As *South African History Online* (2015:1) observes, Sihlali rejected the avant-garde art trends of the time but

rather opted for appropriating the realities of life among black South Africans along with artists like Ephraim Ngatane, Isaac Hlatshwayo, and Louis Maqhubela.

On the other hand, the cultural history of the countryside scene in the KwaZulu-Natal province reveals relatively high poverty rates, especially in the former homeland areas. Notwithstanding the poverty in the countryside, as Klopper (2001:7b) argues, "in ... rural areas ... it is ... mainly [a] wom[a]n who bear[s] the burden of responsibility for looking after rural home-steads". Thus, it can be argued that Sihlali's depiction does not merely reflect responsibility but also seems to relay a social commentary that is not divorced from the "hardship" the African woman faces in her domestic life, for not having access to water in her home, perhaps a consequence of apartheid "exclusion" from modern facilities and development. The narrative invokes, not merely the togetherness of the mother and child in African way of life but, as Sooryamoorthy and Makhoba 2016:312) offers, it hints on a "female headed household". Consequently, Sihlali's rendition not only resonates with togetherness as a significant quality in the mother-child relationship but also seems to establish the need for strong emotional ties between a mother and her child. Though this rendition is not a historical vernacular art, it seems to symbolise the Zulu diaspora "artist's vision of traditional African family value ... [in an] indigenous culture in South Africa" (Peffer 2009:214).

Like this pastoral landscape painting which, in Geoffrey Batchen's (2000:268) view, references "indigenous vernacular" symbolisms rooted in Zulu culture in the 1960s in South Africa, the articulation of cultural symbolisms are overtly present in pastoral landscape paintings produced in Nigeria in the 1960s as well. An example is the *Nigerian Ports Authority Mural* (1962), by modern Nigerian artist Ben Enwonwu (1917-1994). The researcher argues that this title suggests the location of the mural, rather than the context of the depiction. As Ogbechie (2008:157) argues, the depiction reveals three African male figures adorned in cultural attire that references elements in Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo cultures. Standing beside an oil palm grove, immediately behind them are two African women rooted in Fulani culture with calabashes balanced on their heads. However, Ogbechie's analysis does not merely resonate with "cultural mixture" (Parastergiadis 2005:40), but in Mitchell's (2002:2) words, "naturali[s]es a cultural and social construction" of some ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Enwonwu's representation, according to Ogbechie (2008:157), reveals different plants such as cocoa, plantains, timber, oil palm trees and peanuts that grace the Nigerian landscape. Although these plants are represented at the background of this painting, they are as Mudimbe (1994:158) observes, "meant to establish ... a gradual progression from nature to culture", while also perhaps serving as abundant riches for citizens to sustain themselves. On the other hand, the heterogeneous cultural imagery in the work, in Mudimbe's words, suggests "symbolic intersections [of] ... sociocultural conceptions bequeathed to [Nigeria] by colonialism". And as Nikos Papastergiadis (2005:40) argues, the intersections hint upon "hybridity [o]f cultural identit[ies]" appropriated from the three major cultural groups – Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa/Fulani in Nigeria. However, as Oluwatobi (2018:36) argues, "Nigeria became a Nation-State on January 1, 1914, with the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates", but was ruled by British colonisers until 1960.

Eventually, "after many years of colonial rule, on 1st October 1960, Nigeria gained its independence from Britain" (Oluwatobi 2018:36). However, in Mitchell's (2002:3) words, this cultural unity signifies "the formation of a complex network of political, social and cultural identities". This appears so, because soon after Nigerian independence, on January 15, 1966, there was a military coup which ended the first republic (Oluwatobi 2018:36) and on May 30, 1967, there was a secession declaration from the leader of the Igbo cultural group aimed at creating the Biafra nation, but was aborted with the onset of the Nigerian civil war. Though the planned secession was aborted, it suggests that possibly the nationalists' motivation in accepting *a forced marriage* of the diverse ethnicities bequeathed to Nigeria at independence in 1960 is not "devoid of political motive[s]" (Kasfir 1992:41), a decision that consequently divided the nation along the "lines of religion and ethnicity" (Edewor et al 2014:75).

Given the analysis of this pastoral landscape, the painting is understood as the coming together of ethnic identities for the aim of political, social and national unity. As Vogel (2012:100) maintains, it is "to build [a] modern national culture founded on [Nigerian] living cultures and pre-colonial history". Alternatively, Edewor et al (2014:74) note that the "national integration in the Nigerian context has been an attempt to forge 'unity in diversity' and [an] aggressive attempt to ignore, if not dissolve, historic differences". It might be argued that Nigerian unity in diversity was not just to ignore historic differences, but perhaps to harness the rich human and natural resources for the purpose of complementing the co-existence of each cultural group, thereby making "an overt political statement" (Manaka

1987:12). Conversely, in the 1970s, Durant Sihlali's pastoral landscape painting, titled *Looking in [Padda Vlei] Kliptown* (1975), draws attention to a particular place. Kliptown is a suburb township in Soweto, which reveals, as Nikos Papastergiadis (2005:40) observes, a site that hybridises disparate African men and women. This is possibly because Sihlali lived in the township where, in Mario Pissarra's (2011:3a) words, he documented not merely everyday "black lives" but also represented the realities of life in the African township.

The context of the township scene, as Mitchell (2002:2) notes, "greets us as space, as environment, as that within which [the figure] in the landscape find–or lose–[herself]". Although the rendition greets a viewer with a street scene, it reflects an African woman who seems to lose herself, because her house was earmarked for demolition. According to Mdanda (2011:25), "imminent loss is intimated by the representation of a solitary woman seated on a chair outside her home. The presence of her humble bed along with the act of cooking outdoors on a brazier locates her in a public space, highlighting her vulnerability". Though the depiction raises concern for the life and property of the African woman, it also draws attention to the fact that she is experiencing the dilemma of a lonely state. Therefore, she is either a single woman or a widow. On the other hand, the woman's plight demonstrates a cultural history of black women in South Africa, which suggests that she "suffered more than [a] black m[a]n from the violations of ... [her] rights" (Fatima Meer [sa]:1). In addition, as Angie Motshekga ([sa]:1) reiterates, "gender oppression was particularly inhuman during apartheid, where [a] wom[a]n suffered a triple oppression of race, class, and gender". According to Eloff and Sevenhuysen (2011:7), it signals not only attempts at "forced removal [but] meant that ... [the black South African woman would be] left homeless" or perhaps return to her "highly restricted ethnic Homelands" (Krantz 2008:291).

Perhaps the aim of Sihali's painting signifies, in Manaka's (1987:15) words, the "agon[y] of township life" and as Eloff and Sevenhuysen (2011:11) reiterate, it signals a "scene [of] ... the devastating side of life in [a] township". Therefore, it seems Sihali's aim, in Mitchell's (2002:2) view, hints on employing "landscape ... [as] an instrument of cultural power", to make a political and social commentary on the agony and devastating life of the woman, perhaps to challenge, or as Manaka (1987:17) observes, resist the planned "forced removal". Alternatively, in David Krantz's (2008:290) words, its aim is "beyond the aesthetic", because it seeks "to document the conflicts between oppressors and their victims so as [to] alert, persuade and elicit support for the oppressed". Consequently, it relays a political commentary by invoking a notion of identity politics. Similarly, pastoral landscape photography entitled

Council flats, Kewtown (1979), unfolds a subject that suggests a place. While the title of Paul Albert's (1946-2010) work denotes a place, in Mitchell's (2002:1) words, it indicates "a process by which social and subjective identity [is] formed". Kewtown is an urban community in Western Cape, where heterogeneous coloureds and black South Africans live.

As Mitchell (2002:8) argues, a "landscape' [that] denotes a place ... encourages the failure to ask question[s]". Mitchell's argument is contestable because the subject and context of a landscape which denotes a place makes it possible not only to ask questions but to interpret the meaning expressed (Mitchell 2002:15). Still, as Mdanda (2011:27) asserts, it "foregrounds young children, who he [Paul Albert] captures playing unattended on the cemented terrain". Although the environment in which the young African children are playing evokes an unsafe surrounding, their activity suggests a desire to demonstrate their individual physicality rather than concern for safety. This experience narrates the history of "the inequalities and exclusion" (Papastergiadis 2005:43) during apartheid. Pooke and Newall (2008:71) reiterate that it invokes a "human history ... understood as one of ongoing class conflict between those with access to" facility and those without. In this context, it signals lack of access to a playground, either because of their class or cultural identity during apartheid. Possibly after reviewing the extent of exclusion on African children, in John Peffer's (2009:120) view, "the South African Defence Force handed out plastic toy troop carriers to township children as part of an image-polishing campaign in 1985". This augment suggests that the toys handed out to township children are not divorced from hidden motives, because they were not given in recognition of their need for play facilities.

Consequently, the narrative seems to reveal an aim that suggests exclusion in the provision of facilities. In Bhabha's (1990:312b) view, it suggests that the excluded people of political discrimination are installed at the centre. Therefore, Albert's photography seems to install the young African children at the centre of the past exclusion in the 1970s. Alternatively, as Peffer (2009:120) observes the picture hints on "the potential[s] ... of play for positive" physical development, despite the lack of basic facilities. Furthermore, the context of a different pastoral landscape drawing by a contemporary South African artist, Thami Mnyele (1948-1985), unfolds differently within the work titled *Zimbabwe* (1980). However, this subject introduces a national identity of a different African country rather than the artist's home country, possibly because he was exiled at that time. Simbao (2011:53) states that "a man emerges from crumbling stone walls. While the animal carcass and thorn-tree branch on the left side of the drawing allude to bareness and even violence, the wall of Great

Zimbabwe, albeit falling apart". Though the symbolic wall of Great Zimbabwe was falling apart, Simbao further notes that it "seems to suggest the possibility of a man arising from and being strengthened by African traditions".

Thami Mnyele's exile, in Ogbechie's (2009:140) words, symbolises "an example of transnational migration and it mirrors a process of trans-cultural exchange", even though it was for political reasons. As Peffer (2005:341) notes, a person who migrates "into the land of another ... later coalesce into communities self-defined in resistant relation". Thus, Mnyele's art seems to signify "transnational symbols of Africanness" for its articulating forms and ideas from two African countries – South Africa, his home country and Zimbabwe, where he was perhaps in exile. Although he made allusion to Zimbabwe symbolically, Mnyele's movement was known to be from South Africa to Botswana, where he was eventually "killed in the South African Defence Force raid of the ANC bases" (Manaka 1987:16). This articulation of cultural forms and contents from two countries appears to reveal his response to the socio-political environment in South Africa, using imagery from Zimbabwe as an allegory. Even though he was in exile, Mnyele was "strengthened by African traditions" because he "admired past African traditions" (Simbao 2011:53). In contrast, it exemplifies the African consciousness and history of black South African artists who, notwithstanding being exiled, were "pre-occupied by home rather than their immediate environment" (Manaka 1987:17). Thus, the visual narrative implicates not merely upholding the liberation spirit, but as Manaka (1987:13) argues, it hints on an artist "interpreting an African experience through [his] ... own eyes".

As Peffer (2009:83) argues, the aim echoes a possible belief in political struggle as a language for liberation. Ruth Simbao (2011:11) reiterates the aim noting that, "*Zimbabwe* captures – the subtleties of a cultural worker who was a forward thinking revolutionary, who actively fought for liberation both in South Africa and in exile". It might be argued that this mode of depiction hints not merely at a cultural tool for resistance but liberation from apartheid in South Africa, and as part of a commitment to "the ideology of Black Consciousness" (Manaka 1987:16). Therefore, the depiction is significant in relaying "a strong political content" which serves toward nothing else other than an end to the apartheid regime. Conversely, a different pastoral landscape painting entitled *Cattle Rearer* (1985), by Kuti Usman (b. unknown), a contemporary Nigerian artist, unfolds differently. The title echoes a Fulani cultural practice of animal husbandry. In Obodo's (2008:56) words, it "features [a] ... herder and his herd ... carefully and prominently registered. On the

foreground is a figure wearing a hat". Although Obodo's argument did not locate the cultural identity of the herder, the hat worn by the herder suggests a cultural element worn by a herder in Fulani culture, which is significant for providing shade for the nomad as he grazes his cattle.

The history of pastoral Fulani in Nigeria reveals that "the economic mainstay of the pastoralist is animal herding [for example] cattle, camels, goats, and sheep. In Nigeria, the [heterogeneous] Fulani own about 80 to 95 percent of the large animals available" (Etsename [sa]:37). Nevertheless, cattle ownership for a pastoral Fulani, in Okediji's (1973:1) view, is "a symbol of ... solidarity within the plural society". This is viewed as solidarity, because the real owner may be a wealthy individual who chooses to invest his resources into raising herds and employs a trusted Fulani to keep them. Furthermore, Okediji (1973:2) observes that "the herds [are] ... kept near [a] ... town under the charge of trusted slaves, who ha[s] other slave herdsmen to assist him ... if the cattle herds were numerous". Even though the depiction echoes an indigenous form of nomadic Fulani grazing cattle, it is not a historical vernacular art, but as Ogbechie (2009:136) notes, it indicates a "contemporary identification" with ethnicity.

The interpretation of this rendition reveals, as Etsename ([sa]:40) argues, that "the [pastoral] Fulani is [a] migrant ... influenced by climatic conditions, making him drift towards the south [of Nigeria] in the dry season and the north in the raining season". Consequently, the migrant experience of the pastoral Fulani man, in John Peffer's (2005:340) words, gives him a diasporic identity in any community where he is fore-grounded grazing. Alternatively, the depiction, as Etsename ([sa]:43) notes, relays "the relationship between the Fulani herdsman and his sedentary neighbour" as one fraught with conflict. Similarly, another pastoral landscape in linoleum cut in South Africa presents a different scene in *Meeting of Two Cultures* (1993) by Sandile Goje. To demonstrate, as the title suggests, the coming together of two cultures, the context reveals an unusual manner in which Goje depicts two people, a black man, and a white man, both represented as houses. Jacques (2012:161) notes that "the black hand and the white hand are not only the hands of two races or, as the title tells us, of two cultures. They are also the hands of poverty and prosperity".

Picton's stance establishes that even though a white person is called an African, he is in Peffer's (2005:340) words, a "European ... diaspora person". Although they both shake hands on farm land, it can be argued that Jacques' view that the hands are of poverty and prosperity

in the context of this work is misleading, because the representation invokes a "hybrid landscape formation that [is] characterised simultaneously as imperial and anti-colonial" (Mitchell 2002:10). It is imperial because the whiteness reflects the idea of the ruling apartheid, while the Africanness symbolises anti-colonial imagery, which represents in Manaka's (1987:11) words, "a voluntary fusion of ... cultures without any force". Therefore, it signifies the amalgamation that must occur of African and European essences in order to build a unified and racially diverse South Africa. However, Picton (1997:17) argues that in "southern Africa [it] comes as something of a shock ... to get used to ... [a] white [person] with every right to call [himself] ... African".

On the other hand, this portrayal draws on the subject of anti-colonial or anti-apartheid sentiments, not only in the appropriation of the cultural imageries but also in their architecture. The artist's use of basic ideas of normative architecture to represent cultural diversity in his painting signifies as Mitchell (2002:15) observes, that "landscape mediates the cultural and the natural, or "Man", [Architecture] and "Nature". As a result, the portrayal of the "mud" hut represents Africa and the brick bungalow represents Europe/whiteness, thereby sharpening cultural differences under apartheid. Therefore, according to Beinart and Dubow (1995:7), "In 1902, legislation was passed providing for a long-term urban segregation by creation of peri-urban African location". As a result, black South Africans did not have avenues of interaction with the whites and other colours (Peffer 2009:179), neither did they build and live in the same place. It is for this reason a symbolic pastoral landscape is created as a meeting place of a black man and a white. Consequently, as Manaka (1987:170 observes, the aim of this rendition denotes "African consciousness in order to advocate for change and continuity". It thus implies that the black man advocated for change from apartheid to democratic governance in South Africa.

Alternatively, it evokes a narrative that the African and white men, by their meeting, crossed cultural barriers, which Bhabha (1990:292b) notes suggests a demonstration of "hybrid[ity] in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications" as response to the socio-political problems in South Africa in the early 1990s. In contrast, a similar African consciousness is reflected in the pastoral landscape painting of Jerry Buhari (b.1959), a contemporary Nigerian artist. The rendition, entitled *Freedom from Force* (1995), unfolds differently from the anti-colonial representation in South Africa. However, as Otu et al (2015:221) argue, it reveals disparate people filled with "great excitement" because a political prison was liberated from confinement. Given that Otu et al's argument suggests an activity of excitement, the portrayal

showing silhouetted cultural imageries atop a vehicle with several architectural structures at the background, which suggests Lagos city, in Nettleton's (2011:11a) words, signifies a work "placed in the service of a political narrative of liberation" not of a nation but possibly a popular political activist.

The mode of depiction reveals formal structures of imageries in silhouette without detailed representations, however in De Jager's ([sa]:1) view, "By means of posture, gestures, rhythm, in short, patterns of body configuration, these figures express inner ... experiences" of jubilation. Yet their ethnic identities are not easily established because of the peculiar style of representation. To contextualise the history of this narrative, Otu et al (2015:221) argue that "this painting was made during the military regime of Gen. Sani Abacha (d. 1998), which [incarcerated or] assassinated individuals ... in the society [who] openly wrote and spoke publicly to confront his government". Thus, this stance evokes the possible reason for the excitement, which implies that a political prisoner or an activist was freed from force or imprisonment. Such history narrates the tyranny or domination not of an imperialist or colonial ruler, but as Serageldin (1998:2) notes "the tyrann[y] of dictatorship" of an indigenous military government. Consequently, the excitement from the heterogeneous cultural imagery signifies disapproval for the style of leadership.

The analysis suggests as Nikos Papastergiadis (2005:43) observes, an aim which denotes "disappoint[ment] and disapprov[al]" for use of force in governance. This aim is demonstrated with the expression of joy as a form of confrontation, protest or resistance from heterogeneous individuals against unlawful arrests, detention, and torture of activists. Alternatively, in Homi Bhabha's words, it is a "realist narrative [which] produces a national-historical time that makes visible a specifically [Nigerian] day in the detail of its passing time". In a scenario that unfolds in a pastoral landscape produced by a contemporary South African artist, David Koloane (b. 1938-2019), entitled *The Night has a Thousand Eyes* (2007-2008), attention is drawn to a depiction of a night scene. As Gabriela Salgado (2018:1) notes, Koloane foregrounds movement of some black South Africans possibly finding their way to church, as they "walk through the dark roads surrounded by stray dogs and the ominous presence of an owl under the full moon's spell". Although the cultural symbolisms are identified as people walking to church, the simplified mode of portrayal makes it difficult to identify whether they are African men, women or a mixture of both. However, to locate the place identity, in Picton's (1997:18) words, "the image of dog could ... remind you of some

of the fonder memories of township life". Thus, Picton's augment suggests that the cultural imagery has been appropriated from a township and seeks to relay spiritual or religious commentary.

David Koloane's rendition, as Mitchell (2002:1) observes, evokes "the presentation of ... image[ries] designed for transcendental consciousness". Given the fact that the cultural symbolisms are on a religious outing, in Mitchell's view, the presence of "animals and dwellings [in the depiction] can be read as symbols in religious ... allegories". It is contestable for stray dogs and the owl in this context to be read as symbols in religious allegories, but their depiction signifies, as Gerard Eager (1961:52) maintains, "the sending power of the eye ... strongly felt ... as strong batteries power a light that cuts through the darkness". Alternatively, Gabriela Salgado (2018:1) notes that the people, animals and owl signals "where fluorescent eyes emerge from the night scene as prophecies". Though Salgado's allusion to "prophecies" may seem to corroborate with Mitchell's stance on animals being read as symbols in African spirituality, the researcher argues that the artist's express intent seems to echo how different creatures have crystal clear vision to see even a dark night. Similarly, the representation of a night scene also features in the pastoral landscape painting of a contemporary South African artist, John Mohl, evident in a rendition titled *Miners in the moonlight* (1970). However, it echoes, as Eloff and Sevenhuysen (2011:17) observe, "several men, walking back from the mines with their flashlights" rather than just the sending power of their "transparent eyeball" (Mitchell 2002:1).

The interpretation of Koloane's rendition reveals an aim, which in Homi Bhabha's (1990:295b) words, connotes "the power of the eye[s]" of different creatures being translucent on a dark night. Additionally, as Gerard Eager (1961:50) argues, it hints on "the representation of eyes in art [which] ... implie[s] the power of sight, whether directly or indirectly". It might be argued that the aim of this painting, therefore, echoes the power of sight to find pathways even on the darkest of nights. A similar scene unfolds in a pastoral landscape painting in a Nigerian context entitled *Evening Mood* (2008), by Kazeem Olojo (b.1970). Although it depicts rural scenery, the appropriation shows people, houses, trees and vegetation rooted in a Yoruba countryside village in south-western Nigeria. In Bardi's (2017:265) view, Kazeem Olojo appropriated cultural imageries that reference the experiences of people within an indigenous Nigerian rural village, dressed, but walking in different directions, likely to visit friends and families. Thus this depiction, as Rossler

(2006:334) argues, indicates a pastoral landscape that "interface[s] between nature and culture".

Although the rendition presents some indigenous people going about leisurely at dusk to signify a mood of relaxation, rather than resting in a particular place, in Mitchell's (2002:3) view, it suggests "ideological construction of the spectator". Mitchell (2002:7) argues that such a construction hints on "the 'reflective' and imaginary projection of moods into landscape". Notwithstanding this submission, as Mitchell (2002:1) maintains, "times of day ... [and] types of human figures can be linked with generic and narrative typologies such as the pastoral". Therefore, Olojo's rendition demonstrates a pastoral landscape rendition, which "works as a cultural practice" (Mitchell 2002:1). Even though the artist articulates vernacular symbolism in this rendition it signifies a contemporary identification with ethnic identities, rather than a "continuation" (Ogbechie 2009:136) of traditional vernacular art.

The visual narrative suggests contemporary pastoral landscape painting on a dusk scene. It can be argued, in Mitchell's (2002:6) words, that the aim conveys hints on "a reflection of [the people's] mood ... that would restore the human spirit in harmony with [his] environment". Although the idea of restoring the human spirit signals relaxation, which is significant in promoting rest in the evening, the movement of the imageries in different directions after perhaps a laborious day may question such claims of relaxation. It might be argued that through this depiction Olojo demonstrated "his admiration of scenic beauty" (Manaka 1987:14) in a Nigerian countryside.

2.6 Findings and Discussion

Although the findings from the analysis of the pastoral landscape paintings reveal disparate appropriations of vernacular symbolisms, the renditions were made by modern/contemporary Nigerian and South African artists rather than traditional craftsmen. However, in their engagements with pastoral landscapes, these artists not merely focus on representations of cultural imageries from rural areas, but urban areas like "township scenes" (Manaka 1987:13) and idealised landscapes as well. Consequently, as Brenda Greaves (2015:7) observes, their renditions are deemed vernacular art because they appropriate cultural symbolisms and imageries, which in Batchen's (2000:262) view, opens up a narrative on "vernacular genre", but not as Ola Olodi (cited by Oguibe 2002:264) asserts, "the classical African forms" or its "reconfiguration". Likewise, the construction of Africanness is explored in the narrative below.

To summarise the analyses and evaluation of the forms, contents, media and subject matters of symbols and cultural imagery (vernacular-rooted art) considered African, under this broad theme, the researcher argues that in *Zulu Mother and Child* (1960) by Durant Sihlali, although his subject matter evokes abstract portrayal of vernacular imageries of a mother and child, a third individual intercepts them on the way, signifying, in Abdellah Karroum's words (cited by Pieprzak 2009:194), a "possible dialogue and encounter". Therefore, as Ogbechie (2009:135) notes, it invokes "ethnic identity play[ing] out in [a] form of expression" of movement within a homestead pastoral landscape in which they were fore-grounded. Africanness is signified not merely through African culture, but as Vogel (2012:100) notes, through an "ideology of Africanising art [which] calls for the articulation of indigenous rural life" in Zulu culture. Ben Enwonwu's *Nigerian Ports Authority Mural* (1962) reveals a realistic appropriation of vernacular symbolisms of African men and women arrayed in cultural attire and elements rooted in Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Igbo cultures in a pastoral landscape mural painting. It evokes, as Abdellah Karroum (cited by Pieprzak 2009:192) observes, the influence of unity among disparate cultural life on the African continent, but resonates with "a phase in cultural nationalism" in Nigeria at independence (Oguibe 2002:248).

Furthermore, Durant Sihlali, in *Looking in [Padda Vlei] Kliptown* (1975), engaged with vernacular imagery on "an expressive illustration of ... [a] township life" (Manaka 1987:13) of a seated and lonely black African woman from Soweto. It seems to relay an aim which is not merely recording an individual and scene of destruction in the township (Eloff and Sevenhuysen 2011:14), but the woman's predicament in said pastoral landscape. Thus, it signifies Africanness in that it resonances, as Nettleton (2011:147b) argues, with a "search for [a] specifically South African identity". Significantly, pastoral landscape photography, entitled *Council flats, Kewtown* (1979) by Paul Albert (1946-2010), shows vernacular symbolism of young African children playing in an unsafe environment outside their unrepresented apartment. It seems to hint, as Nettleton (2011:151b) notes, at "figurative modernism" which reflects not only their individual physicality but also, in Olu Oguibe's (2002:251) words, indicates "a clear discourse of cultural defiance" during the segregation policy of apartheid. However, Africanness is implicated through the response to a form of "urbanization of African life" (Ngwena 2018:3; Manaka 1987:13).

In reading the formal qualities in Thami Mnyele's pastoral landscape drawing titled *Zimbabwe* (1980), which shows a black man emerging from crumbling stone walls, it hints

on an idealistic cultural expression in the "vernacular genre" (Batchen 2000:262). Nonetheless, it conveys "defiance against the superiority complex of white people" and of apartheid in particular (Manaka 1987:16). Aside from the socio-political undertone of this artwork, Manaka further observes that Mnyele's "form was not that different from what was going on in the art world of Europe", because his work "was highly technical with an academic polish". Therefore, in Ruth Simbao's (2011:45) view, his depiction relays "Africanness" through the "articulation of political resistance" to the apartheid regime. Similarly, the pastoral landscape painting *Cattle Rearer* (1985) by Kuti Usman, a contemporary Nigerian artist, reveals not only the indigenous vernacular imagery of a Fulani herdsman but also his herd. Consequently, his portrayal demonstrates Africanness, as Pieprzak (2009:193) notes, not just for reflecting African cultural heritage of animal husbandry but in being "linked to the realities of the [African] continent and its representations".

Additionally, the findings also reveal that Sandile Goje's pastoral landscape entitled *Meeting of Two Cultures* (1993) is not merely, in Mitchell's (2002:14) view, a "medium of cultural expression", but echoes an unconventional mode of representation of imageries rooted in the South African space. As Manaka (1987:16) argues, it presents an "expression ... [of] architecture in Africa ... through a different system of logic" on farmland, as a black man and a white man are portrayed as houses on a homestead. However, in Katarzyna Pieprzak's (2009:194) words, they symbolise a "specific relationship with Africa". As Nettleton (2011:9a) notes, it exemplifies "African identity" through an inclusive "belonging" to the continent". Jerry Buhari's representation titled *Freedom from Force* (1995), in Anitra Nettleton's (2011:145b) view, reveals "formal and expressive qualities" of disparate and distinct vernacular symbolisms rejoicing in an urban pastoral landscape.

It suggests celebration because a political prisoner was freed from the tyranny of a military dictator in Nigeria in the mid-1990s. In narrating Africanness, it is implied given the fact that the depiction reflects an African scene and the imageries "are indigenous to African space" (Dei 2012:46). Likewise, *The Night has a Thousand Eyes* (2007-2008), by David Koloane, a contemporary South African artist, does not merely foreground movements of people and stray dogs, but as Mitchell (2002:15) argues, demonstrates landscape as a "potent cultural symbol" for portraying black South Africans rooted in a township. Given the fact that they are identified as people on their way to church at night, in Manaka's (1987:13) view, it echoes a theme on the "African experience" of spirituality. Lastly, Kazeem Olojo's pastoral

landscape painting, titled *Evening Mood (2008)*, reflects overt ideological subjects. Though it articulates disparate people at dusk walking in different directions in village scenery, the depiction marries nature and culture as it shows architectural constructs, trees, and vegetation in the background. Therefore, in Mitchell's (2002:15) view, the landscape "display[s] an identity of the real and the imaginary that certifies the reality of [the] ... images" as it reflects modes of relaxation in a Yoruba village in south-western Nigeria. Nevertheless, it implicates Africanness through African culture, not in a homogenous context, but as it reflects rural daily life (Manaka 1987:14) in Yoruba culture.

2.7 Social Issues in Afrocentric Vernacular Paintings

To interrogate the vernacular symbolisms and the aims represented in the context of each contemporary vernacular painting, the questions below will guide the analysis. What are the formal cultural imagery and ideas contemporary African artists from both countries represented in the contexts of their works that reflect social issues? How did their depictions signify Africanness or African identity even though they reflect social issues?

In this section, the study interrogates the African vernacular rooted paintings of modern/contemporary South African and Nigerian artists, in which cultural imageries or symbols that reflect contemporary social issues were appropriated. As Mario Pissarra (2011:3) notes, these African artists articulate "images [which] in part resides in their mediation of horror and intimacy". Thus, this broad theme focuses on the depicted cultural symbolisms which narrate past and present experiences of Africans on subjects and ideas that relay social issues of conflict between two or more people, disagreement or engagement in struggle. According to Manaka (1987:15), some black South African artists "reflect conditions of life in the townships ... [showing the] ... agonies of township life". In defining social issues, Robert Lauer (1976:122) argues that "social problems exist when people define conditions as problematic", especially when they are "incompatible with the values of a significant number of people". In the light of their stance on what constitutes social issues, the profound theme on social issues, therefore, draws attention to rethink some symbolisms which signify environmental or social problems, social concerns, and challenges that arise from behaviours or lifestyles that conflict with traditional values held in African cultures.

What is a value? Idang (2015:101) asserts that "a value is seen as view[s] or conviction[s] which we live with, live by and can even die for... [This] permeates every aspect of human life. For instance, we can rightly speak of religious, political, social, aesthetic, moral, cultural

and even personal values". Idang's view suggests that the values held by individuals or many in the society as expected standards of acceptable behaviours or life styles demands conformity, to do otherwise create conflicts. Therefore, this thematic interrogation focuses on the formal qualities of the vernacular symbolisms which reflect on social issues that arise from conflicts with specific values in Nigeria and South Africa, in relationship to their cultural histories.

Given that African cultures are diverse, so are the subjects represented on contemporary social issues in artworks. To demonstrate a form of social issues, Uche Okeke (1933-2016), a contemporary Nigerian artist, executed a drawing entitled *Maiden's Cry* (1962). In his contemporary identification of social issues, Okeke appropriated an elegantly dressed young African woman weeping, her quadrangular structured mouth forming an expressionistic point of view that echoes wailing (see Chukueggu and Onwuakpa 2016:261, 262). What could make an elegantly dressed African woman stand wailing outside the house like a diasporic person? Therefore, to locate her experience, Chukueggu and Onwuakpa (2016:261) note, she symbolises a victim of injustice and unfavourable condition in traditional or modern societies.

Although traditional or modern societies are implicated in the African woman's unfavourable condition, as Nyongesa (2017:3) argues, a "wom[a]n [is] victim of physical and psychological violence ... [but] the perpetrator" is a man. In identifying forms of violence a man may perpetrate against a woman, Chukueggu and Onwuakpa (2016:261) maintain that it may "include sexual abuse, forced marriage, intimidation, neglect, and discrimination". Notwithstanding the fact that man perpetrates such violence against a woman, Nyongesa (2017:4) argues that "African culture is diverse; [yet] not all African [men] ... are oppressive to women". Aside from the fact that not all men in Nigeria are perpetrators of violence against women, the researcher also argues that violence against an African woman is not confined to a particular culture in Nigeria. On the other hand, to situate the identity of the wailing maid, as Nettleton (2011:143b) notes, offers the construction of an authentic identity in the present demands cultural history. Therefore, in Chukueggu and Onwuakpa's (2016:262) words, "her hands which are raised upwards, resting on her coiffure adorned with traditional carved wooden combs [is] reminiscent of *uli nra* (*uli* comb) motif". Kreamer (2010:18) observes that in Igbo culture in south eastern Nigeria, a woman draws uli symbols to beautify her body as well as upon the walls of her home and shrine, especially for special occasions. Kreamer's stance indicates that the *uli comb* motif in Okeke's work is not only

relevant in constructing identity, but also serves as a symbol of feminine beauty. Thus, a possible influence on Okeke for appropriating *uli* motif in this vernacular drawing in the 1960s is expressed by Picton (1997:13), when he observes that:

> Okeke had grown up as part of the Igbo diaspora that came about in Nigeria ... His encounter with Igbo culture came about partly with the staging of events in the towns of the Jos plateau by the differing Igbo associations formed on the basis of locality back in the Igbo-speaking region itself and partly from seeing Igbo artefacts in Jos museum. It was his mother's explanation of the marks on these things that introduced him to the body and wall painting tradition known as uli.

In fact, Okeke's appropriation of *uli* symbolism from Igbo culture as a dominant motif in his drawing is not merely for aesthetic purposes but also evokes, in Ogbechie's (2009:139) view, an attempt to "reinterpret aspects of indigenous Igbo culture for use in contemporary art". Additionally, it suggests, as Okeke-Agulu (2006:26) observes, that a contemporary "artist studies ... art form indigenous to his ethnicity and reformulates a modernistic aesthetic and formal style on the basis of that art". The reading reveals an aim that denotes her need for communal help. As George Sefa Dei (2012:48) argues, it signifies an "ideology based on African indigenous value systems, concepts, and principles such as community, collective responsibility" with the hope of finding help from someone at the hearing of her cry. Gyekye (cited by Wilkinson 2015:298) reiterates that "communalism is the particular form of socio-ethical humanism where actions are motivated by concerns for others". Thus, it signals a call for a possible communal mode of addressing the violence or the perpetrator of said violence. Perhaps at the notice of such a cry, an elderly person in the rural or urban area may step in alone to address the cause or go with other respected personalities, if the dimension of the violence so necessitates. Alternatively, her cry outside a house hints upon the loss or death of a loved one or relation. Additionally, a different context appears to raise social concerns with respect to a young African child and his mother in Yusuf Grillo's (b.1934) painting titled *Mother and Child* (1979). Rather than reflecting ethnic identity in this title, it draws attention to the relationship between a mother and her child. Oparaocha (2006:61) asserts that "Yusuf Grillo presents in this picture two figures; a woman and a child with some geometric designs on the background, all in vibrant colours of bluish-green, white and light purple depicting piety".

Although Grillo appropriated symbolisms of an African mother and child, his style as Abodunrin and Oladiti (2015:193) observe, is "simplified without descriptive details".

However, the posture of the young African child, who is standing in close proximity to his mother with his head slightly tilted forward, signifies bowing in greeting and respect. The reading establishes this as, Hermer (2004:389) notes; context is given to a work of art when it is presented from a cultural perspective. Hence, as Joanne Eicher (1972:519) notes, "costume serves to aid the artist ... in conveying his image to his audience". This is so because in a review of Karen Hansen and Soyini Madison's book on *African Dress: Fashion, Agency, Performance,* Hans Hahn (2017:218) states that, "clothing is a means of mediation between the individual and society". Therefore, her "garment with a distinctively African flair" (Rovine 2010:4) demonstrates not just cultural identity, but her Africanness as well. Accordingly, her ethnic identity is established as a Yoruba woman because her "African indigenous dress form" (Akinwumi 1998:61) references dress elements in Yoruba culture. This is evident in her *'gele',* a Yoruba word for a towering headgear, and her *'buba'* (blouse).

Although in a contestable view, John Barrell (1990:164) notes that "a painter cannot represent the abstract idea of showing respect", yet it might be argued that Grillo's depiction demonstrates not just the abstract idea of greeting, but also of respect even though the posture of the young African boy appears to be in dissonance with the greeting postures in Yoruba culture. As Johnson (2017:1) observes, a "male or female gender [are required] to prostrate or kneel when greeting someone thought to be older or in a high position". This is so because, in Oti and Ayeni's (2013:27) words, "Yoruba attach great importance to greetings; [as such] every occasion, season, job, and event has appropriate greetings. Anyone who lacks greeting courtesy is considered uncultured and uncivili[s]ed". This notion draws attention to a social issue that resonates with a lack of respect not only for failing to greet an older person but for not exhibiting the proper posture. Consequently, as Familusi (2012:305) argues, "in line with the status of [a] wom[a]n in traditional Yoruba society, [a] wom[a]n [is] believed to be [an] agent of moral ineptitude. This is why ... [she is] blamed for ... [her] child's bad behaviour". Therefore, to avoid blame from society a mother in Yoruba culture begins her work of inculcating cultural values of respect and modes of greetings to her young African child early in life.

The reading reveals an aim which indicates, as Babatunde Fafunwa (cited by Idang 2015:99) observes, that, "the child in a traditional society cannot escape his cultural and physical environments". This painting echoes the significance of inculcating in a young African child, the cultural value of respect to parents and older people to avoid insults. Alternatively, it echoes training aimed at inculcating the culture of respect by greeting his mother through

prostrating, bending or bowing. Conversely, in response to the social ills that arose from political farces in South Africa during the 1980s, a different context of social issue theme unfolds in *Nelson Mandela* (c. 1983), produced by M.K. Malefane (b. unknown). The title introduces a South African nationalist, while the context, in Simbao's (2011:57) words, reveals a "portrait [of] Nelson Mandela, South Africa's most famous struggle hero hold[ing] a spear in his left hand and reaches out for freedom with his right hand, as the prison bars break apart". It might be argued that even though Simbao's analysis of Mandela's imagery echoes a reminiscent conception of his mode of struggles, the imagery is in dissonance with the posture of a real prisoner, as Mandela could not have been allowed to hold a spear in prison at Robben Island and reach out for freedom. However, such a symbolic representation of Mandela with the spear, in Borgatti's (1990:37) words, suggests "the means used to specify the image or the mode of depiction ... [of] culturally held conceptions of the person, ideas about individualism, and aesthetic preferences".

Nevertheless, the symbolic spear held by Mandela in this context indicates not merely a nationalist symbol of struggle, but hints at African identity, even though in a contestable view Robert Loder (1997:5) argues that "African artists have realised that putting spear and shield in paintings does not make them African". It is however contestable to deny African identity in an African depiction that appropriates the symbol of a spear as a socio-political identity in South Africa context. As Nettleton (2010:56) notes, an "image that refers to African histories and memories, and the manner of ... display" signifies Africanness. Thus, the cultural history of spear and shield narrates symbols of *Umkhonto We Sizwe*, the militant wing of the African National Congress (ANC). These symbols were adopted in 1961 when the party decided to adopt a confrontational approach against the apartheid regime after the Sharpeville massacre of 69 men, women and children (Angie Motshekga [sa]:5). It also recalls the history of the early 1960 "strong and unsavoury tradition of detention without trial for those who opposed apartheid" (Merrett 1990:53). Therefore, the researcher argues that the manner of display of spear as an African symbol of confrontation in this rendition serves a political purpose, not just for Mandela's freedom from prison, but the political and national freedom of South Africa from apartheid. The narrative invokes, as Serageldin (1998:2) observes, a fight for "an independence that has to be earned by dissociating [himself from apartheid] regime ... yet remaining authentic to the true spirit of being African".

This consequently demonstrates as Homi Bhabha (1994:295 emphases in original) verifies, "acknowledge[ment] that the origin of the nation's visual *presence* is the effect of a narrative [on] struggle". It suggests, therefore, a style of visual conception on Mandela's mode of resilience in fighting for the independence of South Africa against all odds. On the other hand, it signals a subject matter which echoes not just "the aspiration" of the artist but all black South Africans (Manaka 1987:14). Alternatively, in Serageldin's (1998:2) view, it signifies an attempt "to reclaim a past heritage and forge a new future". Conversely, while this fight for entrenching democratic freedom lasted in South Africa during apartheid, in another painting entitled *The Broken Home* (c. 1984), Craig Master (b. unknown) reflects on a social issue in a black South African family setting. Rather than give a title that reflects ethnic identity, Master's rendition, in Manaka's (1987:15) view, "reflects [the] condition of life in the township" which suggests a black South African family.

In a contestable reading of this painting, Maurice (2011:83) argues that "against a landscape with a shack a father, imposing and probably angry, gesticulates to his son to leave the family home. Accused of wrongdoing, the son stoically stands his ground, as his desperate, agitated mother looks on with baby in arms, perhaps too afraid to intervene". Though the architectural structure – the shack at the background signifies, in Mitchell's (2002:2) view, an element for "the formation of identity", a social and cultural construct that situates the depiction within a black township in South Africa, it might be argued that Maurice's argument that the mother was too afraid to intervene is debatable, because her quiet disposition may be informed by her perception of respectability in African woman's history (Hunt 1989:369). Accordingly, an African woman's response to such a social issue in an African family necessitates submissiveness to her husband within the norms and regulations that restrict her occasional high spirits by keeping them in check.

On the other hand, the attempt by the black father to reprimand his son for wrong doing signals, in Idang's (2015:101) words, that a "person who do[es] not conform to [his] ... immediate [family or] society's values [is] ... somehow called to order". Perhaps the father decided to reprimand his son before anyone else could take up the responsibility of doing so. Given the fact that culture accepts moral values or rules as those rules which a society accepts and to which it demands obedience, to do otherwise would create social issues (Nwosu 2004:208). Therefore, this argument negates the artist's express intent that the scene is not a broken home; rather it indicates the African man's assertive posture. In Clifford Geertz's

(1973:5) words, it serves as "a mechanism for the normative regulation of behaviour" and that of his son in particular. It might be argued, therefore, that the African boy's posture rather implies a difficult task of correcting or enforcing moral values on a recalcitrant son in a black South African family.

The interrogation of the vernacular imageries in this rendition, rather than trumpet the patriarchal role in reprimanding a child, echoes an aim that denotes necessity of a family collaborative approach in child upbringing. As Edinyang (2012:41) notes, in a family "both the husband and wife ... [should] work together to find solution that is satisfactory to both parties" in solving social issues. Perhaps, it is this lack of synergy between the husband and wife in approaching the social issue that signalled the subject of *The Broken Home*. Aside from the father and mother collaborating to resolve conflicts, Edinyang further states that "the husband, the wife, and even the children win, depending on the situation and the parties involved", because through their collaborative efforts they may arrive at a peaceful and satisfactory solution. Consequently, Edinyang's stance draws attention to peaceful conduct in collaborative conflict resolution in the family, which may hopefully result in an ideal home. Additionally, social issues are reflected upon in a different painting *Mama Let Me Go* (c. 1986), executed by David Hlongwane (b.1963), a contemporary South African artist. Though it presents a social problem around a home, unlike Craig Master's work it seems to reference the home of perhaps a single mother in a township in the Cape where the artist lived.

In a contestable reading of this painting, Maurice (2011:85) asserts that "a fearful mother desperately restrain[s] her son from entering the heat of struggle on the streets outside". Although Maurice's stance on the posture of this African woman symbolises fearfulness, it seems to deny the fact that she might be a sophisticated mother depicted as a threat to" her son, unlike the pre-industrial times, when a black family was patriarchal (Sooryamoorthy and Makhoba 2016:310). Thus, demonstrating that it takes an assertive African woman, not fearful, to successfully restrain her teenage African son, or else the son would have taken advantage of her fearful posture to join the struggle without asking for permission. However, such a matriarchal stance in restraining her son, in Hunt's (1989:365) view, hints upon preventing him from unimagined trouble and signifies the importance of an African woman's perception and experience in handling a teenager. Thus, the woman's action is read, as Idang (2015:98) notes, as an "attempt to meet the challenge of living in their environment" in a township. It recalls the history of black African women, who during apartheid, in Meer's

([sa]:16) view, took "desperate measures to force the authorities to concede to them the basic right to protect their children". Possibly, the African woman's right to protect her child expressed by Meer strengthened her in standing resolutely against the request of her son.

This interpretation conveys an aim that this contemporary African art connotes, as Ward et al (2015:69) note, that "parenting remains critical to [a] young pe[rson]'s sense of belonging ... [his] interface with wider society and [his] emotional and physical safety". Alternatively, therefore, Hlongwane's work makes a social commentary that re-emphasises child training as the responsibility not only of a father or mother but both father and mother in an African family. It also echoes the care of a mother for her son (Manaka 1987:15). Equally, a painting entitled *Letters to God* (1988), by contemporary South African artist; Sfiso Ka Mkame (b. unknown), invokes the idea of a written document but it also reflects visuals narratives on socio-political problems that seem to be heart-rending scenes in South Africa in the 1980s. Given that Mkame's title appeals to a spiritual subject on supplication, it, therefore, echoes an African saying that "he who holds out his hands dies not". Maurice (2011:85) states that Sfiso Ka Mkame's work shows a prayer-like mix of struggle images, some of them are primary symbols while others are stock images. Some of "these are the *toyi-toyi*, the dance of freedom: the burning and smouldering tyres in the streets; the ubiquitous placards carrying slogans of revolt; and (police patrol vehicle)".

Even though this portrayal suggests prayer or supplication, the symbolisms articulated in Papastergiadis' (2005:43) words evoke "hybridity [which] is not just ... a metaphor for cultural negotiation, [but] ... a tool for examining the ... exclusion that [is] established in the guise of cultural" subjugation. Perhaps Mkame appropriated the symbolisms in visual culture rather than text to demonstrate to God, as Mitchell (2002:10) notes, "images of unresolved ambivalence and suppressed resistance" in national identity. However, while each of these symbolisms appears to be separate occurrences, they are interrelated scenes – letters that represent the past experiences of apartheid tyrannies the artist might have shared with others and those he had alone (McNaughton 2013:12). Therefore, divine intervention appears to be the only hope, as Bhabha (1994:295b) observes, the symbolisms suggest "a sense of the complex time of the national narrative". It implies a complex time in South Africa then, since the oppression seems unabated, despite violent resistance, peaceful dialogues, and foreign interventions. On the other hand, the significance of this rendition appears to be "a way to

revive the relationship between the physical world and the spiritual world" (Manganyi and Buitendag 2013:2) to help the inadequacies of man and by implication that of the nation.

The reading of Mkame's rendition reveals an aim which, in Mitchell's (2002:7) words, hints on the "harmony sought in landscape [which] is read as a compensation for screening off of the actual violence perpetrated there". Thus, it denotes not just the screening off of those gory sights but desired an end to apartheid. Such a mode of visual expression, in Dei's (2012:45) words, signifies "African spirituality [which is] a form of resistance" against apartheid. Consequently, it demonstrates that though other forms of resistance fail to actualise liberation from apartheid, intercession as "African spiritual heritage" (Peffer 2009:42) will not fail, because it is a heritage which seems to be the hub on which human activities revolve (Idang 2015:104). Alternatively, this painting serves to relay a socio-religious commentary on the importance of intercession in "engag[ing] with issues of social and political oppression" (Nettleton 2011:15a).

Furthermore, though the 1980s were marked by social issues of violent revolt against apartheid, arrests, imprisonment, and killings of black South Africans, the early 1990s gave a ray of hope for a possible end in sight, suggesting perhaps an answer to the requests in *Letters to God*. An example is Azaria Mbatha's (b.1941) vernacular painting titled *The Announcement* (1990). Pissarra (2011:191b) notes that "it depicts a solitary figure seated in a comfortable armchair witnessing a declaration from two figures on his television set. In that, the televised figures are male, one black and one white". Although two male figures are televised, the solitary figure, as Pissarra further claims, is "a black male, seemly middle-aged in his portliness and spectacles, one can deduce that this is Mbatha himself". However, the anticipated announcement appears to be rather an ambivalent social issue, because Mbatha could not tell if it would lead to an end or be the beginning of another phase of oppression. In Majavu and Pissarra's (2011:3) view, it seems to reflect the announcement by President F.W. de Klerk unbanning "liberation movement organisations" on 2 February 1990.

Though the two figures depicted on the television hints, as Papastergiadis (2005:40) observes, towards people with "mixed origins", Pissarra (2011:191b) introduces them as "State President F.W. de Klerk and State President-to-be Nelson Mandela". What was the possible reason they featured on television? He argues further that it is to "symbolise the promise of national reconciliation". Baderoon (2011:75) adds that "the period 1990 to 1996 covered the

tumultuous time of the negotiation ... [to] end apartheid". Therefore, the meeting aired on television in 1990 is probably to communicate not only promise of national reconciliation but possibly agreements reached on ending apartheid and readiness to entrench democracy. It might be argued that it would not merely be, in Jantjes' (2011:25) words, "imminent transition from the dark shadows of apartheid to the bright world stage" of democracy in South Africa, but plans towards awaited transition, by which "in 1994, South Africa ... [as a new nation] enter[ed] a postcolonial future" (Baderoon 2011:75). The interrogation of the vernacular symbolisms in Mbatha's painting conveys an aim that suggests, in Manaka's (1987:17) words, a "work with strong political content" not of resistance against apartheid, but in making an overt political statement, which signals, as Inman and Rubinfield (2013:1) observe, a peacefully negotiated "South Africa[n] transition from apartheid to a truly multi-racial democracy".

It demonstrates, in George Sefa Dei's (2012:47) view, "a project of decoloni[s]ation, Pan-Africanism focused on liberation, independence, and political sovereignty, with a goal of African Unity" with an inclusive African identity for a multi-racial South Africa. Alternatively, it evokes "the end of the Cold War" of apartheid against blacks in South Africa (Majavu and Pissarra 2011:3). However, the realisation of democracy as a significant political event in 1994 was not without responsibilities. This view is echoed in the vernacular painting entitled *Reconstruction* (1994), by Kagiso Pat Mautloa (b.1952), a contemporary artist in South Africa. Rather than appropriate cultural imageries from rural areas or townships, Mautloa resonates with symbolic images of "the very conditions of political representativity in the public sphere" (Mitchell 2002:3) in South Africa. In reading the context of the triptych, Oliphant (2004:11) argues that:

> the first mailbag has attached to it an image of a devastated environment, the second supports the replica of a newly built house in a collage of painted wood fragments, the third displays [a symbol that represents] the new South African flag painted onto a wooden strip inscribed with African iconography.

Given the "political allegories" (Mitchell 2002:1) Mautloa's representation resonates with, it suggests that identities are not only constructed from cultural context, as argued by (Charles Ngwena 2018:19), but from political context as well. So, rather than focus on cultural imagery in *Reconstruction,* Mautloa's rendition demonstrates, as Gupta and Adams (2018:4) note, engagement "with questions of national identity ... through an alignment with the state ... [and] recording political change (including the ends of colonialism and apartheid)". The

symbols do not reflect only upon the past but present South Africa, but seem to focus attention more on the rebuilding of a democratic nation, rather than just the past bequeathed by apartheid. The devastation symbolised in Mautloa's rendition seems to heighten, in Krantz's (2008:290) words, "with the election of the Nationalist Party in 1948, [when] the long-standing segregation and domination of Blacks was increasingly legitimated, codified and enforced. The laws defining this racism were subsumed under the term 'apartheid'". Consequently, in South Africa, the arrests, imprisonment, killings and "repression of the country's vast majority Black population by the apartheid regime" (Krantz 2008:290) was heightened.

As a result, the formal analysis of Mautloa's appropriation resonates with the political context of a new South Africa. As Manaka (1987:11) argues, "it echoes the past, present, and previsages the future of [South] Africa". Thus, the visual elements signify an aim that denotes, in Eyo's (1998:16) words, "the resurgence of interest ... [not only] for the purpose of reconstructing the African identity" but perhaps the different ruins caused to the nation of South Africa during apartheid. Alternatively, as Manaka (1987:18) claims, it hints at the "quest for freedom ... not only the gaining of political power but also ... of social reconstruction". Thus, the concept of social reconstruction, in Manaka's words, embraces the "social, educational, religious, political and economic needs" of not only the black South Africans but of the multi-racial nation as a whole. Notwithstanding the past repression of black South Africans "during the evil brutalities of apartheid" (Picton 1997:17), the reconstruction is an inclusive one.

However, while South Africa experienced liberation from apartheid in 1994, Nigeria gained independence from colonialism in 1960, which reveals differences in the timing of post-colonial eras in the two nations. Notwithstanding Nigeria's long history of post-colonial governance, a similar scene of oppression unfolds not from a colonial ruler but, in Serageldin's (1998:2) view, invokes the tyranny from a military dictator who ruled between 1993 and 1998. This is evident in the vernacular painting of modernist Nigerian artist Gani Odutokun (1946-1995), entitled *Police Brutality* (1994). The rendition reveals "two female figures ... depicted in both hands of the beastly depicted police officer, with a chevron on the short sleeve shirt showing the rank of a sergeant" (Otu et al 2015:217). Perhaps the cultural imageries were symbolic depictions from urban areas in Nigeria. Although in Idang's (2015:104) words, "African culture has a moral code that forbids doing harm to a relative, a kinsman, an in-law, a foreigner and a stranger, except when such a person is involved in an

immoral act", the symbolic giant police officer, as suggested by the title and context, seems to demonstrate acts of brutality to the two unarmed young African women, but the offence they may have committed is not known.

Given that the offence which attracted the brutality of two African women is unknown, it invokes, as McNaughton (2013:15) argues, "human experience ... full of ... obscurity". Despite the obscurity of the scene, in Krantz's (2008:295) words, "the images [seems to] communicate the political [undertone], in contrast to the [offence if any] ... thus providing a more subjective portrayal of reality". Given the political context in Nigeria in 1994, as Peffer (2005:341) notes, though the female figures are not displaced into foreign land, within their homeland, they are like "people in diaspora [who] become ... signs". Therefore, in reading them as signs, in Mitchell's (2002:7) words, they symbolise "hard facts' embedded in ideali[s]ed settings". Such symbolic hard facts which Odutokun embedded in this rendition signify, as Deborah Stokes (2018:83) observes, "a stinging political satire" that portrays not only the brutality of the police in particular but the tyranny of the military government, which, like the apartheid government in South Africa, clamped down on disparate persons who opposed its style of leadership.

It can be argued that the reading of the visual elements – vernacular symbolisms in Odutokun's painting, reveals an aim, which as Homi Bhabha (1990:294b) notes, indicates "the ... idea of the nation in the disclosures of its everyday life; in the telling details that emerge as metaphors for national life". Thus, the import of this rendition evokes not just the notion but relays in Manaka's (1987:18) view, "a language of resistance that can transcend cultural barriers" to condemn and oppose brutality from "cultural authority" (Bhabha 1990:3a) to harmless citizens symbolised as female folk in contemporary Nigerian society. On the other hand, this painting suggests that "since political action takes place within a given social environment, morality in traditional society [should have] a lot of influence and moderation on governance in Africa" (Nwosu 2004:207). In contrast to Odutokun's work is another form of oppression in Nigeria, which presents a social issue of violence against a young African woman in the twenty first century. This African vernacular rooted painting, *Eruption 1* (2012) by Abraham Uyovbisere (b.1963), appropriates the cultural image of a semi-nude young African woman standing alone in an urban area in Nigeria. In Anaso's (2016:89) words, "her hand[s] protectively covers her delicate body parts in order to give the impression that ... she gives no consent to the viewer's gaze". As Uyovbisere (2013:7) states, she "typifies a modern girl in a reflective pose, deeply in thought of her life and environment,

of all that she has learnt, but basically using her pose as visual satire for the strains [she received from] the society".

While the appropriation of a young African woman without a blouse or covering of her upper body, except for a blue wrapper loosely tied around her waist flowing graciously down to her feet, may invoke visual satire, as Boscovic ([sa]:179) argues, "the image of bare-breasted African woman was both the stimulus and the temptation" to the sexually repressed. It is, however, contestable for Boscovic to conclude that the image of a young African woman appearing bare-breasted in public is a stimulus and temptation to the sexually repressed. In Wambui Mwangi's (2013:1) view, in 1922, an African woman, Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru in a display of bravery stripped naked not merely in protest but to shame the men who were too timid and cowardly to demand the release of a Kenyan nationalist leader, Harry Thuku, who was arrested and detained by the colonial government.

Similarly, to indicate that her half nude body is not an attempt to tempt, but perhaps, in Hunt's (1989:364) words, to relay a social message of protest she uses her hands to cover her delicate body parts "as symbolic means of enhancing [personal] dignity" despite the strains brought on her. Consequently, this use of a semi-nude body to protest in public appears to be a re-experience of history. As Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu (2009:46) argue, "Igbo women, in the south eastern Nigerian commercial city of Aba ... gathered [nude] in defiant protest against the taxation policies of the British Colonial administration". This argument, therefore, locates not only an African woman's body but disparate African women's bodies being used as visual satire to relay the notion of protest against the social issue of taxation under British administrators.

To further demonstrate as the analysis of this depiction conveys an aim that hints on the use of a young African woman's body in protest, rather than for enticement, Enwezor, and Okeke-Agulu (2009:46) maintain, that "Nakedness is not just a tactic to shame, but an act of social protest, a vehicle of gendered radicality and feminist power". Thus, in Loder's (1997:6) words, it indicates "the view of a contemporary African woman commenting on matters that are of importance [not only] to her [but as it affects] ... her community". The significance of a woman employing her semi-nude body as a tool of social commentary signifies, as Loder argues, "a tale of brutality", which seems rather to convey the sacred worth and value of a woman's body in the face of "social repression". Alternatively, an African woman's use of nakedness in a public space also suggests "a critical public voice of

dissent against the all-encompassing patriarchy" (Mwangi 2013:1). It might also be argued in Robert Thompson's (1979:5) view that it suggests beauty blazing out of a body that is young and alive.

2.8 Findings and Discussion

The findings on the analysis of the vernacular paintings under the broad thematic groupings on social issues reveal different subject matters and contents that resonate with conflicts in either social, cultural, political, moral or religious values in Nigeria and South Africa. However, while the ideas their artworks relay symbolise responses to their socio-cultural and political environments (Manaka 1987:17), they reflect oppressions, resistance, "revolutionary struggle", family problems and other social issues. Given the fact that their renditions, in Brenda Greaves' (2015:7) view, draw on the articulation of cultural imageries, such renditions are deemed vernacular art. Likewise, the narrative also establishes how their renditions signify Africanness.

In *Maiden's Cry* (1962) by Uche Okeke, which is deemed vernacular given the fact that he articulates an indigenous African maid wailing in the public, in Mitchell's (2002:1) view, Okeke attempts to create her Igbo cultural identity with the *uli* motif which he depicted on her. Thus, his work, as George Dei (2012:49) notes, implies Africanness through identification with *uli* design elements rooted in Igbo ethnic identity, thus of an African culture. Conversely, Yusuf Grillo, a contemporary Nigerian artist, through his abstract depiction entitled *Mother and Child* (1979), demonstrates a vernacular portrayal not only in representing an African mother "elegantly dressed" (Ferrier 1991:47) in "traditional form of adornment" (Rovine 2009:44) which hints on her Yoruba ethnic identity, but reflects an "African family" (Dei 2012:45) duty of child training with regard to respect. Thus, Africanness is signified, as Alan Donovan (2007:10) notes, in African cultural heritage on a child's posture when greeting an elder as a mark of respect in his interface with the society.

Similarly, the work of Matthew K. Malefane, a contemporary South African artist, entitled *Nelson Mandela* (1983), references a vernacular imagery of Mandela not just as a Xhosa native, but as a nationalist carrying a spear in his left hand, reaching out to the iron bars for freedom from prison. It echoes an artist's response to the oppressive apartheid socio-political environment and imprisonment of black South Africans without trial (Manaka 1987:17; Merrett 1990:53). Consequently, the work narrates Africanness which embodies resistance to the imprisonment of Mandela (Simbao 2011:43). Though the formal qualities in *The Broken*

Home (1984), by Craig Master reflect vernacular imageries of a black African father, mother, and son rooted in black township scenery, it narrates a patriarchal stance in reprimanding a recalcitrant son. Thus, the depiction, as Ruth Simbao (2011:41) observes, does not merely signal Africanness through the portrayal of an African family but also, in Manaka's (1987:17) view, in "assimilating African cultural value" of moulding and shaping a son's character. In *Mama Let Me Go* (1986), David Hlongwane, a contemporary South African artist depicts vernacular symbolisms of a black African mother restraining her son from joining a fight on the street.

The content echoes a matriarchal stance rather than patriarchal, in display of African humanity of a "heartfelt sense" of her son's safety (Nussbaum 2003:24). In contrast, Sfiso Ka Mkame's rendition *Letters to God* (1988) signifies, in Homi Bhabha's (1990:3a) view, diverse vernacular "symbols associated with [the] national life" of South Africa during the socio-political oppressions of apartheid. The symbols include toyi-toyi, the dance of freedom, the smouldering and burning of tyres in the streets, the ubiquitous placards carrying slogans of revolts and a police patrol vehicle. Although the depictions, in Manaka's (1987:17) words, echoes Africanness through "identifi[cation] with the African environment", it is also signified through intercession as a form of "African spirituality" (Dei 2012:45). In *Announcement* (1990) by Azaria Mbatha, though the subject reflects socio-political announcement on the possible end of apartheid, its context rather reveals vernacular symbolisms of a white man and a black man on a television set while a third vernacular imagery is seated in the comfort of his home watching and listening to the declaration.

It might be argued that as Charles Ngwena (2018:117) argues, an "inclusive Africanness" is implied not merely in its identification with South African socio-political environment (Manaka 1987:17), but in portraying multi-racial imageries. However, when South Africa entered her post-colonial future in 1994, Kagiso Pat Mautloa appropriated vernacular symbols in *Reconstruction* (1994). The depiction shows interrelated vernacular symbols of a devastated environment, a newly built house in a collage of painted wood fragments and a new South African flag. In Homi Bhabha's (1990:3a emphases in original) words, it hints at "the nation, as a form of cultural *elaboration*". However, as Gupta and Adams (2018:4) argue, even though such symbols resonate with issues of "national identity ... [in] recording political change [which] include[es] the ends of colonialism and apartheid" they are deemed vernacular rendition. Therefore, Africanness is implicated, as Nettleton (2011:14a) argues because they are linked to "African sources" with deep roots on the continent.

Similarly, *Police Brutality* (1994) by Gani Odutokun depicts a black police officer and two female imageries. The female imageries symbolise victims of police brutality in urban areas in Nigeria. Even though the police officer is adorned in uniform as a marker of his profession, in Bhabha's (1990:3) view, he symbolises "the image of cultural authority" which renders it a vernacular rendition. Although the cultural identities of the imageries are unknown, they signify Africanness because they represent "African people" who are indigenous to African scenery and space (Simbao 2011:41; Dei 2012:46). The vernacular painting titled *Eruption 1* (2012) by Abraham Uyovbisere echoes not merely a social issue of viciousness against a young woman, but her lone response to the issue with a semi-nude body idealised in an urban scene. In Gupta and Adams's (2018:2) view, the vernacular in this context also "defines that which is domestic ... [and] identif[ies] the personal or private" life of the lady. As Charles Ngwena (2018:117) notes, however, Africanness in the trope is signified "in terms of belonging to Africa".

While the analysis reveals deeper understanding of the contents and contexts of themes that reflect social issues, they are rooted in the subjective experiences of some South Africans and Nigerians.

2.9 African Vernacular Rooted Symbolisms in Sculptures with Socio-Cultural Themes

Under this broad socio-cultural theme, the researcher interrogates the sculptures of Nigerian and South African artists which manifest vernacular symbolism and the ideas they convey to the audience. What are the formal vernacular symbolisms contemporary African artists represent in the contexts of their sculptures with socio-cultural themes? What is the cultural history of each vernacular rooted rendition? What possible aims does the analysis of each sculpture relay? What African identity did these artists represent in their Afrocentric sculptures?

In this section, the researcher seeks to explore the vernacular imageries and symbols some contemporary Nigerian and South African artists appropriated in their works "in a socially acceptable way" (Pooke and Newall 2008:66). Contemporary South African and Nigerian artists have in different ways engaged, in Manaka's (1987:13) view, with "culturally enrich[ed]" African vernacular rooted sculptures, which reflect different subject matters that focus on socio-cultural themes and relay social or cultural commentary. However, such vernacular symbolisms may reference not just motifs on socio-cultural contexts, but the realities of past and present experiences, as Hess (cited by Simbao 2011:51) notes, rooted in

"African cultural essence". Still, such works make social commentaries because, in Idang's (2015:101) words, different "African culture[s] embrace the totality of the African way of life". However, as Sandile Memela (2007:11) argues, "human experiences" are not static because they evolve with time, perhaps because of "cultural exchange" (Papastergiadis 2005:41). Therefore, there is no static or authentic socio-cultural African way of life. This is relevant in laying the context of interpreting the sculptures in this section, which focuses on the "visual expression of social and cultural as well as personal desires" (Clarke 2006:27) of Africans.

Perhaps it is because of this exchange of cultures that the interrogation of the socio-cultural ways of life of black South Africans articulated in artworks becomes difficult to narrate without acknowledging the consequences of apartheid. In Picton's (1997:13) view, "in South Africa, the politics of apartheid, with its hijacking of tradition for the culture of the mis-called homelands, subverted the possibilities of [artist's] recourse to tradition" in modern/contemporary art. As Simbao (2011:45) reiterates, the works of black artists focused on Africanness through the "articulations of political resistance in their demonstration of how Europeans robbed Africans of their customs". Consequently, black South African artists "had become alienated from traditional culture" (Manaka 1987:17) in drawing inspiration for their arts. In Manaka's (1987:14) view, "African artists, like their people, did not totally surrender their culture to the white man's way of life". Therefore, to demonstrate their socio-cultural ways of life, the artists are preoccupied with articulating "struggling people, their energy for work, their domestic activities, their determination, courage, hopes and victories" (Manaka 1987:14). It is perhaps for these reasons that it is problematic for contemporary South African artists to have recourse to tradition in their socio-cultural renditions as in the Nigeria context.

Nevertheless, in their search for articulating vernacular symbolisms with African roots, some contemporary South African artists had "significant influences [from] African masks and geometric designs of traditional art" (Manaka 1987:16) in their works. On the other hand, aside from apartheid hijacking traditions and customs form black South African artists, Nettleton (2011:151b) argues that some of "these artists did not refer to African forms because they thought of them ... as less advanced than European art forms". As Manaka (1987:17) reiterates, "instead of assimilating African cultural values to mould their creativity, [some South African artists] ... made a concerted effort to maintain European trends of art".

On the contrary, however, the situation is different in Nigeria, where contemporary Nigerian artists like *the modern state*, in Okediji's (2015:129) words, are "carrying intact [Nigerian] indigenous traditions as the basis of ... modernity" in the production of vernacular artworks. While Okediji's argument seems contestable for asserting that Nigerian artists carry intact Nigerian indigenous traditions in executing artworks, in Okeke-Agulu's (2010:511) view, Nigerian artists "adapt generic African sculptural form into some of their work, [while others] research[ed] into specific art forms from Nigerian cultures". Thus, the researcher argues that the indigenous traditions or forms appropriated by contemporary Nigerian artists may have evolved as well, because of cultural exchange, telling stories of pains and joys, and hybridity of diasporic ideas in the representations of experiences that convey social commentary or symbolise visual displays. Such depictions are evident in the socio-cultural sculptures executed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Although Ben Enwonwu (1921-1994), a modern Nigerian artist, appropriated indigenous imagery in his monumental bronze sculpture entitled *Sango* (1964), it reflects a socio-cultural theme. Thus, the title, as Ogbechie (2016:93) proposes, draws attention not merely to an indigenous Yoruba concept, but the name of a historical personality. "Sango" who is also known as "Oba Koso", in Wole Adedoyin's (2014:1) words, represents "the ancestor of the Yoruba people of Nigeria believed to be the "god of thunder" living in the sky', who hurls thunder stones to earth, killing those who offend him or setting their houses on fire". Ogbechie (2008:163) asserts that Enwonwu articulated a:

> Male figure wearing a diadem whose right hand pointing skyward wields a double-headed axe. The axe references Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning. The muscular figure is dressed in a loincloth strung with objects of power, with another double-headed axe tucked into his belt. He also gazes skyward.

Although Ogbechie's argument establishes mixed cultural elements on *Sango,* they invoke symbolic ancient costumes and objects of personal adornment in "traditional African heritage" (Donovan 2007:10). Even though *Sango* is believed to be Yoruba "god of thunder" of past indigenous tradition, as John Peffer (2005:340) observes, Enwonwu's recourse to portraying his symbolism in a post-colonial era renders it a modernist engagement with tradition, rather than a historical vernacular art, because it bears no resemblance to the cultural artefacts of African traditional art. However, the depiction is symbolic given the fact that it graces the landscape of the former headquarters of Nigerian Electric Power Authority (NEPA), Lagos. Consequently, it narrates the piece of ancient Yoruba mythology of a

traditional source of lightning in relationship to modern electricity. As a result, Enwonwu seems to have executed the sculpture to demonstrate not merely the identity of *Sango*, but as Olu Oguibe (2002:249) argues, to serve as "a means of preserving and perpetuating [the cultural] identity" and relevance of the traditional belief in modern power generation in Nigeria. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that Enwonwu's vernacular sculpture hints on the idea of supernatural forces behind the modern reality of electric power (Ogbechie 2008:163). It might be argued, in Olu Oguibe's (2002:246) words, that it signifies "a vehicle for translating and reinstating [Yoruba cultural] heritage into new form in the context of changing reality ... [in] Africa".

In addition, as Nettleton (2011:149b) reiterates, it signifies "the mystique of Africa's forgotten past, [which serves to] interpret its 'ancient myths' ... [by] adapt[ing] its 'surviving symbols". Thus, it echoes a meaning which not merely interprets the past Yoruba cultural heritage and myths, but establishes the relevance of the past to present and future generations through the idea of modern electricity. In contrast, in the 1960s, a vernacular sculpture entitled *Dancer* (1965), by Sydney Kumalo (1935-1988), a contemporary South African artist, unfolds differently. As Mile (2004:98) presents, the stylised bronze sculpture shows that Kumalo articulated a black South African man dancing, with both hands raised above the head to signify expressive posture at a socio-cultural event. To construct the cultural identity, Julia Meintjes (2012:14) maintains that Guenther had encouraged Kumalo and a group of artists in 1963 to focus on "the exploration and promotion of African aesthetic in contemporary South African art". Perhaps to demonstrate African aesthetic in this portrayal, *South African History Online* (2011:1) notes that Kumalo had recourse to appropriate a dancer from his Zulu culture, not merely because he had deep-rooted pride for his ethnic identity, but respect for the ancient stories of his tribal people.

Nevertheless, it appears the depiction of the African dancer is not simply because of his pride for Zulu culture, but most likely, as *South African History Online* (2011:1) argues, because Kumalo had love for traditional music, and respect for his noble Zulu heritage. Alternatively, the mode of depiction, in Meintjes' (2012:14) view, suggests that "he interpreted his subject matter in a form which combined Expressionist and African aesthetics". Additionally, as Powell (2015:1) observes, it indicates not merely "the particular fusion of African reference ... [but the] modernist expression which characterised Kumalo's expression". Therefore, the performative art posture of the dancer signifies the combination of expressionist and African aesthetics. It echoes an aim which suggests, in Manaka's (1987:11) view, reflection on

"African life". However, as Nettleton (2011:147b) argues, it exemplifies a "search for [a] specifically South African identit[y]". Notwithstanding, Picton (1997:13), in a contestable expression, argues that "the artist's relationship with the traditions of the past is more problematic in South Africa".

However, it signals that despite Kumalo's European expressionist mode of creativity, rather than representing a diasporic European he chose to engage with an African form that seeks to construct *authentic* native or traditional (Oguibe 2002:249 emphases in original) life. A similar scene that evokes performance art unfolds in the work of Ezrom Legae (1938-1999), titled *Young Man/Youth* (1968). Miles (2004:126 emphases in original) notes that Ezrom Legae "created [this] sculpture [which] epitomizes youthful vitality. The athletic body of *Young man* with head turned skywards is a praise song to beauty. The tilted head of young man finds a triumphant counter when there are no hands to be shackled behind his back". Thus, Miles' argument does not merely establish, as Carol Hermer (2004:389) argues, a presentation of vernacular sculpture from the perspective of culture, but in Charles Ngwena's (2018:19) view, a construction of identity from cultural context. This is because the identity of Legae's rendition echoes a black South African, perhaps appropriated from a township, given that his hands were not shackled behind his back during apartheid.

Although the expressive posture of the young African man, with his head, tilted backwards, invokes the idea of praise song to nature as argued by Miles, it might be argued, in Fairweather's (2006:720) view, that it hints at an expectation of "construct[ing a young African man] ... as postcolonial subject through performance and display". Notwithstanding, South Africa did not enter her post-colonial era until 1994, despite gaining independence from Britain in 1961, possibly because she plunged deeper into apartheid and, as Nettleton (2011:13a) argues, in the 1960s an expectation for "African contemporary art, to qualify as distinctively African, [it] would preferably be expressive, [rather] than naturalistic". Therefore, Legae resonated with the expectation of demonstrating Africanness in his vernacular sculpture by producing an expressive figuration (Nettleton 2011:13a). Similar modernist modes of executing sculpture are also evident in the works of contemporary South African artists, Dumile Feni, and Sydney Kumalo.

In articulating a vernacular imagery of a youthful black South African during the dark years of apartheid, Ezrom Legae had an idea he wanted to convey to the audience. The analysis of the vernacular imagery reveals, as Bhabha (1990:293b) questions, "Why do nations celebrate

their hoariness, not their astonishing youth?" Thus, the aim of this sculpture is the celebration of the youthfulness of a young African man, rather than the hoary. Conversely, moving from the celebration of youthfulness in the 1960s to the 1970s, a contemporary vernacular sculpture unfolds a socio-cultural theme differently. It reveals the work of a contemporary Nigerian artist, Erhabor Emokpae (1934-1984), entitled *Iya Ibeji* (1970). Although this title adopts a Yoruba philosophical concept (Ogbechie 2016:93), it is aimed at introducing the sculpture and the cultural influence on the artist. Simply put the subject matter *Iya Ibeji* means 'mother of twins' in Yoruba culture. While the title seeks to draw attention to the African mother of twins, it also invokes the subjective identification (Mitchell 2002:1) of the twins. Twins are not as easy to identify, especially when they are of the same sex and identical. Moreover, in Yoruba culture "the first born twin, whether a boy or a girl, is always called *Taiwo*, meaning 'having the first taste of the world', whereas the second is named *Kehinde*, meaning 'arriving after the other'" (Leroy et al 2002:134). According to Masterpiece (2016:3):

> Three figures are sequestered in one composition, in a rhythmic outlay that presents their frontal and rear views in synchrony. The supposed twin figures with their oval and featureless heads bound the head of their mother that is well defined in a heart-shaped form and hosting a pair of bulbous eyes, a snout nose, and roundly configured mouth.

Notwithstanding, Emokpae's well-defined mother of twins head and peculiar proportions demonstrate not just the aesthetic of abstracted vernacular sculpture but, as Lawal (1985:91) argues, evokes a conformity to "regard [for] the human head (ori) as the most vital part of a person" in the Yoruba culture of south-western Nigeria. "Hence it is the biggest and the most elaborately finished part of Yoruba figure sculpture". In Ajiboye et al's (2018:62) view, the head is considered the most vital part of the human body "because it houses the most essential parts that coordinate human activities [such as] the eyes, ears, mouth, and nose". The African mother's head in this context signifies the source of wisdom, not merely in being thoughtful, but in loving and caring for her twins, while her eyes signals lamps for guidance (Lawal 2012:14). Productions of twins in traditional Yoruba art mostly reflect "ibeji figures, [without portrayal of mother] originally used to commemorate dead twins" (Kasfir 1992:48).

The reading of Erhabor Emokpae's sculpture, in Makinde's (2004:167) words, suggests a woman who becomes not merely a mother, but "is promoted to the esteemed position in which she can be referred to as a precious stone" and, as Leroy et al (2002:134) argue, she is believed to be a blessed and happy woman because of a "belie[f] that twins are able to bestow

happiness, health, and prosperity upon their family". Alternatively, it signals Yoruba cultural beliefs of children being the responsibility of parents, but in this context particularly their mother's responsibility. Unlike Emokpae's *Iya ibeji* sculpture, an abstract vernacular sculpture titled *Mask* (1987), by contemporary Nigerian artist, Ben Osawe (1931-2007) unfolds a different reflection on the socio-cultural theme. This is so because, in Mangiri and Kquofi's (2014:270) words, a "masked figure ... [is] generally face covering used largely ... [to] disguise the wearer and usually communicate an alternate identity that [is] believed to be spirit entities". As Okafor (1991:44) reiterates, "spirits are believed to reside in the mask so that the performer who wear[s] the mask actually become[s] the spirit, not merely their impersonators". However, in some African cultures, Ogbechie (2009:138) argues that a mask or masquerade may be appreciated purely as a manifestation of the ideal of perfect beauty, rather than an embodiment of a spirit.

Nonetheless, the context of this mask, as Filani (2017:13) observes, shows a "facial rendition [that] is styli[s]ed in a concave symmetry with an elongated nose. The side view of the sculpture seems to be a rendition of the Ada royal symbol used in Benin court art. The Ada and Eben royal paraphernalia are used as symbols of authority by the Oba in the Benin Kingdom". In addition, Osawe did not merely reference elements in the Benin Kingdom, but as Filani further notes, "the frontal view is an adaptation of the Ngil face mask from the Fang tribe of Gabon". Thus, given the mode of depiction and referencing of the Ngil face mask and the Ada and Eben royal elements, Osawe's *Mask* ensemble is a sculpture that signals "search for new language of expression (Ogbechie's 2009:139).

Consequently, as Highet (1969:39) notes, Osawe's "sculpture is of a highly abstract nature" with an elongated neck which gives his piece an air of graceful stature. As a result, Osawe's stylised sculpture is in dissonance with other masks in indigenous African cultures, despite "borrow[ing] iconic image of" the mask (Ogbechie 2009:137). Furthermore, it invokes a modernist mode of engagement with indigenous African cultures, which suggests that he is arguably mistaken to have titled it *Mask*, even though it suggests an attempt to mirror the present African form in the past and the past traditional art in the present (Gadamer 1977: [sp]). It is, however, significant in relaying the idea that "the traditional society is still and will continue to be a relevant part of contemporary African history" (Nwosu 2004:207). This is so because Ben Osawe's rendition "bridges the gap between the traditional and the contemporary in African art" (Filani 2017:13). Conversely, a different scene reveals a

vernacular sculpture titled *Nigerian Woman Shopping* (1990), by contemporary Nigerian-British artist Sokari Douglas Camp (b.1958).

The title, as Charles Ngwena (2018:19) notes, evokes an identity framed from cultural and historical context. However, in Mudimbe's (1994:164) words, Sokari Douglas is "fascinated by [the] everyday life of her people, the Kalabari of Niger Delta, whose traditions her thrilling compositions show". It is contestable to conclude that all her works show "the impact of Kalabari traditional culture" (Simola 2007:203) because the title of this sculpture resonates with the national identity of the African woman, rather than the Kalabari culture. Additionally, most of Camp's works with a direct impact of Kalabri culture were given titles that reflect the cultural influence, for example, *Kalabari Lady* (2008) and *Spirits in Steel – The Art of the Kalabari Masquerade* (1998-99). Therefore, the subjective identification of the sculpture as a Nigerian woman invokes an idea on "mobility in contemporary culture" (Papastergiadis 2005:39), where possibly, as John Peffer (2005:340) observes, she was located as a historic diaspora African woman, and there was "contest" on her national cultural identity (Oguibe's 2002:245).

In LaGamma's (2009:97) words, Camp's work shows a "faceless woman [who] would be invisible, were it not for the bold stars and crescents of the cloth wrapped around her. The design deliberately evokes a popular Dutch wax print whose star-and-crescent moon pattern, produced in bold yellow and blue, [is] derived from Arab sources". Although LaGamma's analysis draws attention to her "African cultural heritage by means of African dress" (Falola and Ngom 2009:xxix), it might be argued that the African fabric "disrupts" an authentic African identity because it signifies, as Nikos Papastergiadis (2005:41) notes, a product with "patterns of global cultural exchange". Therefore, in Tolia-Kelly and Morris's (2004:156) words, "the Dutch wax technique used in the production of the batik textiles is not African at all but originates from Indonesia, from whence it travelled to Holland then on to Manchester and only finally reached [West] Africa". However, despite the origin of African fabric, it is further Africanised, as Ogbechie (2016:93) notes, with a Yoruba concept "Ankara" to give it cultural relevance in Nigeria. Consequently, its adaptation in everyday usage, as represented by Camp, is not merely adornment or fashion, but significant for personal style in the context of a long history of the display of wealth and communicating African cultural attire and identity (Rovine 2009:45).

The interpretation of Camp's portrayal hints on an aim framed on socio-cultural significance of the African woman's outfit. As Clarke (1998:23) notes, it signals not just focus on the African "dress and objects for personal use, [but] ... reflect[s the] social position ... [which] serv[es] to define" the Nigerian woman. In Jennings' (2011:9) words, "each symbol [of an African dress] has an accepted meaning, giving a voice to the fabric and its wearer". Thus, the elaborate cultural attire on the Nigerian woman invokes the idea of affluence and socialite, which reflects in her mode of shopping, rather than outing at a socio-cultural event. In another socio-cultural thematic sculpture titled *Thobeka Leaving* (2001), Willie Bester (b. 1956), a contemporary South African artist, executed a vernacular sculpture with a title that suggests identity of a young African woman. Thobeka, which means "be humble", is a name given to a lady in Xhosa and Zulu cultures, thus hinting on a complicated cultural identity. In order to construct her identity, as Ledimo (2004:50) offers, the African form of Thobeka was articulated from a rural township, surrounding the Western Cape, where Willie Bester takes photographs of people, thus evoking a Xhosa ethnic identity rather than a Zulu identity.

However, the representational vernacular sculpture in the round appropriates a full African woman in a moving posture executed with metal and found objects. In Brenda Atkinson's (2001:1) view, it is "a hyper-detailed sculpture of a woman", which shows her dressed in a flowing gown that barely reaches her knees, while her left hand holds a big box tied with rope in place on her head, suggesting that she is leaving (Ledimo 2004:50). Thus, to understand the context, the present experience is constructed from a cultural history context. The history of a young African woman's movement from rural to urban areas in South Africa presents, in De Jager's ([sa]:1) words, a narrative of a mother who because of her social circumstances is forced to forsake home and children to urban area in search of job or for the pleasure of city life. Alternatively, it narrates in John Peffer's (2005:341) view, an example of "historic ... migration", which Ntombela (2011:14) argues is shaping "South Africa's recent history ... especially that of rural dwellers moving to the urban areas". Therefore, as John Berger (cited by Bhabha 1994:315b) observes, "The migrant's intentionality is permeated by historical necessities".

Consequently, a young African woman who engages in such mobility invokes leaving for prostitution, which undermines traditional values of morality. It might be argued, as Nwosu (2004:207) notes, that it indicates that "the past is not completely absent from the present" and, as Hunt (1989:369) offers, it narrates an "attempt ... [at] gaining economic independence in the face of economic decline in the rural areas, due to the exodus of males". Ntombela

(2011:14) reiterates that such mobility signals a quest "to become part of the cash economy" because of "a present that satisfies no hunger" (Serageldin 1998: 2). As a result, it relays not only a twenty-first century expression of a young African woman's pain in response to her rural area, but speaks of "becoming entangled with act of survival and resilience" (Simbao 2011:39) by resonating with rural-urban migration. Lastly, the socio-cultural thematic vernacular sculpture *Dance* (2011), by Ebong Ekwere (b.1961), a Nigerian contemporary artist, hints on a form of performance. Given that this subject resonances with the act of performance art, with no hint on any ethnicity, it appears to invoke notions of a Nigerian cultural dance, rather than any foreign dance.

However, the context articulates cultural imagery of a nude young African woman rooted in Nigerian urban areas standing on her left toes, with the right leg raised backwards above her head, which symbolises the posture of a Russian ballet dancer. Otu et al (2015:215) argue that "the work elicits [for] the viewer to imagine any type of classical music being played to make the dancer strike the pose". It is contestable for Otu et al to conclude that classical music influences the ballet dance step, which perhaps she may be performing without a classical music piece. Such a narrative that focuses on the musical influence denies modern dance practice or performance. Although the performance in the Nigerian context evokes, in Nikos Papastergiadis' (2005:39) words, "a cultural idea in alien context", as John Peffer (2005:342) notes, it "represent[s] a history of encounter" between the female dancer and Western culture. Therefore, it traces the history of ballet dance which, in Brown's ([sa]:1) words, is "traced back to the Renaissance period and the early court dances in France and Italy. [When] any celebratory occasion, such as the birth of an heir or an influential marriage would call for social court dancing". However, as Brown ([sa]:1) further maintains, a ballet dancer is often adorned with a "classical tutu (short, stiff skirt)", which "allows the dancer to move more easily and also enables the audience to see the dancer's legs and feet as she executes the difficult steps". Rather than depict such a short and stiff skirt on this performer, Ekwere's portrayal reveals a nude young African female dancer, or possibly wearing a stiff overall dancing suit which shows as though she is nude. This makes not only the dance but the costume too, foreign to the Nigerian space.

Given that the aim unfolds, as Serageldin (1998:2) notes, the idea of an "evolving cultural identity" of the female dancer, in Memela's (2007:11) view, it suggests that "being African is not static, [because] it is part of the global human experience that evolves with the times". Thus, it demonstrates, as Serageldin (1998:2) argues, "the search for identity [as] an

important part of the definition of the self". In view of Serageldin's position which links the definition of self to "a modernity trend", it then echoes "the belief that being modern is better than being traditional" (Mpofu 1994:343).

2.10 Findings and Discussion

Although, Jacques Maquet (2009:159) argues that the "similarity experienced in different parts of Black Africa is based on cultural similarity", it might be argued that the interrogation of African vernacular rooted sculptures of contemporary Nigerian and South African artists, under these socio-cultural themes, reveal "cultural differences" (Papastergiadis 2005:39) in their socio-cultural narratives. However, such differences in visual narratives are not unconnected with the fact that South Africa suffered from colonialist settlers, apartheid and the struggle for liberation, which seems to have denied black South African artists' focus on "traditions" and "customs" in socio-cultural ways of life (Manaka 1987:11; Picton 1997:13; Simboa 2011:45), unlike Nigerian artists who engaged with indigenous traditions and other mores in socio-cultural contexts (Ogbechie 2009:136). However, the narrative establishes why their works are deemed vernacular and signifies Africanness.

Furthermore, this research focuses on discussing the notions of vernacular symbolism and how Africanness is constructed in the artworks under this socio-cultural thematic section. Ben Enwonwu's sculpture, *Sango* (1964), is deemed vernacular because it articulates an ancient historical figure from traditional African religion deeply rooted in Yoruba ethnic identity in south-western Nigeria (Greave 2015:7). The depiction alludes to Africanness by "reflecting on African past, [for the] present and future" (Dei 2012:47). Given that in *Dancer* (1965), Sydney Kumalo, a contemporary South African artist, appropriates "an expressive illustration" of a cultural imagery of a dancer rooted in Zulu ethnic identity, dancing with both hands raised above the head, his work is deemed vernacular rooted (Manaka (1987:13; Greaves 2015:7). Additionally, Africanness is signified in this work which reflects an expressive "portrayal of the African experience" (Manaka 1987:13) in Zulu culture.

Similarly, Ezrom Legae's sculpture, entitled *Young Man/Youth* (1968), which unfolds a masculine and expressive young black African man with his head turned skywards, invokes not merely an expressive posture but a celebration of his youthfulness. As *South African History Online* (2011:1) observes, Legae's art "was mainly concerned with the social condition of the [black] segregated settlement". Therefore, it is deemed a vernacular rooted portrayal (Greaves 2015:7). In narrating Africanness in Legae's sculpture, as Nettleton

(2011:10a) argues, it signifies an "African" depiction, which reflects a celebration of African humanity. In another sculpture that reflects socio-cultural themes, given that Erhabor Emokpae appropriates stylised cultural imageries of a mother and her twins in *Iya Ibeji* (1970), deeply rooted in Yoruba culture, it is deemed a vernacular sculpture (Greaves 2015:7). However, Africanness is implicated because the portrayal "is a reflection of African thought and belief" (Manaka 1987:7) on the birth of twins and motherhood in a family rooted in Yoruba culture.

Likewise, the analysis reveals that the stylised sculpture titled *Mask* (1987), by Ben Osawe shows a stylised imagery rather than a mask, but adapts motifs from two different African cultures, the Edo-Benin culture and the Equatorial Fang ethnic group of Gabon. As a result, in Brenda Greaves' (2015:7) view, it is reckoned a vernacular art. And as Bruce Knauft (cited by Okeke-Agulu 2010:507) notes, it signifies "vernacular modernity" because it "describes indigenous ... non-Western ... modernity". Yet its reference to two disparate African cultures hints on Africanness and hybridises aspects of African cultural traditions or historical African art forms in establishing African identity (Nettleton 2011:10, 14). In *Nigerian Woman Shopping* (1990), a contemporary Nigerian artist, Sokari Douglas Camp, appropriates an African woman dressed, as Adepeju Oti and Oyebola Ayeni (2013:25) argue; "wear[ing] *Iro* (wrapper) and *Buba* (the blouse) with a matching head-gear (*gele*) ... [along] with different accessories", holding her purchase and a hand bag to match. Consequently, Douglas' rendition is deemed vernacular art because it depicts the cultural image of a Nigerian woman (Greaves 2015:7). Still, it alludes to Africanness through African heritage and, in Alan Dovovan's (2007:10) view; by invoking life style through "African costumes and ... fashion created from African textile".

Conversely, the sculpture titled *Thobeka Leaving* (2001) by Willie Bester, a contemporary South African artist depicts a young black African woman dressed in a gown that flows down barely reaching her knees, but shows her carrying a metal box on her head supported by her left hand as she walks away. Given the fact that it appropriates the cultural image of a young woman from Xhosa ethnic identity, it is deemed a vernacular art (Greaves 2015:7). However, it narrates how Africanness is signified through her story which recalls a historical African experience of rural-urban migration that began in South African in the early 1800s (Manaka 1987:11). Lastly, in *Dance* (2011), Ebong Ekwere, a contemporary Nigerian artist, articulates cultural imagery of a female dancer performing a contemporary ballet dance, thus it is deemed vernacular art (Greaves 2015:7). Even though the expressive posture of the African

dancer suggests a Euro-centric influence, it is not, as Manaka (1987:16) observes, an "African modern art ... inspired and influenced by European art" but rather a Western culture. Despite the fact that the depiction suggests assimilation of Western culture; it might be argued that Africanness is implied because the portrayal shows "an African character" (Manaka 1987:17).

2.11 African Vernacular Rooted Imageries in Socio-Political Thematic Sculptures

In this thematic narrative, the researcher interrogates African vernacular rooted symbolisms appropriated in the contemporary sculptures of Nigerian and South African artists, in their engagements with "issues of social and political" concerns (Nettleton 2011:15) within indigenous or modern African cultures. This theme also interrogates the possible ideas each context conveys, using the following questions as a thread in the analysis. What are the cultural imagery and symbolisms contemporary African artists represent in the contexts of their vernacular sculptures that reflect socio-political themes and their purposes? What are the aims of each of these vernacular rooted sculptures? How is African identity signified in their vernacular sculptures?

Although contemporary artists from South Africa and Nigeria are identified with the evocation of African vernacular imageries in sculptures, in Nettleton's (2011:15a) words, they are "used [as] art to make social and philosophical, and hence political statements". They reveal how contemporary African artists relate to the socio-political situations in their countries. To reiterate this point, Manaka (1987:18) observes that the works of contemporary artists suggests that they are sensitised with African socio-political milieu in their creative impulse. Consequently, in this section, the interpretations of vernacular sculptures are structured around thematic representations rooted in African cultures. In Homi Bhabha's (1990:3a) words, it narrates how some may focus on "the image[s] of cultural authority" in society. However, prior to the colonisation of African countries, cultural authorities in African cultures had political hierarchies that were traditionally arranged. The political arrangement in African societies at that time constituted the council of chiefs, advisers, clan heads, and paramount leaders who were responsible for governance (Idang 2015:104). Some of these structures still remain in the contemporary era in South African and Nigerian cultures, alongside the democratic political arrangement bequeathed to Africa by the colonisers.

Given that contemporary artists from both countries may have responded differently to "their socio-political environment" (Manaka 1987:17), multifaceted socio-political subjects may unfold. However their cultural appropriations, in Nettleton's (2011:157) view, may reflect "strong political flavour" of traditional or political systems of governance or identification with political issues. As Eisinger (2013:1) argues, "all art is political in the sense that it engages society in some way, either influencing or influenced by it". He quickly observes that "some works speak more directly to concerns relating to human rights, corruption, [and] the distribution of class, wealth or power". Notwithstanding this general notion of all art being political, in Steven Friedman's (2011:110) view, the researcher focuses on works that reflect "political power-holders" in which Nigerian and South African artists, or attempt to engage with contemporary socio-political issues in both countries. This background is necessary in situating the vernacular sculptures that bear traces of African identity in socio-political experiences, in both countries, with reference to their cultural histories.

The interrogation unfolds a sculpture that reflects socio-political themes rooted in a traditional Kingdom and an indigenous Nigerian culture entitled *Anyanwu* (1954-1955), by modern Nigerian artist, Ben Enwonwu (1921-1994). Enwonwu gave an Igbo "ethno-linguistic" title, which exemplifies, as Ogbechie (2016:93) notes, the need to interpret art with concepts rooted in African cultures. Thus, the Igbo philosophical concept *Anyanwu* means "the sun". But as Ogbechie (2008:128) argues, Enwonwu articulates "a female figure whose naturalistic head and upper body taper into abstract pointed base. The head of the figure is derived from an Edo royal portrait sculpture of a Queen Mother, whose idealised face and distinctive 'chicken beak' coiffure provides a counterpoint to the attenuated abstract lower body of the sculpture". In addition, Ogbechie notes that "her body is slim, and she wears matching hoops of bracelets on her wrists". Although Enwonwu appropriated the symbolism of a Queen from the Benin Kingdom, it is not to resonate with her display of power but rather seems to convey a commentary on her royal regalia, in relationship to the brightness of the sun.

In Ogbechie's (2008:131) view, "*Anyanwu* (the sun) symbolises the all-seeing eye of God, and Enwonwu's use of this word references the Igbo practice of venerating the Great Spirit, *ChiUkwu,* by saluting the rising sun". Notwithstanding the acknowledgement of a title with deep application to God, it might be argued that Enwonwu's recourse to use the concept as the title of this sculpture which reflects royal symbolism, regalia, and objects of personal

adornment defies spiritual significance, but rather resonates with perhaps the brightness of the Bini dress in depicting the form of feminine beauty (Ogbechie 2008:131). However, the history of the queen's royal adornment in the Benin kingdom is traced to the first mention of special kinds of clothes that were woven and used within the palace by the Oba and his court in 1778, when Landolphe visited Benin (Connah 1967:597). This analysis suggests that the queen's traditional attire might arguably predate European contact with the Benin kingdom, which detracts any diasporic influence in its production. Nevertheless, just as the Oba's royal garment was produced within the palace, so too was the queen's royal garment produced in the palace, perhaps to ensure there would be no replicas of the special attires outside of the court.

Although the historical context of the queen's royal regalia in the Benin kingdom demonstrates unique traditional regalia, in Picton's (1997:12) words, it also signals "a resource upon which to draw" inspiration for cultural attires and motifs in visual culture. As Papastergiadis (2005:41) argues, it redefines indigenous notions of "cultural and aesthetic proposition" of feminine beauty within the court, rather than merely resonating with political "ambience" in the Benin Kingdom. Alternatively, it echoes the cultural value and belief in the adaptability of an older tradition of feminine beauty that is relevant in making social and political commentary in the present (Picton 1997:12; Loder 1997:5).

In Eyo's (1998:16) view, it suggests not only a political statement but a "resurgence of interest in the African past for the purpose of reconstructing the African identity" in the present. Conversely, another vernacular sculpture that reflects a socio-political theme in the South African context shows a portrait entitled *Chief Albert Luthuli* (1968), by Dumile Feni (1942-1991). The subject of Dumile's imagery, in Borgatti's (1990:34) view, presents the use of name to individuate a portrait of a former political leader. It might be argued that although the name introduces the personality the portrait depicts, it also establishes not merely his Zulu ethnicity with his given name Luthuli, but his political status as well. In Stokes' (2018:85) view, *Chief Albert Luthuli* is one of those who shared in "the role of resistance and activism playing critical role[s] in political outcomes" in South Africa in the 1960s.

However, Dumile's portrait of *Luthuli* reveals an elongated face and enlarged facial features that do not signify a realistic representation of the African man (Nettleton 2011:12a). Although the vernacular symbolism suggests a portrait, it evokes a modernist mode of depiction which defies resemblance of the subject because it symbolises an African mask

rather than a human face. As Borgatti (1990:34) argues, "the portrait canon stresses physiognomic likeness-notably, the communication of personality through facial features". Given that Dumile's portrait is in dissonance with the personality's face for its deviation from physiognomic likeness, in Nettleton's (2011:14a) view, it hints on influences from "African sources [such as] ... Fang and Ngere masks". Therefore, it demonstrates, as Peffer (2005:344) notes that in African cultures facial masking tends to merge "a specific historical ruler memorable for his benevolence ... with the previous stereotypes of ... masks, sometimes resulting in the invention of a new mask type". Notwithstanding Peffer's argument, it might be argued that in as much as the portrait hybridises the human face with mask symbols, it does not only symbolise a new mask type but a man-like mask symbolism as well.

An online article titled *Legacy of an African Hero* (2016:1) narrates that Luthuli was the first African and individual outside of Europe and the Americas to be awarded the 1960 Nobel Peace Prize for his campaign of a non-violent struggle against apartheid. This he did in his position as the President-General of African National Congress (ANC), and as a spokesman for national liberation until his death in July 1967. The visual narrative reveals, in Borgatti's (1990:35) words, the significance of a "portraiture [which] ... springs from a common impulse to remember and be remembered, whether the reasons are personal or political". As Clarke (2006:27) reiterates, this "portrait of [a] past leader document[s his] ... leadership and serves as a visual reminder of [his] legacy". Thus, the portrayal hints at a cultural value for a commemorative portrait of Luthuli, not merely for personal reasons but possibly for his political campaign of non-violent resistance against apartheid, given that it was produced a year after his death.

Alternatively, the portrait, as an article entitled *Legacy of an African Hero* (2016:1) observes, invokes the legacy of an "African humanitarian". Similarly, a vernacular sculpture titled *Socrates* (1975) by Michael Zondi (1926-2008), one of the earliest black South African sculptors unfolds differently. This title, in Mitchell's (2002:1) view, enunciates an individual identity of a renowned European philosopher and scholar. Although the name, as Peffer (2005:340) observes, echoes a European diaspora, Nieser (2004:72) argues that Zondi depicts the philosopher as a contemplative, bearded, tall-standing African man, with an embodiment of the philosopher's trait of holding a cloak over his left shoulder. Therefore, Zondi's articulation of cultural image and symbols that resonate with *Socrates,* in Borgatti's (1990:38) words, signify an "emblematic portrait" because it takes on the "cultural and historical markers present" in the philosopher's life. However, as Oguibe (2002:259) notes,

the depiction evokes an attitude to "rethink and reformulate ... European form" by referencing a black African form, with an "African character" rather than a European form. In narrating this modernist mode of engagement with a socio-political personality, in Manaka's (1987:17) view, it gives clue to a "search for African identity".

However, as Borgatti (1990:37) argues, it also suggests an "African portrait" which depicts a real person "whose li[f]e form[s] part of the historical narrative [not only] of a family, a community, [but] a nation". This argument demonstrates that Zondi's adoption of a European name with an African form is not merely, as Nettleton (2011:147b) notes, a "search for specifically South African identity", but also an attempt to acknowledge *Socrates'* contributions to the development of education in South Africa and perhaps the continent of Africa. On the other hand, as Oguibe (2002:256) observes, Zondi's depiction signals an attempt to "displace the European [identity] and chose African sculpture and form as the source of inspiration, the point of departure and yet the frame of reference". This trend is analogous to Pablo Picasso's example of drawing inspiration from African masks, yet referencing European forms. It is also evident in Ernest Mancoba's mode of engagement with African forms. Steven Sack (cited by Oguibe 2002:257) submits that "Mancoba turned away from ... European sources in exchange for a keener interest in the sculptural tradition of Africa" forms. Thus, in Manaka's (1987:17) words, the portrayal hints on "drawing ... inspiration from Europe" yet remaining identified with Africa.

Nevertheless, the historical trajectory of Socrates as a philosopher, in Gutherie's (1971:[sp]) view, suggests that he was one of the key figures who caused a "dramatic and fundamental shift of philosophical interest from the physical universe to man". Therefore, because of his contributions to solving persistent logical and philosophical problems, he dominated the history of Western philosophy. The analysis of Zondi's sculpture, as Oguibe (2002:256) notes, relays "a new aesthetic ... [which] propose[s] a confluence of European and African modernisms by writing African art as the common frame". In Eisinger's (2013:1) view, although Socrates was a philosopher and not a politician, his imagery signals the significance of his socio-political influence on Africa through philosophy. Therefore, Zondi's portrayal of *Socrates* as an African man is not merely to signify issues of individual identity (Perryer 2004:7) or African identity, but to create a new visual aesthetic with an influential personality. In Isaac Makeleni's (1948-2008) vernacular sculpture titled *Mandela and De Klerk* (c. 1990), he drew attention to two heroes of democracy in South Africa in the 1990s. As at this time, F.W. de Klerk was still the President of South Africa (Majavu and Pissarra

2011:3) but had announced on 2 February 1990 the unbanning of the liberation movement organisation. However, this announcement must have preceded Mandela's release from prison at Robben Island in February 1990 (Klopper 2004:68). Thus, while the title introduces two political icons at a socio-political scene, it also enunciates Africanness and whiteness.

In narrating the context of the portrayal, Pissarra (2011:11a) states that "a closer look reveals that De Klerk's arms are joined together, effectively tied, whereas Mandela is animated, it is he who holds the microphone". Despite the fact that Mandela was depicted holding the microphone, it was not a transition event, because it was executed in 1990. Possibly, it is to symbolise recognition of "the authentic representative of the South African people" (Pissarra 2011:6a). In Pissarra's (2011:11a) words, there was a "representation of a spear along with a traditional African woman [which] also hints at the violence and the spectres of ethnicity and tribalism that marked the transitional process". It is however contestable for Pissarra to conclude that the spear in the work hints at violence, alternatively, it should be acknowledged as Mandela's "symbol of struggle" (Simboa 2011:57), and perhaps his resolve to continue the liberation struggle unless and until democracy is realised. Additionally, the African woman Pissarra identified may not signify a traditional woman, but possibly symbolise Mandela's wife or a witness to the negotiation meeting. However, a return to history recalls, as Majavu and Pissarra (2011:3) observes, the period of "negotiations between the two dominant protagonists, the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party" assuring the people of an end to apartheid.

Given the fact that Makeleni's portrayal resonates with socio-political thematic evocation, the interpretation reveals an aim, which in Pissarra's (2011:9a) words, hints on "readiness to embark on a new journey to establish a non-racial democracy" in South Africa. Therefore, it signals not merely hope towards the realisation of political liberation from the legacies of slavery, colonisation, and racism, but signifies for Mandela a reclaiming of past African heritage and the forging of a new future (Serageldin 1998:2; Picton 1997:11). In contrast is a sculpture entitled *Adekunle Fajuyi* (1999) by Olutunde Makinde (b. unknown), a Nigerian contemporary artist. Although the title echoes a name of an African man in Yoruba culture, in Manaka's (1987:7) view, it suggests a "search for the assertion of an identity". Thus, to establish his identity, Wale Adebanwi (2008:419) introduces him as "Lieutenant Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, the Military Governor of the Western Region, who was assassinated ..., in July 1966" during a military coup.

Given the introduction, the portrayal reveals overt socio-political themes that present a cenotaph of *a victim of political forces* in the 1960s, but the sculpture reveals a full standing African man dressed in green military union which gives clue to a Nigerian military officer. As Borgatti (1990:36) notes, Makinde's representation of the African man in military regalia signifies an "African mode of portraiture that rel[ies] on the property or clothing of the subject to evoke the individual, as in Bwa commemorative forms, Ibibio funerary shrines or Baule portrait masks". Similarly, commemorative forms are, in Peffer's (2005:353) view, evident in the works of some disjunctive African artists like Nicolas Damas, Emile Guebehi, Koffi Kouakou, and Coulibaly Siaka Paul, who were previously known mostly in the Ivory Coast for making commemorative statues for the deceased.

History reveals that there was a cultural crisis in Nigeria soon after independence from colonial regime in 1960 (Adebanwi 2008:423). As a result, on 15 January 1966, a group of military officers who were natives of the Igbo culture from south-eastern Nigeria staged a coup that abruptly ended the first republic. In Adebanwi's view, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi became the head of the new military government, but the northern and western Nigerians were displeased with his style of leadership and led a counter-coup (Adebanwi 2008:419) on 29 July 1966. During the coup, General Ironsi was abducted along with Lieutenant Coloniel Adekunle Fajuyi but, as Adebanwi (2008:425) argues, they were "later killed at Lalupon, a sleepy rural community about 12 kilometres from Government House Agodi, Ibadan". Consequently, while Makinde's depiction of Adekunle Fajuyi resonates with socio-political thematic subjects, it connotes a commemoration of the hero. As Clarke (2006:29) argues, the "figurative sculpture, indicates [his] importance as [a] symbol of cultural, personal, and/or professional identity".

Still, given that he was a military officer and governor of Nigerian Western Region, it signals his importance and contributions which would have been not only to nation building but also to "politics of ethnic identity" (Peffer 2009:176). Thus, the Yoruba cultural identity of the trope implicates Africanness not merely for being indigenous to Yoruba ethnicity but for being indigenous to the African space. In *Who Let the Dogs Out?* (2001), by Willie Bester, a South African contemporary artist, Brenda Atkinson (2001:1) notes that he executed a metallic "sculptural installation" with "labour intensive perfection", which unfolds a socio-political thematic nuance on post-apartheid brutality. Although the title raises a question in an

attempt to unravel the identity of the individual(s) who released some dogs, the composition shows, in Ledimo's (2004:50) view, a work that "depicts footage from a South African news broadcast showing police training their dog by setting [it] upon an African immigrant".

As Ledimo (2004:50) notes, "the work is comprised of four separate figures – the dog handler, the dog itself, the terrified victim and another policeman who films the whole event". It is however contestable for Ledimo to conclude that an individual who is a victim of a police dog attack is merely a terrified victim. Given that a police officer reacts by filming the dog attacking the African immigrant suggests, in Enwezor's (1997:21) words, that the "haunted past is very much part of the present" and as Ledimo (2004:50) observes, it hints on "a monumental [and] gruesome depiction of police brutality". Consequently, in Serageldin's (1998:3) view, it evokes the idea of "incomplete independence and betrayed dreams". The researcher reasons that this is because it reflects scenery that suggests "revisiting of the theme of racial injustice" in South Africa (Atkinson 2001:1). Furthermore, it retells the story of white police officers who "have not really changed" in "racial attitude" (Willie Bester cited by Vega 2018:1). Ledimo (2004:50) suggests that "such a scene could well have ... played out under apartheid. Therefore this present experience invokes the history of past racism and torture of black South Africans. During apartheid, Merrett (1990:30) argues that security police employed brutality or torture as a means of interrogating a detainee.

Although dogs may have been used to torture black South Africans during apartheid, the notion of torture with dogs does not just connote literal dogs, because a "dog of the government" among black South Africans implies a "policeman" (Howie 2016:3). Still, in narrating other forms of torture used by the police, Christopher Merrett (1990:31) notes that "In late 1986 a 74 year old man was detained as hostage for his son and a 15 year old was locked in a refrigerator on a Soweto dump". Consequently, the interpretation of Bester's sculpture relays an aim which denotes, as Ledimo (2004:50) notes, a "socio-political comment ... on the unchanged racial attitudes in post-apartheid South Africa". Alternatively, in Brenda Atkinson's (2001:1) words, it suggests a refusal "to conspire with the soothing discourses of rainbowism and renaissance". As a result, instead of experiencing a renaissance in attitude, it is rather a resurgence of racism manifested in post-apartheid South Africa. Thus, as Tumelo Mosaka (2004:7) observes, it suggests that this "socio-political condition [presents] a relevant concern". In contrast, Olabisi Onawale Fakeye (1942-2017), a contemporary Nigerian artist, executed a vernacular sculpture entitled *Hope for World Peace*

(c. 2003), which draws attention to a global concern. In Manaka's (1987:16) words, it narrates that each African "artist with different ethnical background work towards world peace".

Although the title echoes *Hope for world peace*, in Bardi's (2017:6) view, Fakeye "carefully and neatly carves the beautiful hairdo of his subject and makes the figure look mature with broad shoulder blade that he was able to align and balance with the size of the base. He carves the wrapper by moulding a simple fold that hangs on a thin waist". The narrative on the hairdo signals the creativity of "black hairstyling" (Miller 2001:182) in Yoruba culture and, as Clarke (2006:29) reiterates, "hairstyle, in particular, [is] regarded as means by which the body is refined and civilised". Besides the coiffure, Bardi's argument narrates the realistic style employed in the rendition, rather than how the vernacular symbolism hints on world peace. Consequently, the portrayal shows the African woman in a kneeling posture, with both hands, joined together to give clue to the act of praying, perhaps for world peace. Additionally, another significant cultural element on the African woman is the drapery *iru* (wrapper), carved around her waist, which in Akinwumi's (1998:61) view, symbolises a modest African dress form for covering the lower parts of her body.

However, to establish the cultural history, Bardi (2017:5) observes that "traditional Yoruba influences are easily recogni[s]able in many of [Fakeye's] works" and this one in particular. Thus, a possible Yoruba tradition that influenced Fakeye is the traditional religion, which suggests in Karickhoff's (1991:62) view, the posture of imagery dedicated to "Orumila (god of divination) usually ... signified by a kneeling woman [but] with a child on her back, offering a bowl of kola nuts". However, this piece references only the kneeling woman, whose posture hints on intercession as a "spiritual force ... [or] power ... enlisted to maintain order and well-being [not only] in a community" (Clarke 2006:27), but the world over. On the other hand, aside from the notion of intercession, to resonate with the socio-political commentary Fakeye's portrayal as a "diasporic body" seeks to relay, in Peffer's (2005:340) words, a sculpture "perceived as if [it is a] human actor" "mov[ing] from continent to continent" (Peffer 2005:341) to mediate in world peace.

The interpretation of Fakeye's depiction relays, in Ademuleya's (2007:217) words, an aim that not only "reflects certain accepted thoughts and shared values" in African tradition, but in relation to world peace. Okwu (1972:73) reiterates that in "traditional African societies ...

the cosmic view [is] ... one that integrated nature, society, and man into a harmonious whole". Similarly, to demonstrate such African perceptions of the world, in Okwu's (1972:73) words, "the ... thought very much about the world, [is] not, indeed, as the world inside which he found himself, but as the world of which he formed a part". Alternatively, the portrayal hints on a vernacular sculpture kneeling in worship to a deity. Further reflection on socio-political themes in African vernacular sculpture reveals Familehin Sola's (b. unknown) work entitled *MKO Abiola* (2000). Although the title reveals the name of a political icon in Nigeria, it also hints on a Yoruba philosophical concept (Ogbechie 2016:93), which serves to construct his cultural identity.

As Akintonde and Kalilu (2013:28) observe, "MKO Abiola, [was] a business Mongol and political martyr of modern Nigeria, [who] was captured in vivacious political action reminiscence of the icon". However, the formal analysis reveals a full standing statue of Abiola "heavily adorned with the biggest flowing gown" believed to be worn by a rich man in Yoruba culture (Eicher 1972:518), and a cap to match. Yet his posture, as he raises both hands, evokes waving perhaps to a waiting multitude, which suggests greeting, possibly during a political campaign or appreciating them for giving him the mandate as president-elect (Adebanwi 2008:420). Alternatively, his vibrant mood, in Falola and Ngom's (2009:xxx) words, invokes the "styling of the political self in a way that speaks both to a global political ethos and simultaneously remains rooted to local" socio-political context. Thus, the cultural history of this experience recalls, in Omotoso and Oyerami's (2014:5) words, a struggle that "started with the successful organisation of 12 June 1993 ... presidential election globally adjudged the most peaceful, fair and free in Nigeria's post-independence political history". Notwithstanding the high rating of the 1993 election in which Chief MKO Abiola was believed to be the winner, it was cancelled and the Third republic was truncated by the then military President General Ibrahim B. Babangida (Omotoso and Oyerami 2014:4).

As a result, Babangida's decision, in Rifkin's (1985:20) view, suggests "a conflict between politically good (good intention in conducting election) and bad intentions (for cancelling the election results)". Consequently, the bad intention or indiscriminate wielding of power betrays "the philosophical and humanitarian principles on which African culture is based". Such principles include "dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community" (Nussbaum 2003:21) and, as Homi Bhabha (1994:296) notes, it

"does suggest that position of authority [is] ... part of a process of ambivalent identification" with possibly "politics of ethnic identity" (Peffer 2009:176), given that Babangida is from northern Nigeria and Abiola from south-western Nigeria. Alternatively, as Clarke (2006:22) argues, it hints on a belief in Yoruba culture that "the most important individual is depicted as the largest figure". Hence, this vernacular sculpture attests to the importance of MKO Abiola, not merely as a president-elect of a betrayed dream, but a philanthropist and businessman which makes him a relevant socio-political personality to be remembered with a large sculptural rendition. Moreover, given that this sculpture was executed two years after his death, it symbolises a commemorative statue of Chief Moshoud Abiola and serves to communicate not only political commentary on the situation that surrounded his death but his truncated dream of becoming president.

2.12 Findings and Discussion

The interrogation of African vernacular rooted sculptures under this socio-political thematic section reveals, in Nettleton's (2011:13a) view, how the works of modern and contemporary African artists are in different ways "placed in the service of ... political narrative". Although the styles, medium, and subject matters of the sculptures may not reveal commonality for comparison, it might be argued that the grounds of commonality are their appropriations of vernacular symbolisms that reflect socio-political themes. Thus the analysis reveals ways contemporary artists in Nigeria and South Africa explore the complexity of socio-political themes during colonial/apartheid and post-colonial rules which dramatically impacted African political institutions (Clarke 2006:26). The analysis also shows how their works are deemed vernacular and construct Africanness.

Consequently, the findings on how their works are deemed vernacular and construct Africanness are documented. In fact, Ben Enwonwu's depiction entitled *Anyanwu* (1954-1955) is reckoned, in Greaves' (2015:7) view, to be a vernacular rooted sculpture because it references an indigenous cultural symbolism of a queen dressed in royal regalia rooted in the Benin Kingdom in Nigeria. Thus, in Batchen's (2000:262) words, it signifies a "vernacular genre" that is "highly symbolic with a strong traditional [Nigerian] background" (Manaka 1987:17). Africanness is implied not merely, as Nettleton (2011:9) observes, because the African form "belong[s] to the continent", but it echoes "African costumes" (Donovan 2007:8). In *Chief Albert Luthuli* (1968), Dumile Feni executed a portrait of a political personality. Although the work appears to be in dissonance with the physiognomy of the

subject depicted, because of what Manaka (1987:16) observes, the "influence of African mask", it is deemed vernacular for reflecting a cultural symbolism (Greaves 2015:7). As Manaka (1987:16) further notes, the depiction indicates Africanness through "the search for roots of African art" and form. Additionally, Africanness is signified through a theme that reflects his legacy of African humanism (Nussbaum 2003:23).

Similarly, Michael Zondi's vernacular sculpture entitled *Socrates* (c. 1975), in Greaves' (2015:7) view, is deemed a vernacular rooted rendition because it references the cultural imagery of a renowned European philosopher with the embodiment of his traits, but as an African man, making him a relevant African socio-political icon. However, in Borgatti's (1990:37) view, the portrayal is "individuated" with Socrates' name but Africanised. Consequently, Africanness is signified given its "Afrocentric perspective" (Manaka 1987:16). In *Mandela and De Klerk* (c. 1990), although Isaac Makeleni represents cultural imageries of two important political icons of South African democracy from a multi-cultural or multi-racial context, in Manaka's (1987:16) view, they are located in a scenery that appears to be a "political event" in 1990. Thus, his depiction is not just deemed vernacular rooted sculpture, but indicates Africanness through "African unity" (Dei 2012:44) and belonging to Africa in an "inclusive Africanness" manner (Ngwena 2018:117). In responding to his "socio-political environment" (Manaka 1987:17) Olutunde Makinde, a contemporary Nigerian artist, produced a sculpture of *Adekunle Fajuyi* (1999), perhaps a commissioned work. Given that it depicts a cultural imagery of a full-standing African man, despite being dressed in military uniform, it is reckoned to be a vernacular sculpture (Batchen 2000:262). Africanness is signified from a specific African culture rooted in the Yoruba cultural group (Dei 2012:49).

Willie Bester's sculptural installation titled *Who Let the Dogs Out?* (2001) is, in Batchen's (2000:262) view, reckoned as a "vernacular genre" even though it manifests "multiple cultural attachments on identity" (Papastergiadis 2005:40). Given that the police officers and the African immigrant are cultural imageries, they are identified as vernacular rooted sculptures. In narrative Africanness in this portrayal, it might be argued that the rendition alludes to Africanness through the African scene. In narrating the notion of vernacular sculpture of Olabisi Onawale Fakeye, *Hope for World Peace* (2003), it might be argued that Fakeye's portrayal of a kneeling female symbolism rooted in indigenous Yoruba culture is deemed an indigenous vernacular imagery (Batchen 2000:262). However, aside from interrogating the notion of vernacular, the Africanness is valorised through African culture,

not in a homogenous sense but in being rooted in Yoruba culture in "relation to African tradition" (Okeke-Agulu 2006:27). Similarly, in *MKO Abiola* (2000) by Familehin Sola, the rendition is deemed vernacular because it shows a full-standing cultural symbolism of an African man adorned with an elaborate African garment (Greaves 2015:7). Given that it depicts, as Kasfir (1992:41) argues, an African elite, the sculpture alludes to Africanness-via-figuration" (Nettleton 2011:13a) and African cultural attire rooted in Yoruba culture.

I maintain that the interrogation of ideas represented in the African vernacular rooted artworks in chapter two, reveals a wide range of ideas which the artists embodied and considered to be African. Similarly, I argue that the analysis of paintings arranged under the theme on African vernacular rooted symbolisms in pastoral landscapes presents different ideas on cultural identities and socio-political commentaries on the past and present experiences of individuals rooted in rural and urban areas and townships. However, in asserting their Africanness in pastoral landscapes, they were signified through their themes, African forms and the messages they communicate.

2.13 Conclusion

By appropriating cultural imageries and symbols from indigenous African cultures and other African sources in the evocation of artworks, contemporary South African and Nigerian artists demonstrate contemporary vernacular art practice. Thus, I argue that such mode of representations of vernacular imageries in contemporary art defines a "vernacular genre" (Batchen 2000:265). However, such cultural imageries echo the experiences of disparate African people rooted in rural and urban areas in Nigerian and South African. Aside this, the study establishes that their continued representation of vernacular symbolisms in artworks is the emergence of contemporary forms of art, which bear no resemblance to historically dated art objects (Ogbechie 2005:62). It might be argued, therefore, that any attempt to arrogate to African vernacular-rooted arts produced in modern or contemporary eras as historical African art in both countries would suggest problematic interpretations.

Furthermore, it might be argued that the historical vernacular arts revealed in different artefacts can be defined as an extinct tradition some of which are now present in collections of museums in Africa and the West. This study, therefore, creates a dichotomy in art history

by documenting the emergence of contemporary African vernacular rooted arts with little similarity to the artefacts evocated in traditional African art. Perhaps as Holly (cited by Ogbechie 2005:63) observes "time changes the questions that artworks put before us, different objects call to different subjects at different moments, and new political angles make new objects come into view". Holly's argument connotes that the possible reasons for the transformation in the form of African vernacular rooted representations in the present is because of time now and then, different subjects and new political angles. New political angles possibly influenced the "pioneers of African contemporary art [to become] more and more attracted to the naturalistic Eurocentric style" (Manaka 1987:13).

I argue that Manaka's stance appears to reflect the experiences of contemporary South African and Nigerian artists, where artists in Manaka's (1987:13) view, were "influenced by traditional art and art from the Western world" but create works with African roots. I further contend that art in Nigerian context presents instances where naturalistic style was evident for instance in traditional Nok, Ife and Ikenga arts, not just because of art from Western world, suggesting that naturalism has been part of African art. However, the acknowledgement of the contemporary attraction to creating vernacular art with naturalistic European style is not to deny representations of vernacular symbolism in abstract styles. It is argued that the naturalistic European styles employed by South African artists are not homogenous as differences abound in the mode of execution and as well as in comparison to Nigerian artists.

This study thus revisits the question of vernacular arts in contemporary context and challenges our understanding of indigenous forms of expressions in African arts. It also establishes that contemporary African vernacular representations should not be narrated as a significant part of traditional art in African art (Ogbechie 2005:62) because of the transformations that were identified. However, the vernacular rooted artworks produced by contemporary African artists whose works were reviewed allude to Africanness through African cultures, themes on African experiences of people's hopes, pains, and joys.

CHAPTER THREE

African Vernacular Tropes in the Artworks by South African artists, Nelson Makamo and Lebohang Sithole

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses two South African painters: Nelson Makamo and Lebohang Sithole and their appropriations of cultural imageries, which in this thesis are regarded as contemporary vernacular art. It presents not merely the vernacular tropes of young African children, but as Colin Richards (2011:47) observes, the "history and the manifold reworking of memory" of their past lived experiences and present experiences of others in rural and urban areas in South Africa in twenty first century. In Magee and Grabski's (2013:7) words, their works demonstrate "artists working today [by] engag[ing] with the contemporary moment and also with the local past and its histories". Whereas Makamo's depictions are reflective of a childhood once lived by adults, migration, and his journey from his rural area "Modimole to Johanessburg" (Ntombela 2011:15), where he experienced street homelessness, Sithole's renditions resonates with his recent childhood history of suffering, poverty, loneliness and wandering in search of home because of his experience of homelessness in rural areas of Kwazulu-Natal among others.

The responses of these artists during field research to their studios in Johanessburg were extracted, and used in understanding as well as interpreting their African vernacular rooted paintings. Given that both artists trained at different times at the Artist Proof Studio[3] in Johanessburg, it is possible that their representations of cultural imageries of recent histories of their childhood experiences which characterises their paintings are influenced by institutional focus and styles. Although the study focuses on their paintings produced between 2007 and 2016, Makamo's depictions include paintings and drawings, while Sithole's renditions show paintings. However, both artists appear to adopt drawing techniques in the works, but Makamo's works show more detail modelling than Sithole's which appear sketchy.

3.2 Nelson Makamo (b.1982)

[3] This art making centre was established in 1991 at Newtown, Johanessburg, with the goal of training young people in three years fine art programmes in drawing, print making, visual literacy and business skills aimed at producing professional artists. To demonstrate the high level of training and education at Artist Proof Studio, it also accommodates post-graduates interns and artists' residencies.

Nelson Makamo was born in Nylstroom (now Mondimolle), Limpopo province in 1982. He moved to Johannesburg to join the Artist Proof Studio in January 2003, where he trained as an artist and obtained diploma in Printmaking, Marketing and Product Design in 2006. His painting skills were self-taught and at some point, older artists helped to define his focus. Makamo has participated in several groups and solo exhibitions nationally and internationally.

Given that Makamo has been painting and drawing for close to two decades, this research, therefore, focuses on the paintings he executed referencing indigenous symbolism and ideologies between 2007 and 2016. In discussing Makamo's works, five were sampled within the specified period of the research. They include; *Somewhere I belong* (2010), *Moment Alone* (2011), *Smiles* (2015), *I belong to the world* (2016) and *Young Soul* (2016).

The findings of my research, reveals that the major cultural imageries Makamo articulates in his artworks are the black South African children. In Makamo's (2017) view, "I represent the black African child in my works, by reflecting on what it takes to be an African child in contemporary era. I look at the black child as a symbol of Africa not only in the present but in the future". Therefore, the trope of an African child can be regarded as a vernacular trope as Makamo sees it as a symbol of Africa. However, in addition to the depiction of disparate vernacular tropes of young African children, he also portrays adults in his artworks. Such works reveal concepts and contents that reflect the experiences of black South African adults. As Makamo (2017) argues, "besides the African child, I depict other images that reference adults in my works as well". Notwithstanding his claim, his works reflect more of young black African children, which signify the hope of a continent. Thus, I argue that Makamo's focus in representing cultural imageries of black South Africans in artworks, situates his works within the context of contemporary vernacular art, and in Anitra Nettleton's (2011:9a) view demonstrate African identity by reflecting on blackness as a sign of race.

Makamo traces the historical trajectory that seems to shape his search for cultural tropes or symbolisms to the time he was introduced to older black South African artists, stating that

> When I was introduced to the artworks of George Pemba, David Koloane among other South African artists, I discovered myself. I observed that they depicted a lot of cultural imagery and symbols that reflect African societies and I said to myself, I can use similar visual language in communicating my experiences and cultural environment in a language everybody can understand.

His introduction to those contemporary black artists and their works seems to mark the beginning of executing contemporary vernacular arts. Despite his decision to represent vernacular tropes from African societies, he focuses more on the African child than adults. Makamo's (2017) view, "a major factor that influences me is how the world views an African child in a contemporary era. When I spend time with an African child, I am inspired to reflect on memories of my childhood". Even though he argues that the world view of an African child influences his depictions, I argue that he did not mention what such view is contemporary era and how his works seek to either deconstruct or construct the image of an African child. This reveals African consciousness and why perhaps most of the imageries one would encounter in the works of Nelson Makamo are young black African children, as evident in works titled *Somewhere I Belong* (2010) (Figure 5), *Moment Alone* (2011) (Figure 6), *Smiles* (2015) (Figure 7), *I belong to the world* (2016) (Figure 8) and *Young Soul* (2016) (Figure 9).

To situate his works as representing Africans, in Makamo's (2017) words, "I am influenced to represent cultural imageries from my roots in visual language". Such search of representing contemporary vernacular tropes with African roots is evident in the works of earlier black South African artists "like Lucky Sibiya, Azariah Mbatha, John Muafangejo, Dan Rakgoathe and several" others (Manaka 1987:16). It is, however, worthy of note that Makamo's practice of appropriating indigenous forms in artworks are not merely for visual aesthetic, but aimed at demonstrating African identity in their contents and contexts. In describing the kinds of tropes he articulates in artworks, Makamo (2017) notes that "the imageries I depict in my works reflect the socio-cultural ways of life of my African society because I am an African. I always reflect my rural and urban surroundings in artworks". Therefore, Makamo's argument locates not just the Afrocentric perspective of his contemporary arts, but the sources he reflects in his artworks. As a result, each of his artwork seeks to write a visual history of South Africans, and thus of a nation. This stance was expressed by Makamo, who notes that "I attempt to write our history in every artwork I create. The history I write is of our contemporary existence as Africans, within our societies". However, the context of such works, as Makamo (2017) recounts, reflects "black children playing or walking, which signals to move on in life. This nonetheless does not only reflect South Africans but Africans in general". Thus, Makamo captures actions and moods of black African children to make social and political commentaries not merely about children but a continent that is hopefully moving forward.

While Makamo's artworks demonstrate African identity the contents and contexts reflect diverse issues. In Makamo's (2017) view, "My ideas are framed around the concern and love I have for the future of South Africa and the African continent". These concerns are evident in *Somewhere I belong* (2010), which unveils the homelessness of some black South Africans who migrate from rural to urban space with no one to accommodate them. This speaks to the contemporary issues of migration and xenophobia of some Africans trying to find a home in foreign African countries. As Makamo (2017) further affirms, another major idea in his works is the "use of the black child as a symbol of a better Africa in the future, if well modelled; this is because there is no better symbol to signify that notion. So, I portray them with confidence by reflecting on their present proud moments, but showing where we are heading". In addition, Makamo argues, "I represent them in such a way that every African can mirror himself/herself in those children. For me that environment where they play today made me who I am as an artist".

Furthermore, in executing his works, Makamo employs different media. Makamo (2017) claims that, because "I come from a drawing background; I mastered how to use different media in depicting imagery from a very early age. However, the main media I use now are charcoal on canvas and on paper, watercolour, oil colour on canvas and paper, and print making". The applications of some of these media are evident in the works selected for analysis in this research. In describing his technique of applying charcoal or colour on canvas and papers, Makamo (2017) notes that "I apply oil on canvas using not only brushes but my hands and fingers, thereby creating a blend of smooth and rough textures and shades that I desire. This is also applicable to artworks made with charcoal". Furthermore, he observes that "it may interest you to know that I paint with raw colours rather than from a palette. I blend the colours on the canvas, board or paper using my fingers or brushes". Nevertheless, except a viewer is present when Nelson Makamo is producing his artworks, it will be difficult to explain how he executed each work. This was my experience when I was at his studio to interview him.

While responding to the question on why he still paints, in view of new media and installation arts, Makamo (2011) argues that, "I feel the history of contemporary African painting has not been fully explored. Paintings enable me to tell stories not only about South Africa but Africa, and communicate different ideas to audience using simple visual symbolisms that they may understand easily". Though arguable Makamo's argument does not only identify a gap in contemporary African art practice but reflects on the need for art

historical discourse of such contemporary artworks, because the continual representation of paintings is a necessary trend that must be documented. Therefore, Makamo is filling a gap with his paintings. On the one hand, as Makamo (2017) notes, "I also feel some subjects in African societies have not been fully communicated visually for people to be able to relate with in painting". So, his appropriations of vernacular tropes are aimed at hopefully addressing such subjects. In addition, his second reason is that "art is not well collected among black South Africans, so I started focusing people on the concepts in my artworks and hope to introduce more blacks into appreciating and collecting my artworks".

In assessing audience reception of his works, Makamo (2017) claims that "people love my works and call me African Picasso and others call me "talent". Others say my works are incredible with amazing concepts and contents. Aside, I have about five major collectors of my works; this is because of their appreciation or reception for my works". Possibly, it is for this he is arguably adjudged the second best-selling contemporary South African artist. Yet there is no serious scholarly attention devoted to his works. Rather he is excluded from art historical narratives, despite his projection of contemporary vernacular tropes of young African children and thematic reflections on social issues in South Africa. In Malatjie's (2011:10) view, his exclusion is because such works are viewed as being outside the mainstream "contemporary art standard. [So,] while collectors purchase ... [his] works – often from ... [his] studios – [his] works are not discussed in art historical research". It is this exclusion, despite his mode of appropriating vernacular tropes as an important trend in contemporary African art that necessitated his inclusion in this research, so as to document some of his oeuvres.

3.3 Analysis of Vernacular Tropes in Nelson Makamo's Artworks

Makamo's engagement with indigenous black South African forms unfolds in a realistic pastoral landscape drawing entitled *Somewhere I belong* (2010) (Figure 5). Although the subject matter does not appear to draw attention to ethnicity, it echoes a statement of personal consolation and a sort of identity. Makamo (2017) claims that "when I was not able to afford accommodation in Johannessburg, I found one somewhere on the street". While this theme invokes an "emotional expressiveness" (van Robbroeck 2011:85), I, however, argue as Cross et al (2010:7) note that, a condition of "rooflessness" does not represent accommodation even though many unfortunately live there in contemporary era. His work depicts not just a hybridity of vernacular tropes of young black South Africans sleeping in different postures

beside each other on the street but contrasts it with depictions of urban houses, which signifies diametrically opposite living conditions. It might be argued as Malatjie (2011:11) claims that, "Nelson Makamo's work is an attempt to construct a narrative, varied tales, about his and other people's experiences of living in the city".

Makamo employed charcoal as the medium of protocol with which he represented blurry lines. This use of lines exemplifies Makamo's (2017) claim not just of coming from a drawing background, but of mastery in use of lines to depict imagery. The formal structure of this composition reveals a demarcation created between the background and foreground, which creates different visual narratives on twenty-first century urban living conditions. While the immediate foreground is executed from aerial view, which allows for the depiction of the roofs of houses, the background shows rooflessness. As David Buuck (1997:118) notes, such as "undermines any fixed notions of a … stable self and history". A close reading of these houses, symbolize shacks and possibly bungalows in an urban area in South Africa. In locating this composition in Koloane's (1995:151) words, it signals "a social-realistic expression of ... township" life.

Figure 5: Nelson Makamo, *Somewhere I Belong,* 2010. Charcoal on paper, 200 x 150 cm. (Courtesy of Nelson Makamo)

The experience in this depiction recalls the cultural history of migration in South Africa, which on the one hand, Manaka (1987:13) claims began "With the advent of the mining industry in the 1880s, [when] African people joined the migrant labour blues in greater numbers". It was during that era as Manaka (1987:9) further observes, "Our grandparents and their children, our parents, came to Johannesburg from all parts of the country and the rest of

Southern Africa". As a result urban townships were created to cater to the population that would provide cheap labour for Johannesburg and Witwatersrand. But Eloff and Sevenhuysen (2011:6) remarks that the "municipalities [refused or were unwilling] to spend money on housing as the people for whom they were providing homes could often not afford to pay the rent". Consequently, people who could not afford to pay the rents became homeless. This, on the other hand, evokes the cultural history of twenty-first century street homelessness. Though contestable, the results of the 2001 census shows that there may be 100 000 to 200 000 truly homeless adults and children living on the street in rural and urban areas in South Africa. But Johanessburg as of 2001 had the highest figure of street homeless children, which was estimated at 3000 (Cross et al 2010:7). Due to a lack of official statistics, Emeka Obioha (2019:2) argues that "researchers rely on unofficial individual studies for the estimate of homeless persons", as a result, current statistics cannot be ascertained in this study.

Conceivably the problem of housing was created by "Hendrik Verwoerd's government [who] ensured that black people's movement to the city was controlled" (Malatjie 2011:11). In Bhabha's (1990:2a) words, it signals not merely the ambivalence in the lives of those who live in modern societies, but "the uneven development of capitalism [which] inscribes both progression and regression". It does not merely speak to surrounding social issues on rural-urban migration but xenophobia, which reflects on the idea of an African trying to find home in a foreign African country. Thus, signals as the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres (2018:1) observes that "migration [should] be an act of hope, not despair". While contemporary migration is not discouraged, the experience of sleeping on the street denotes despair rather than hope. Alternatively, as Cross et al (2010:13) argues, it hints on a "street homeless problem [which] affects both those who have fallen out of developed society and those who have never gained an initial foothold". Such experience in Ntombela's (2011:15) view indicates that "the South African world Nelson Makamo's work is looking at is one still plagued by poverty and deep structural inequalities". Arguably, many poor people do not live on the street in South Africa. The philosophy that guided Makamo in this work centres on his sensitivity to the urban homelessness of rural-urban migrant black South African youths. In *Moment Alone* (2011), while the title hints on a wordless and reflective moment, its content and context echoes more than engagement with passing time.

To exemplify his argument of representing the trope of an African child as symbolic of Africans, he portrayed a black South African girl standing alone but backing the viewer as

though she is walking away. Although, in Makamo's (2017) view "the young girl is captured alone waiting for her younger sister", there is however no representation of any other trope in this work to demonstrate that she is waiting for her sister. Therefore, her lonely posture is in dissonance with the notion of waiting for a younger sister who was not depicted in the context of the work. The formal structure suggests as Kunle Filani (2018:22) argues, a "seemingly contemplative pose".

Figure 6: Nelson Makamo, *Moment Alone*, 2011. Monoprint, 77.7 x 106.5 cm.
(Courtesy of the Artist)

Though this is a realistic depiction of a vernacular trope, it is presented in monoprint, a medium influenced by Makamo's background of print making. This work suggests that he reproduced the imagery in monoprint perhaps to get fresh idea of such imagery in a different medium (Smith 2013:1). Even though the depiction shows a black South African girl standing alone, her left hand is bent in an upward angular position holding a bulging plastic bag with a firm grip over her back. The bulging plastic bag seems to suggest not merely items purchased from perhaps a mall but hints on content that is weighty, even though she is able to

carry it conveniently. As Makamo (2017) notes, “she is a child sent to buy provisions from a shopping mall, returning home with her bag loaded with goods purchased from the shop”.

Makamo’s view on coming from shopping mall is contestable because someone could have handed over the plastic bag to the girl, or she is conveying items from home on an errand to someone, as there is no portrayal of shopping in this work to suggest the girl is actually coming from a mall. Nonetheless, the young African girl stands out from the background covered with darkness, evoking a night scene as light reflects on her hand from the right side of this rendition. She is adorned with a small flowing dress that drapes graciously below her backsides, with folds created with dark shades on the left sides to signify the direction from which the light reflects the girl. Her legs are depicted in a standing posture close to each other, to suggest a waiting posture.

In narrating the experience of this young African girl, the cultural history of black children in South Africa from apartheid to post-apartheid as Lockhat and Van Niekerk (2000:297) notes, reveals that “children have been historically the most neglected ... of the South African population”. To further narrate the history of the black child, Lockhat and Van Niekerk (2000:292) argue that, the black child was not afforded any protection during apartheid. “Instead it could be argued that the state waged a carefully planned social, economic and political war on its own (black) children”. But in post-apartheid era, to boost the economic well-being of adults and children, Said Marc Edwards (cited by eProp@News 2013:1) observes that the previously untapped areas like “townships and rural areas in [South Africa] have emerged as a new market for national retailers as we see an upward movement amongst township communities in terms of expendable income”. Therefore, given that shopping malls offer goods for sale within walking distances from homes in townships and rural areas, sending a young African girl to shop seems to pose no risk.

The reading relays an aim which in Makamo’s (2017) words echoes the place of “an African child in beginning to take responsibility from an early age”. It may be argued that while the girl child does shopping in the twenty first century, in rural areas older vernacular images of girls depict them fetching water and firewood. And as Isiugo (1985:58) observes, this hints that “domestic tasks may have taken on a new dimension in present-day urban areas” in South Africa. Thus, Makamo’s rendition draws attention to the notion of African cultural belief and way of life which values child training and development in running errands from

an early age. On the other hand, the reading echoes another aim framed around the symbolism of the plastic bag held by the girl. As Makamo (2017) notes, "this plastic bag reflects the bag immigrants take along in the course of migration that takes place from rural to urban areas, within Africa and from Africa to other continents in search of greener pastures". In Malatjie's (2011:10) view "while migration still occurs, it has assumed different forms". Nevertheless, Ogbechie (2009:140) reiterates despite different forms of migration taking place, "this does not mean that there are not sedentary and much localized peoples in Africa, but generally speaking, internal migration is very pronounced on the continent as is international travel". Alternatively, the depiction narrates the story of a victim of xenophobic attack escaping with the only handy property, at a cross road of decision making.

Furthermore, I argue that the different forms of migration taking place in Africa questions Bhabha's (1990:1a) submission that a nation or continent of Africa is a continuous narrative of national or continental progress. Conversely, Makamo evocated another realistic vernacular painting entitled *Smiles* (2015) (Figure 7), which unfolds a different scenario that focuses on humorous facial expression of a black South African lady. Even though the subject matter suggests smile, the context of the depiction elicits laughter. It evokes Nelson Makamo's (2017) claim that "I focus on the expression on the face and attempt to summarize such expression in my depiction". But Jeeve (cited by Wolkoff 2019:1) argues that smile "is a response, not an expression perse". Yet, an example of an enigmatic smile in art is Leonardo da Vinci's painting *Mona Lisa* (ca. 1503-19), which reveals "a tight-lipped expression" (Wolkoff 2019:5). Still, other forms of smiles in art may bare the teeth slightly. Nonetheless, in this painting, Makamo references an image of a young African woman with her mouth widely opened, baring teeth and tongue thereby evoking laughter rather than smile.

The depiction shows her laughing a lone, with her head tilted backwards as a mode of "humorous reaction" (Hartz and Hunt 1991:301). However, in African art, Thompson (1979) notes that "laughter ... [is a] bodily response" noticeable in a dancing figure. Though Thompson narrates laughter in dancing as a form of bodily response, as Filani (2018:17) argues, this rendition reveals "peculiar formalism", which gives clue to humorous response in interpersonal relationships rather than in dance. It shows the use of elaborate lines in creating not only the humorous look but effects of light and shade. A similar effect is created

around the neck of the lady with slight folds because she tilted her head. The realistic work reveals use of "pen and colour" (Peffer, 2009:42) in the portrayal, making it stand out from the receding background which is smoothly painted pink colour. Other media used are a charcoal stick, powdery charcoal and acrylic pastel applied to paper to create different tonal effects on the symbolism. From the top, he applied charcoal to fully depict the well combed hair, which signifies neatness. Rather than introduce other colours on the face and neck of the lady, it seems Makamo chose the use of charcoal possibly to contextualize her black identity.

Figure 7: Nelson Makamo, *Smiles,* 2015. Mixed Media, Size unknown. Private collections (Courtesy of Nelson Makamo)

While it seems there are no focused study on smiles or laughter in African art history, in Julia Wolkoff's (2019:6) view, "By the 17th century in Europe, aristocrats had decided that baring teeth in public and in art–was a lewd expression reserved for the lower classes, drunk and theatrical performers". However, examples of figures baring teeth which possibly suggest laughter in African art are nineteenth century commemorative figure of queen, Bangwa Kingdom, Cameroon (Grossman and Bonnell 2009:76). I argue that while the present experience of laughter from a young African woman maybe heart-warming and contagious, Makamo (2017) argues that, "I always do pieces with varied expressions, and 'smile' is one that I continue to depict. It is a constant reminder of how we all need to remember to smile from the heart". A similar ideology is explored by Joe Musa, a contemporary Nigerian artist.

In Ikpakronyi's (2008:6) view, the symbolic depictions focused "on masks series where he shows his ability to visually represent the human phenomenon where people smile at you, but have venom in their hearts". It suggests as Julia Wolkoff (2019:8) reiterates, "hidden behind the frozen smile-masks lie weighty political criticism and social commentary". But Nontobeko Ntombela (2011:15) notes that "Makamo's work is a depiction of his personal experiences and gaze upon the world".

Although the idea hints on ambivalence in socio-cultural interactions, where an individual seeks to change the cultural value and attitude that underlies true relationship that comes from the heart, it signals as John Peffer (2009:48) notes, "a truth that could only be seen in the mind". Therefore, it might be argued that "facial movements such as smiling and [laughter] … are not necessarily indicators of deception" (Hurley and Frank 2011:124). But as Julia Wolkoff (2019:1) argues, may be perceived as "indication of friendliness, happiness, or affection". As a result, Makamo's philosophical view in articulating a vernacular trope of a black South African lady in this work echoes the value of true friendship rather than ironic and concealed humorous response. In *I Belong to the World* (2016) (Figure 8), Makamo (2017) draws attention to a subject of ownership of a black child. I argue that biologically a child belongs to a family, not the world, except in an ironic sense or as Lockhat and Van Viekerk (2000:292) observes that, "the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 states clearly that the state should be the ultimate guardian of children". Even at that, the state is smaller than the world.

The context of Nelson Makamo's rendition shows a contemporary stylistic tendency (Filani 2018:17) in evocating a realistic vernacular trope of a black African girl. She is foregrounded in a pastoral landscape scene walking away from the viewer. Though the work is a full charcoal rendition, Makamo employed the use of lines applied with brushstrokes to create a simulacrum of painting with colours. Still, the work reveals distribution of light and shade, with faint splashes showing smooth effects of application of charcoal appearing transparent like watercolour. This mode of rendition evokes as Ingrid Christensen (2019:1) argues, a depiction without the complexity of colour, as it displays a monochromatic use of black pigment plus white, which allows focus on the accurate shape of the girl with degrees of light and dark.

Though the girl is walking away from viewers, her head is slightly tilted downwards as if the object of attraction is in the direction of her gaze (Eager 1961:52). The effects of the

brushstrokes employed to represent her hair is evident in the upward stretches. Nonetheless, as the young black African girl walks away "barefooted", her left hand holds part of her garment, while the right hand swings freely possibly feeling at home within her neighbourhood. She is represented with a sleeveless garment that appears fitting at the top and flows graciously with folds downward. In Niala Orsmond's (2016:1) view, "the flowing softness of her dress is as magical as the ballet dancers of Degas". Given the fact that the rthymic movement, gracious flow, and softness of the dress invokes in Orsmond the ballet dancers' dress suggests as Nikos Papastergiadis (2005:39) argues hybridity of diasporic European cultural ideas and elements.

Figure 8: Nelson Makamo, *I Belong to the World*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 190 x 90 cm. Private collections. (Courtesy of Nelson Makamo)

Arguably, the experience narrates a cultural history of the highly communalistic pre-industrial black South African societies (Manaka (1987:9). As Christain Gade (2012:486) notes, communalism which reflects universal human interdependence is traced to pre-colonial African communities. In such a communalistic society, Isiugo-Abaniche (1985:56) argues, "children are generally thought of as belonging not only to biological parents but" to all.

Although communalism is not unique to Africa, what makes it African as Gyekye (cited by Wilkinson [sa]:298) maintains, is because it is seen as the particular form of "socio-ethical

humanism where actions are motivated by concerns for others". Thus, in Makamo's (2017) words, her movement suggests "a present proud moment, showing where Africa as a continent is heading". I contest that though the symbolic movement of the black girl may signify progressive steps; however, it is ambivalently doubtful if the direction Africa is heading can be situated. Therefore, to define the direction of Africa, Makamo (2017) argues that, she represents "a generation that can be moulded so as to experience the change we desire on the continent of Africa". It might also be argued that Makamo's work draws attention to African cultural value on communalism in collectively training a black African child. Alternatively, as Ntombela (2011) argues, it investigates the relationship between this girl and the occupiers of the space.

The philosophical idea that guided Makamo's depiction suggests that every African child symbolizes the future of Africa and should essentially be given a didactic opportunity. Furthermore, Makamo's Afrocentric focus on the vernacular trope of young black African children unfolds in *Young Soul* (2016) (Figure 9). The subject as Makamo (2017) notes introduces a black African boy. Although the title draws attention to a young soul who may be easily prone to learning, it is not books but as the context shows technology. This realistic African vernacular rooted painting reference the boy seated alone, with an earphone over his head suggesting that he is listening to music. But as Papastergiadis (2005:40) argues, it invokes the idea of hybridity of foreign elements in shaping the domestic way of life of the young black African boy. His facial expression reveals a calm posture gazing at the viewer. Though playing alone, as Makamo (2017) notes, his face does not merely show calm disposition but reflects confidence and an innocent look. It is, however, not surprising for a young black African child to have an innocent look, he is perhaps not exposed to the social vices in the society.

The formal elements reveal elaborate lines which in Filani's (2018:17) view were used to create the apt trope of the young African boy as well as light and shade. While some parts of his face show smooth texture others appear rough possibly because of the lines created with charcoal sticks, tip of the artist's fingers and brushstrokes. It establishes as Makamo (2017) notes, "I use brushstrokes and my fingers to apply charcoal to my works. This creates the texture and shades that I desire". Nevertheless, I argue that except Makamo is being observed when he is applying colours, it will be difficult to differentiate the effect of brushes from the marks of his fingers in a work. Though the boy is represented with a green patterned shirt and an Afro hair, his appearance seems rough against a bright atmosphere. In Makamo's (2017)

words, “I observe that when an African child is playing where he or she was born, he feels at home”. Even though the boy feels at home, I argue that a black African child does not only feel at home in his place of birth but everywhere. Possibly, this young soul seated on the ground does not look bothered about his environment, neither his clothes, because he is within his rural black community.

In giving context to this depiction, I trace the cultural history. As John Peffer (2009) notes, the South African space he is seated invokes where the blood of countless small children were spilled during apartheid. Others who were alive had neither toys nor play facilities during the brutal reign of apartheid. In Peffer’s (2009: xix) view, children had no toys to play with so they created toys with improvised materials. Though Makamo’s work is not exploring the dearth of toys in postcolonial South Africa like earlier artists did, what aim does the interpretation of his painting reveal?

Figure 9: Nelson Makamo, *Young Soul,* 2016. Charcoal and Acrylic on Paper, 120 x 160 cm. Private collections (Courtesy of Nelson Makamo)

The main aim according to Makamo (2017), is to “reflect on what it takes to be an African child in contemporary era”, not only in South Africa but on African continent. Makamo (2017) adds that “we are living in an era when technology plays an important role in our

lives, so I reflect on the role of technology in shaping the social life of an African child". Alternatively, while such foreign element reveals acculturation, it is not only of the technology but the music which "circulate in everyday life" (Papastergiadis 2005:39). Eloff and Sevenhuysen's (2011) view, signifies exposure of a black child to a different way of living, which leads to the process of adapting a western lifestyle. Furthermore, Makamo (2017) claims that "this piece embodies my continued fascination for a childhood once lived by adults". Although adults have past childhood experiences, modern technology was not part of such reflectivity. The philosophy that guides Makamo is that modern technology brings the child from a rural environment and keeps him in touch with the world.

3.4 Sub-conclusion

In sum, the discourse on Nelson Makamo's artworks in this study reveals the articulation of vernacular tropes of black African children from South African context, rooted in memories of his past and present experiences of those children. Although he executed contemporary African child which are deemed vernacular tropes, it as Brenda Greaves (2015:7) argues, because of his articulation of cultural forms. However, Makamo was more interested in imaging the black African child and their symbolic significance rather than rooting them in specific cultural groups in South Africa. However, his works reflect on different social issues that affect the sociocultural life of young African children in South Africa. In an attempt to establish his claim that he depicts Africans in his works, Makamo employed charcoal and black paints as the major medium he combined with colours to demonstrate racial identity. As Makamo (2017) notes, "I use charcoal to emphasize the identity of the imagery I depict". This he magnanimously applied on the tropes to indicate blackness as the signifier of their Africanness.

A major social issue that is relayed in Makamo's visual narrative is the problem of homelessness which results from rural-urban migration or African immigrants suffering xenophobia in search of home. Thus, Nelson Makamo's contemporary art has "maintained the practicality ... of dealing professionally [not only] with local situations" (Bhabha 1990: 6a), but continental issues. Even though street homelessness is a contemporary issue affecting some adults and children in South Africa, as Cross et al (2010:7) argues, "Johannesburg has the largest and most differentiated population" of homeless street children possibly because of poverty. Nevertheless, not all poor people who do not have formal housing in South Africa become homeless, because some find alternative as squatters on farmlands or in shacks.

In addition, his works also reflect on the idea of Ubuntu as a collective way of raising a black child. Others echo gender dimensions with a boy using technology and a girl shopping. Such gender dimension reflects vernacular arts of the past where girls are depicted fetching water and fire wood, and boys play with toys they constructed in the townships during apartheid. In Bhabha's (1990:1a) view, it hints on a "liminal image of the nation ... a particular ambivalence that hunts [on] the idea of the nation ... and the lives of those who live it".

3.5 Lebohang Sithole (b.1989)

Lebohang Sithole is a painter and print maker. He studied professional print making at the Artist Proof Studio from 2009 to 2013 when he graduated with a diploma. He currently lives in Gauteng where he is practicing full at the studio space at August House, Johannesburg. Lebohang Sithole had his first solo exhibition in 2016 at Halifax Art titled Intathakusa (Before the Sun Rises) and a group exhibition in 2017.

Given that Sithole has been producing paintings and printmaking for some years, this research focuses on tracing not only the vernacular tropes in his paintings but the ideas he represents in them between 2007 and 2016. In studying his Afrocentric paintings within the specified period, five works were purposively selected for analyses and interpretations. The works are entitled *From the Tap* (2010), *Kuze Kuse- Till Morning* (2013), *Gone Too* (2016), *Bongumusa –Giving Thanks for Blessing* (2016) and *Thousand Kisses* (2016).

The research findings reveal that Sithole appropriates vernacular tropes from rural and urban areas in South Africa. In the interviews, Sithole (2017) states that "I represent in my paintings imagery and symbols from South African environments". Thus, his works focus not only on adapting cultural imageries that reflect on memories of the past but reflect present scenes as well. However, in the context of each work the stories and the tropes as Sithole (2017) notes, reflect "mostly my childhood experiences, which narrates the situations that surrounded how I grew". When Lebohang Sithole, a native of Zulu cultural group was growing up as a child, many factors shaped his life but the most notable was his violent tendencies to other children within his neighbourhood. This forced families to restrict their children from playing with him. Consequently, Sithole (2017) recounts, "I grew up a lonely child because other children were restricted from playing with me". Nevertheless, other factors may account for his loneliness which he expressed in works titled *From the Tap* (2012) (Figure 10) and *Thousand Kisses* (2016) (Figure 14).

As Sithole (2017) further claims, “most of my works reflect loneliness in children because such stories portray my experiences”. Although loneliness is not a homogenous experience of all black African children in South Africa, his childhood experiences influence his depiction of children that reflect such situation. Aside appropriating tropes that evoke loneliness in his vernacular paintings, Sothile (2017) observes that “I also focus on children playing, because I missed that privilege during my childhood”. He is also passionate about the expressions on the faces of black South African children. In Sithole’s (2017) view, “I am conscious of the expressions on the faces of people whether they are sad, happy, smiling, laughing or joyful”. Possibly because he came from a depressed background, facial expressions convey certain social commentaries that may situate such symbolism. Sithole (2017) adds that “being conscious of my background, I am raising my child in a way he will enjoy his childhood”. Given the fact that Sithole’s childhood experiences were hurtful, he draws a sense of responsibility and commitment from them with regard to raising his son in a way that such cycle will be broken.

Aside appropriating young African children in his artworks, Sithole also focuses on depicting musical performance as well, an influence he draws from the photographs of his late paternal grandfather. In Sithole’s (2017) words, “my grandfather was a musician, who used modern instruments to sing African jazz in South African, so I reference his photographs that show him performing”. An example is the work titled *Kuze Kuse- Till Morning* (2013). However, the narratives of Lebohang Sithole’s works in Charles Ngwena (2018:3) view elicit Africanness not only through being indigenous to Africa but also through their Zulu ethnic identities. To contextualize this assertion, Sithole (2017) argues that “most of the tropes I depict in my paintings are from my neighbourhood, so they are African”.

To situate the aims he represents in his paintings, Sithole (2017) notes that “the aim I represent, seeks to convey the beauty of the black African child despite challenges”. Even though Sithole seeks to relay commentary on the beauty of the African child, his artworks interrogated seems to reflect the social issues that surround the young African child rather than beauty. Conversely, in reflecting the idea in renditions that references music, as Sithole (2017) notes, “my aim on African music reflects the framing of indigenous culture in South Africa, through which I seek to question where my grandfather learnt his music”. Although he aims to explore where his grandfather learnt jazz music, there may be no seeming response as his grandfather died the same day he was born. In Sithole’s (2017) words, “the factors that

influence my choice of appropriating cultural forms in artworks are my lonely upbringing as a child and appreciation for my grandfather's involvement in music".

Sithole employs different media in evocating the tropes in his works. In his response to the interview question on the kinds of media he uses in executing his paintings, Sithole (2017) recounts, "I use acrylic, charcoal, oil pastel and watercolour on papers". His works analysed in this study exemplifies the use of these major media he identified. To justify his continual production of paintings in spite of shift towards international tendencies like new media and installations, Sithole (2017) observes that "I still paint because I find freedom of expression in painting subjects and contents that interests me rather than consider conceptual arts". In addition, Sithole claims that this mode of engagement "makes it easy for me to frame life experiences, hardship and happiness among other concepts as well".

Given that he has been producing different works, what is the reception of his works? As Sithole (2017) responds, he affirms that "people appreciate my artworks because I do things that they can relate with. The concepts and contents of my works allow people to experience the life of the young black African child in South Africa". While his argument suggests that his works have good reception contained in positive comments, they also attract uncomfortable reactions. Thus, Sithole observes that "the strange aspects of my works which people note, is the story I frame". Though strange, such stories seem to make social commentaries on the past experiences of the artist. In the narrative of the selected contemporary African vernacular paintings produced by Lebohang Sithole, I also focus on how he employs different media in representing the vernacular tropes, and how African identities were signified. Another focus is on his personal influences in each work and frame of references, knowledge base, and ideas.

3.6 Analysis of Vernacular Tropes in Lebohang Sithole's Works

Lebohang Sithole's Afrocentric vernacular painting unfolds a rendition entitled *From the Tap* (2010) (Figure 10). Though the title of this painting suggests a scene of returning from perhaps a tap, as Mitchell (2002:2) argues, it evokes formation of individual identity rather than ethnic identity. The context shows a realistic depiction of a young black African boy carrying a yellow bucket on his head, but wearing a torn shirt within a rural black community as he walks towards the viewers. According to Sithole (2017), "this painting is a representation of a boy in rural area of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa". Although Sithole

situates the appropriation within Zulu ethnic identity, there are no symbolisms that reference elements in the culture except perhaps it draws attention to the social reality of life in the rural area.

The formal elements in Sithole's painting shows use of black lines in evocating the half-figure of the lone young black African boy. In John Peffer's (2009:7) view, the scene hints on a "context of black domestic life". Though it invokes a domestic life, it is, however, contestable that the source of water is outside the house in a contemporary era in rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. The expression on the boy's visage appears moody, while he focuses on the direction of his movement. It establishes as Sithole (2017) observes that "in my depiction of young African children, I focus on their moods". Still, shades were rendered on the right side of the boy's face bordering his right hand, which hints on shadow cast. The background of the painting is rendered with tones of red enhanced with wavy and straight black lines, this the artist introduced possibly to create the effects of aerial perspective. Although it is a realistic rendition, Sithole (2017) notes that "I am less concerned with representing details in my forms, because I am more interested in the idea the work embodies". Perhaps this stance by Sithole signifies why his depiction appears like a sketch.

Figure 10: Lebohang Sithole, *From the Tap*, 2010. Water colour, 20 x 30 cm.
(Courtesy of Lebohang Sithole)

The experience invokes a cultural history as Lockhat and Van Viekerk (2000:292) argue that "apartheid had to produce an oppressed group that would feel so dehumanised that it would lamely accept white dominance". But in this work, it is a sense of personal history of a child from the oppressed group depicted using visual elements as illustrative representations of rural experience (Adejumo 2002:166). Such illustrative representation was also evident in the

works of South African artists Dumile Feni (1939-1991) and Vumikosi Zulu (b.1947-). This style of representing everyday black life in rural areas dates back to the vernacular paintings of Durant Sihlali (1935-2004), which he produced in the 1960s.

In Sithole's (2017) view, this "work narrates my experience of searching for water". The interrogation reveals as Sandra Klopper (2006:69) observes, the artist's early experiences of life shaped by struggle in rural areas of South Africa. In Drewal's (2013:26) view, it signals that though it was a struggle of early life experience, yet it was to stress the value African culture placed on the "power of water...as a source of sustenance". Alternatively, the narrative in this painting draws attention to "the hidden injuries of class" (Bhabha 1990:2a), poverty and suffering. To situate the significance of this depiction, I argue it echoes that "little is settled in history: we invent as we remember" (Richards 2011:47). Therefore, the philosophy that guided Sithole's representation is as Sandra Klopper (2006:69) notes, "a careful excavation of personal experience [of] childhood nostalgia" of domestic life.

Aside from depicting scenes from recent past memory of his childhood experiences, *Kuze Kuse –Till Morning* (2013) (Figure 11) unfolds differently. As Ogbechie (2016:93) observes, Sithole employed indigenous Zulu philosophical concepts to introduce this vernacular painting. It invokes the subject of entertainment which took place "at local hotels and restaurants" (Devroop 2007:5) in the townships. The context of Sithole's depiction, in Kunle Filani's (2018:20) view, shows a full standing black African man in "a peculiar modernist style" holding a saxophone. His expressive posture suggests a rhythmic movement, which invokes the idea of a South African jazz performer. He is adorned with a black hat, shirt and pair of trousers which symbolises English wears. Sithole (2017) claims it reflects "inspiration from his paternal grandfather's involvement with music". Given that the portrayal was not individuated with name or demonstrates a realistic representation, it is contestable to establish his identity as Sithole's grandfather. But a performer engaged with jazz music.

The formal structure reveals that Sithole employed a medium he is familiar with – ink on paper, which he used not merely in painting but in representing the lines. As David Summers (2009:476) notes, I argue that the mode of linear depiction creates an illusion that is apparently sculptural. Despite a colourful background rendered with purple and orange colours, the artist's use of lines creates variation in aesthetic on the background and immediate foreground. The performer's posture invokes the notion that "the African in his traditional beliefs expresses [himself] ... artistically in songs, music and dance" (Omatseye

and Emeriewen 2010:541). The experience of this performance traces a cultural history of a recent past apartheid era in South Africa when a black thriving jazz musician was not allowed to play to cross-cultural audience or in places that could attract better welfare package (Peffer 2009:xvii). However, as Chatradari Devroop (2007:5) notes, if a non-white musician was allowed to enter the entertainment venue, he would "leave through either the fire exit, the kitchen, or the exit by the toilets". In tracing the idea in this work *Kuze Kuse-Till Morning*, I argue that it reflects as Sithole (2017) notes that, "my depiction is a reflection on the social life of black South Africans because it reflects African jazz sang with local songs but foreign musical instruments". This idea in Swinson's (2010:61) view, suggests that "music provide[s] a vital interface between African traditional culture and modern technology". Thus, Sithole's rendition is not just an interface between African traditional culture and modern technology but symbolises cultural evolution.

Figure 11: Lebohang Sithole, *Kuze Kuse-Till Morning,* 2013. Ink on paper, 35 x 50 cm.
(Courtesy of Lebohang Sithole)

It might be argued, in Chatradari Devroop's (2009:7) view that, it hints on a musician who contributed to the survival of jazz as an art form, by remaining in South Africa during apartheid without going into exile. Hence, his philosophical view in this work centres on the preservation of indigenous African jazz. In *Gone Too* (2015) (Figure 12), as Sithole (2017)

claims, is a title that reflects "my experience during youthful days in rural black Zulu community, after the only family house was sold. So, when I recounted the properties my family had sold, the last of which was the house, I exclaimed *gone too*".

Sithole used mixed media to execute this expressionistic depiction which references a black South African youth walking away from the viewers in a pastoral landscape. Although the depiction shows a full imagery of the boy pushing his suitcase in front as he walks away, he occupies the middle of the "pictorial space" (Summers 2009:476). He is adorned with English attire, a white face cap on his head, with part of his uncovered hair painted black. Given the fact that his adornment is with English attire, it denotes hybridity that occurs in "the process of cultural mixture" (Papastergiadis 2005:40). There is, however, evident use of lines that delineates the trope, whose movement in Papastergiadis' (2005:39) view, hints on the idea of "mobility in contemporary culture".

Figure 12: Lebohang Sithole, *Gone Too*, 2015. Mixed media, 50 x 70 cm
(Courtesy of Lebohang Sithole)

Though the reading shows evidence of perspective at the foreground, the effects of depth and distance at the background is not evident as it is painted with parches of red and yellow with tones of charcoal to create the effect of aerial perspective. However, the depiction signals "combination [of] 'history and memory' [which appears to be] ... something of an

overcooked culture industry. [Yet it] ... does not necessarily devalue it as a way of approaching contemporary South African art" (Richards 2005:47). Rather, it demonstrates as Homi Bhabha (1990:4a) argues that "it is from such narrative position [of] culture and nation ... the painterly, the past and the present that [the rendition] ... seeks to affirm" its position.

The experience depicted recalls the history of the Natal Colony in 1855, when the "Colony ... empowered magistrates to remove squatters from public or private land" (Cross et al 2010:13). Cross et al (2010:14) argue that, when the numbers of homeless rural population increased they "gravitated to the towns in search of work to substitute for the land-based livelihoods to which they no longer had access". However, as Cross et al further note, "By 1935 a report on the 'Question of Residence of Natives in Urban Areas' noted the presence of a floating population alongside the relatively stable and settled black population in all the country towns of the Transvaal". On the other hand, it invokes in Sean Morrow's (2010:51) words, the history rather than "stories of the vagrant and street people of twenty-first century South Africa". It seems such vagrant activities have continued to define the rural-urban space in South Africa. Although as Sithole (2017) claims, the depiction reflects "my childhood experience, on the situations that surrounded how I grew", I argue in Sean Morrow's view that, it rather "tell[s] us much about the broader society of which ... [he is] part". It echoes a narrative on "severe economic crisis", not merely in the rural areas but of distress in a family (Morrow 2010:55). Alternatively, it invokes the idea of social issues in Cross et al's (2010:14) view, which exemplifies one who "wandered the roads ... looking for temporary jobs or domestic service work". Furthermore, it speaks to the aim of rural-urban migration in South Africa. In Ntombela's (2011:14) words, it hints on the "one way street that siphons [a] young [person] ... from the rural to deposit [him] into the urban areas". Consequently, it echoes migration as a social phenomenon not only within South Africa but as an occurrence within Africa and from Africa to other countries in the diaspora.

As Bhabha (1990:6a) argues, migration presents "the 'ethical home truths' of humanistic experience with the advantages of developing knowledge of acting in a dispersed global system". The further reading of Lebohang Sithole's African vernacular paintings unfolds a different rendition, which shows a realistic painting *Bongumusa–Giving Thanks for Blessings* (2016) (Figure 13). The title creates a cultural identity, with the adoption of Zulu ethno-linguistic concept. Such use of African indigenous language as a title of this work demonstrates the cultural influence on the artist. Although the title associated with this work signifies a thankful heart, according to Sithole (2017), "I depicted the portrait of my son as a

symbol of gratitude to God, for the privilege of hosting my first solo exhibition, which was a dream come true". Despite Sithole's stance, I argue that this mode of portraiture does not conform in African art, which Borgatti (1990:35) argues is "individuated with name and context". Rather, its association with the subject of thanks giving exemplifies Borgatti's (1990:37) view, the construction of "social identity rather than personal identity". It thus suggests that an artist may associate a vernacular trope with a subject and a narrative in ways that appear unrelated, yet making social commentary that is significant.

However, the rendition unfolds a realistic face of an African boy, suggesting in Jean Borgatti's (1990:35) view, a "portraiture that convey[s] personal identity" of the boy. In representing the face of the boy, bright colours were used on the right side to signify the direction of light, while dark colours were employed to create shades on the left side. Though the effects of lines are visible in the representation of the head warmer and jacket covering the boy, the dark brown colour, with parches of red and yellow are more evident than the thin lines. However, as Joanne Eicher (1972:519) maintains, the depiction of attire is aimed at conveying a trope to the audience. Hence, the mode of covering over the boy suggests not merely aesthetic, but a painting executed during winter in South Africa. However, in comparison to other Sithole's works interrogated in this study, the portrait of his son shows more detailed treatment. This demonstrates that even though Sithole (2017) argues that, he is not bothered about representing details in his works, it does not apply to all his paintings.

Figure 13: Lebohang Sithole, *Bongumusa (Giving Thanks for Blessing)*, 2016. Mixed media, 200 x 150 cm. Artists Collection (Photograph by Lebohang Sithole)

Although this depiction invokes the cultural history of portraiture in South Africa, I argue that modern and contemporary South African artists have in different ways depicted portraits of black adults. An article titled *South African Art* (2018:1) notes that Gerard Benghu (1910-1990) depicted realistic portraits that were not individuated with names. Examples are portraits of rural Bhaca life and culture entitled *"Portrait of an Old Man"* and *"Portrait of a Young Woman"*. However, there are others who represented portraits that were identified with names of "specific individual[s]" (Borgatti 1990:38). In situating the aim, Sithole (2017) notes that it "was employed as a symbol of innocence for my solo exhibition at Halifax art gallery, Parkhurst, Johannesburg in 2016". Rather, I argue that it does not appear as a symbol of thanks giving but of a child that is well cared for by the parents. Thus, it establishes in Sithole's (2017) words that, "being conscious of my past lonely and hurtful upbringing, I am raising my son in a way he will enjoy not to have a repeat of my experience". Therefore, in Richards' (2011:47) words is the knowledge of Sithole's past. Because historical knowledge "may be helpful to us [when we] read it, interpret it and possibly even deal with it". Hence, Lebohang Sithole's idea, in not wanting his dilemma to repeat in his son's life echoes a positive response in dealing with his history.

Alternatively, the reading in Nsamenang's (1987:285) view, suggests that an African child is valued not only for the prestige and respect he brings but the companionship he provides. Sithole's philosophical concept in this painting is guided by the cultural value of parental care for each child in contemporary era. In *Thousand Kisses* (2016) (Figure 14), Sithole reflects on the subject of romantic expression of affection. It, however, evokes multiple expressions of love, rather than cultural identities. The context reveals a young black African boy seated but bordered by two standing imageries that were kissing him. Sithole (2017) identifies the imageries as angels. Although an artist depicts costume on his imageries to convey identity to the viewer or audience (Eicher 1972:519); I argue as Jean Borgatti (1990:37) notes that, such attempt hints on "the means used to specify the image or the mode of depiction". Therefore, even though in Don Stewart's (2019:1) words, "angels do not have a physical form like human", yet the culturally held view of angels are beings wearing "long white robes". This cultural conception is exemplified in this depiction, in which he Africanised the angels not with African form but in referencing the African scene.

In Sithole's (2017) view, "one angel is conceived to be from the mother's family and the other angel from the father's family". Their heterogeneous presence is to fill the vacuum the absence of both parents created in the life of the lonely African boy. Such depiction as

Bhabha (1990:4a) posits, reflect "a process of hybridity, [which] incorporat[es] new people in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning". Thus, from an Afrocentric perspective, the images of the 'angels' speaks to the cultural concept of undying motherhood and fatherhood. This implies that a child's parents are not only the biological parents; a child has many "mothers" and "fathers" within a normal African family structure. In the absence of biological parents there is always a relation, for example, the mother's sisters and the father's brothers. In fact, even the women from the father's side are a child's "fathers" and likewise the males from the mother's side are the child's mother. However, the cultural history traces as Lockhat and Van Niekerk (2000:294) notes that certain histories account for the absence of both parents of black children who grow up without father or mother during apartheid and post-apartheid eras.

Figure 14: Lebohang Sithole, *Thousand Kisses*, 2016. Dripoint Monoprint, 35 x 50 cm. (Photograph by Lebohang Sithole)

As Sooryamoorthy and Makhoba (2016:315) argue that, "Apartheid policies separated men from the families" because they had to leave their rural residences to work in the mines. Besides, Motepe (2006:139) observes that "in times past it was usually war or neglect or famine or poverty that resulted in a child being orphaned". But recent past histories show that many children in the 1990s and 2000s are orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, as Sithole (2017) observes "the art piece is about caring for the boy's need of love". Arguably, the black African boy's need for love was heightened with the absence of both parents as the child grew up in his rural black–Zulu community. It might be argued that the loneliness is

occasioned because of rural-urban migration, where a mother leaves her child with "gogo" in Nontobeko Ntombela's (2011:15) words, "move[s] to the cities to access opportunities" for earning a living. But in Bhabha's (1990:3a) words, it indicates "the assign[ing of] new meanings and different directions to the process of historical change" in parenting. The philosophy that guided Sithole in this work is borne out of his desire for entrenchment of family values where both parents except otherwise live with their children. In Richards' (2011:47) words, the aim of the rendition is not merely "what we might mean by 'history and memory'" but it is best situated as "cultural crisis", which causes hurts and pains to a young African boy because of the absence of both parents.

In addition, Ward et al (2015:69) observe that "whether [a] child live[s] with both parents, one ... or neither parent – can have marked influences on" the child. Therefore, the aim hints on the significance of the rendition, as Ward et al further arguing that "parenting remains critical to [a] young [child's] sense of belonging, construction of [his or her] sexuality, [his or her] interface with wider society and to [his or her] emotional and physical safety". If not properly handled, it portends danger and relays a social commentary on the proper upbringing of the black South African child in the present and future. Alternatively, the imageries resonate with some of the many "mothers" and "fathers" in African relationality filling the gap in the absence of the child's parents.

3.7 Sub-conclusion

In summary, the art historical discourse on appropriations of vernacular tropes in Sithole's artworks reflects the experiences of young black African boys rooted in South African space. Nevertheless, the symbolism in his works are deemed vernacular tropes not in the sense of indigenous African art, but as a rethink in the use of old terminology in narrating cultural appropriations in contemporary arts (Gupta and Adams 2018:2; Greaves 2015:7). Although four of his works interrogated show articulation of young black African boy as a dominant trope, which narrates memories of his recent past childhood experiences, the fifth work depicts an African man performing jazz music. These two dominant cultural symbolisms define the major influences on Lebohang Sithole's representations in vernacular paintings.

However, while several reasons maybe advanced for the loneliness and suffering of a black African child in KwaZulu-Natal rural areas, in Sandra Klopper's (2006:69) words, such hint on a "complex relationship to a sense of history". This sense of history invokes disruption of family life caused by paternal absentism, inability of a single mother to rear a child alone

because of lack of support from the father, and labour migration (Sooryamoorthy and Makhoba 2016:315). Consequently, not only the father but the mother is forced to migrate to urban areas in search of employment, thereby leaving behind a lonely child. In narrating the conditions in the rural areas, Lockhat and Van Nierkerk (2000:296) refer to it as "impoverished rural areas" possibly because there are no means of livelihood. Given the facts of his past hurtful childhood experiences, Sithole seems to draw lessons that make him manifest love and a sense of paternal responsibility to his son. Nevertheless, as Nsamenang (1987:286) argues, "the objective of the father is to promote the best interest of his family" in general, not only the son.

Other social issues narrated in Sithole's works are wandering in search of accommodation because of rural homelessness and African jazz. As Drewal (2013:23) argues, African "jazz, with its essence in spontaneous, creative improvisation [has] its undisputed roots in African and Afro-Caribbean vibrations in the hearts, minds, and bodies of enslaved Africans carried to the Americas over 400 years". Even though Drewal's argument traces a historical trajectory of jazz to Africa, in South Africa, musical artists who remained in spite of apartheid exclusion contributed to the preservation of the music genre.

3.8 Conclusion and Comparison of the Aims in Makamo and Sithole's Works

While both artists appropriated generic tropes of the black African child from indigenous South African space, their narratives echo diverse social phenomena. However, in Devin Griffiths' (2017:491) view, in a comparative analysis as much as possible identify the likenesses and differences, and as far as possible explain the causes. Therefore, I attempt a comparison of the aims that manifest similarities and differences not necessarily following a chronological order in which the works were analysed.

The interrogation of Makamo's work *Somewhere I Belong* (2011) and Sithole's renditions *Gone Too* (2015) hold different themes on Africanness not only on migration but rural and urban homelessness, which Sean Morrow (2010:51) argues, "is part of the larger phenomena of poverty, migration, changes in family structure". While Makamo's depiction of three youths sleeping on the street echoes as Nontobeko Ntombela (2011:15) argues, an aim that reflects redefining a sense of home in urban areas and recreates a sense of belonging, suggesting that anywhere an African youth finds to sleep is home. Sithole's wandering youth exemplifies in Ntombela's (2011:14) view, the process of migration from a rural area moving to an urban area. And, as Ogbechie (2009:140) notes a major reason for such movement far

away from home is a search for job. Although rural and urban homelessness are not confined to experiences of these young African children referenced but a contemporary phenomenon even in the west. In Ruth Simbao's (2011:41) view, it narrates the "lived experience of blackness or Africanness".

The aims that unfold in Makamo's depiction titled *Moment Alone* (2011) and Sithole's painting entitled *From the Tap* (2010), in Chatradari Devroop's (2007:5) view, reflects African form of training a black child to run errands. Whereas Makamo's aim echoes making a black African child learn the act of taking responsibility of shopping early in life, and value in Ntonbela's (2011:15) view, the mobility between the rural and urban spaces or "growing xenophobic fervour directed at immigrants and refugees" (Richards 2011:77), the aim in Sithole's painting traces the attitude of sending a black African child on domestic errand in Zulu culture. Both works, however, suggest as Colin Richards (2011:49) notes, African value in turning a child in the direction of the human he or she reflect. But in *Smiles* (2015) by Makamo and *Bongumusa-Giving Thanks for Blessing* (2016) by Sithole, though both works reflect on issues of doing things from the heart, they differ as Makamo's narrates an aim on the ambivalence in interpersonal relationship, and Sithole's signifies hearty reference to God and parental responsibility to his son. However, Manaka (1987:15) indicate that, these aims hints on not merely the expression of the inner feelings [but gratitude] of Africans as human being".

Conversely, the aims in two of their works in Colin Richards' (2006:62) view, reflects on nuanced but fundamental exploration of "African humanism" as a theme on Africanness. Whereas Makamo's vernacular painting *I Belong to the World* (2016), resonates with the idea of ubuntu as it relates to collective or communal upbringing of a black African child, Sithole's rendition entitled *Thousand Kisses* (2016), gives clue to angelic care, comfort and companionship, a situation Colin Richards (2011:47) observes as in the face of parental and societal inhumanity. Alternatively, it evokes as Lockhat and Van Vierkerk (2000:294) argues, children growing up without fathers and mothers. Thus, both aims unpack the consequences of loneliness, hurts and pains caused to an African child when both parents are not there and others within the community become individualistic in assisting with needed training, love, and companionship. As Nsamenang (1987:287) notes, these suggest that certain priorities, death or changes in value prevent either a father or mother "from being the guides, companions, and models for their children".

Furthermore, the comparison of the aims in Makamo's *Young Soul* (2016) and Sithole's *Kuze Kuse-Till Morning* (2013) reflects the hybridity of modern technology in music. But in the mode of technology and how they were adopted differs. While Makamo's rendition draws attention to a young black African child adopting technology in listening to music, Sithole's depiction echoes the adoption of saxophone in engagement with Afro-jazz (Devroop 2007:5). Although both works present African scenes, as Ruth Simbao (2011:39) notes, in "portrayal of Africanness", they draw on musical equipment and technology with roots in Europe/whiteness.

In conclusion, even though both artists articulate the trope of the African child in the evocation of their twenty first century artworks, the ideas they represent relay different social issues that confront the African child in South Africa. However, as Nettleton (2011:13a) argues, the expressions are seen not merely as the essence of what it is to African but the realities heterogeneous Africans confront. The common aims expressed in the context of the works include internal migration, collective child training, relating with people from a sincere heart and parental devotion to child. On the other hand, other aims echoes recalling childhood memories to define our present and future and love for African music.

CHAPTER FOUR

African Vernacular Imageries in the Sculptures of Contemporary South African Artists, Pitika Ntuli and Sinethemba Ngubane

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the discussion focuses on Pitika Ntuli and Sinethemba Ngubane who are contemporary South African sculptors. While both artists appropriate cultural imageries in the making of their sculptures and installations, their modes of portrayal and medium employed vary significantly. Their works are deemed African vernacular for representing cultural imageries that are rooted in heterogeneous African cultures. However, the factors that influenced their depictions are, as Colin Richards (2011:49) observes, a reflection on manifold reworking of past and present acts of inhumanity in South Africa. In Stefan Berger's (2008:3) view, the stories the two artists tell in their vernacular sculptures are about national belonging and being in South Africa. Although the past cruelty of the apartheid regime to black African men and women appears to be a lost past, some of Ntuli's depictions reflect invocation of history (Richards 2011:47) for the present.

On the other hand, Ngubane's works reflect "protest art" (Neke 1999:8) for lack of acceptance of children born intersex in Zulu culture and the ambivalent ill-treatment of murder and rituals targeted at one or more of them. The ambivalence is because the family call for the killing of an intersex child, that such a child is an abomination, yet surprisingly use the tissues or organs for *muti* ritual. As Rob Turrell (2001:24) argues, Ngubane's installations resound that "ritual murder appears distressing" to her because she believes in the right to life.

Even though the making of sculptures in African art is traceable to the pre-colonial era, I argue that sculptures are "as old as humanity" (Meintjes 2012:3). As Julia Meintjes argues "the language of sculpture is ancient. As a medium of visual communication, it crosses cultural differences and history where language cannot". Therefore, contemporary vernacular sculptures are, in Anitra Nettleton's (2011:13a) view, understood as works of art with stylistic and formal cultural elements that speak symbolic messages to the audience. However, the styles, Nettleton further observes, "vary from naturalism to ... different expressionist forms". The adoption of vernacular in narrating the contemporary sculptures of South African artists is not merely a rethink in using old terminology to open new debates, but in narrating articulation of cultural imagery in visual cultures.

4.2 Pitika Ntuli (b.1942)

Pitika Ntuli is not only a painter but also a sculptor, writer, and poet. He is a Professor of Fine Arts and the History of Arts as well as an adjunct Professor of Sociology. Ntuli was released from prison into exile, during which he traversed several diaspora countries within Africa and beyond. He sojourned in UK from where he left to study at the Pratt Institute in New York, USA and obtained a Masters of Fine Arts and a Masters of Arts in Comparative Industrial Relations and Industrial Sociology. He returned to South Africa from exile in 1994 and took up a lecturing job at the Department of Fine Arts, Wits University. Although he participated in several exhibitions in Europe and the US, his first exhibition in South Africa was in 2010 and was titled *Scent of Invisible Footprints*.

Although Ntuli has been producing sculptures for over four decades, this research focuses on interrogating the African vernacular rooted imageries in his contemporary sculptures produced between 2007 and 2016. Ntuli's contemporary sculptures are read as vernacular because he appropriates in them cultural imageries that are rooted in South African cultures. Five of his works were purposively sampled. The selected works are entitled *Marikana* (2012/13), *Silverton Three* (2013), *Mandela and the Rainbow Children* (2015), *The Torture of a Woman Giving Birth in Prison* (2015), and *Shaka Zulu* (2015). The works have all been analysed using visual hermeneutics theory, formal analysis, and cultural history methodologies. To establish the ideas in each artwork, I focus the reading on form and content since form is insufficient for determining the idea in a work of art (Filani 1998:33).

Although the research findings reveal that Ntuli's contemporary vernacular sculptures reflect past and present experiences of black South Africans, Ntuli (2010:20) observes that "my symbolisms show the faces of my people, their voices, their movements, their cries, their laughter, their struggles, and triumphs". So, while such works, according to Ntuli (2010:20) are "infused with ... African sensibilities", they hint on his response to the social issues in South Africa. The aims of those renditions in Ntuli's (2010:17) view are to engage the world with desired meanings and invoke viable emotions. Possibly, his experiences during the struggle against apartheid and imprisonment on death row left hurting and hunting memories in him. Ntuli (2010:22) posits that I was "carry[ing] echoes in my eardrums, memories in my mind". His depiction *Torture of a Woman Giving Birth in Prison* (2015) possibly reflects one of such memories and echoes of agony in his eardrums.

Aside from works that are influenced by the cries and movements of black South Africans, Antoinette and Pitika Ntuli (2010:11) note that, "Ntuli is an African artist who is acutely aware of the significance of all things African, including his ancestors, the interconnectedness of natural and human worlds ... in shaping his art". To demonstrate how the interconnectedness of human and natural worlds shaped Ntuli's art, Koloane (2010:35) argues that, "most of Pitika's sculptures are anthropomorphic". The reason is, "in African worldviews animals are not separate from humans". Thus, you will discover that "each Nguni or Sotho family has an animal totem". Possibly, that world view accounts for shaping the anthropomorphic sculpture entitled *Shaka Zulu* (2015) (Figure 19).

To narrate his engagement with tradition in Zulu culture, Ntuli (2010:28) claims that "in my culture when an individual or the community as a whole is faced with a crisis in the form of illness, or if demons wreak havoc in the lives of the people, the individual/community turns to Isangoma–the healer who will in turn 'throw bones' to divine the problem". Although Isangoma is a Zulu name for identifying traditional healers, it is adopted in identifying such practitioners in southern Africa. But, to show the influence of this traditional practice on Ntuli, he has heaps of bones as an installation in his studio. According to Ntuli, "my bone sculptures seek to divine myths and mythologies. I divine the state of our nation with my bone sculptures". However, the outcome of his divinations is not documented because they are not within the scope of this study.

While he appropriates cultural imagery from the South African context, Antoinette and Pitika Ntuli (2010:10) note that he is concerned in demonstrating African identity as the major drive for such appropriations. Thus, Antoinette and Pitika Ntuli (2010:11) conclude that "he is an African artist whose work is redolent of African influence and abundant references to Africa". For the mere fact that his works show abundant references to Africa does not necessarily establish African identity except the content and context are interrogated to narrate such a stance. In tracing the ideas in his works, Ntuli (2010:25) argues that "ideas are not born in isolation. My brain or body responds to the external world, builds storage of facts and feelings that must be referenced for the world to interact with because art is a language that allows me to express disagreeable ideas agreeably". I argue that not all viewers of artworks or Ntuli's works may interact well with his works for, except they understand and perceive the cultural and historical facts the works convey, their subjective interpretations may frame ideas that are not related to his.

In addition to creating installation sculptures, he also sculpts large stones. As Ntuli (2010:20) notes, "I chose a medium that suited me best: sculpture". Therefore, with his installations and sculptures, Ntuli is "leaving trails of artworks that speak where words fail". So, his commitment to using installations and sculptures as a medium in communicating the facts of his time makes his works worth interrogating. Shlomo Shoham (cited by Ntuli 2010:20) notes that "If the individual has heeded the call to ... embark on a search for ... creative expression; he still has to find the mode and medium of creativity optimally suited to his specific psycho-social configuration". In narrating the media he uses in making his installation sculptures, Ntuli (2010:17) argues that "I can make bold to say in my art, 'Western found objects' are employed with an African spirit". Although Ntuli's installations are responses to African scenes and issues, his argument establishes that he uses foreign found objects in narrating such stories rooted in South African space. This is evident in *Marikana* (2012/13), *Silverton Three* (2013) and *Shaka Zulu* (2015). To support Ntuli's stance on the media he employs in executing installation sculptures, Koloane (2010:135) observes that his works show "a variety of found objects". Therefore, given the fact that his works and mode of renditions are contemporary sculptures, it destablises any claim of reading them as a continuation of historical vernacular African art.

In terms of reception of Ntuli's sculptures, I argue that there has been local and international reception for his works, especially during the years he spent in exile and after returning to South Africa. Since his return to South Africa, his artworks have enjoyed a good reception. Examples of his works exhibited in public spaces include *Silverton Three* (2013) at *Soweto*, and *Marikana* (2012/13), which was a response to the Marikana killing of black African miners. Other works in this study are part of a sponsored project Ntuli was working on.

4.3 Analysis of Vernacular Tropes in Pitika Ntuli's Sculptures and Installations

His installation sculpture entitled *Marikana* (2012/13) (Figure 15), shows mixed found objects. The title "Marikana" introduces where striking miners were massacred in August 2012, and still hints at a rural place of the Tswana cultural group (Naicker 2015:99) in the North-West Province of South Africa. This was an installation in an open space in South Africa shortly after the grievous display of power by the police. The composition reveals three disparate vernacular imageries evocated with a variety of found objects which reference striking mineworkers before they were massacred. This exemplifies a worrisome occurrence

that might be linked with "the horror of apartheid [had it not] been officially laid to rest" (Neke 1999:8).

The image on the left side is, in Ntuli's (2017) words, "the leader of the striking miners". Though this is Ntuli's claim, I, however, argue that it could be a different mine worker rather than the leader. However, his head is constructed with a gearbox of a car, perhaps to signify how effective he was in thinking and directing the affairs of the miners. The facial features constructed on the head signal a stern gaze at viewers, with mouth agape, possibly while he articulated reasons for the strike action. The green plastic container covering him, as Pijoos (2017:1) notes, hints at a subjective identity of "the image of Mgcineni Noki *aka* The Man in the Green Blanket". Although Pijoos' identification establishes the identity of the leader, it also locates his Xhosa cultural identity. The other two vernacular symbolisms were also created with found objects such as was evident in the oeuvres of Ezrom Legae (1938-1999). Ntuli's adoption of found objects in creating installations is not limited to plastic containers but also includes exhaust pipes and other scraps. As Koloane (2010:135) notes, his works show "uncanny utilisation of motor parts characterised by linear projections of entangled exhaust pipes and other tubular articulations, always offbeat in nature".

Figure 15: Pitika Ntuli, *Marikana,* 2012/13. Mixed media, varying sizes. Artist's collection (Courtesy of Ntuli)

This experience invokes the history of the massacre of protesting mineworkers before they were shot at by security police. Even though the Marikana incident happened in post-apartheid South Africa, a similar massacre took place on 21st March 1960, at Sharpeville,

near Johannesburg. An article titled *Sharpeville* (1960) states that "the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) started new campaigns against the hated pass system. So, on the morning of 21st March 1960, 5000 people gathered at the Sharpeville police station to start the campaign". Though they were angry, they were peaceful and quiet when suddenly, the police opened fire on them without warning and this led to the death of sixty nine people. It also invokes the Soweto uprising of June 16, 1976. However, in this interactive installation, the philosophy that seems to guide Ntuli is one that speaks in outright condemnation of the killing of the mineworkers rather than exploring the option of dialogue.

Although the aim, in Ntuli's (2017) view, is a condemnation of the killings, Gael Neke (1999:2) elaborates that it gives a clue to a "protest art [which] ran a course of rejection or at best critical ambivalence". Alternatively, in Sandra Klopper's (2013:137) words, the aim hints at a massacre caused by "the greed of wealthy mining magnates" who did not allow for recourse to resolving the wage dispute strike despite its peaceful mode, so as to continue their exploitation. Therefore, as Mitchell (2002:2) argues, it serves as "a dynamic medium" of cultural weapon in a public space for viewers to relate with in calling for justice. Similarly, *Silverton Three* (2013) (Figure 16), in Mitchell's (2002:1) view, is a title that hints on the formation of individual identities in South Africa. The identity of the three men suggests Wilfred Madela, Humphrey Makhubo, and Stephen Mafoko

The stylised vernacular sculpture located in Soweto depicts a man whose right hand, pointing skywards, holds a gun likened to an AK-47 thus evoking "the armed struggle" (Ntuli 2015:1). Although the dustbin lid on the left hand seems to symbolise a shield held by a warrior, Ntuli, however, argues that it "speaks to the cultural struggles generally referred to as the Soweto Uprising". It is however contestable for Ntuli to associate the dustbin lid with a different struggle because that symbol obviously evokes the idea of a shield. Perhaps he acknowledges that struggle to make the siting of the monument in Soweto relevant.

In narrating the media employed in this work, several scrap materials were employed in the creation of this full standing image that is above life-size. Though the head, made of gearbox, has tripartite faces, it appears to be a symbolic representation of "the three freedom fighters and captures three moods – calm determination; confrontation; and surprise" (Ntuli 2015:1). The gearbox head, as Ntuli further observes, "symbolise[s] the working of the brain, significantly the brain of a military struggle". A feather like symbol atop the head, on which a dove perches, does not merely symbolise peace, but "a war feather ala Shaka, Maqoma,

Sekhukhuni and other traditional leaders who resisted colonial incursions into our sacred land" Ntuli (2015:1).

Furthermore, a solid iron from an earthmover is welded to the symbolic body of this imagery to create the torso and limbs. Notwithstanding the interpretations of the different parts employed in constructing this vernacular imagery, in John Peffer's (2009:42) view, it demonstrates "expressive distortion of the human form". The symbolism stands on two solid metals welded to the upper frame which symbolises the body. Ntuli (2015:1) argues that the earthmover "symbolises the struggle for land and the imperative for its eventual redistribution". It is arguable however to associate the earthmover used as the massive legs of the monument with the struggle for land. It nonetheless reveals an attempt at relaying a present political commentary that is beyond the past which his visual narrative seeks to make. Ntuli further notes that "the centrality of space [at] this moment is characterised by a womb-like opening in the centre of the Monument, symbolic of the birth of a new, caring society".

Figure 16: Pitika Ntuli, *Silverton Three*, 2013. Metal, 5 metres. Soweto.
(Courtesy of Artist)

Although the reading "explored form and content" (Filani 2018:17) of overt political rendition, the category of the present experience invokes the cultural history of the three black South African men who were killed on January 25, 1980. They were until police killed them during apartheid, members of the African National Congress, Umkhonto we Sizwe (Mafeno 2013:1). According to *South African History Online* (2011:1) they

> ... were allegedly on their way to carry out a planned MK sabotage mission on petrol depots at Watloo near Mamelodi. En route, the trio realised they were being tailed by the police. In an attempt to escape, they took refuge in a branch of Volkskas Bank in Silverton, Pretoria. They held 25 civilians in the bank hostage, making a number of demands, including a meeting with State President Vorster, the release of Nelson Mandela and a man called Mange, as well as R100, 000 in cash and an aircraft to fly them to Maputo.

Rather than grant their requests, a team of security police stormed the bank and killed the three black South Africans. As Ntuli (2015:1) notes, "the Monument captures the significance of the siege in re-igniting the hope of the oppressed". Given that the monument symbolises a commemorative vernacular sculpture in honour of the "fallen heroes" for their role in the liberation movement (Koloane 2010:140; Peffer 2009: xviii), it might also be argued that the formal elements of this depiction are in dissonance with commemorative sculpture in African art. Somewhat, in Combrinck's (2013:11) view, it "tell[s] a story of courage, [and] self-sacrifice" displayed by a soldier. In addition, I argue, as Opper's (2010:45) does, that this public art becomes not just a vehicle for revealing the multiplicity of hidden stories of the liberation struggle, but the silenced histories of oppression. Africanness is indicated not merely for reflecting black South Africans who were indigenous to the continent, but, as Combrinck (2013:11) argues, because Ntuli "ingrained into the monument Adinkra and Dogon symbols of reconciliation, bravery, fearlessness, and humility". Consequently, these symbols demonstrate the wider context of African identities in other African nations. Conversely, in *The Torture of a Woman Giving Birth in Prison* (2015) (Figure 3), we see a different "thematic thrust" (Filani 2018:20). It unravels areas of power abuse during the recent past apartheid government (Neke 1999:8).

The context depicts a stylised but expressive vernacular imagery which references a black African woman standing but bowed with both hands raised with the head of a baby around her stomach. According to Ntuli (2017), "she was giving birth to a baby while in prison yet beaten by a policeman during the apartheid period". The work, however, gives dissonance to torture as no depiction shows the act of brutality. Ntuli (2017) argues that "the two hands

were raised in self-protection and defense from the several stripes the policeman was laying on her. While the expression on her face suggests courageous affirmation to the police officer, 'the stripes will not make me cry'". Despite the height of oppression and torture, her hope of giving birth to her baby did not dim. However, her posture and facial expression recall similar mode of depiction that was evident in the works of South African artist Dumile Feni (1942-1991), who represented man like beast.

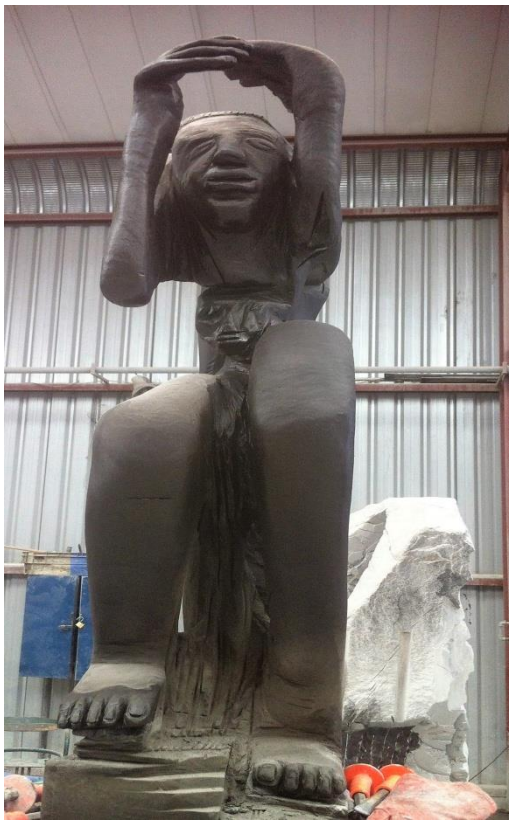

Figure 17: Pitika Ntuli, *The Torture of A Woman Giving Birth in Prison,* 2015. Stone, 1.7 Metre. Artists Collection (Photographed by Sule A. James)

The medium employed in executing this sculpture is a large stone that is about life size. In Ntuli's (2010:26) view, the process of production is described as "entering into a conversation with a piece of granite stone". During his encounter with the stone, series of destruction takes place as he begins to use a sharp angle grinder to cut out unwanted parts. The process continues with the use of a chisel to shape out different aspects of the symbolism. From the top of this stone sculpture, a close look at the hands reveals that they were shaped differently, the one on the right side appearing bigger, perhaps suggesting that it is swollen as a result of the severe torture by security police. This invokes the idea of a "body in distress as a sign of the inhumane condition" (Peffer 2009:41). In the depiction of

her legs, it seems the artist gave no consideration for proportion, as her right leg is carved bigger than the left leg.

In narrating the cultural history of this depiction, in Naidoo's (2010:123) words, "Ntuli's sculptural piece ... is inseparable from his country's history and his experiences". Before Ntuli was released into exile, he "was in a death cell at Matsapa prison in Swaziland" during the period of apartheid (Manaka 1987:12). Possibly, it recalls one of the past cries echoing in his eardrums. But before Ntuli was imprisoned for political struggles, between the 1960s and 1980s, cases of the security police detaining black South African men, women and children opposed to apartheid without trials were unsavoury (Merrett 1990:28). Aside from imprisoning them, the security police acted with impunity while interrogating and torturing them. Commenting on this phenomenon, Christopher Merrett (1990:30) observes that "Women constitut[ed] 10% of the detainee population in late 1986 [and many] encountered specific problems, in particular, miscarriages after assault, [and] tear gassing during pregnancy". The consequences of such torture resulted, as Merrett further notes, in "at least one fetus ... [being] found in a cell". According to Ntuli (2017), "because of the brutality meted out to this woman while giving birth, her baby came out in an abnormal way appearing around her stomach, rather than fall to the ground". While Ntuli's stance seems contestable, to imagine that police brutality did not cause stillbirth but abnormal delivery, Peffer (2009:60) argues that such "brutal acts ... were rarely seen unless you were there in the jail cell [or] you had scanned the newspapers for clues". Thus the philosophy that guided Ntuli's production is perseverance in adversity.

In Ntuli's (2017) view, the "aim of this depiction is a reflection on the torture of pregnant women in detention during apartheid". Alternatively, as Gael Neke (1999:8) observes, the idea hints at "Apartheid ... reworked through the current concerns of examining ... history". Therefore, in Nettleton's (2011:141b) words, it "aimed for simplified forms considered purer, more truthful and more closely linked to the emotion of the artist". Further, as Sandra Klopper (2013:137) argues, it "capture[s] the emotionally challenging experience of ... living in apartheid South Africa". However, this social reality in South Africa is not a representation of socio-cultural activity but of a culture that was defined differently as resistance to oppression from agents of apartheid (Peffer 2009: xviii). In contrast to the sculpture that has been interrogated is his large stone sculpture entitled *Mandela and the Rainbow Children* (2015) (Figure 18). Although the artist adopted the concept of rainbow children as a title of

this vernacular sculpture, as Neil Lazarus (2004:617) claims, the rainbow nation "is the myth of South African exceptionalism perpetuated in the form of shiny new campaigns and slogans".

Figure 18: Pitika Ntuli, *Mandela and the Rainbow Children,* 2015. Stone, 3.6 metres. Artists Collection (Photographed by Sule A. James)

The formal structure of this vernacular sculpture in the round depicts a large African man seated on a chair, carrying six young children in his bosom, supported with his two large hands. Ntuli (2017) claims the depiction references "Mandela and the races that makeup South Africa. These include black Africans, whites, Indians, Coloured, Asian and Chinese". However, the mode of depiction does not show any distinct features to establish the races identified. The carved head of this large imagery notwithstanding, the mode of depiction with chisel and hammer, in Jean Borgatti's (1990:37) view, demonstrates an African portrait that depicts a real person whose life forms part of the historical narrative of a nation. On his left shoulder rests a jungle rabbit with long ears carved close to his face, to present not merely a visual but symbolic narrative to the six young children. Jonathan (2017) observes that "the rabbit seems to be asking Mandela how he survived 27years imprisonment". But Ntuli (2017) notes that his survival is "likened to the survival of a rabbit in the jungle; though small, the

rabbit survives the antics of bigger predators". It is this survival of imprisonment that brought Mandela to the position of becoming the first democratically elected president of South Africa.

In reading the formal structure of Ntuli's sculpture from the back, as Koloane (2010:140) observes, "as you move around the piece different scenarios emerge". One such scenario that emerges on Mandela's back is a large iron chain inserted in the middle of his back, symbolising his backbone. Although Jonathan (2017) claims that "the chain represents his backbone", he adds that it "symbolises his strength and resilience in suffering, his struggles, and steps to freedom". However, his freedom, as Richards (2011:51) argues, for many across the globe the South African victory in the liberation struggle is a perfect case of justice and equality. Thus, Ntuli's philosophy projects not just Mandela's freedom which attests to victory in the liberation struggle, but also his selflessness.

To situate the present experience in Ntuli's sculpture, it reflects on the history of the past oppression and racism in South Africa before Nelson Mandela was elected president in the first democratic election in 1994. Gordimer (cited by Lazarus 2004:621) speaks "of the meaning of April 1994, when, as she put it, 'South Africans of all colours went to the polls and voted into power their own government, for the first time". Before 1994, in Sandra Klopper's (2004:68) view, the Nationalist regime that entrenched abuse of human rights and realities of racism rose to power in 1948. During those dark years of oppression, those who engaged in political opposition against apartheid were detained in prison without trial (Merrett 1990:28). Mandela and other political prisoners were detained in Robben Island for over two decades until February 1990, when they were released (Klopper 2004:68). Mandela (quoted by Barbara Nussbaum 2003:24) argues that "to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others".

The portrayal of Mandela in historic dialogue with the rainbow children is, in Ntuli's (2017) view, a reflection of his anti-racial stance. The portrayal, Ntuli (2010:17) says, hints at "my worldview ... a worldview predicated on interconnectedness, interrelationships and interdependence" of the races. And in Sandra Klopper's (2013:129) words, it seems Mandela was "exploring the ways in which the present has [to be] shaped [from the] painful experiences [of] the country's past". It might be argued that although South Africans clamoured for a non-racial nation, more than two "decades since the end of apartheid ... this

myth of South African exceptionalism" (Lazarus 2004:611) appears elusive. Despite such mythological campaign, the work, however, seeks not merely to relay but remind of and uphold this South African cultural value that underlies the attitude of promoting harmony and unity of a non-racial country. In *Shaka Zulu* (2015) (Figure 19), the title presents a subjective identification of a distant past personality rooted in Zulu culture.

The sculpture shows a mixed media abstracted anthropomorphic vernacular imagery in the round. Given that it is individualised with name, it evokes the referencing of an ancient African man from Zulu ethnic group in South Africa. It depicts a warrior standing tall from his base in a "totemic stone" rendition (Peffer 2009:42). The primary medium adopted is stone, but other media employed are tubular pipes, flat metal sheets, car gearbox for the head and cow horn to signify the animal emblem Shaka appears closely related to and not a physical resemblance. Even though it is a large totemic stone sculpture, it draws attention to the weapons Shaka holds and his height. His two legs are carved out without any footwear, possibly to demonstrate as *Biography of Shaka Zulu* (2017:1) notes, that "Shaka Zulu found that taking off his sandals and fighting barefooted helped him manoeuvre better". However, the upper parts of the legs are stylised with no resemblance to the appearance of human legs. This hints on possible inspiration from an earlier tradition of free-standing Tsonga figurative sculpture in South Africa (Nettleton 1988:49).

A breastplate-like depiction in front of the imagery reflects a symbol of a short spear that is kept as a spare for attacking his victims. His two hands were constructed with the tubular pipe of a car exhaust and engrafted into the upper part of Shaka's shoulder to form his arms. This mode of combining different materials, in Manaka's (1987:12) words, reveals that "Pitika is an innovative sculptor who uses whatever material is at hand". Even though he combined materials to exemplify the warrior, his posture gives clue to readiness to attack, as he holds a spear in his right hand backward, and his left hand holding a shield in front for protection from enemies' weapons. Pitika Ntuli (2017) argues that although "Shaka Zulu is often depicted with long spears, in reality, he carries short spears with which he attacked his victims".

Although the head of the image was constructed with a gearbox, the face demonstrates, in John Peffer's (2009:59) words, a person "harnessing the physical characteristics of animal". More so, the gearbox in the work of Pitika Ntuli symbolises the working of the brain, in this context, of Shaka Zulu's brain. Despite that, the fusion of cow horns to the gearbox head does

not merely signify the animal totem to which Shaka Zulu's behaviour and person were interconnected but his strength. It points at, as Greenberg (2008:[sp]) claims, "a long oral tradition in Africa, adopt[ing] age old stories in which human behaviour is subject to scrutiny by reflection in the animal kingdom". Such interface of animal–human elements relays a social commentary in contemporary South African art because it is a style that is evident in the works of Jane Alexander and black South African artists – Sydney Kumalo and Ezrom Legae. As Peffer (2009:42) argues, "imaging the human figure in abstracted non-human form ... is a trend that dates to the canonical African sculptural forms". While the evocation of human figures in abstracted non-human form was a trend in traditional African art, the contemporary trend is implicated by time and period. However, the round gearbox head invokes a similar style in Zulu free-standing sculpture which, in Nettleton's (1988:49) view, shows that "the male figure often wears a head ring, a hairstyle to which only [a] seasoned warrior among the Zulu groups [was] entitled".

Figure 19: Pitika Ntuli, *Shaka Zulu*, 2015. Mixed media, above 3 metres. Artist's collection, (Photographed by Sule A. James)

He was not just an ancient traditional ruler, but a warrior. As John Havemann ([sa]:1) claims, the icon Shaka Zulu was "born in 1787 in unfortunate circumstances. He was an unwanted

child and this affected his approach to life throughout his entire life". His background, as observed Havemann, may have accounted for his turning out to be a warrior. Mbili (2017:1) asserts that "Shaka used warfare to achieve his political agenda and to instil fear and respect for his rule". Arguably, such a traditional style of leadership defines not just a subjugation of people in his kingdom but introduces an oppressive personality. However, his reign as king was short lived, as he ascended the throne in circa 1820 and died in 1828 (Nettleton 1988:49; Mbeje 2017:1). It seems the philosophy that guided Ntuli's work is that of honouring cultural heroes for the present and future. Ntuli (2017) observes that the sculpture is aimed at a visual narrative of "Shaka's short spears rather than long as he is often depicted holding". According to Kleiner (2010:393), it hints at the "core beliefs and practices [of] ... honouring ancestors". On another level, in Adejumo's (2002:167) words, it evokes an "African [art which is] ... based on the exploits of ... [an] individual who triumphed over adversities to positively impact the lives of members" of his kingdom.

Possibly, Ntuli, in a historic gesture in the twenty first century appropriated the image of an ancient traditional leader and warrior to make a historical commentary on his life experience. Africanness is indicated in this depiction not merely in its reference to a traditional hero in Zulu culture but in the history of warfare and conquests that are indigenous to the African continent.

4.4 Sub-conclusion

The narrative on Pitika Ntuli's sculptures in this study reveals that his vernacular imageries, which reflect African identity by heritage, culture, and history, are rooted in distant and recent past as well as present experiences of individuals in South Africa. To situate his contemporary arts in South Africa, in Sandra Klopper's (2013:137) words, Ntuli "evokes histories of violence and exploitation, past and present". He did so by reflecting on the numerous killings of black South Africans during the apartheid as well as post-apartheid era making his works to function both as "accusation and a reminder" (Neke 1999:3) to those who tortured and killed blacks in the prisons or during protests in South Africa.

Furthermore, the readings of Ntuli's contemporary African sculpture reveal different aims which reflect not merely symbolic embodiment of cultural belief, value and attitude of courage but endurance against external affliction and torture during apartheid. As Gael Neke (1999:1) notes, Ntuli's works "open up a space, within and beyond its terrain, for South Africans to face their history". Perhaps, Ntuli had to evocate these ideas in the twenty first

century given the fact that he was in exile until the end of apartheid. Consequently, as Homi Bhabha (1990:6a) notes, considering the different forms of brutality, I query, "What kind of a cultural space is the nation with its transgressive" activities? Despite those numerous hurts from the past, a non-racial campaign was launched and promoted when Nelson Mandela was elected president. Rather than retaliate for the past repressions and sufferings of black South Africans and himself during the apartheid era, Mandela chose the path of forgiveness and racial unity.

Lastly, his evocation of Shaka Zulu serves to convey many historic issues not just about him but about the Zulu identity. Zulu as a term referred only to a clan which recognised Zulu as its founding ancestor before King Shaka ascended the throne. But soon after Shaka's conquest and consolidation, the term Zulu was employed to include hundreds of clans under Zulu monarchy. Over time its usage extended not only to the monarchy but to an ethnic identity that is linked to the Zulu language (Mbeje 2017:1).

4.5 Sinethemba Ngubane (b.1991)

Sinethemba Ngubane was born in 1991 in Durban, South Africa. Ngubane works predominantly in the medium of ceramics but includes sculptures in large installations. Ngubane completed a national diploma in Fine Art in 2014 and Bachelor's Degree with distinction at Durban University of Technology in 2015. She has exhibited in academic group shows in KZNSA Gallery, Durban University of Technology, Steve Biko Art Gallery and artists' group shows in art space, Durban. Ngubane is currently studying for a Masters in Fine Art at Durban University of Technology. She is an award winner of Emma Smith Scholarship and lives, works and studies in Durban.

Although she is a young practising contemporary African artist, her choice and inclusion in this study was informed by her unique mode of exploration of distorted bodies (Filani 2018:19; Peffer 2009:48) of young intersex black African children in South African space. She has been producing sculptures for some years within the scope of this research. Therefore, this research focuses on tracing the ideas the reading of her vernacular symbolisms produced between 2007 and 2016 and conveys to the audience. In studying her installations sculptures, five works were purposively selected. The works are *Rebirth of Bio-politics* (2015) (Figure 20), *Ninkoloyi*, (2016) (Figure 21), *Impaired,* (2016) (Figure 22), *Gaze of disfigured* (2016) (Figure 23) and *Excavated* (2016) (Figure 24).

The visual narrative of findings in works executed by Ngubane reveals cultural appropriation of bodies of young black African children from the Zulu cultural group rooted in South African space. In Ngubane's (2017) words, "the sources of my vernacular symbolisms are the indigenous cultures in South Africa. I produce sculptures on specific subjects and in ways other artists might not have worked". While it appears she is filling a gap in visual culture with disparate bodies of young black intersex babies, similar depictions of distorted and mutilated bodies are evident in contemporary South African art. But Ngubane (2017) affirms that, "in my works, I focus on the human body and how people use such human flesh for rituals and sacrifices. Specifically, I focus on the bodies of intersex babies, and societal attitude towards them". Defining intersex, Jenkins and Short (2017:92) state, "intersex broadly refers to a variety of conditions that ... do not correspond to typical definitions of male and female". A curious enquirer may ask how she discovered this information. To this, Ngubane (2017) responds that she obtained information "from the South African police and newspapers".

In Ngubane's (2017) words, her "sculptures are associated with the social life in rural and urban areas, but on the subject of rituals among some black South Africans who want to start business and want the business to prosper". While it is however contestable in contemporary era that some black South Africans are identified with ritual murders of intersex children, Rob Turrell (2001:22) observes that *muti* murder among the Zulu people dates back to the 1900s. Arguably, such murders are mostly because of mythological beliefs that riches, protection, fame, and power come through the ritual at the expense of other people's lives. According to Ngubane (2017), "my ideology in these works reflects greed and ignorance in denying intersex babies the right to life. Thus, while these babies are considered an abomination, they are killed and used for rituals". This appears to be the major factor that influenced the production of her works. Ngubane (2017) claims "I was influenced to produce my kind of sculptures because of the concern I have for the killings of such babies". It seems Ngubane's argument invokes the idea that her sculptures make social and moral commentaries.

Expatiating why she continues to represent cultural symbolisms in contemporary vernacular sculptures, she declares "I still represent them in contemporary artworks because there are no other symbolisms that reflect this present focus" Ngubane's (2017). I argue that ritual murders are not only targeted at intersex but young black African children in general, so they could also form the focus of her work. Moreover, the biological condition of the children

represented is not so distinct except in one work, therefore, her works may be taken for mutilated bodies of young black children rather than intersex.

Furthermore, another aspect that is central to her works is the media she uses. According to her, "the media I work with are clay, gelatine mixed with glue and water" Ngubane (2017). Aside from these, she glazes them after they are dried and fires each piece, thereby creating a colour effect which symbolises dead bodies. In making her point on the possible reason for producing installations, Ngubane (2017) observes that "I was interested in ceramics at the beginning of my practice, but later had a redirection of focus towards sculpture. So I combine sculpture and ceramic techniques in creating my installations". Thus, the glossy effect on her terra-cotta installation sculptures is because she glazes them before firing.

Given that many contemporary African artworks are executed to communicate symbolic messages, significant aspects of such messages are relayed to examine audience reception. Hence, Ngubane (2017) argues that "the receptions of my works have been impressive so far, in fact, I won an award for the kind of works I am producing". Although she is not the first artist to focus on mutilated bodies, however the novelty in her works comes from the idea she frames around intersex as protest art. Consequently, the award seems to spur her to work harder. On the other hand, Ngubane (2017) claims that "people are easily attracted to my kind of works because the concepts and contents are all together new, so they ask a lot of questions to understand what the works mean. In addition, I also enjoy patronage of my works from some other people".

4.6 Analysis of Vernacular Tropes in Sinethemba Ngubane's Installation Sculptures

The interrogation of Sinethemba Ngubane's vernacular rooted installation sculptures reveals *Rebirth of Bio-Politics* (2015) (Figure 20). As Ngubane (2017) claims, "this title is given to these distorted bodies, because it reveals an aspect in biology that is contested and debated". It is arguable however for Ngubane to claim that there is debate in science on the existence of intersex babies because research in 1970 by Grace Hatherley (1970:3) notes that, "intersex syndromes have been recognised in South Africans' different racial groups" since the 1960s. This establishes the fact that intersex babies exist not only among the blacks and whites but among other races in South Africa. Nonetheless, the names used to identify people with both male and female or ambivalent genitals in southern African cultures vary. For example, in Zimbabwe, it is referred to as *incukubili* in Ndebele, *sisikanje* in Shona, and *ubulilimbili* in Zulu culture.

But rather than depict intersex elements, Ngubane's depictions reference different stages of mutilations in eight distorted bodies of black babies. In John Peffer's (2009:62) words, the "bodies displayed are exactingly rendered as if they were zoological specimens". Such denotation of zoological specimens is because the imageries reveal evocation not merely of skeletons but distorted bodies. Who is responsible for such mutilations? Ngubane (2017) observes that "family members and ritualists are responsible". Similarly, mutilation was evident in Lien Botha's images. And, as Gael Neke (1999:7) notes, the works of Penny Siopis reflect installation suggesting massacre of children but not intersex. Although different degrees of decomposition are exemplified in the formal elements of the installations, there appears to be a visible inconsistency in the level of decomposition in the same body. For example, while the second imagery from the left shows a high level of decomposition on the body, the head appears like that of a sleeping child. Perhaps, as John Peffer (2009:58) argues, they are "coded indictments of the tortures inflicted upon real human beings". From the left side of the installation, the first body was represented from a back view with a head that appears to be in normal condition but the body is severely distorted. The head of the second baby was depicted with all the facial features reflecting a sleeping baby, whereas the remaining parts of the baby are mutilated. Likewise, the third and sixth imageries were represented to show the various degrees of mutilation which reveal the rib bones painted white, while all other parts show maimed arms and legs. Even though the fourth, fifth, seventh and eight symbolisms are alike; the stages of mutilations suggest that they are beyond recognition.

It is, however, contestable if the last two imageries on the right were not buried together; this is implied from their position which evokes conjoined babies with their heads placed in different directions. Ngubane's primary medium used to execute these eight distorted bodies of young African children is clay, but they were allowed to dry and afterwards burnt to signify terracotta sculpture (Peffer 2009:42). This is possibly the reason there appears to be an intersection of aesthetics of glaze colours fused into each of these sculptural installations, so as to create the effect of mutilations on the bodies. In tracing the cultural history, in Hatherley's (1970:3) view, intersex was first discovered in South Africa at the Cape between 1817 and 1827, after the death of Dr James Barry, Surgeon General to the British forces. While there are no known statistics of people living with the condition of intersex in South Africa, in the 2010s, an intersex activist Sally Gross (cited by Husakouskaya 2013:12) suggests that the population of intersex was "between 45 000 and 90 000 South Africans". It

is however contestable to have a high population of people living with the intersex condition without medicalisation.

Figure 20: Sinethemba Ngubane, *Rebirth of Bio-politics*, 2015. Fired Clay Installations, 84.5 cm x 184 cm x 20 cm. (Courtesy of Sinethemba Ngubane)

Even though medical practice embraced surgery for erasure of sex ambiguity, in the 1990s activists and scholars joined forces to counter medicine's treatment of intersex (Jenkins and Short 2017:94). And in 2004, the medical community showed interest not merely in reforming but moving away from using surgery as the best practice of erasing any sex of intersex people (Jenkins and Short 2017:93). Possibly, they realised the failure of surgery in correcting the situation. As Ngubane (2017) notes, "I knew someone who was demoralised and dejected because he was intersex. After he had an operation performed on him to erase the female genital, unfortunately, it failed, and eventually he committed suicide". Thus, in Ngubane's (2017) view, "my works are aimed at correcting societal attitude towards intersex. In rural black communities, such babies are looked upon as abnormal, so they are killed". As Alice Dreger (2006:73) reiterates, it hints at "poor treatment of families dealing with intersex". In addition, Jenkins and Short (2017:97) observe that it echoes "societal beliefs in a rigidly dimorphic approach to sex". It might be argued, as Alice Dreger further notes, that this depiction evokes the harder job of treating intersex.

But in Olu Oguibe's (1998:51) view, Ngubane's depiction demonstrates that "in African metaphysics ... the dead remain with [the] living". Even though the depictions seeks to "make

sense of th[e] debased condition[s] and to contest it through arts" (Peffer 2009:48). In *Ninkoloyi* (2016) (Figure 21), this title evokes cultural identity with the use of indigenous Zulu language. The title signals an ethno-linguistic concept which means "witchcraft" and "Spiritism" in Zulu culture in South Africa. As Mesaki (1995:163) defines, witchcraft is "the crime called 'maleficium', the practice of harmful black magic". It involves "performance of deleterious deeds by means of extra-ordinary, occultic, mysterious, preternatural or supernatural power". In Kombo's (2003:82) words, "witchcraft is normally practised at night" because the practitioners are afraid to be caught. Thus, most people are exposed "defencelessly to the pursuits of witches" (Harnischfeger 2000:100).

Figure 21: Sinethemba Ngubane, *Ninkoloyi*, 2016. Mixed media, 16 x 48 cm
(Courtesy of Sinethemba Ngubane)

The vernacular symbolisms show similar but distinct installations made of mixed media not merely for aesthetics, but visual narrative. As Susan Vogel (2012:10) notes, though the conceptual mode of her work is at experimental stage it is rarely found among fine artists in South Africa. Yet, the media she adopts relay their own language. The formal elements reveal rough textured human head, a nail fastened to the forehead, piece of blue cloth wrapped over the head with a skin strap on one head while the other has none as they are arranged inside a shallow basin. However, the eyes portrayed within their sockets are looking sideways,

bordered by a rough textured nose and the face likened to a victim of terrible skin disease. The heads do not symbolise portrait, but in Kombo's (2003:83) view, paraphernalia employed in witchcraft which "have in them no power to cause misfortune or suffering". Rather, Ngubane (2017) argues that "a practitioner is turned into *Mantindane* known as *tokoloshe (dwarf-like water sprite)* and sends *Mantindane* to fetch children of certain age, gender, and intersex, to kill and feed on them". In contrast, Mesaki (1995:163) argues that the evil act of piercing the imagery is expected to kill the intended or targeted person.

Conversely, in some Shona cultures in Zimbabwe, when a witch is caught in the act at night, a nail is used to pierce the head. The ritual is set up in such a way that the witch goes and dies at their homestead, where examination of the body will reveal the nail on the head as evidence. So, a Shona reading of *Ninkoloyi* would state that the head in the basin is that of a witch caught in the act and killed. This depiction narrates an experience that recalls the cultural history of witchcraft in African societies. In Simeon Mesaki's (1995:174) view, the social issue of "witchcraft was a reality in many of the pre-colonial societies". And, as Johannes Harnischfeger (2000:101) notes, in the 1950s reports show that fear of witches increased among black Africans. A belief among the Bantu of the Early Iron Age attributed the evil of witchcraft to human envy and malice (Mesaki 1995:166). But during colonial administration in South Africa, the blacks were worried that their reports of witches eating them at night were taken lightly. Thus, they were encouraged to persecute witches by illegal means (Harnischfeger 2000:101). As Harnischfeger (2000:99) notes, a police report states that between 1985 and 1995, 312 people were killed in Lebowa, a former homeland in eastern Transvaal. Nevertheless, Ngubane (2017) argues that the aim of this rendition reflects spiritual killing "to keep his wealth running".

Alternatively, this traditional African witchcraft practiced by some persons in Zulu areas reeks of inhumanity. In Richards' (2005:69) view, inhumanity is "the evil associated with witchcraft". Consequently, witchcraft activity is an ambivalent scenario, because while the malevolent individual considers his or her life worth living, others must suffer and die for no just cause. As Johannes Harnischfeger (2000:100) posits, "witchcraft is a criminal offence". Similarly, a different scene unveils an African vernacular installation *Impaired* (2016) (Figure 22). While the title suggests a reduction of young African children's body into a pot as installation, Ngubane (2017) notes that "this work symbolizes the bodies of babies fetched and being prepared in ritual procedure". It is however contestable for Ngubane to conclude

that the bodies are prepared in ritual. As La Fontaine (2017:307) argues, the mode of depiction hints at a likely process of human sacrifice. But given the fact that "the central act of ... killing and eating of a child or baby, perhaps stolen" is for ritual purpose (La Fontaine 2017:308), the depiction signals ritual killing.

In Ngubane's (2017) view, "the ritualists feed on cooked bodies of the intersex babies". I argue that the portrayal gives a clue to two distorted young African children cramped inside a clay pot so their sex cannot be determined. As Enwezor and Okeke (2009:47) observe, it evokes "an image of ritual sacrifice, [of] ... tortured bod[ies]". The major medium used in executing this work is raku clay, explored for the purpose of portraying how bodies of intersex babies are used for other hidden motives when decisions are hurriedly made to kill them. A similar mode of depiction, according to Peffer (2009:41), features in the works of "South African artists [who] have long used the image of the human body in distress as a sign of the inhumane conditions in their society".

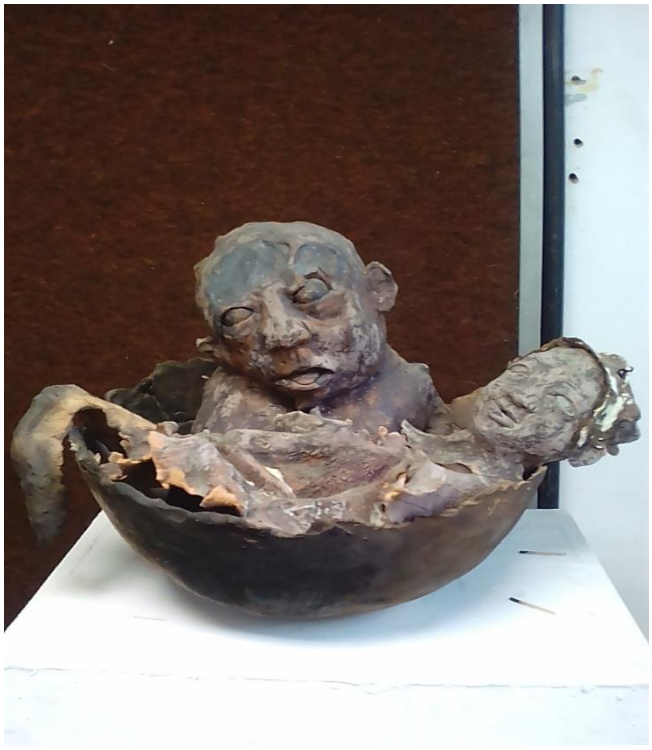

Figure 22: Sinethemba Ngubane, *Impaired*, 2016. Glazed and fired Raku clay, 37 x 56 cm. (Courtesy of Sinethemba Ngubane)

Richards (2011:55b) posits, "our comprehension of complex rituals ... [are enhanced when] located in their proper cultural context". Therefore, the cultural history traces the experiences of "indigenous Africans... [that were] given to rituals ... and the offering of sacrifices" (Omatseye and Emeriewen 2010:530). In the pre-colonial Zulu kingdom, human ritual

murders were associated with gaining extraordinary power "required to win competitive advantages in chiefly rivalries over people" (Turrell 2001:22). But Rob Turrell notes that between the 1900s and 1930s, Natal chiefs lost their monopoly of ritual murders. In the South African Sunday Times of 28 September 2017, Nathi Olifant reported an incident of cannibalism in Wembezi, an indigenous Zulu township "where many of the alleged cannibal incidents" take place. A resident of the urban area, Ndlovu (quoted by Olifant 2017:1), argues that within 24 to 48 hours when a child is reported missing "by that time they would have cooked the child".

According to Peffer (2009:41), "South African artists have long used the image of the human body in distress as a sign of the inhumane conditions in their society". What aim does the interpretation of this work relay? As Ngubane (2017) claims, the reason for such practice is because "more people seek to be successful outside legitimate means of livelihood". And, as Nomsa Maseko (2017:1) notes, it defines persons engaged in cannibalism who "were told [it] had magic properties and would convey money, power and protection". Therefore, those lured into this practice do it for avarices not minding what they go through to achieve or accumulate wealth. From another angle, Peek (2008:14) argues, it invokes the idea of pairs or doubles concerned with twinness in African art. In a related stance, Salami and Visona (2000:4) argue that "academically trained artists ... promote particular forms of art ... one based in indigenous culture".

From the discussion this far we can conclude that Sinethemba Ngubane uses her sculpture to communicate the need to rethink so as to give intersex babies the privilege to live rather than kill them. The philosophical view of Ngubane is guided by a principle of African humanism despite the biological condition of intersex children. In the *Gaze of disfigured* (2016) (Figure 23), this title seems to invite a close look at a dismembered body. The naturalistic vernacular imagery references a lifeless and disfigured body of a young African child. As Ngubane (2017) claims "this practice of amputation and altering of flesh demonstrates another form of ritual sacrifice" rooted in Zulu countryside. However, in John Peffer's (2009:72) words, the deletion may not be ritual motivated but evokes "as the body of the victim is taken apart, society may itself cohere around the spectacle and move into the realm of the wolf pack".

The reading of the formal elements shows the use of raku clay mixed with wax as the medium for executing the work. While the body lays lifeless, the eyes appear slightly opened but not giving any clue of being able to see. Aside the mutilation that is evident, there is a cut

around the neck and across the chest to the navel concerning which Ngubane (2017) concludes that the "incision from the bottom of the stomach to the top of the chest" shows inhumane condition. A similar slit is evident in Jane Alexander's sculptures entitled *The Butcher Boys*. To establish a possible reason for the slit, Peffer (2009:65) questioned "have their hearts and other organs been removed?" Peffer's argument suggests that when such a slit is performed, vital internal organs are removed for undisclosed purposes or as La Fontaine (2017:307) notes, "murders for body parts are not offerings to any god or spirit but killings for gain". Thus, Ngubane's sculpture signals mutilation of hands, legs, perhaps lungs, and guts, as revealed in the distortion. Besides, to demonstrate the identity of the black African body as intersex, at the immediate foreground, a curved male genital creates a clear view of the female genital directly below, which hints at how both sexual organs coexist in the body of an intersex baby.

Figure 23: Sinethemba Ngubane, *Gaze of disfigured*, 2016. Raku clay and wax, 47 x 23 cm. (Courtesy of Sinethemba Ngubane)

This experience invokes the cultural history of dismembered bodies in South Africa. In the 1910s, as Rob Turrell (2001:21 emphases in original) observes, a form of killing in which a person's body parts are taken for *muti* murder was identified in Natal. Turrell further notes

that two little boys were principal witnesses in a case of their comrade who was murdered and watched his wretched body mutilated. Although in the 1890s muti murders were reported amongst the Sotho, Zulu, and Swazi, there seem to be few amongst the Xhosa in the Cape (Turrell 2001:22). But in the twenty first century, Nomsa Maseko (2017:1) argues that a traditional healer in the Zulu cultural group argues that "ritual killings and the use of human tissues are not part of traditional healing". This suggests that human tissues are used for a different purpose in Zulu communities. However, similar depictions showing deletion of limbs in a sculpture entitled *War Victim* (1982-86) by contemporary Ugandan artist, Francis Nnaggenda, hints at a war victim rather than a victim of ritual murder (Nyachae 1995:167). Yet, the common experience with Ngubane's installation is in the mutilation of the body parts. In John Peffer's (2009:62) view "anyone could be vulnerable to bodily violation".

As Bailey (2010:1) maintains, mutilation "is a prolific problem that affects every single community. [However] ... there is no evidence that adults are specifically asked for, but there is evidence that kids are mutilated". Ngubane (2017) reiterates that "this act of disfiguring a young child is practised around the rural areas in South Africa". Nevertheless, such mutilation, in Ngubane's (2017) view is aimed at the "quest to be rich, to get power or gain good yield in farm produce". I argue that even though progress is desired in life, it is faulty to build it on a mythology framed around mutilating human bodies. John Peffer (2009:59), on his part, says this hints at "a kind of hybrid monster of the sort produced in times of civil war and barbarism". If Ezrom Legae and Helen Sebidi, as Peffer (2009:72) notes, saw "the image of animal sacrifices [as] more than an indictment of human cruelty", then, the imagery of a distorted young African child is worse than cruelty, because it echoes cannibalism in which the people are filled with lust for human flesh (La Fontaine 2017:313). Ngubane's philosophical idea is thus, guided within the parameters of opposing carnivorous rituals done not with animals but with the human body. This work entitled *Excavated* (2016) (Figure 24), is a subject matter that echoes excavation of a buried body, thus signifying it as a "historic and traumatic migration" (John Peffer 2005:340), not of the living but the dead.

The depiction which combines terracotta and ceramic techniques reveals representation of a body covered with earth. It would have been read as terracotta if glaze was not applied to create visual aesthetics and finishing. In Ngubane's (2017) view "the smoked fired work represents a body that was dug up and mutilated as a form of a ritual" rooted in the rural areas in Zulu culture. Several mixed media employed include local clay, glaze applied for firing

and twine for stitching the cut. Although earth covers the head and parts of the body, it is to symbolise an exhumed body. However, the fact that this rendition is without arms and legs raises the question of when the work was mutilated, not to have limbs represented at all. Perhaps, as a visual representation, the mutilation is to signify what happened after it was exhumed given that Ngubane (2017) had argued that it was dug up to remove organs. Assuming that it narrates an experience within a culture, what does the cultural history of this depiction reveal? It reveals the history of different forms of exhumations in South Africa. For example, in the 1990s, the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) undertook several exhumations of corpses of opponents of the apartheid government who disappeared in the 1980s. The aim of the exhumation was to provide healing to the families of the victims (Satyapal 2012:57).

Figure 24: Sinethemba Ngubane, *Excavated*, 2016. Smoke fired raku Glazed, 50 x 30 cm (Courtesy of Sinethemba Ngubane)

In the twenty first century, in KwaZulu-Natal province, another form of exhumation is identified. As Maseko (2017:1) argues "It is alleged that ... young men [are sent] to dig graves in the middle of the night so [as] to make magic charms known locally as 'muti'". Nathi Olifant (2017:1) reiterates that with grave desecrations taking place around the urban

areas of Wembezi in Estcourt, KwaZulu-Natal, the persons identified with such exhumations can only be ritualists who visit a grave, dig it up and desecrate it by tampering with the dead body. Thus, this visual discourse echoes grave desecration. As Ngubane (2017) claims, "this violence of exhuming intersex is committed for purposes of supplying highly valued body parts to people that use them for ritual". Also, in Rob Turrell's (2001:21) view, it signals the removal of human organs which are "'rendered down' to make mixtures that were believed to give immense power when eaten or imbibed". Thus, this relays an African "fairy-tale" on traditional medicine or *muti* for getting wealth in Zulu culture. Consequently, Ngubane portrays a philosophy that is guided by the principle of humanity against the manifestation of inhumanity in grave desecration.

4.7 Sub-conclusion

The visual narratives on Sinethemba Ngubane's contemporary African vernacular installation sculptures in this research reveal appropriation of cultural symbolisms of disparate mutilated bodies of young African children identified as intersex. Through the visual culture narratives on intersex, the reading echoes negative family and societal attitudes of collaborating with ritualists or others to kill a black African child born intersex. As Colin Richards (2011:53) notes, such invokes "disingenuous sentimental abuse". Similar sentiment was manifested towards twins in the distant past in Nigeria. Philip Peek (2008:15) observes that in the past not all people cherished twins in Nigeria since they were considered unusual and therefore killed.

The disingenuous sentiment towards intersex is manifested in the swift response in killing, mutilating and removing their body organs for *muti* ritual. This signifies ambivalence in exhuming and desecrating the grave because of "mythological subject from Africa" (Peffer 2009:42) that promotes the belief that eating the body parts in *muti* ritual will promote wealth and give protection. Aside from the ritual killing, Ngubane's works echo the evil of witchcraft against intersex and perhaps other young black African children. As Kisilu Kombo (2003:75) argues, witchcraft is "supernatural powers to bring disaster, death or fear to their victims".

4.8 Conclusion and Comparison of the Aims in Ntuli and Ngubane's Works

Given that this chapter discusses the African vernacular sculptures of Pitika Ntuli and Sinethemba Ngubane, five of their works were interrogated. The aims represented in each context were traced from the interpretation of the formal elements and the views of the artists

obtained during interviews. Consequently, I conclude the chapter arguing, as Wayne Visser (2016:17) notes, that "the victims of everyday tragedy [seem to] seek solace" in the artworks of Pitika Ntuli and Sinethemba Ngubane that echo the sounds of their traumas. The aims in their depictions are compared to demonstrate similarities and differences and how they contribute to contemporary global African art history.

The comparative analysis of Ntuli's rendition entitled *Marikana* (2012/13) and Ngubane's *Rebirth of Bio-Politics* (2015) reveals representations of different aims. Whereas *Marikana* explores unjust post-apartheid massacre of striking mine workers possibly because of greed of the mine magnates, *Rebirth of Bio-Politics* reflects the inhumanity of families that kill their own children born intersex on the ground that they are abominable. Although both works, as Ruth Simbao (2011:39) argues, demonstrate "expressions of Africanness", this is however only with regard to violation of human dignity (Satyapal 2012:56). In De Jeger's ([sa]: 1) view, they show "the cruelty of man and what people do to each other". Conversely, the comparison of the commemorative sculpture titled *Silverton Three* (2013) by Ntuli, and Ngubane's installation *Nonkiloyi* (2016) reveals divergent aims within the South African context.

While Ntuli's work mirrors, as Ntuli (2015:1) argues, honour for the "determination of those who gave their lives for the liberation of the country" during a planned violent resistance to apartheid at Silverton in Pretoria, Ngubane's rendition unfolds the evil of witchcraft as it may be associated with paraphernalia employed by practitioners. To narrate witchcraft and its African identity, Kombo (2003:84) notes that the "knowledge of African worldview and belief system" is important. Consequently, as Johannes Harnischfeger (2000:110) observes, the belief in witchcraft is not merely a characteristic of African identity but a part of a cultural heritage rooted in Zulu culture.

Furthermore, the comparative analyses of Ntuli's sculpture *The Torture of a Woman Giving Birth in Prison* (2015), and Ngubane's installation entitled *Impaired* (2016) point our attention to different forms of torture. Whereas Ntuli's portrayal reflects the torture of a woman in prison as part of abuse of power by the security police during the repressive years of apartheid (Neke 1999:8), Ngubane's work echoes not merely torture of black African children but also the evil of ritual murder. In particular, it draws attention to the process of cooking the bodies of black intersex children killed, to be eaten for *muti* rituals. As Rob Turrell (2001:22) argues, it is because of a mythological belief that "ritual killing of a human

was required for the acquisition of extraordinary power". In contrast, the comparison of aims in *Mandela and The Rainbow Children* (2015) by Ntuli, and *Gaze of Disfigured* (2016) by Ngubane reflect on two diverse social issues. Ntuli's depiction resonates with the unification of the races in post-apartheid South Africa signifying an embrace of all races as one people. As Wonke Buqa (2015:1) notes, "it is part of the meaning of the Rainbow Nation that we are one nation regardless of our various backgrounds and cultures".

Ngubane's work mirrors, as John Peffer (2009:41) puts it, "abused body" in indigenous Zulu ethnicity. The mutilated and abused intersex body, in Sandra Klopper's (2013:138) view reflects a rural society that seems to be at war with itself. Nevertheless, to demonstrate Africanness in *Mandela and the Rainbow Children*, it may be viewed as a humanity that is first recognised in others (Richards 2011:49). But, in Ngubane's renditions, I argue, as Ruth Simbao (2011:43) does, that the narrative on Africanness hints at a complicated dimension of inhumanity because a victim of ritual murder is not only a member of the community but a relative of one or more of her murderers (Turrell 2001:23). Then, lastly, the comparison reveals that whereas the aim in Ntuli's work *Shaka Zulu* (2015) manifests, as Jean Borgatti (1990:39) argues, a specific person or ancestor invested with anthropomorphic identity in ways that are meaningful to Ntuli's audience, Ngubane's installation *Excavated* (2016) unfolds lack of "respect for indigenous cultural, religious and traditional values" (Satyapal 2012:56) by practitioners of corpse and grave desecration. Although Ntuli's depiction reflects Africanness through a Zulu cultural ancestor, as Nettleton (2011:157b) argues, Africanness is further signified in its mode of abstraction with anthropomorphic imagery which reflects the African world view of human interrelatedness with animals.

In conclusion, the interrogation of the aims embedded in the African vernacular rooted sculptures of Pitika Ntuli and Sinethemba Ngubane shows that while Ntuli's aims revolve round victims of past and present socio-political tragedies in South Africa, Ngubane's aims elicit the traumas associated with the ritual killings and mutilation of intersex black African children.

CHAPTER FIVE

African Vernacular Rooted Symbolisms in the Paintings of Contemporary Nigerian Artists, Olatunbosun Shonibare and Chinedu Ogakwu

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to two Nigerian painters: Olatunbosun Shonibare and Chinedu Ogakwu. The discussions focus on their media and analysis of how they represent "contemporary present" (Enwezor 2003:57) cultural symbolism which they consider African and why they still represent such symbolism in contemporary African art. Still, in their engagement with Nigerian and African cultures in contemporary paintings, these artists appear to have been influenced by their individual native cultures and the environment where they live. It demonstrates, as Kunle Filani (2018:20) notes, that "often times, the adaptation of traditional forms, symbolic patterns, and decorative motifs are drawn from the indigenous culture of the artist". For example, Shonibare is influenced by socio-cultural themes in Yoruba culture such as male and female couple, mother and child relationship and hair styling. His institutional influence, characterised with articulating of "discernible images" (Filani 1998:35) from Northern Nigeria, is evident in his compositions framed around Hausa/Fulani indigenous system of government and the celebration of Hausa Islamic religious festivals.

But for Chinedu Ogakwu, his major influence comes from his indigenous Igbo culture of south eastern Nigeria, where he trained and practised from as a contemporary African artist. Although he is influenced by his culture, the factors that seem to define his depictions are the practice of socio-cultural honour, historical personality, and childhood memory. Other factors that influence him include the necessity of planning which previsions the future individual life of Africans (Manaka 1987:11) and social issue of national and cultural unity in Nigeria. With regard to this work, the responses of both artists to interview questions during field research were found useful in the reading of the selected paintings.

5.2 Olatunbosun Shonibare (b. 1976)

Olatunbosun Shonibare was born in Ibadan and raised by his mother. He is a painter whose career as an artist started in primary school where he learnt how to draw from Bible stories and was helped to develop artistic skills by his elder brothers. When, economically, things became difficult for his family, Shonibare and his elder brother partitioned their mother's

shop and turned one side into an art studio in 1986. There they were able to produce and sell artworks through which they raised funds to meet their needs. He attended Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, where he obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in painting in 2006. Shonibare Olatubosun has participated in several group exhibitions in Nigeria and abroad. He has been producing paintings for close to two decades, so this research focuses on interrogating the African vernacular rooted symbolisms he represented in contemporary paintings from 2007 to 2016. In studying his paintings within this specified period, the five identified and selected works are *In Expectation* (2007), *Her Backbone* (2010), *Durbar* (2012), *Kosefowora –Priceless* (2015) and *Onidiri- Hair Braider* (2016).

The findings of my research on Olatunbosun Shonibare's paintings reveal that he articulated vernacular symbolism that reflects everyday life on womanhood and Northern Nigerian royal traditional ceremonies. It is an acknowledged fact that the sources from which an artist draws inspiration determine the kind of works he represents. In Shonibare's (2017) words, "as an artist, I am inspired by multiplicity of life generally, nature, socio-cultural themes, family life, womanhood, my background, and personal experiences". To further explain his experiences, Shonibare admits "I have gone through life challenges, so I want to tell my personal stories through artworks". However, when it comes to telling his personal stories or appropriating vernacular tropes, Shonibare adds that he is "confronted with the choice of what story to tell each time [he has] to paint, whether to depict subjects from [his] immediate environment, family, socio-cultural experiences or nature". Thus, Shonibare's argument indicates that he is not limited in the subjects and concepts that he appropriates in Afrocentric paintings.

Even though Shonibare identified the different sources he references in the creation of his paintings, there are specific kinds of tropes he represents. In expressing this view, Shonibare (2017) says

> In producing cultural imagery, I focus majorly on motherhood because of my background with my mother as a young African child. My experiences when I was growing up with my mother made me realise how strong she was as a widow who struggled to cater for her children all alone. This past experience makes me appreciate motherhood and womanhood, so I am inspired to appropriate their disparate vernacular tropes and some of the values I have seen in my mother and other women in general. I also depict nature as well, mostly in the form of landscapes.

Shonibare's expression reveals that while he represents motherhood because of appreciation for his mother and also that he draws inspirations and influences from womanhood in general

in executing his Afrocentric paintings, he also represents other aesthetics on African life. For example his other selected works, *Her Backbone* (2010), *Kosefowora –Priceless* (2015) and *Onidiri- Hair Braider* (2016), all reference heterogeneous vernacular tropes on womanhood. In situating the ethnic identities that influence his subjects and appropriations on motherhood, Shonibare (2017) notes that "I appropriate cultural forms of disparate African women from Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa cultures by intersecting their tropes with the patterns on African textiles or fabrics in paintings". Other influences on Shonibare come from his immediate Northern Nigerian environment rooted in Hausa culture.[4] The influence of northern Hausa/Fulani culture in his Afrocentric paintings can be seen in the works entitled *In Expectation* (2007) and *Durbar* (2012).[5]

Furthermore, the art historical narratives on the works of this contemporary African artist– Olatunbosun Shonibare reveals an engagement with diverse visual aesthetics that are centred on African scenes and indigenous cultures. Considering the kind of works he creates and the African stories embodied in them, Shonibare (2017) argues, "My influences notwithstanding, I am an African, so my artworks reflect African subjects and cultures which can be seen in the symbols and the patterns I depict. The stories I tell reflect Africa because my experiences are African". The context of his representations and the references resonate with African subjects therefore his works exhibit Africanness.

Nonetheless, the African subjects and stories referenced in Shonibare's paintings portray the social life of Nigerians. In responding to an interview question on whether his representations reflect the social life of Nigerians, Shonibare (2017) responded, "Yes, my cultural imageries and symbolisms are associated with the social life of Nigerians. In representing the social life of Nigerians in my artworks, I reflect on scenes not only around motherhood but other socio-cultural activities". This is evident in the social life he reflects on in his Afrocentric paintings which shows that they are not limited to motherhood as he also represents socio-cultural events rooted in Hausa culture. There are other works that hybridise nature and socio-cultural subjects together in his paintings and which echo different ideas. According to Shonibare (2017), "generally, my aims are revealed in the stories I tell in each artwork I execute. In my

[4] Hausa culture is one of the three major cultural groups in Nigeria. It is the predominant cultural group in the north of Nigeria.

[5] The Hausa/Fulani cultures in the north of Nigeria do not merely practice Islamic religion but embrace a traditional system of government known as the emirate council. The traditional ruler over the council is an emir to whom so much loyalty is shown. The significance of the religion and the emirate council is reflected in these works that are framed around loyalty to the emir and celebration of Salah as part of Islamic religious festival in the emir's palace in the north of Nigeria.

view, the ideas embodied in my paintings communicate different statements to differently viewers". In Patrick McNaughton's (2013:12) view, "there is the fact that visual art especially ... deploys form to produce an effect in ways that often defy authoritative explanation". Considering Shonibare's view, I argue that even though his views are important in understanding and reading his paintings, he does not hold an authoritative explanation to the representations but rather the audience brings different subjective interpretations to the form and content of each artwork that is read and which reveal several ideas and meanings represented in a work.

Shonibare is inclined to adopting African textiles or fabrics and canvas as the media on which he evocates vernacular symbolism in his exploration with forms and motifs from indigenous Nigerian cultures (Filani 2018:19). In representing such cultural symbolisms, Shonibare has been experimenting with linear patterns and brushstrokes in applying oil on canvas and on African fabrics. In mentioning the media he adopts in his paintings, Shonibare (2017) affirms "the media I use mostly [include] oil colour and once in a while I use acrylic, whether painting on canvas or African fabrics stretched over a canvas". To highlight how he executes his paintings on canvas, Shonibare maintains "I use brushes to create different linear motifs and patterns on canvas alongside the imagery I portray. This was during the phase of exploration with linear patterns". In differentiating his modernist mode of engagement with vernacular tropes on African fabrics, Shonibare further affirms, "when I choose to use the African fabric, I search for the fabric that will suit the African forms and concepts I wish to depict. In this exploration with African fabrics, I find joy and endless inspiration in representing distinct cultural symbolisms". While commenting on the outcome of his paintings on African fabric, Shonibare (2017) notes, "my exploration in painting on wax prints or African fabrics is an innovation that projects my stories of African cultures in a new way". The visual aesthetics he creates through his depictions on African fabrics seems to convey an entirely new mode of evocating paintings.

Although in Douglas Crimp's (1981:74) view, painting is considered reactionary in global contemporary art discourse, Shonibare (2017) asserts, "I still paint because that is the best way to tell my African story. At the moment, I do not want to use installation or new media art to tell stories about Africa. Whether making a three dimensional or two dimensional painting, I still prefer the traditional method of painting with oil on canvas or oil on African textiles". He appears to be resistant to change in exploring installation or new media otherwise he could have used them to tell his stories about Africa as well. If he has to do

installation with his paintings, Shonibare (2017) claims, "I can bring three paintings together in installation, to tell a story". Although his choice of painting till date is to enable him to express his African stories visually using specific traditional media, he is also committed to experimenting and exploring non-traditional media in visual culture.

Furthermore, to justify his reasons for still appropriating vernacular imageries in paintings, Shonibare (2017) argues that "it is said that 'the river that forgets its source will dry up'. Where I come from matters a lot in terms of the cultural symbolisms I reference in artworks. There are things to tell about my roots or motherhood, so I choose to do that with such forms". Although Shonibare's root is traceable to Yoruba ethnic identity,[6] his recourse to appropriating motherhood rooted in Yoruba culture is because of the virtues he saw in his mother, rather than a desire to draw motifs from his indigenous culture. Shonibare (2017) observes "some of the works or subject matters I depict today may have been depicted before. Except that I am representing them in different ways and styles". Even though the subject matters he depicts in contemporary paintings may not be new, his mode of depiction as a contemporary African artist may be entirely new. To demonstrate this, an example is the mother and child subject which has been represented by several contemporary artists but, in Shonibare's appropriation of mother and child forms, he executed it on an African fabric and gave it a Yoruba vernacular title *Kosefowora –Priceless* (2015). The denotation is the cultural value of the time and smiles a mother gives to her child and not just the depiction of mother and child.

However, the reception of Shonibare's paintings has been enormous not only at exhibitions but also through patronage and commissions. The analyses of the selected Afrocentric paintings produced by Olatunbosun Shonibare focuses on the non-traditional media – African fabrics and oil on canvas – he employs in the appropriation of cultural symbolisms which he considers African in contemporary African art. Also in focus are his personal influences and frames of reference, knowledge base, and idea or aim represented in each context.

5.3 Analyses of Vernacular Symbolisms in Olatunbosun Shonibare's Paintings

Shonibare's cultural appropriation unfolds a pastoral landscape scene, even though the foreground appears blurry with lines from thick brushstrokes. This contemporary painting *In Expectation* (2007) (Figure 25), unveils a subject matter that does not give a hint on identity

[6] Yoruba ethnic identity is one of the three major cultural groups in Nigeria. They are located in the southwest region of Nigeria.

or ethnicity. But its content shows a realistic rendition of vernacular symbolisms rooted in Hausa cultural group in Northern Nigeria. The composition shows, as Nikos Papastergiadis (2005:40) notes, a hybrid identity of continuum of African men on horseback, while others are standing in an engaging manner (Anaso 2016:87). The African men on horseback are all dressed in traditional garments, which hint on royal robes used by disparate personalities in the emir's palace in Northern Nigeria. The architectural construct at the background embellished with indigenous motifs signifies the palace. It establishes as Kunle Filani (1998:35) observes the influence of the "Zaria School"[7] mode of depiction characterised "with elegant Northern Nigerian architecture". The arc-like shape on the wall symbolises two entrances into the palace. The colours applied to the palace show effects of smooth textured brushstrokes blended at the top left side with few visible lines.

Figure 25: Olatunbosun Shonibare, *In Expectation*, 2007. Oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches. Private collection. (Courtesy of Olatunbosun Shonibare)

As Coleman (1968:373) argues, "the commonest pattern of indigenous government in Northern Nigeria [is the] emirate". The traditional ruler over the emirate is the Emir who is assisted by other royal personalities. In Ogbechie's (2008:198) view, these African men symbolise those who sit on the Emir's council of high chiefs and are the principal figures of northern emirate indigenous government. Their gazes and postures evoke as Shonibare (2017) notes, waiting in expectation of a dignitary, who is likely to emerge from the direction of the highlight. Such stares, in Eager's (1961:51) view, suggest that "the eye becomes the

[7] Zaria School is a term used in referring to the Fine Arts department at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

shaft of light directed where the spot is ... then moving on until it finds the object". However, the formal reading of the imageries and this monochromatic composition indicates evident use of linear patterns in tones of blue with "the brilliance of light radiating from the top right" (Anaso 2016:86) signifying depth and distance. Although it demonstrates Shonibare's (2017) claim that, "I use brushstrokes to create depth in composition", I am of the opinion that the effects of the bright linear strokes on the far right symbolise Arabic words which perhaps invokes the idea of Arabic writing in Northern Nigeria. The shade of blue that is evident on the immediate foreground of this rendition is not merely for visual aesthetics but hints on nearness.

Additionally, the reading also reveals that the heads of the horses are decorated with royal styled fabrics embellished with colourful embroidered motifs. This African vernacular rooted depiction signifies, in Adejumo's (2002:167) words, that the "forms, tones and texture in African art are expressions of the [artist's] perception of the world around [him]". While the rendition shows three advancing imageries on horses, it also draws attention to the brilliant depictions of their turbans or hoods, designs and drapery of the royal robes. Tunde Akinwumi (1998:54) observes that the designs signify the different types of embroidery that are woven on those African garment forms. This visual narrative signals, as Mudimbe (1994:157), argues, an artist's exploration, studying with his eyes the world around him and grasping areas of interest. Without doubt, Shonibare's philosophy represents a symbolic view on the appearance of royal personalities in traditional Hausa/Fulani government.

In tracing the historical trajectory of emirate councils in Northern Nigeria, it is worth noting that this became an established system of indigenous government since the 18th century when the Caliphate made wars and conquered territories. As a tradition, an Emir is placed over the conquered territory to administer rule yet remaining loyal to the Caliphate. But when the colonial regime was established in Nigeria, part of the Islamic ruler's responsibilities of fortifying defences and stock-piling weapons became "irrelevant to the needs of the society" (Uba 1976:47). Coleman (1968:374) observes that there are principal chiefs who are in charge of administration of towns but with representatives at the court reporting the incidences of the towns to the Emir. Shonibare (2017) notes that the aim suggests that as the "chiefs and audience were expecting a particular royalty, in life, where there is expectation there is hope". Alternatively, the reading of the painting reveals, in Isaac's (2010:2) view, an aim that signals the respect and moral values the Emir upholds as a powerful force in northern Nigeria. Possibly, the power an Emir wields is primarily because he is not only a

traditional ruler but also a religious ruler as well which is why loyalty to him is non-negotiable in the emirate. The reading stresses the importance of loyalty to the Emir in the traditional system of government. In contrast, in *Her Backbone* (2010) (Figure 26), while the title does not seem to create, as W.J.T. Mitchell (2002:1) notes, a cultural identity, I argue that it constructs the individual identity of a woman and symbolically creates another identity referred to as her backbone rooted in urban areas in Nigeria. Although the mode of appropriation shows a realistic depiction of a young African woman staring sideways to her left, there is evidence of expressionistic style in the rendition as well.

The reading of this vernacular symbolism unmasks the medium Shonibare employed in executing the painting. This work is rendered with linear patterns in shades and tones of two dominant colours, black and red, richly applied on the background and on the young African woman. In Shonibare's (2017) words, the painting exemplifies "exploration of linear patterns with brushstrokes". I argue that the exploration with linear patterns gives a clue to patterns on an African fabric rather than elaborate brush work. But the patterns with brushstrokes show geometric shapes hybridised with linear motifs of different shapes and sizes to create visual aesthetics.

Though the lone African woman appears to be in the confines of her room, her gaze in the direction of light suggests a contemplative posture. In Eager's (1961:52) words, her stare hints on "the sending power of the eye [which] is strongly felt [even though] it remains passive ... because the eyes look only to examine and not to influence". And, as LaGamma (2004:9) notes, it signals "a yearning ... [that] transcend[s] isolation and connect with an 'other'". Such a connection with the other who is not physically present invokes an emotional bond through her longing and contemplative posture. As Kenechi Anaso (2016:84) observes, the "studied facial expression" shows that the linear patterns embellished on the left side of her face with brushstrokes do not only present a calm disposition but also signifies facial beauty. The further reading of this symbolism suggests that the representation of her hairdo reveals an elaborate coiffure that evokes a modern hairstyle created with a relaxer rather than braiding. In Sieber and Herreman's (2000:1) view, it indicates an innovation in the personal styling of a woman's hairdo in present day Africa. Even though she appears with a neat and coyly arranged hairstyle, it signifies her evolving culture in defining self and evidence of cultural exchange. Nonetheless, to establish her African identity through heritage, a large earring embellished with spiral lines is depicted dangling freely from her left ear, showing a symbol of Africa (Ngwena 2018:117; Nettleton 2011:10a).

Figure 26: Olatunbosun Shonibare, *Her Backbone*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 40 x 20 inches. Private collection. (Courtesy of Olatunbosun Shonibare)

Furthermore, even though a part of her body from behind is uncovered, it is to demonstrate, as the subject echoes, her backbone. Thus, her uncovered back reveals the use of brushstrokes to outline a silhouette of an African man directly over her invisible spinal cord, which hints on her symbolic backbone. In Philip Peek's (2008:22) view, it signifies, on the one hand, an "African art [which] serve[s] to visualise the 'invisible or the not normally visible". On the other hand, the representation of her symbolic backbone, "serve[s] to remind us of this highly desirable and more complete condition in which ... various aspects are truly 'connected'". Rather, it evokes the interconnectedness of that invisible image with the visibly represented African woman. As Ogunleye (2006:402) argues, this mode of rendition establishes that an "African [artist is an] abstract thinker and that [his] painting [is] being used as a medium for communicating important concepts as opposed to being merely art for art's sake". While the subject seems to be an embodiment of abstract thought in a contemporary African painting, the thematic interpretation unveils a skeletal depiction of her symbolic backbone rather than literal bones.

In contrast, in Dumisani Thabede's (2008:235) view, I argue that the ways most African cultures would see and interpret this depiction will vary based on their cultural beliefs and values. The African woman normally carries a child on her back and the image on her back coupled with the cloth seemingly denotes her carrying a man on her back. Therefore, is the woman symbolically carrying the husband or his responsibilities and burden? If yes, then as Ifi Amadiume (1987:90) puts it, although the woman is a wife, for acting as the family head or discharging the husband's responsibilities, she is seen as a "female husband". Apart from the representation on the lower part of this African woman's back shows the gracious folds of a drapery wrapper loosely tied around her but decorated with linear motifs and patterns which signify aesthetics.

However, the experience depicted recalls a cultural history reconnaissance of duality or couple in African art which features traditional Yoruba artistic expressions. According to Suzanne Blier (2012:73), an ancient Yoruba art from Ita Yemoo[8] shows a copper alloy casting which depicts a king and queen with interlocked arms and legs. Such mode of depiction reflects a royal couple promoting political and religious marriage in the Ife kingdom. Similarly, double figural representations that reflect bond are also evident in the traditional art of the Baule peoples of Cote d'Ivorie (LaGamma 2004:23, 30), present day Ivory Coast. Despite these examples, the mode of portrayal of male and female couple evident in Shonibare's contemporary rendition does not bear any resemblance to them because of the abstract thought and attempt to visualise the invisible partner on the woman's back. According to Shonibare (2017), the aim of this depiction evokes a "glamourous look and beauty that is a result of the husband's commitment to discharging his responsibility to his wife". And, as Alisa LaGamma (2004:9) reiterates, it implies that "images of idealised figurative pairs often express underlying social and philosophical ideas concerning duality that are culturally specific".

Alternatively, it signals, in LaGamma's (2004:9) words, "the presence of a bond that joins two elements together". The two elements bonded together in this context are the African woman and her symbolic husband. It might also be argued that the depiction is making a socio-cultural commentary as Pat Caplan (1987: ix) notes, that this woman in an African context is "'husband' as well as wife". Thus, this contemporary representation locates a philosophical view of "duality" using visual aesthetics with linear motifs. Conversely, his

[8] Ita Yemoo is an ancient site in Ife, the cradle of Yoruba kingdom, South Western Nigeria, where some ancient arts were collected.

realistic pastoral landscape painting *Durbar* (2012) (Figure 27) hints not merely on an ethnic Hausa/Fulani traditional ceremony, but as an article titled *Durbar* ([sa]: 1) observes, introduces, a "festival celebrated at the culmination of the two great Muslim festivals Eid al Fitr and Eid al Kabir". Even though the event takes place two times a year, it holds only at the Emir's palace. As Shonibare (2017) recounts, "I watched durbar for the first time in 2012 at Zaria city when I went in the company of my lecturer Prof Muazu and it was an exciting moment". It was this colourful event that seems to influence the evocation of this Afrocentric vernacular rooted painting.

The composition is divided into two, depicting heterogeneous African men attired in royal robes on horseback on the right side, whereas the left side reveals a portrait of a heavily turbaned African man "deeply rooted in [Hausa] local culture" (Rovine 2010:4). However, the African garment form with which he is arrayed resonates with Hausa/Fulani notion of royal identity, and hints on "African mode of portraiture that rel[ies] on the property or clothing of the subject to evoke the individual" (Borgatti 1990:36). Although the colourful royal robe is intricately designed with embroidery, it is, however, in dissonance with the elaborate embroidery theme incorporated on a Hausa royal robe. Therefore, it signifies a simulacrum of the embroidery theme on a *babanriga (traditional gown),* which may be used by an elite in Hausa culture. As Tunde Akinwumi (1998:54) notes, "the best known example of embroidery in Nigeria is that found on the front and back voluminous tailored robe referred to as *[baban]riga*[in] Hausa [culture]". In Clarke's (1998:28) view, the "royal dress [is] meant to be worn by a high ranking chief". I, therefore, maintain that even though the specific office of this royal personality may not be easily situated, his "royal embroidered robe" (Akinwumi 1998:56) identifies him as a high ranking chief in Zaria Emirate Council. In addition, in Hausa/Fulani cultural groups, a royal robe does not only signify identity but may as well be personalised to the traditional office of the wearer.

Besides his traditional garment, while his visage evokes a focused and calm disposition, in Jean Borgatti's (1990:35) view, it signifies a "portraiture that convey[s] personal identity without resorting to" being individuated with name or traditional title. His facial features were all depicted in realism, but the face is embellished with linear patterns in tones and shades of yellow, brown and red appearing like tribal marks. Furthermore, the second half of the composition unfolds a scene of disparate African men appearing like suspended figures because of the mode of depiction, which employs linear patterns on the foreground instead of the movement. It evokes arrival of the Emir as an online article *Durbar* ([sa]:1) notes, "with

his splendid retinue" for the Durbar celebration. As the article further narrates, it demonstrates the "parade of ornately dressed horsemen, [and the] Emir dressed in ceremonial robes". The royal identity in the entourage presents a royal guard on horse in the centre of the pictorial plane with a towering brown turban on his head, dressed in white robe elaborately embroidered with linear patterns. His royal robe, painted white, is intricately embroidered with red colours from the back of the right shoulder to the front and around the border of the drapery robe that borders the hand. Behind the royal guard is a symbolic depiction of the Emir of Zaria, adorned in white turban with two projections, a style that is only meant for him and distinguishes him from other royal personalities. As Eicher (1972:517) notes, their many types of royal ceremonial dresses are not only for identification but "are a result of both indigenous and outside influences", an influence that is traceable to Islam and Arab dress form. The other royal personalities reference palace guards, all adorned with different turbans. However, the depiction is characterised with "colours, lines and movement fused and broke[n] as if worked by a vibrant rhythm" (Mudimbe 1994:162) and serves to "reinforce the personal prestige and social value of the [heterogeneous] traditional rulers" (Akinwumi 1998:58).

Figure 27: OlatunbosunShonibare, *Durbar*, 2012. Oil on canvas, 36 x 60 inches. Private collection. (Courtesy of Olatunbosun Shonibare)

Furthermore, the cultural history of this present experience reflects durbar which, Andrew Apter (1999:219) argues, is however contested as a pre-Islamic practice in Jukun Kindgom. But the Islamic durbar is associated with the major Sallah festivals known as Id el Fitr and Id el Kebir in the emirate. However, he notes that the earliest written account of durbar is c. 1829. As Laessing and Sotunde (2016:1) claim, "Durbar is a custom which involves warriors from villages and towns in [northern] Nigeria ... [at] the Emir's palace". Durbar festivals take place in Northern Nigeria so, during Durbar, the regiments gather for a military parade to demonstrate allegiance to the ruler. Still, other events characterise this religious festival in Northern Nigeria. Its evocation is significant for communicating social and historical commentary on this ancient tradition that is still experienced in the present. As Shonibare (2017) notes, the aim of this depiction is to relay "the display of horses, the array of the palace guards, the procession of the royal family and the colourful royal garments which was a beauty like none else". The interpretation echoes an aim that reflects underlying cultural value for the observance of an indigenous colourful cultural celebration but gives expression to the traditional political power.

Alternatively, in Griswold and Bhadmus's (2013:125) words, it hints on Durbar as a social "drama that helps sustain a sense of place-based collective solidarity and that supports the political *status quo*" of the Emir. I argue that such indigenous tradition does not only demonstrate solidarity to the Emir but also seeks to convey the pertinent colourful celebration of religious festival in Hausa/Fulani culture that is still practiced in the 21st century despite the toll of globalisation on African cultures.

In a different painting titled *Kosefowora* (2015) (Figure 28), while this title echoes a Yoruba ethno-linguistic term which means 'priceless', it also hints on the culture that influenced the composition. As Shonibare (2017) notes, "the birth of a child is a priceless gift that no one can buy with money". I argue that even though money cannot buy motherhood, it may help a couple to get medical help towards having a biological child. Tunde Akinwumi (1998:60) notes that it is perhaps a couple's "wish, hope, and aspiration to have money and children" but that nevertheless, the aspiration of having money may be realised without any child no matter the efforts. This establishes that giving birth to a child is a priceless gift. Although, motherhood may not be the only experience in life that is considered priceless, yet in Yoruba culture, like in many African cultures, because of the "'matripotency'–supremacy of motherhood" as "representative of humanity" (Oyewumi 2016:7, 62) and given the fact that

"only women can give birth" (Coetzee 2018:3), motherhood is valued as priceless, and thus celebrated.

To communicate this cultural reality, Shonibare, in this African vernacular painting references an African mother and child on an African fabric as the medium of expression. Similar use of fabric as a medium in portraying cultural imagery is evident in the paintings of a Cote d'Ivoire artist, Gerard Santoni (1943-2008), who paints "on traditional hand-woven narrowband cloth" (Vogel 2012:100). Though the linear patterns and colours on the African fabric appear dominant in this depiction, yet there is evidence of lines from brushstrokes that intersect and impose the mother and child on the African fabric. However, the African mother's *gele* (headgear) which is represented in several layers of folds, signals a depiction that is "rich in African costume".

Figure 28: Olatunbosun Shonibare, *Kosefowora -Priceless,* 2015. Mixed media, 48 x 36 inches. Private collection. (Courtesy of Olatunbosun Shonibare)

Besides the 'gele', her African garment 'buba' (blouse) reveals adornment which, as Joanne Eicher (1972:518) argues, demonstrates "the concept of harmony" in the colours and patterns. Around her neck is a beaded necklace delineated with spherical lines that enclose the patterned motifs on the fabric with dark colours. The context reveals an African mother smiling to her young child whose left hand appears on her shoulder. It seems the mood and the posture of this African woman was, among other things, the requisite language conveying

the notion of a joyful mother. In Shonibare's (2017) view, it invokes "the natural beauty expressed through the depiction of smile on the face of the woman while playing with her child is considered priceless". Although humour has beauty in it, but to interpret the smile from a mother to her child as priceless is contestable because "it is hoped that [a mother] will smile at her child (Scafoglio 2013:74). On the other hand, the depiction hints on a smile in portraiture while baring teeth, unlike a Westerner client of centuries past who would refrain from smiling in portrait to avoid showing ... bad teeth" (Wolkoff 2019:2).

Notwithstanding the formal analysis, this experience of mother and child relationship in Yoruba culture invokes a cultural history of portraiture. Portraiture in past centuries, Yoruba art, in Nicholas Jeeves' ([sa]:1) view, shows "conflict between the serious and smirk". But open smile in those art works were unfashionable. On the other hand, the representation of mother and child in past Yoruba art, as Simon Ottenberg (1983:52) notes, depicts "mother with twins or with numerous children". They are figures which symbolise the importance of children and of fertility in Yoruba culture. The philosophical content of this Afrocentric representation signals visual aesthetics of motherhood through the intersection of oil paints on non-traditional media. In Shonibare's (2017) view, the idea is simply "motherhood is priceless". As Taiwo Makinde (2004:166) argues, "motherhood is considered to be very important in Yoruba culture because the preservation of humanity depends on the role of the mother". It might also be argued that the aim echoes the communicative value of humour which is evolutionarily profitable in advertising a safe and pleasant play situation (Hartz and Hunt 1991:301).

In contrast, a different African vernacular-rooted depiction unfolds with a title *Onidiri* (2016) (Figure 29). This title adopted by Shonibare is an indigenous Yoruba philosophical concept (Ogbechie 2016:93), which means the hair braider. Hair braiding or "binding" is a traditional practice in different African cultures used for beautifying the physical appearance of an African woman. While braiding is a form of beautification of the hair, it is also a profession for some women and men in contemporary Nigerian cultures. Nonetheless, the use of the Yoruba concept to present the vernacular painting hints on cultural influence. In Shonibare's (2017) words, "the lady whose hair is being braided is my niece". It is, however, contestable to establish the subjective identities of the cultural imageries because the work does not individuate any of them except perhaps their ethnic identity.

Figure 29: Olatunbosun Shonibare, *Onidiri -Hair Braider*, 2016. Mixed media, 54 x 42 inches. Private collection, (Courtesy of Olatunbosun Shonibare)

Moreover, the depiction shows an African woman whose hands stretched over the hair of an African girl suggesting the process of hair braiding. In her right hand is an instrument with which she parts a portion of the hair in preparation for the continuous braiding, while the left hand holds the parted hair in place. However, her downward gaze, in Gerald Eager's (1961:52) view, evokes eyes that are strongly and consciously focused on her client's hair as she braids. Still, the braiding suggests an appearance of two steps style of braiding. The forward braids drop over the left side of the African girl's face, with her face looking downwards to indicate a suitable posture while the braiding lasts. Although, as Joanne Eicher (1972:519) claims, sectioning of the hair design imposed on the scalp in Nigeria is given names, the name of this coiffure in Yoruba culture is not known to the writer. Nevertheless, a similar coiffure in indigenous Luba culture is referred to as "cascade" or "steps" and is symbolised by layered tiers of hair covering, evident in 19th and 20th century historical African art of Luba people of the Democratic Republic of Congo (LaGamma 2004:32). I argue that Alisa LaGamma's stance in identifying a name of coiffure style in Congo is at variance with Joanne Eicher's stance that giving names to coiffure is not only in Nigeria. Although the hair braider is dressed in a grey gown and the girl dressed in red blouse, both have the same patterns because the work was represented on an African fabric. As Vogel

(2012:103) notes, it suggests that "each new medium and style has an inherent symbolic or metaphoric potential"

Although hairstyles of contemporary black people of African heritage have nothing in common with those of millennia ago (Mokoena 2017:113), yet cultural history is significant in creating identity. Thus, as Hlonipha Mokoena (2017:117) notes, hairstyles that are produced across the continent of Africa vary significantly. For instance, different hairstyles were identified in depictions of ancient Egyptians as well as other African countries. Similarly, there are numerous historical and cultural examples of *Irun biba* (hair knotting) in Yoruba culture. To identify some of these historic hairstyles in Yoruba culture South Western Nigeria, Oti and Ayeni (2013:26), maintain that traditional braiding styles may include: Suku (long or short knots, which run from forehead to back or crown of the head); Kolese (without legs, weaves that run from the front and end at the back); Ipako-Elede (starts from the back of the head and ends at the front); Panumo (keep quiet) which starts from the back of the head as well as the front and meets at the centre and, Ojo npeti (rain soaked ear) "braiding [that] starts from one side of the head, [and] ends close to the ear". Thus, the philosophy that guided Shonibare in this work is essentially the framing of cultural forms with the aesthetics of patterns from non-traditional media.

Given the fact that the depiction shows a "tight-woven hair", what aim does the interpretation of this rendition convey to the viewers? As Shonibare (2017) observes "my idea in *Onodiri* is that there is no beauty without pain". He told a story that "Although my niece was excited she would have her hair braided, soon after the braiding began she became moody because of pain". It signals the cultural value of adorning the head which echoes a subjective concept of natural beauty. In Joanne Eicher's (1972:519) view, the aim reflects braiding of hair which adorns not merely the face but the head in a different way. It also reveals the idea of the economic significance of braiding hair on the part of the hair braider. Alternatively, it gives a clue to hair rule which emphasises looking after the hair to promote personal neatness by plaiting (Tate 2017:96). On the other hand, as Mokoena (2017:115) argues, it suggests that "the world would have been robbed of one of the richest visual stories and visual performances" without the creativity of black African women hair braiding in human history.

5.4 Sub-conclusion

In the narratives of the contemporary African vernacular rooted paintings executed by the Nigerian artist Olatunbosun Shonibare, I argue that his works reveal articulation of cultural

symbolisms from Hausa/Fulani traditional royal context and womanhood from his Yoruba ethnic identity in Nigeria. He uses human imageries as a strong vehicle in his depictions. To situate his oeuvres, in Vogel's (2012:101) words, it evokes that "the insistent presence of the human figure in the work of [a] contemporary African artist ... in particular never quite bec[o]mes unfashionable".

Shonibare's visual narratives serve to relay different aims rooted in Nigerian cultures. In his effort, as Ekpo Eyo (1998:16) notes, to reconstruct African identity, he evocated a narrative that focuses on Hausa/Fulani indigenous system of governance of antiquity that is still practised in the twenty first century. It might also be argued that the work also reflects the subject of loyalty to the Emir in the emirate council. His rendition echoes an African abstract mode of reconstructing duality and bond in male and female couple. It draws attention to a husband's responsibility in defining the beauty of his wife. The subject of hair as the most visible marker of Africanness and Blackness next to skin (Tate 2017:99) and thus of race, is narrated in hairstyles. Therefore, to create African identity, Siweya (2014:1) argues that the definition of an African woman requires coiffure as a means of representing Africanness. I argue however that while Siweya's argument enunciates the need for African identity through hairstyle, several other factors are responsible for defining Africanness in a black woman. Another theme of Africanness that unfolds is also defined in the family setting in Yoruba culture when a woman becomes a mother. It demonstrates African identity from cultural heritage (Dei 2012:49).

5.5 Chinedu Ogakwu (b. 1975)

Chinedu Ogakwu is a painter and a sculptor. His practice portrays him as a painter whose knowledge of sculpture influences his modelling of imageries, especially in his appropriation of wood bark in painting. Ogakwu trained as an artist at the Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu, where he obtained a Higher National Diploma (HND). He decided to go into full time studio practice and presently works from his studio at Port Harcourt. He became aware of his artistic talent quite early, thus began drawing portraits and painting as a hobby. By the age of 16, he was selling his drawings to his teachers and classmates. These are the events that marked the beginning of his artistic career and positioned him for more experiments with different media with which he works to date. He has participated in several solo and group exhibitions locally and internationally.

My research findings reveal that Chinedu Ogakwu articulated vernacular symbolism from indigenous Nigerian cultures in his Afrocentric paintings. His works interrogated in this study reflect socio-cultural and historical concepts and contents. In Ogakwu's (2017) words, "I am an Igbo man; in my works I depict African concepts and subject matters precisely from my root–Igbo culture". He also references "universal subjects". Ogakwu's introduction does not only locate his ethnic identity, it also reveals that he knows his root and comes to terms with his identity (Okeke-Agulu 2006:28), in contemporary visual narrative. His ethnocentric perspective is evident in the identified, selected and analysed paintings from his collection in this research. Aside from depicting people in his works, Ogakwu argues "I reference Uli design motifs that are often depicted on walls of traditional houses, human bodies and in artworks".

Although he is identified with appropriations of cultural imageries in art, Ogakwu (2017) claims that they "are associated with the social life of Nigerians". He states further "I derive my inspiration from cultural events and ceremonies rooted in different ethnic groups in Nigeria". An example of his painting that references people dressed in cultural attires rooted in different ethnic groups in Nigeria is *Wazobia* (2016). To situate his paintings as indicating Africanness, Ogakwu (2017) argues "my works are African because they focus on subjects that reflect African way of life". Ogakwu's expression does not just reveal the different sources from which he appropriates his symbolisms in contemporary African paintings, but likewise serves to establish their Africanness because they reflect African scenes.

Furthermore, in stating why he has continued to depict cultural imageries in art, Ogakwu (2017) posits "I still represent cultural symbolisms because they form the core of African social life and the interaction that takes place within our societies". He further argues "I cannot paint or sculpt, as an African, without introducing a particular concept on African culture in my work. So, if I paint African men and women, I depict dresses that reference elements in their ethnicities" to show their different cultural heritages. In Ogakwu's (2017) view, "an artist has a culture and that influences his artworks significantly".

In narrating the aims he represents in his contemporary African paintings, Ogakwu (2017) argues "I work mostly on subject matters that depict the past, so my aims in such works serve to convey historical relevance of the past to the present. In such works, I tell stories about where we are coming from and the lessons we need to learn for our present societies". Ogakwu adds that, however, "my aims are best seen from the context of each work I depict,

not just a specific idea in all my artworks". For example, even though he represented people dressed in attires rooted in the three major cultural groups in Nigeria, he seeks to narrate the need for cultural unity of the nation in *Wazobia* (2016). In Ogakwu's (2017) words, "my aim in the work is constructed around the necessity of Nigeria's unity in diversity, which I believe keeps us stronger than being fragmented into smaller entities". Thus, it conveys a socio-political commentary on national unity.

Ogakwu adopts different non-traditional media in the production of his contemporary paintings. He argues: "I do mix media painting. If I have to create or represent human forms, I like to apply black and earth colours to suggest African identity in such a work". While earth colours may symbolise African identity in Ogakwu's paintings, I argue that that is not the only basis for trumpeting Africanness in contemporary African art. In itemising the different media he uses, therefore, Ogakwu (2017) notes "I work with textured canvas by creating smooth or rough effects with particles of boards, nets, glue and tissue papers mounted on the canvas, after which I either use oil colour or acrylic to make my depictions". To create different effects of rough textures, Ogakwu (2017) adds that "presently, I am focused on working with tree barks, which I assemble and glue to the surface of the canvas. In other works, I introduce different found objects in creating texture [and] after drying, I paint on them". Notwithstanding the numerous materials he uses in preparing his canvas before painting, he observes that "the project and concepts I work on at any given time determine the kinds of found objects I must use to create texture". This view implies that Ogakwu does not combine all the found objects in treating a canvas before executing a painting, but determines the medium from his concepts and contents.

While contemporary artists in Africa are shifting from painting to evocating installation and new media arts, Ogakwu still paints. So, when asked why, Ogakwu (2017) responded "I still paint, because painting is one and installations of different kinds are others. The artworks I create are the ones that can stand the test of time and can be treasured when kept over a long period". He holds the view that paintings have a long time economic value over installations and new media and this is why he still paints. He argues that "installation art is created for a short time to communicate certain ideas, after which they are dismantled and taken away". He argues further "I still paint because it is the medium I have chosen to express myself with visually". Consequently, Ogakwu's expression suggests that he is not considering making installation or new media arts because they are temporal, unlike paintings that have long time economic value.

On a final note, while Ogakwu seems to enjoy positive responses from audiences towards his works, he claims "I try to get an audience for my works when I stage exhibitions, this I do by identifying those that like specific kinds of works and then keep contacts with them" (Ogakwu 2017). When, on the other hand, he meets people who do not appreciate them, Ogakwu (2017) maintains that he "create[s] opportunity to talk with them so that [he could] convince them or make them see reasons why they should like [his] kind of artworks". In the interrogation of the selected paintings, therefore, I focus on Chinedu Ogakwu's frame of reference in the cultural imageries depicted, the ideas he represented and reasons why his contemporary African artworks may be considered African.

5.6 Analysis of Vernacular Symbolisms in Chinedu Ogakwu's Works

Ogakwu's realistic painting titled *Hawkers' Meeting* (2010) (Figure 30), introduces market people rather than cultural identities. However, it sounds strange that heterogeneous hawkers of goods who engage in "mobility in contemporary culture" (Papastergiadis 2005:39) like nomads on the street, would engage one another in a meeting. But the subject matter appears to draw attention to the dialogue that ensued among some heterogeneous people hawking goods. The context of this painting unfolds six vernacular symbolism that reference disparate African market women and a man dialoguing. Ogakwu (2017) asserts that "this painting was inspired by a sight of some hawkers who were discussing on the street on the land border between Nigeria and Benin Republic". I argue that there are symbols in the work to establish Ogakwu's claim that these imageries were referenced between Nigeria and Benin Republic borders, so it is difficult to locate them within any culture other than arrogate African identity to them. This is because "there is a blending of influences from disparate [and unknown] ethnic groups and cultures" (Owerka 1985:78) in this painting.

The composition unfolds full standing African women with modelling details as if he was treating a lone figure. They are adorned with different colourful, casual, "African dress forms" (Akinwumi 1998:61) as they engage in dialogue. Although the designs on their clothes are different, as Joanne Eicher (1972:518) argues, their colourful dress forms hint on "the Yoruba market women's outfit [which] combines various patterns". However, the various patterns suggest, in Heather Akou's (2009:210) view, the aesthetics and patterns of African textiles. The women are standing with trays loaded with goods on their heads, with the exception of the man who is dressed in a white flowing gown, backing the viewers with

his goods neatly tied together and carried on his head and additional goods in a bag hanging graciously from his shoulder. Still, the goods they are carrying also vary significantly.

Figure 30: Chinedu Ogakwu, *Hawkers' Meeting,* 2010. Mixed media, 72 x 50 inches. Artist's collection. (Courtesy of Chinedu Ogakwu)

However, to signify a round standing meeting that gives "away hints of dissonance" (Anaso 2016:85), the faces of all the figures are looking inwards. This "circular formation" during a meeting may be conceptualised as a characteristic of gatherings in African cultures, which vary from traditional courts to play or dance rings and are given names according to the contexts, for example, legal, communal, familial, or entertainment meetings like dances where each dancer gets a turn at the centre of the ring. Further analysis reveals that Ogakwu seems to create balance in this composition with the representation of three imageries on either side. Although he observes that, "the background of this painting was coated with glue and oil colour to create impasto" (Ogakwu 2017), I argue that the effect of rough texture on the canvas is not evident. Despite his technique of treating the background, the entire background is dominated with tones and shades of green which appears like thick vegetation that hints on "the *unification* of nature in the representation of landscape" (Mitchell 2002:12).

To situate this experience of market women and man, it traces the cultural history of land border trade between Nigeria and Benin Republic. Isyaku (2017:209) notes that "long before coloni[s]ation of Africa, there were extensive contacts and mutual interactions between African people" in both countries. They "were linked together by internal trade route" despite the fact that different colonial administrators ruled them. As Alec McEwen (1991:62)

observes, "from a legal point of view the boundary is clearly defined by two Anglo-French agreements of 1906 and 1914". However, there are "territorial limits ... controlling the movement of people and goods across them, especially in situations involving the large-scale passage of refugees or contraband". Notwithstanding the control, McEwen (1991:69) further notes that "border communities ... [were allowed to] enjoy the maximum freedom of [border and] trans-border movement for social and economic purposes".

Though Ogakwu (2017) claims the narration in this painting "reflects an idea of organisation and dialogue that can better the disparate market people's quest to sell their goods", it may be argued, as Peace Hyde (2018:1) notes, that street vendors hope to sell goods to earn a living and feed family members. It might also be argued, in Chike Aniakor's (1998:14) view, that this rendition asserts the economic significance of dialogue and team spirit necessary for success in a chosen endeavour. It might even be further argued that though the figures in the painting are carrying goods to sell, the scene suggests argument or quarrel rather than meeting. The aim also suggests an attempt to resolve interpersonal problems among the hawkers. Thus, Ogakwu's philosophy reflects the need for proper planning that may hopefully prevent poor performance in life endeavours. In this depiction, Africanness is signified by referencing not merely black people but a scene in the African context.

A different vernacular rendition unfolds with the title *Chief and Lolo* (2012) (Figure 31). This title reflects the use of indigenous Igbo concept for introducing the content of the vernacular painting. Thus, to present the meaning of the ethno-linguistic concepts, Ogakwu (2017) claims that "the chief is a significant title given to a respected Igbo man in the society, which simply means chair. It is usually in recognition of his achievement, status or impact in the society". Ogakwu notes that "Lolo" is a name given to the wife of the chief to honour her along with her husband, perhaps in recognition of the family's contributions to the society.

This abstract vernacular painting depicts an African man and his wife rooted in Igbo culture[9] of South Eastern Nigeria and attests to Ogakwu's (2017) claim that he articulates imageries from his root in his paintings. However, their facial features show no details to indicate and possibly emphasise, as Jean Borgatti (1990:35) observes, on social identity rather than resemblance. Though the context of this mixed media painting reveals appropriation of a couple, their portrayal reflects a distorted portrait as they are dressed in "African garment"

[9] Igbo culture is the culture of one of the three major cultural groups in Nigeria. While the Yoruba cultural group is located in the south western geographic region, Hausa culture occupies the north of Nigeria and Igbo is in the south east geographical region of Nigeria.

(Akinwumi 1998:53). But the chief is adorned with a red traditional cap on his head and red beaded necklace around his neck which suggests a complete adornment of the illustrious Igbo man. In Ukpokolo's (2015:33) view, in a complete outfit, "a man wears a long gown [over] a pair of trousers or a wrapper, a red cap ... and beads for the wrist and neck". Possibly, because the rendition is a portrait of chief's outfit, the length of his shirt and other apparel may not be established. But the multi-coloured embroidered shirt embellished with elaborate simulacrum of embroidery, motifs such as linear and dotted brown geometric shapes signify the adoption of uli motifs as a form of cultural aesthetics in his appearance.

Figure 31: Chinedu Ogakwu, *Chief and Lolo*, 2012. Mixed media, 39 x 35 inches. Artist's collection. (Courtesy of Chinedu Ogakwu)

Besides, Lolo is adorned with a towering dark blue headgear which also spreads side ways to symbolise social status. It is similar to the 'gele' (headgear) worn by a wealthy African woman rooted in Yoruba culture. Other ornaments on the African woman include large earrings on her ears and several alternately beaded necklaces between yellow and red colours. As Mudimbe (1994:159) notes, these ornaments echo "inspir[ation] from 'traditional oeuvres". And, in Kunle Filani's (2018:19) view, it reflects "adaptations of symbolic motifs" from indigenous Igbo culture. But the sleeveless blouse on Lolo seems to be in dissonance for a traditional blouse that such a respected African woman would wear. According to Ukpokolo (2015:33), "a woman dresses in a pair of wrappers with matching blouse and head gear. Beads and earrings are worn on the neck and ears respectively to accentuate beauty". Although Ukpokolo's argument identifies a pair of wrappers as matching attire, Ogakwu's

mode of rendition did not reference the lower part of the African woman therefore that cannot be identified.

The philosophy in this painting suggests that humanitarian services do not go unrecognised no matter the passage of time. Nevertheless, the pre-colonial cultural history of Igbo people reveals rich cultural heritage. Although the Igbo is identified as a large cultural group, they are however not a homogenous entity because there are sub-cultures with significantly different identities (Amadi and Agena 2015:18). As Amadi and Agena (2015:23) observe, in Igbo culture, ethical traditional practice is its reward system for honouring people who through philanthropic or patriotic services to their communities are rewarded with traditional titles. In tracing the aim of this painting, Ogakwu (2017) maintains that "the idea represented in *Chief and Lolo* is honour and recognition for good reputation". The recognition of 'Lolo' along with 'Chief' also seeks to strengthen the tie between the African man and his wife, and demonstrate that she is the personality behind his achievements and successes. It might be argued that it also signifies "the visual vocabulary of divinely sanctioned leadership" (LaGamma 2004:44). Alternatively, as Alisa LaGamma (2004:28) argues, this representation of a couple suggests "the ideal partnerships we all seek to achieve completeness and fulfilment".

Another work by Ogakwu interrogated in this research is the retrospective vernacular painting titled *Once Upon A Time* (2014) (Figure 32). This title, as Colin Richards (2011:47) notes, reflects "history and memory", whereas the context references six young African children. This suggests that he is reflecting on his recent past childhood experiences in rural areas rooted in Igbo culture. It articulates four of the children seated inside a wheel barrow, being wheeled by perhaps two older girls; one has neatly braided hair, while the other has low Afro style. This depiction exemplifies, as Ogakwu (2017) claims, that he "focus[es] on historical concepts in an attempt to mirror the present from the past. [He] do[es] not want to be carried away with current happenings and forget the memories of [his] past". Although Ogakwu's argument suggests that recalling childhood history is to make him connect with his humanity, I argue that he does not necessarily need to remember such humble beginnings to be human. But the "knowledge of the past may be helpful" in providing possible interpretation for present challenges (Richards 2011:47).

While the subjective gazes of the children seated inside the wheelbarrow hints on passive sending power of the eyes, the foreword look of the young African girls wheeling the barrow

implies an active sending power of the eyes (Eager 1961:49,52), aimed at safety of all else. However, the expressions on the faces of the young African children hint on excitement rather than fear. Aside from the facial expressions, the clothes on them were depicted in bright colours with slight folds resulting conceivably from their seated postures. This wheel barrow painted in tones and shades of brown seems to signify vehicular movement while they played.

Figure 32: Chinedu Ogakwu, *Once Upon A Time,* 2014. Mixed media, 42 x 48 inches. (Courtesy of Chinedu Ogakwu)

The entire rendition shows the dominant application of brown and black to signify the African identity of the children. But the background reveals a rough textured canvas because of the found objects. In Mudimbe's (1994:157) words, it hints on an attempt to have "a dream of re-creating a new artistic universe". The presentation of such lived experience of childhood memory in the present requires a return to cultural history. Retrospective representations of vernacular tropes of young African children playing are also evident in the Afrocentric paintings of contemporary South African artists Nelson Makamo, Lebohang Sithole and Durant Sihlali. However, when narrating Durant Sihlali's evocation of vernacular tropes of childhood memory, Sandra Klopper (2006:69) argues that, they do not merely hint on "the artist's complex relationship to a sense of history", but a "careful excavation of personal experience, childhood nostalgia, and memories connected to quasi-mythical past".

The philosophy that guided Ogakwu's work is that the humble beginnings of a childhood past soon become memory against which an adult assesses achievements in the present. Ogakwu (2017) observes that "notwithstanding achievements and progress himself and other adults

might have made in the present, there was a past characterised with such playful moments, which must not be forgotten". As Bruce Onobrakpeya (cited by Kennedy 1986:90) observes, the aim signals "the process of the use of art in recording history". And, in Ogbechie's (2008:205) words, it evokes that "the artist sought solace in the memory of powerful figures that dominated his childhood". Therefore, this painting conveys a retrospective history that is not only personal but universal because it seems to tell his story as well as of other heterogeneous African people. Alternatively, as Homi Bhabha (1990:1a) notes, it hints on the nation state which looms "out of an immemorial past and glide[s] into a limitless future". Similarly, Ogakwu represented another reflective Afrocentric painting entitled *Ikemba* (2016) (Figure 33). Although this title presents an individual identity, it is adopted from Igbo culture. The Igbo word *Ikemba* means the strength of the people. In Adejumo's (2002:167) words, this title indicates the mythological reflection on "the colourful stories that surround the" life of a hero which provides an "African artist with a theme for his work".

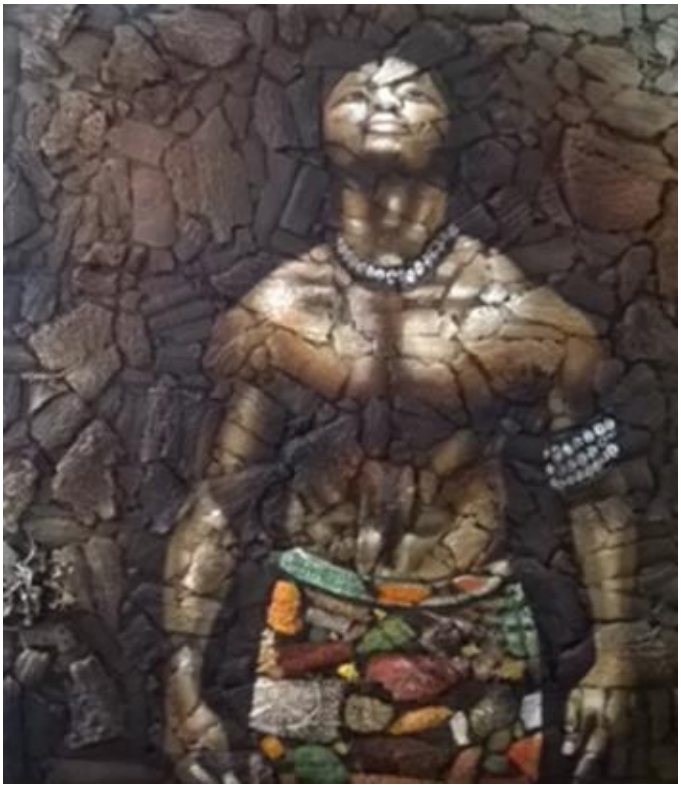

Figure 33: Chinedu Ogakwu, *Ikemba*, 2016. Mixed media, 42 x 48 inches. Artist's collection. (Courtesy of Chinedu Ogakwu)

To demonstrate, as Ogakwu (2017) claims that he "references diverse sources in his background and culture", he evocated this realistic imagery of a semi-nude masculine African man adorned with white cowries, necklace, as well as armlets on his left hand and a small loincloth. They are not merely for aesthetics and elegance, but symbols that resonate with the

idea of social status and wealth. His head is slightly tilted backwards as he looks up, perhaps not just in intercession, but for invocation of divine power or support, for strength and victory in battle, a symbol he represents in Igbo culture. Though in a standing posture, he is represented on a rough textured assemblage of tree barks, which appropriates the sculptural technique in painting. Ogakwu (2016:24) argues that "[I] us[e] bark of wood to create the basis of the piece. By transforming the bark of wood in my work, they are given new relevance". While it seems to demonstrate a new relevance with the effect of a broken and fragmented background, it signals a depiction on a rock. Light seems to reflect on him from above as evident on his face and broad chest, thus portraying Ikemba's masculine stature as a symbol of strength. Rather than as Ogakwu (2017) claims that he is a leader in warfare, the imagery invokes the idea of a chief priest making invocation in Igbo culture.

Moreover, to locate the cultural history, Oghojafor et al (2013:14) argue, that in ancient Igbo cultural practices, different titles are given as reward to an African man who leads his community to war and comes back successful. Some of the titles include Ikemba (the power house of his people), "Ochiagha" (leader of war) and "Odokara Olua" (one who says it and makes it happens). In narrating the mode of depiction and adornment, similar appropriation of a muscular figure "dressed in loincloth strung with objects of power" is evident in Ben Enwonwu's sculpture of *Sango* (1964) (Ogbechie 2009:163). In Joanne Eicher's (1972:517) view, such "contemporary [depiction] ... of dress in Africa ... can be understood only by analysing history and culture contact through the centuries". Therefore, as Immanuel Jannah (2014:1) argues, little clothing was appropriated in Igbo culture in the past because the purpose of clothing was to conceal the private parts. Although Jannah's argument establishes historical relevance, yet it does not suggest why Ikemba's wrapper is colourful. Ogakwu (2017) claims that in past "indigenous Igbo culture, such cultural attire suggests an expensive cloth or a warrior's costume and wealth". Thus, the colourful wrapper designed with orange, green, yellow, purple and white does not only hint on indigenous aesthetics but also symbolises Ikemba's riches and wealth. The aim of this visual narrative, according to Ogakwu (2017), denotes "honour and respect for a personality deemed strength of the people or being at the forefront of decision making and warfare".

Alternatively, in Oghojafor et al's (2013:14) view, it hints at exultation and elevation to the position of an elder in his community. It might also be argued as Sylvester Ogbechie (2008:35) observes, that it symbolises an art used in Igbo culture "to document individual and cultural memory". And, as Bruce Onobrakpeya (cited by Kennedy Jean 1986:90) argues, it

evokes a reflection on past indigenous Nigerian glories rooted in Igbo culture. The philosophical view of this Afrocentric painting draws attention to the need for contemporary identification with stories that resonate with past cultural events and heroes in visual culture. In contrast, for *Wazobia* (2016) (Figure 34), Ogakwu gave a title that reflects not just the formation of cultural identities but national identity. The title adopts indigenous Nigerian philosophical concepts from the three major cultural groups: Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo. The first two letters in the title "Wa" are derived from the Yoruba vernacular word which means "come"; the next two letters "zo" are appropriated from the Hausa ethno-linguistic word also meaning "come" while the last three letters "bia" constitute the Igbo word which connotes "come" as well. These concepts are hybridised into one word to symbolise the unification of one Nigeria.

The context of this vernacular painting reveals an expressionistic mode of articulating cultural imageries of men and women adorned in "African indigenous dress forms" (Akinwumi 1998:61), rooted in the three major ethnic identities in Nigeria as the title suggests. But their postures hint at interwoven closed up depictions as they border each other, thereby resonating with the concept of cultural bond and an indivisible country–Nigeria. As Okeke-Agulu (2006:29) notes, the bodies of these imageries are sparsely modelled while their faces are depicted in black. For me, however, I want to argue that while Ogakwu's expressed intent was to reference dress as cultural elements in the three cultural groups, in Owerka's (1985:78) view, he seems to "possess an awareness of contemporary ... trends" of African dress that transcends two cultural boundaries–Yoruba and Igbo cultures rather than Hausa culture possibly because he has no knowledge of dress elements in Hausa culture in Northern Nigeria.

The background of this rendition was treated with nets, ropes and saw dust and by so doing creating a textured effect that appears like a camouflage. On the other hand, the treatment on the background of the work suggests the appearance of a cramped animal skin and evidence of perspective. This is visible in the immediate foreground and at the upper background painted in tones and shades of brown, blurred with white colour.

However, to present a discourse on the present experience, the narrative invokes the cultural history of agitation for a Biafran state in the 1960s in Nigeria. The modern state, Nigeria, from the 19th century, in Homi Bhabha's (1990:2a) words, represents "that curiously hybrid realm" of multiple and diverse cultures. Nevertheless, at the birth of Nigeria in the 1960s, the

modern Nigerian artist, Ben Enwonwu, represented cultural imageries rooted in the three ethnic identities to demonstrate cultural unity. This was however before what the Negro Digest (1965:47) described as the experience of a dark period that beclouded Nigeria during the agitation for secession of the Biafran states from present Nigeria in 1966. However, after that initial failed secession which led to the Nigerian Civil War, a renewed agitation surfaced in 2016. Since then, the renewed agitation has been causing "political tension" in Nigeria. As Coleman (cited by Okeke-Agulu 2006:27) argues, it is caused by "nationalist politicians" who aspired to national office but soon created division along ethnic diversity.

Figure 34: Chinedu Ogakwu, *Wazobia*, 2016. Mixed media, 45 x 35 inches.
Artist's collection. (Courtesy of Chinedu Ogakwu)

The aim, in Ogakwu's (2017) view, is informed by "my concern for a united Nigeria [for] despite ethnic and religious differences, we are better when together". Thus, this rendition relays the political essence as well as "new visual language [of bond] for a nation composed of a wide range of ethnicities" (Ogbecie 2008:163). In the words of Bhabha (1990:1a), it is "an idea whose cultural [significance] lies in the...unity of the nation as a symbolic force". It is this concern that influenced Chinedu Ogakwu to execute this Afrocentric painting. Alternatively, the painting hints at the richness of cultural costumes (Obiechina 1975:7) in Nigeria.

5.7 Sub-conclusion

In view of the narratives on Chinedu Ogakwu's appropriation of cultural symbolisms in contemporary African vernacular paintings interrogated in this research, I conclude that Ogakwu's "aesthetic program offered him a unique opportunity to explore, reclaim and assert

his Igbo artistic and cultural heritage" (Okeke-Agulu 2006:26). As Ogakwu (2015:6) observes, "my art is a celebration of [my] roots, the simplicity of [my] culture, and the beauty of Igbo land". However, in Ekpo Eyo's (1998:16) view, though he explores "African cultural heritage [he] creates work[s] in a range of media not seen in the traditional art of ... [his] forefathers". According to Ogakwu (2015:6), "as an African Ambassador, art is my language" of communicating ideas about my roots.

In narrating ideas from his roots therefore, Ogakwu reflects on African cultural mode of honouring a male and female couple with the traditional titles of *Chief and Lolo* in Igbo culture. In Ruth Simbao's (2011:43) view, such "portrayal of African tradition" hints on Africanness that recognises and honours acts of humanity to others within a community (Richards 2011:49). Closely related to this honour is the idea Ogakwu's work relays on exaltation and honouring of a successful community warrior with a traditional title which draws "from African mythology [or tradition] and the legendary past" (Simbao 2011:43). Although he also reflects on the need for national unity despite cultural diversities in Nigeria, it invokes, in Colin Richards' (2011:51) view, engagement with critical African humanism of Ubuntu, which suggests that I am because you are. And, as Christian Gade (2012:486) argues, ubuntu is rooted in African indigenous cultures which "represent universal human interdependence". Aside from Africanness that reflects communalism, Ogakwu's aim echoes African identity in "memory and history [which] articulates a disposition to the future" (Richards 2011:47). In stressing the significance of such disposition to the future, his work hints on the need for planning as an important component of Africans in the present while gliding into a hopeful future

5.8 Conclusion and comparison of the aims in Shonibare and Ogakwu's Afrocentric paintings

The interrogations of Shonibare and Ogakwu's contemporary African paintings deemed African vernacular rooted arts because of their representations of cultural imageries reveal similarities in appropriating imageries from their roots. As Pickvance (2005:6) notes, the similarities in ideas must be explained in terms of common features and that difference must be explained as principle of variation. Thus, in concluding the chapter, a comparison of the aims that unfold from the reading of their works is made below and perhaps such contributes to the development of contemporary arts not only in Nigeria but also in the global African visual culture.

The comparative analysis of the aims that unfolded from the reading of Shonibare's depiction entitled *In Expectation* (2007) and Ogakwu's *Hawkers' Meeting* (2010) reveal differences. While *In Expectation*, traces an underlying African humanism in cultural attitude of waiting to welcome a royalty with manifestation of loyalty from disparate subjects within an emirate council to the Emir in Hausa/Fulani ethnic identities in Northern Nigeria, Ogakwu's *Hawkers' Meeting* appears to differ as it reveals cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes in dialogue and planning necessary for success in the present and future. Shonibare's work relays, as Simbao (2011:45) observes, Africanness in social and political commentary on indigenous African traditional system of government in Nigeria, while the aim in Ogakwu's depiction is a social statement on "Afro centric perspective" (Manaka 1987:16) of planning.

Conversely, the comparison of the aims in Shonibare's painting titled *Her Backbone* (2010), and Ogakwu's *Chief and Lolo* (2012) reveal similarities in reflecting African marital bond and heritage in male and female partnership. In Geoffrey Batchen's (2000:266) view, this invokes Africanness in the "physical intimacy of" the couples. Furthermore, whereas *Her Backbone* echoes an African man's responsibility towards the well-being of a wife in contemporary Nigerian context, the interpretation of *Chief and Lolo*, signifies Igbo cultural value in recognising and honouring a couple with traditional title for their contributions to the development of their community. Thus, Africanness is signified, in Barbara Nussbaum's (2003:21) view, through "humanitarian principles on which African culture" in Igbo ethnicity is based. Furthermore, the comparison reveals that Shonibare's rendition *Durbar* (2012), and Ogakwu's *Once Upon A Time* (2014) reflect differences in the aims that unfolded from their interpretations. While *Durbar* echoes the observance of an Islamic religious festival (Sallah) rooted in Hausa/Fulani cultures, *Once Upon A Time* represents a retrospective aim that hints on recalling memories of past childhood activities rooted in Igbo culture, but significant for defining the present and future life of an adult. Therefore, to demonstrate Africanness *Durbar*, Shonibare reflects on an "aspect of African cultural tradition" (Nettleton 2011:10a) in celebration of religious festivals rooted in Hausa/Fulani culture.

The comparative analysis of Shonibare's painting *Kosefowora-Priceless* (2015) and Ogakwu's portrayal *Ikemba* (2016) reveals differences in the aims that unfold from the interpretations of both renditions. *Kosefowora-Priceless* echoes motherhood as a priceless stage in a woman's life rooted in Yoruba culture consequently exemplifying Africanness in "the mores and ethos of African culture" (Manaka 1987:11).

But *Ikemba* reflects a distinct African cultural value of exaltation and honouring a hero with traditional title for winning battles for his community rooted in ancient Igbo ethnic identity. Finally, the comparative analysis of Shonibare's depiction entitled *Onidiri-Hair Braider* (2016), and Ogakwu's painting *Wazobia* (2016) conveys different aims. Whereas *Onidiri-Hair Braide r*resonates with African cultural practice of personal adornment in braiding, beautification, and means of livelihood, *Wazobia* elicits the Nigerian cultural value and attitude of promoting cultural and national unity among the three major cultural groups in Nigeria through symbolic representations of African dress forms. Although Ogakwu's rendition hints on cultural groups and national unity in Nigeria, as Ruth Simbao (2011:45) notes, it alludes to Africanness through "cultural specificity in terms of dress" symbols which references African dress elements rooted in Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo cultures. Thus, given the idea of cultural unity it relays, in Nussbaum's (2003:22) view, it signals the maintenance of harmony as part of African culture.

CHAPTER SIX

African Vernacular Rooted Imageries in the Sculptures of Contemporary Nigerian Artists, Yemi Ijisakin and Fidelis Odogwu

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discourses two Nigerian sculptors: Yemi Olaolu Ijisakin and Fidelis Odogwu Eze. In this narrative, I focus on their appropriations of cultural imageries in contemporary sculptures which are deemed African vernacular rooted art and the ideas the works convey to viewers. Although their figural depictions speak to contemporary African experiences, some of them reference social issues in Nigerian cultures (Okeke-Agulu 2006:27), while most of them are rooted in Yoruba culture and traditions. However, while Ijisakin appears to have been influenced by contemporary social issues like solitary contemplative moment and insecurity, others include socio-cultural factors on motherhood, African spirituality and the need for refreshment after labour. Odogwu is influenced by socio-cultural factors on the role of a traditional drummer in social function, marital bond, fertility in male and female couple, search for self-discovery and African cultural traditions and festivals. The interpretations of their works were not only done through formal analysis but were guided by their responses to interview questions during field research.

Besides those factors that seem to influence their cultural appropriations, these artists worked with specific media in the production of their sculptures. Whereas Ijisakin adopted soap stone as his major medium, Odogwu employs metal as his sole medium in sculptural renditions. To give context and identity to their portrayals, as Arnoldi Mary Jo (2013:132) notes, “any regional art history must take seriously the production of multiple historical narratives that are based on the groups’ claims to different pasts”. Therefore, the formal structures of their sculptural renditions were not only narrated but likewise situated in the cultural history of each depiction then traced and located within their socio-cultural functions in African and Nigerian cultures in particular.

6.2 Yemi Olaolu Ijisakin (b. 1957)

Yemi Ijisakin trained as a sculptor at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, where he also works as a sculpture lecturer. Ijisakin has been producing sculpture since 1987 to date. He has participated in a group exhibition in Nigeria. Although Ijisakin (2017) notes that his "first

stone sculpture was a Mallam's head. A portrait that references a Hausa man adorned with turban" in the late 1980s, yet it is not included because it is outside the scope of this study. However, given that he has continued to execute sculptures, I selected five stone sculptures from his collection for this research and focus reading not only on the cultural symbolisms appropriated but the ideas represented in each of his African vernacular rooted works evocated between 2007 and 2016. The works selected from Yemi Ijisakin are entitled *Embrace* (2009), *The Thinker* (2009), *The Priest* (2010), *Mother and Child* (2013), and *After Labour* (2015).

My research findings on Yemi Olaolu Ijisakin's art practice reveal the articulation of cultural imageries rooted in contemporary indigenous Nigeria cultures. Still, such artworks explore figurative imageries that reference African men and women. Given the fact that vernacular symbolisms are visible articulations of diverse cultural concepts and contents, such renditions draw attention to the sources of his inspirations. In Ijisakin's (2017) words, he draws inspirations from "cultural beliefs, African religion, ecological issues, and politics. The religious works represent African traditional beliefs that reflect worship". An example, of a sculpture that references African traditional religion is his depiction entitled *The Priest* (2010). The work reflects an Ifa priest[10] carrying a calabash bowl with ritual substances, on his way to a place of sacrifice or mediation for his community. It demonstrates, therefore, as Ijisakin (2017) claims, that "most of the works I execute are based on things that happen within my environment in Yoruba culture south-west of Nigeria". But such vernacular symbolisms, as Ijisakin (2017) argues, reference "men, youths, mothers and children, gods and goddesses, as well as their paraphernalia (dressing and costumes)".

In narrating why his works are considered African, Ijisakin (2017) claims that "I consider my artworks African, because they are replica of African cultures and embody symbols that reference African lifestyle". Although his view of Africanness draws on the colonial notion of homogenous Africa, however, I argue that African cultures are not homogenous but heterogeneous. But his reflection on Yoruba ethnicity as an African culture, as Ruth Simbao (2011:45) argues, evokes a cultural referent which "even if distinct in some ways, tends to overlap and intersect" with some cultures in Nigeria. On the other hand, Ijisakin's belief that his contemporary vernacular sculptures signify Africanness is because they are produced on

[10]An Ifa priest is a spiritual leader and diviner rooted in Yoruba traditional religion. He is consulted by the king, elites, individuals, families and the community for divination and ritual sacrifices because of mythological belief in his roles.

the African continent and reflect African scenes rooted in the sociocultural life of disparate Nigerians.

Even though the appropriations of cultural symbolisms from indigenous and traditional contexts in contemporary African arts are described as retroactive or reactionary, yet Ijisakin, a sculpture lecturer, is still committed to this practice. Indeed, he affirms pointedly, "I still represent vernacular symbolisms in artworks so as to propagate our indigenous cultures in contemporary era" (Ijisakin 2017). Therefore, the projection of cultural normative in Ijisakin's sculptural renditions demonstrates a stream that is continually influenced by traditions (Filani 2018:20) he is passionate about in the present. As Ijisakin (2017) notes, "one factor that influences the production of my vernacular artworks is passion. The love of what belongs to Yoruba culture as well as promoting the ideals of our local life". This continuity is, according to Ijisakin (2017), because "he is a grass roots person" who believes in reflecting African heritage in his sculptures.

Given the fact that the viewer's interpretation of artworks depends on the form and content (Filani 1998:34), the formal structures and contents of Ijisakin's sculptures present viewers with opportunities to read each context to unveil the ideas that are embedded therein. Still, his view is significant in providing a critical reading of his works. Ijisakin (2017) says, "My ideas are framed around cultural values and beliefs that surround the lifestyles of Nigerian so that we do not lose them completely". Although his express intent is the representations of aspects of Yoruba cultural life that appear threatened, it is my contention that hybridity is evident in all cultures. But, as Ogbechie (2009:135) argues, the aims he represents echo events and traditional forms of expressions rooted in Yoruba ethnic identity.

Although Ijisakin produces sculptures in different media such as wood, terra-cotta, stone and metal, his sculptures identified and selected for this research are stone sculptures which, incidentally, is his preferred medium. To attest to this, the works he produced with other media mentioned aside stone were produced before the period the study focuses on documenting, so they were not included in this study. In narrating the reception of his stone sculptures, Ijisakin (2017) observes that "when people come for my stone sculptures I am motivated to produce more because of their appreciation, even though stone sculptures are not so much patronised". People often express surprise on the outcome of his stone sculptures and the skill used in executing them. Thus, in Ijisakin's (2017) view, "people respect dexterity in the production of my stone sculptures; however some mistake them for idols, so

their appreciations are inhibited for the finished stone work". Such response invokes, as Olu Oguibe (2002:245) notes, "indigenous forms which colonialism condemned and sought to obliterate". Nevertheless, in reality, the sculptures are pure modern/contemporary modes of representing cultural imageries that are not associated with the practice of idolatry.

Additionally, in Kalilu's (1991:16) view, some writers have argued that historical African art or contemporary African sculptures like Ijisakin's stone sculptures are not always objects of worship or idolatry, nor do they all represent gods or spirit despite the controversies that abound in their relationship to viewers of African art objects. As Ajibade et al (2011:175) argue, such denial and labelling of contemporary African art as "idol[s], devilish and evil is because the arts do not fit their narrow, parochial and judgemental notions". Therefore, the discussions of the selected sculptures produced by Ijisakin focus on the soap stones he carves and how he used them in representing vernacular symbolisms which he considers African in contemporary art. Other foci are on his personal influences and frames of reference, knowledge base, and ideological stances.

6.3 Analysis of Vernacular Symbolisms in Yemi Ijisakin's Sculptures

In presenting the formal analysis of Ijisakin's contemporary sculptures which are deemed vernacular rooted art because they reveal appropriations of cultural forms (Greaves 2015:7), the visual narrative begins with a rendition entitled *Embrace* (2009) (Figure 35). Although it is an abstract stone sculpture, yet the subject matter of embrace, in John Berger's (1972:8) view, signals the response of someone in love, at "the sight of the beloved". And, as Ashraf Jamal (2013:54) reiterates, it suggests "love as the embrace of [an]other". But, in this depiction, Ijisakin (2017) draws attention to an ironic embrace, where "an individual with evil motive would come to embrace his supposed victim while hiding his evil intentions until eventually he harms the unsuspecting victim". While ill motives may be expressed through ironic cultural practice of embrace, still not all embrace typify danger.

The sculpture depicts a small abstracted vernacular imagery in the round which reveals an African man and a woman entangled with warm hands. As Van Robbroeck (2011:85) argues, it "emphasise[s] the emotional expressiveness of the art". However, to create a distinction in the formal structure of the symbolisms, the imagery on the left side reveals an African woman with plaited hair. This demonstrates, in Joanne Eicher's (1972:519) view, that braiding does not merely adorn the face and head, but aides to shape the head. Although her hands are entangled with the hands of the African man, it hints on a continuum of one hand

rather than distinct and separate renditions of female and male hands. But at the point of intersection of both hands are several elements that appear like bangles used as ornaments for female personal adornment. Aside from the entangled hands, their legs seem to be entangled as well, possibly to convey the idea of the embrace which joins them. Rather than an embrace, however, the reading evokes a posture of a couple dancing because the mode of embrace does not include body contact. As Alisa LaGamma (2004:25) notes, "Their dynamic formal interaction suggests that they may be about to begin dancing", rather than showing embrace. On the other hand, in Ashraf Jamal's (2013:54) view, their posture invokes "fear of being embraced", which gives a clue to a process of struggle. If we accept this reading, the depiction is in dissonance with embrace as it rather evokes the attempt to embrace.

Figure 35: Yemi Ijisakin, *Embrace,* 2009. Stone, 8 x 12 x 5 inches. Artist's collection. (Photographed by Sule James)

In narrating the cultural history, in Alisa LaGamma's (2004:28) words, it evokes "couple imagery [evident] in numerous African sculptural traditions [and] constitutes an ideal of cultural refinement and elegance designed to enhance the prestige" of bond. And, as Philip Peek (2008:23) argues, in African cultures, twin imagery is depicted "because this best represents that desired state of completeness, the merging of male and female" imageries. Therefore, even though Ijisakin's sculpture is a peculiar contemporary rendition, it does not only draw attention to similar depictions of seated female and female figures embracing in a 19th and 20th century female couple headrest in Luba society in African art, but also appears to have been influenced by its mode of rendition (Peek 2008:22; LaGamma 2004:32). The philosophical view that guided Ijisakin's work is sensitivity to security matters and the need

for vigilance so as to stay safe in contemporary Nigerian societies. In Ijisakin's (2017) view, the aim narrates a "contemporary redefinition of embrace, where a husband embraces his wife but afterwards sells her or sacrifices her for money rituals or [a] terror suspect embraces his victim only to detonate the explosive afterwards, leaving the scene littered with remains of human flesh".[11]

Although people, as Samuel Oyewale (2016:36) opines, are kidnapped for ritual killings, for fame, money, protection, power, and success, not all may be through embrace. However, the ambivalence in embrace as van Robbroeck (2011:83) notes comes from the unsuspected terrorist who uses "ironic humour" to attack and detonate a bomb. While the sculpture retells the need for security consciousness, one must not be suspicious of people in general. On another level, the work hints on "completeness which only the act of making love can temporarily accommodate" (Berger 1972:8). The aim also echoes duality in contemporary African vernacular rooted sculpture. In a realistic stone sculpture titled *The Thinker* (2009) (Figure 36), Ijisakin presents this subject matter that unfolds, as Jamal (2013:57) argues, the concept of a human entering a reflective mood. In Kunle Filani's (2018:22) view however, "the title inspire[s] a thematic interpretation that is rooted in African philosophy that has to do" with human head in Yoruba culture.

As Joanne Eicher (1972:518) observes, "in decorating the body itself [an] African has different ways". To demonstrate this, the carving portrays the African man in a seated posture adorned with a beaded necklace bearing a large crest hanging over a nude body, and a traditional styled cap folded to his right side. But his head is tilted and bowed to the right side, signifying the state of sober reflection rooted in Yoruba ethnic identity. Although the African man, as Kunle Filani (2018:22) argues, is "in a seemingly contemplative pose", in Babatunde Lawal's (1985:91) view`, I argue that it reflects the significance of his head as the "seat of wisdom and reason". However, the representation suggests that the man is worrying rather than thinking, possibly because "most of his life he had been in debt" (Berger 1972:13). Thus, the thinker's action signifies an attempt to gain insight through introspection. Still, as the symbolism is sculpted with both hands placed on the drapery cloth covering the lower part of his body, from the waist to the legs, he appears lost in thought.

[11] Boko Haram which became a threat to lives of Nigerians from 2009 continued to adopt new strategies when seeking to kill more people in the northern part of Nigeria. Sometimes adults or children members of the sect with bombs strung around their bodies forcefully embrace a victim in the crowd and thereafter detonate the bomb, killing the suspect, victim and others within close proximity.

A further reading reveals graceful folds carved on the drapery loincloth, evoking the use of chisel in creating that effect around the waist of the vernacular imagery. Even though, as Babatunde Lawal (1985:91) argues, the head in Yoruba sculpture is elaborately depicted because of their regard for the human head (ori) as the most vital part of a person, this sculpture, however, does not treat the head differently but shows proportionate representation of the head along with different parts of the body. Yet the thematic nuance of the sculpture symbolically echoes the place of the head in thinking. Nevertheless, to establish his mode of rendition, Ijisakin (2017) states "my academic training as a sculptor influences me to represent proportion in each artwork I execute". Despite this stance, the legs of the African man do not appear, perhaps because of his seated posture. This depiction recalls the cultural history of Yoruba philosophical relevance attached to human head.

Figure 36: Yemi Ijisakin, *The Thinker*, 2009. Stone, 9 x 6 inches. Artist's collections. (Photographed by Sule James)

In the Yoruba ethnicity of south western Nigeria, Ajiboye et al (2018:63 emphases in original) observe that the head is divided into two; the physical head *oriita* and the spiritual head *ori-inu* or metaphysical head. The Yoruba mythological belief, in Babatunde Lawal's (1985:92) view, at creation the Supreme Being, Olodumare directs Obatala, a lesser divinity, to create the physical body, while Olodumare breathes life in through the head but allows each newly created individual the choice of inner head from a host of similar but distinct heads; the one he chooses determines his lot on earth. Lawal further notes that he who

chooses a good inner head will be lucky and prosperous whereas "the person who is persistently unlucky is simply assumed to be an *oloriburuku,* the possessor of a bad inner head". Thus, in narrating the idea in this portrayal, Ijisakin (2017) claims that it invokes the notion that "whosoever cannot think is dead or stagnant". In the light of this, it, therefore, becomes contestable for Ijisakin to conclude that it is lack of thinking that causes stagnation in adulthood because Lawal (1985:92) argues that even if an individual possesses good ori (head) to think will not guarantee success in life since he or she must work hard for success. This is however not to deny the significance of contemplation in adult life which, in Ijisakin's (2017) words, is a necessary "part of a man's life to create moments of sober reflection, during which he will assess personal successes, failures, achievements, and mistakes". In Staudinger's (2001:150) view, such moment "enhanc[es] self-understanding and self-insight, or enhance[es] life insight and wisdom" as well self-critical perspective.

It might be argued that the aim of this sculpture, as Babatunde Lawal (1985:101) notes, is that the "physical, spiritual and material well-being" of the thinker depends on how well he can make use of his head not just in thinking but in acting. Thus, Ijisakin's philosophy is guided by the principle of creating time to think as didactic in an individual's life. *The Priest* (2010) (Figure 37), though a realistic African vernacular sculpture, is a title that introduces a spiritual leader. According to Ijisakin (2017), "The Priest is an intermediary in his culture". Thus, given that the subject has its roots in Yoruba traditional religion, as Kunle Filani (2018:19) notes, it hints on an "artistic contribution to the mythical [and] spiritual ... visual aesthetics of Africa". However, the medium employed in this sculpture like others sampled from him in this study is stone.

The formal structure of this roughly textured imagery references an African man carrying a calabash bowl in his left hand while he dips the right hand inside the bowl suggesting an "Ifa divination priest" (LaGamma 2004:25). I argue that the representation of the calabash bowl in this ritual is in dissonance with the cultural element adopted by the priest. As Pogoson and Akande (2011:17) note, a priest uses tray in Yoruba ifa divination. Although, Ajiboye et al (2018:63) argue that the head in Yoruba sculpture "is depicted larger in size compared to the body", the head of this symbolism is moderately shaped with all the facial features - eyes, ears, nose, and mouth - executed in naturalism. This evident difference in the mode of representing the head in Yoruba culture demonstrates a contemporary style of depiction in visual culture. However, while Ajiboye et al further argue that "the hair is rarely left without adornment", I argue that his head is moderately kept without adornment but roughly textured

because of the tools employed in the carving. But the cultural "aesthetic requirement" (Ajiboye et al 2018:61) shows adornment with a thick beaded necklace carved around his neck appearing like the collar of his shirt.

Figure 37: Yemi Ijisakin, *The Priest*, 2010. Stone, 9 x 6 inches. Artist's collection. (Photographed by Sule James)

In presenting the cultural history of the Ifa priest in Yoruba culture, Pogoson and Akande (2011:20) state that "the history of *Ifa* divination among the Yoruba can be said to be as old as the people themselves". John Pemberton ([sa]:1) observes that the "Yoruba priest of Ifa [is] known as *babalawo* (father of secrets). Trained from [his] youth in the rituals of divination, they are masters of a vast corpus of oral literature known as ese ifa often referred to as containing wisdom of ifa". In addition, an online article *Ifa Oracle* ([sa]:4) claims that, "within ifa, there are numerous ceremonies and rituals used for personal protection, improving one's health, achieving goals, preparing for pregnancy, obtaining wisdom and knowledge, removing negative spirit energy, becoming more productive, and becoming married". Nevertheless, in Emmanuel's (2014:525) view, "African religion has also been faced with challenges of votaries. Genuine votaries are dying out in many locations and in cases where priesthood is hereditary; those who are to become priests are not available due to Western influence, especially education". Mudimbe (1994:163) reiterates that "the ritual that inspired the artist [is] dying out". Therefore, the depiction is perhaps an attempt to preserve a dying Yoruba Ifa religion. But in narrating the aim, Ijisakin (2017) argues that it hints on

"ritual performed for healing of individuals in his society, acting as an intermediary between them and the spiritual realm, a messenger and a warrior".

I argue that the interpretation of this African vernacular rooted sculpture echoes cultural belief, value, and attitude of relying on a traditional spiritual leader for help. In Mudimbe's (1988:1) view, the work does not merely echo the relationship between "African traditions and cultures", but, as Alisa LaGamma (2004:24) notes, it suggests a priest carrying out divination. Alternatively, the aim, according to Christa Clarke (1998:23), suggests a contemporary African art "directed to the spiritual realm, in the service of gods or ancestors". And, as Pogoson and Akande (2011:17) reiterate, it invokes "ifa divination [employed as] a means of communication between man and god" in Yoruba culture. But in Ogbechie's (2018:121) view, it is "developed to address forms of ritual knowledge deployed as a tool for social" purposes. Thus, the philosophical content symbolises the belief some people in African communities have in the role of the traditional priest as a mediator. In *Mother and Child* (2013) (Figure 38), a different thematic nuance is introduced in a realistic sculptural rendition. Though the subject of mother and child has been represented in different ways in African art contexts, yet it relays different social commentary. In Yoruba culture, for example, Moyo Okediji (1997:177) notes that it was common among mothers with "high rate of infant mortality".

Although this rendition shows an African mother seated diagonally to the right side as she carries her young child, her elbow rests as a support for her restive posture. In Ijisakin's (2017) view, she is "seated on a rock within her neighbourhood, taking care of her child". It is arguable that a nursing mother would rest her elbow on a hard rock surface; rather it signals resting on a couch for comfort. However, her downward gaze on her baby who is wrapped in thick cloth demonstrates, as Mary Roberts (2017:60) argues, that "Vision may be understood in ... African art context as more active than static". Even though it is a contemporary engagement with mother and child theme, this portrayal, in Henry Drewal's (1977:545) view, makes evident the practice in Yoruba art which portrays a female as nursing mother among others. Possibly, the African mother is portrayed with braided hair not merely for identification as a woman and aesthetic expression in ori (head), but to demonstrate that "the hair is rarely left without adornment" in Yoruba culture and art (Ajiboye et al 2018:63).

Even though this portrayal is with stone, it shows evidence of proportion in the entire body and attests to Ijisakin's (2017) claim that he is "conscious of representing his imagery with

proportion, not elongation, because of his academic training". However, this experience recalls the cultural history of mother and child in Yoruba culture. A child born by a married woman in Yoruba culture is, as Makinde (2004:167) observes, "described as Okun (beads). These are a type of traditional necklace worn by Obas (kings) and Ijoye (chiefs); wearing of 'okun' is a symbol of royalty and authority". This describes the revered position accorded a child which, Makinde (2004:167) notes, requires "using a royal symbol to describe a child. Therefore, it may be interpreted to mean that a child confers on his/her mother the power to exercise authority in her husband's home". Also, in Moyo Okediji's (1997:177) view, it traces the history of a Yoruba mother who protects her child through sacrifices to divinity to keep the child from the lure of supernatural spirits.

Figure 38: Yemi Ijisakin, *Mother and Child*, 2013. Stone, 11 x 12 x 6 inches. Artist's collection. (Photographed by Sule James)

According to Ijisakin (2017), it "signifies fulfilment of motherhood". Alternatively, as Ijisakin (2017) notes "the idea in this sculpture reflects happiness, joy, security, and fulfilment of motherhood and the intimacy of a mother with her baby". Makinde (2004:167) reiterates that it suggests that "by becoming a mother, a woman is promoted to the esteemed position in which she can be referred to as a precious stone. Therefore, it is a tragedy for a Yoruba woman not to have a child". It might be argued that, given that the depiction focuses on just the mother and her child, the aim resonates with "a joyful mother celebrating the birth

of a new baby or rejoicing in the health of her child" (Okediji 1997:177).The philosophy centres on the idea of a happy woman being one that embraces a biological child. Another realistic stone depiction entitled *After Labour* (2015) (Figure 39) unfolds differently, drawing attention to what Robert Armstrong (1970:10) calls "dimension of humanity activity" after a form of labour. Although an African man in Yoruba rural community may engage in different forms of labour, the most common ones are farming, hunting and palm-wine tapping (Okpewho 1977:311). However, to narrate what happens after labour in this visual rendition, Ijisakin (2017) claims it introduces "a farmer serving himself palm-wine after labour on his farm". Ijisakin's stance is contestable because there is no depiction of any farming implements to establish the African man's identity as a farmer. Nevertheless, the context shows a seated African man, wearing singlet and knickers, as he carries a big gourd of calabash tilted forward, serving or pouring a liquid substance into a serving bowl of calabash which suggests palm-wine.

Figure 39: Yemi Ijisakin, *After Labour*, 2015. Stone, 10 inches. Artist's collection.
(Photographed by Yemi Ijisakin)

Palm-wine is a distilled liquid substance tapped from a palm tree. Possibly, because physical work is exacting, therefore, Ade Obayemi (1976:202) claims that palm-wine is consumed after daily labour to "act as a reliever of fatigue and [it] helps to increase output". But in Odejide's (2006:27) view, "the use of beverage alcohol (palm-wine) was restricted to adult

males and it was essentially for pleasure at the end of the day's farming activities". Thus, given that adult males were permitted to consume palm-wine, Ijisakin (2017) observes that it "is often served and taken by farmers in a group". However, in this context, a farmer is represented rather than a group, which suggests that he worked on his farm alone hence he is about to be refreshed without the company of others.

But the cultural history of this experience, as Atinmo and Bakre (2003:350) observe, palm-trees from which palm-wine is tapped are found in "the tropical rain forest of West Africa". Still, Odejide (2006:27) claims that palm-wine is traced to "the pre-colonial eras in Africa [when] beverage alcohol was produced locally by tapping the palm-tree". And, in Abiodun's (2014:1) view, palm-wine tapped from palm tree is not only fresh and undiluted but also medicinal. Thus, it is believed to cure malaria fever and, when mixed with other herbs and roots, it may be used for other purposes. Perhaps it is for this reason, Dumbili (2013:20) observes that "palm wine beverages were drunk in traditional societies and are still used in this modern era for different purposes". Furthermore, the reading of Ijisakin's African vernacular rooted sculpture communicates different ideas to viewers. According to Ijisakin (2017), because of the "belief that palm-wine has curative substance for curing malaria fever when taken" there is a regular intake of *emu* (palm-wine).

Despite such belief associated with the consumption of palm-wine, in Odejide's (2006:36) view, "alcohol [palm-wine] ... accounts for a considerable amount of premature deaths, acute alcohol problems, injuries, and disabilities. These untoward health consequences contribute to alcohol-induced social and economic problems for individuals, families, and society". Alternatively, the visual narrative echoes a cultural practice and lifestyle of "alcoholism as a social problem" (Obayemi 1976:205). Therefore, as Robert Armstrong (1970:16) notes, it hints on an individual having "a prodigious appetite for palm-wine". However, this mode of relaxation, though reflecting a Yoruba farmer, is also evident in other cultures in Nigeria. Hence, Ijisakin's philosophical idea is guided by preference for indigenous natural beverages over processed beverages.

6.4 Sub-conclusion

The summary of the analysis made on Yemi Ijisakin's African vernacular rooted sculptures in this study reveals articulation of cultural imageries from the Yoruba cultural group of south-western Nigeria. Although his works are contemporary African sculptures, yet their references to different aspects of life on cultural practices and traditions in Yoruba culture

communicate aims with themes on Africanness. Such aims include ambivalence in expression of love, the use of *oriinu* (inner head) in thinking, priestly traditional ritual for a community, motherhood and cultural lifestyle of refreshment with palm-wine.

As Chinua Achebe (cited by Armstrong 1970:19) notes, these aims are seen as narrating "African experience[s]" because they are appropriated from "African surroundings". In narrating the experience of embrace, though it is supposedly an expression of love, in the contemporary Nigerian space, in Ashraf Jamal's (2013:54) view, "embrace of others remains [ambivalent] ... given the psychological" effects created when a suicide bomber would rush to embrace a victim in public space only to detonate a bomb. He reflected on the place of the human head, in Lawal's (2012:14) view as the "site of identity [and] perception" during moments of thinking. Although as part of traditional African aesthetics in Yoruba culture the head is adorned and depicted larger than other parts of the body, yet in this contemporary rendition it is proportionately depicted in relationship to other parts of the body. Still, it is believed that there is an *oriinu* (inner head) "that contains the whole destiny of man on earth" (Ajiboye et al 2018:63). Therefore, thinking with the inner head must also result in hard work to attain success.

The world view and belief systems of Yoruba culture reflects, on the other hand, on the priestly traditional ritual performed by an Ifa priest. As Clarke (1998:23) observes, it does "not only reflect societal concerns but also actively engag[es] in the creation and maintenance of religious, political and social systems" in a Yoruba society. Furthermore, a woman who bears a child is revered and honoured in Yoruba culture because, in Ijisakin's (2017) view, her experience is seen as the fulfilment of motherhood. Although water is known for refreshing an individual after labour on the farm, Ijisakin's visual narrative draws attention to the use, in Yoruba culture, of palm-wine as a means of refreshment and relaxation after labour on the farm.

6.5 Fidelis Odogwu Eze (b. 1970)

Fidelis Odogwu's training as an artist started in secondary school, under the tutelage of Mr. Igwe, his art teacher at Gbenoba Grammar School, Agbor from 1980-1985. His art teacher did not only teach him art in school but also created free weekend classes for teaching talented students the art of sketching human figures. Fidelis Odogwu started training towards becoming a sculptor at Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, in 1986. After completing his National Diploma (ND) in 1988, he worked with the renowned Nigerian Sculptor, Ben Osawe,

between 1988 and 1989. He obtained the Higher National Diploma (HND) in Sculpture after completing his training at Auchi Polytechnic, Edo State, in 1991.He is currently a full-time studio artist at Universal Studios, Lagos, where he engages in the production of professional artworks. He staged a solo exhibition Square Pegs Round Holes at Omenka Gallery, Ikoyi, Lagos in 2012. He has participated in several group exhibitions both nationally and internationally. The most recent exhibition he participated in is The Content on the 18th June 2017 at Adam and Eve, 8, Isaac John Street, GRA, Ikeja, Lagos.

Given that Fidelis Odogwu Eze has been sculpting with metal for more than three decades, this research focuses on the ideas represented in his contemporary renditions in which he appropriated cultural symbolisms that are deemed vernacular rooted sculptures produced between 2007 and 2016. In discussing Odogwu's works, five works were sampled within the specified period of this research, interrogating the vernacular symbolisms he represented and the ideas embedded in them. The selected works are *To the Dance* (2008), *Fertility* (2013), *Who Am I?* (2014), *Together Forever* (2015) and *Custodian* (2016).

The interrogation of his works in this research shows that Fidelis Odogwu executes African vernacular rooted sculptures that articulate cultural symbolisms in different and distinct modes. With regard to the production of his sculptures, Odogwu (2017) introduces himself first as "a metal sculptor, an African, a Nigerian to be precise". Though he gave diverse professional, personal, national and continental identities, it is not merely for "establishing an African personality profile" (Nettleton 2011:10a), but significant in locating his sculptures as works of an African. Therefore, to situate the sources of his sculptures, Odogwu (2017) states that "our cultures as Nigerians are so diverse and I try as much as I can to give a trace of these cultures to my sculptures". Although his response reveals an understanding of cultural diversities in Nigeria, yet in making sculptures he references certain Nigerian cultures that are not homogenous but heterogeneous. Hence, as an artist, he tells stories of African cultures rooted in Nigerian space in his vernacular rooted sculptures.

To establish how these cultures reflect in his works, Odogwu (2017) claims that, "when I work on the Fulani milk maiden from the northern part of Nigeria, there are traditional motifs that I appropriate to give an impression of Fulani or Northern Nigeria representation. The same goes for the uli motifs that I represent from Igbo culture". Thus, he is not limited to referencing a particular culture in the execution of his sculptures. In Odogwu's words, "When I am influenced to depict a Fulani milk maiden; I try to depict the elegance I see in them

because Nigerian women are beautiful. The cat walking, the movement and graceful features that characterise women influence my depiction of women in general". While his argument suggests that he still references indigenous forms, as John Berger (1972:14) notes, the formal structure of his imagery is informed by his "own observation of people, [and] gestures". But Odogwu (2017) observes that "those traditional motifs are represented to appeal to the eyes so that people that see such works will appreciate them". Additionally, aside from appropriating symbolisms from Nigerian cultures, Odogwu (2017) claims that "I am not merely an artist, but a universal being, so I work on universal concepts as well but create elements that identify such cultural influence me. Still, I like to reflect on Nigerian cultures in most of my works". This is exemplified in his Afrocentric sculptures selected and analysed in this study.

The framing of African identity in the contents and context of Fidelis Odogwu's sculptures is evident, not merely as Odogwu (2017) argues, that "I consider the vernacular symbols I represent to be African" but because his renditions signify Africanness either in the teleology of the stories or through the indigenous Nigeria cultures he reflects on in each work. He observes that "I buy a lot of Nigerian magazines that bear elements of cultural groups in Nigeria so as to use them as references in executing my sculptures". Therefore, his appropriations of cultural imageries in sculptures are not only from a wide range of engagement with Nigerian cultures, but also attempts to infuse symbols that hint on African identity. In Odogwu's (2017) view,

> When I travel to any part of Nigeria, I take note of the indigenous architectures and study the designs and embellishments on them, to see how relevant they will be as motifs in my renditions. For example, there are embellishments on the walls of Emir['s] Palace in the north or Obi['s] Palace in the south east of Nigeria that have symbolic meanings around royalty in those cultures; these may serve as rich cultural symbols and motifs. Thereafter, I ask questions from people who understand their meanings and then explore them as forms, symbols, and motifs in my artworks.

Consequently, his attempts at representing cultural motifs and symbols from different "aspects of African cultural tradition" (Nettleton 2011:10a) in Nigeria reveals why his sculptures are deemed African vernacular rooted symbolisms. However, such works that he executes are constructed around the social life of Nigerians. A major reason Odogwu still focuses on appropriating cultural motifs from contemporary indigenous traditions in sculptures is, according to Odogwu (2017), "because they bear traces of who we are in the contemporary era. The foundation of what I do matter[s] to me because it is said that 'train up

a child in the way he should go and when he is old he would not depart from them". To further justify this continuous appearance of indigenous symbolism in his works, Odogwu (2017) affirms that, "I like to dwell in our beliefs and cultures so that they do not die. These are historical accounts that must be documented for future generations". Even though Odogwu's argument narrates the future significance of his sculptures, I argue that there is first a present relevance of such depictions before the futuristic view. Nevertheless, his works are immersed in socio-historical context which bridges the local and global African contemporaneity.

Given that Odogwu executes contemporary African sculptures by reflecting on indigenous traditions in forms and contents, what aims does the reading of his works reveal to viewers? In Odogwu's (2017) words, "my ideas revolve round togetherness, happiness, peace, love, and unity within African cultures. These ideas are represented in the African vernacular symbolisms I create in artworks". Although he expressed different ideas in different ways, I focus on reading the contents and formal structures of his works to see the ideas that unfold from each context, in addition to his expressed ideas on such works.

Given that the media used in executing an artwork serve as the vehicle that communicates ideas to viewers, for Odogwu, metal is the only medium he employs in exploring and constructing forms and content in sculpture. According to Odogwu (2017), "I do not produce works in other media aside metal because I want to understand and know metal well. Today, people call me 'the prince of metal' because I have understood my material and work with it as if I am using clay to model figures". It is contestable however for Odogwu to state that he understands metal well. I argue that he might have explored it in the ways possible and known to him; hence it is possible there are many ways he has not explored. However, in describing the kinds of metal he works with, Odogwu (2017) notes that "I work on mild metal sheets, that can be panel-beaten to different sizes or shapes that I desire. Wire, rod, flat metals, and perforated metal sheets are among the metals I work with". A rendition he executed with a combination of metal beaten to shape and perforated metal sheet is *Who Am I* (2014). The mastery with which this artist executed that vernacular sculpture attests to deep understanding of this medium he has explored since he left school in 1991.

Despite the shift by many contemporary African artists towards international tendencies such as installations and new media art, Odogwu still sculpts. In responding to the interview question on why he still sculpts instead of creating installations and new media art, Odogwu

(2017) notes that "an artist decides for himself what he wants to do. We have artists who have decided that they like to work with installation art. I like to sculpt with the media that would stand the test of time, not like some installation arts that are created for an exhibition and after such exhibitions that last one week; such works ceases to be relevant". But it might be argued that, while most installation arts are temporary, some are installed permanently in public spaces for people to interact with. Aside deciding to sculpt works that will stand the test of time, Odogwu (2017) further argues "I like to do works that will leave traces of me for generations that will come after me".

The reception accorded artworks by the audience serves as an encouragement to most artists to do more. In Odogwu's (2017) words, "the reception of my vernacular art has been great. People feel refreshed when they interact with the subject matters and forms that reflect on the everyday life of Nigerians, in my sculptures". Thus, his works are given commendable reception in Nigeria and abroad. Odogwu (2017) claims that "people appreciate my art works not only monetarily but in form of the comments they make regarding those works". In excitement, according to Odogwu (2017), audiences are spurred to "ask how I did such works even though I am from Nigeria. My style has evolved so that I do not become bored with what I do. These are the elements that have drawn audience receptions to the different concepts I create".

The discussions of the selected sculptures produced by Odogwu Fidelis Eze focuses on the welded metals he employed and how he used them to represent vernacular symbolisms which he considers African in contemporary African art. Another focus is on his personal influences and frame of references, knowledge base, and ideological stances.

6.6 Analysis of Vernacular Symbolisms in Fidelis Odogwu Eze's Sculptures

As Brenda Greaves (2015:7) notes, Fidelis Odogwu's sculptures are deemed African vernacular because he appropriates cultural imageries and symbols in their context. A stylised metal sculpture he executed is a relief fabrication depicted with the title *To the Dance* (2008) (Figure 40). While the title hints on movement to "a site for cultural expression and social dialogue" (Omojola 2010:30), yet it did not specify the identity of the individual(s) it seeks to narrate. However, in Yorubaland, there cannot be dance without music because of the importance drums occupy in cultural functions (Akinyemi 2017:1). Therefore, the rendition unfolds an image that references an African man dressed in cultural attire carrying two

traditional drums rooted in indigenous Yoruba culture. In Odogwu's (2017) view, "he is a traditional Yoruba drummer on his way to a ceremony". Thus, he is portrayed in a posture that suggests movement as he bears a circularly shaped traditional drum on his right shoulder, and a second drum hanging down graciously from his left shoulder. Notwithstanding Odogwu's argument, the drummer's movement may signify return from performance. Nevertheless, to demonstrate the significance of drums in cultural event, Oti and Ayeni (2013:25) argue that, "drums and singing are the main elements of Yoruba music".

Given that his contemporary sculptures, according to Odogwu (2017), are made of "metal which has been his major medium since 1991, when he graduated from tertiary institution", the construction of this drummer attests to an example of his use of metal in sculpture. Nevertheless, his adornment with traditional cap and attire evokes a form of Yoruba male attire that is different from the biggest flowing gown worn by the rich (Eicher 1972:518), but signals, as Oti and Ayeni (2013:26) note, that "different occasions also require different outfits" in Yoruba culture. However, the face is devoid of facial features because of his mode of stylisation in representing the imagery. But the several linear designs on his African garment symbolise as Tunde Akinwumi (1998:61) observes, an example of "continuous change in innovative embroidery". The metal embroidery on the right side of the gown extends in projection that signifies effects of drapery.

Figure 40: Fidelis Odogwu Eze, *To the Dance*, 2008. Welded metal, 100 cm.
(Alatise 2012:16)

The experience of the drummer is thus narrated by returning to cultural history. In Yoruba culture, an ancient man named Ayangalu is believed to be the first drummer. As a result of that belief, "members of Yoruba drumming families bear names that begin with *Ayan*, a prefix of Ayangalu" (Omojola 2010:34 emphasis in original). To demonstrate such appropriation of names, Omojola notes that examples include Ayantunde (*Ayan* returns), Ayanleke (*Ayan* is victorious/overcomes) among several others. Aside from this, drummers in Yoruba culture have used drums, as Omojola (2010:39) argues, in "Yoruba music" at different cultural festivals, and ritual performances from distant past to the present. Despite the history, the depiction is not individuated with name but is rather narrated to be engaged in site directed mobility. But the drums, in Kernan's (2000:1) view, are likened to talking drums "which can imitate speech". The talking drum is often used to suggest different choreographies to cultural dancers. The music produced communicates sounds that make meaning to people.

The aim of this sculpture suggests as Odogwu (2017) notes that, "I like to be in a joyous mood and be happy most times, so I create artworks like music, and dance to reflect happiness". Yet, such happiness is not divorced from "story of celebration and festivities found in Nigerian culture both past and present" (Alatise 2012:15). It might be argued that, given the fact that the drummer was not performing with his drums, it does not signal celebration but the significance of a drummer in a socio-cultural function. As Robert Armstrong (1970:21) observes, it hints on the relationship of "the traditional drummer to his music". On the other hand, it invokes an introduction of a member of the drummer's family. In *Fertility* (2013) (Figure 41), a different thematic nuance is contemplated in an African vernacular rooted sculpture fabricated with metal. This subject matter hints on a social construction on "fertility of the family" (Ajibade et al 2011:175) in the marriage union. However, it depicts a painted non-figurative rectangular relief sculpture which symbolically represents female reproductive organ bordered by surrounding of the womanhood rather than a visual display of fertility.

However, in Odogwu's (2017) view, "the rectangular form represents the husband while the oval shape represents the wife". But Bardi (2016:7) argues that "the background of the work ... [is] lined [with] tissues running from the top to the base" symbolically representing "the wall of womanhood where fertility occurs". Though it is contestable that geometric shapes and linear patterns would signify a female ovary and a potent male body, yet Odogwu (2017)

claims that, "these linear decorative patterns are cultural motifs adapted from southern Nigerian cultural heritage, and symbolise the husband of the woman as someone who is rich externally and internally to fertilise his wife". Although the construction is a symbolic concept of fertility that concerns an African couple, the style employed in this sculpture, as Mudimbe (1994:160) observes, hints on a work that is "conservatively and academically rendered as abstract [sculpture] that ... [is] reminiscent of abstract expressionist work". Notwithstanding the rich cultural sources of the linear motifs, they do not have a correlation with the subject of fertility, except in giving symbolic expression to "African aesthetics" in art (Ajiboye et al 2018:61).Thus, this sculpture is best narrated as an "elaborate [relief] work embellished with ...patterns" (Adejumo 2002:172).

Figure 41: Odogwu Fidelis, *Fertility*, 2013. Metal, 9 x 139 cm. Private collection.
(Courtesy of the Artist and Oreze II 2014:41)

Although this sculpture, in Mudimbe's (1994:158) view, is "a symbolic socio-cultural conception" of the reproductive viability of a family, and recalls the cultural history of fertility in Nigerian cultures, yet it also invokes the history of abstract depiction in African art". In 1963, Ben Enwonwu (cited by Vogel 2012:101) "condemned abstraction as a Western art form alien to Africa". But Owerka (1985:78) argues that "the strength of [contemporary African artists'] ... orientation toward Western art styles and culture varies, but all share an interest in abstraction. The development of abstract art owes as much to the influence of traditional African and other 'primitive' arts". This then means that, if African art and other primitive arts inspired abstraction, abstraction is not alien to Africa. On the other hand, the depiction recalls the history of how infertility and fertility are handled in Nigeria. In Ekwere et al's (2007:35) view, "traditional attitudes and cultural practices in

Nigeria esteem high fertility", whereas infertility is a stigma for a childless couple. Therefore, as Ekwere et al add "reproductive failure ... has a far reaching social implication ... where the main reason for marriage is often to have children". It is perhaps against this background Odugwu's rendition narrates fertility as a factor of both male and female reproductive wellness. Thus, the conception in this work reveals Odogwu's philosophical view which is guided by the sensitive subject of the African woman being able to conceive after marriage.

In tracing the aims in this rendition Odogwu (2017) argues that it hints on "the cultural value of fertility that results from the union of a husband and a wife rooted in Nigerian context. This suggests that a happy and fruitful union results from the coming together of a healthy man and woman". As Serageldin (1998:1) narrates, it signals an art that is a "fundamental expression of culture, in a broad sense, and is itself the content of culture, in the narrow sense". In contrast, given its mode of representation in embodying a white oval shape which symbolises a fertile female ovary awaiting fertilization, it evokes, in Henry Drewal's (1977:545) view, a depiction that "epitomises the essence of womanhood" in a marriage relationship. Therefore, even though fertility is a universal concept, Odogwu contextualized the rendition as one rooted in Nigerian culture through the iconography of decorative motifs appropriated. It might be argued that the depiction appears like an embellished prison window. His vernacular sculpture titled *Who Am I* (2014) (Figure 42), is a stylised metal sculpture in the round. Although the title, in Ogbechie's (2018:121) view, indicates a "contemporary interrogation of complex idea" that hints on search for true self identity or self-discovery, the subjective identity appears vague. But Odogwu (2017) notes that the title reflects "a query I directed at myself when I meditated on the elusiveness of opportunities, recognition, and lack of support from the Nigerian government to an artist". Given the fact that it is a personal query directed at him, it then gives a clue to lack of self-knowledge.

Even though self-reflection, as McNaughton (2013:16) argues, is necessary in gaining knowledge of one's self as a practical fact of life in relationship to "the physical and social world", the portrayal does not seem to represent Odogwu who is of average height, whereas the depiction is tall. Aside, given that it references a tall African man standing without a shirt, thereby exposing a semi-nude masculine body with both hands folded across his chest, it suggests a traditional wrestler or dancer rather than an artist. However, his posture evokes an introspective pose rooted in urban Nigerian space. As Henry Drewal (1977:547) notes, it invokes a control of the inner self. Still, the mode of depiction shows the face, but without

facial features and a welded necklace around his neck and armlets around his hands, which hints on objects of "body adornment" (Ajiboye 2018:63). As Ogbechie (2009:163) observes, it signifies an attempt by Odogwu "to arrive at an African style by grafting African ... motifs onto a thoroughly European formal and conceptual framework". This mode of depiction is evident in Ben Enwonwu's sculptural portrayal entitled *Sango*. Nevertheless, in Moyo Okediji's (1991:30) views, the semi-"nude figure is treated in a decorative style that seems to reduce the emphasis on the nakedness". Thus, the metal adopted in modelling the imagery unmasks the artist's understanding of human anatomy, as evident in the display of good sculptural formalism (Bardi 2016:5) of the head, the upper body structure, and the lower part adorned with a long waist cloth. Despite the adoption of welded metal, proportion is unmistakable in the construction of different parts.

Figure 42: Fidelis Odogwu, *Who Am I*, 2014. Welded Metal, 73 inches.
Private collection. (Courtesy of Fidelis Odogwu)

Odogwu's adoption of different kinds of metals welded together signals an attempt at creating visual aesthetics in the portrayal of this vernacular imagery and demonstrates, as Odogwu (2017) observes, that, "I work on mild metal sheets that can be beaten to desirable shapes, wire rods, and perforated metal sheets". Consequently, the perforated metal creates circular patterns on the styled wrapper tied on the man, drapes to the base of the work which

created a hollow view into the structure of the African man. In narrating the experience of this imagery from cultural history, in Joao Zilhao's (2011:112) view, the ancient African man showed evidence of symbolic thinking posture in his behaviour and relationship to others in human lineage. Still, this depiction is likely to have been influenced by ancient traditional Yoruba cultural belief in the activity of *oriinu* (the inner head), which is believed to be responsible for controlling "all thoughts and actions" of man (Drewal 1977:546). As Alisa LaGamma (2004:24) notes, a person's "vitality and character are situated" in *oriinu*, that is the inner head, hence it is significant to ask questions aimed at self-identification which may sharpen a person's view about life. The aim, according to Odogwu (2017) relays a narrative "on my personal life as an artist, a citizen of Nigeria who does not have any form of support from the government in making ends meet". I argue that Odogwu's argument is contestable because there is no sign in the depiction that represents an artist, and moreover, a self-employed practicing artist is not a staff on the pay roll of the government Moreover, there is no known welfare plan from which he is excluded.

It might be argued, therefore, as Homi Bhabha (1990:2a) observes, that it hints not merely on "social consciousness", but, in Ogbechie's (2018:121) view, "he is writing his experience as a contemporary African struggling with the burden of heritage". Alternatively, the aim of this depiction signals an attempt at having true self-knowledge. As Henry Drewal (1977:545) argues, it hints on the "unknowable quality of a person [that] is revealed only when thoughts are uttered". The philosophical view centres on his sensitivity towards opportunities that would enhance the professional practice of an artist. Another African vernacular rooted sculpture unfolds differently with the title *Together Forever* (2015) (Figure 43).This title, I argue, invokes the idea of companionship or marriage union, even though in the real sense no marriage lasts forever. However, marriage in Yoruba cultural traditions that influenced the depiction is viewed as a permanent, social, spiritual and emotional bond between the couple (Jankowiak and Fisher 1992:149; Oni 1991:155).

The "formal content" (Ogbechie 2018:121) shows stylised metal relief which references an African man and woman adorned in "African dress forms" (Akinwumi 1998:61) rooted in Yoruba culture of south-western Nigeria. Given the fact that these imageries are standing together and adorned with African flair traditional styled garments of similar decorative motifs, it evokes not just the notion of double, but also reflects a male and female couple (Peek 2008:14). But they may represent siblings because in Yoruba culture a male and female standing together and adorned in cloth of the same colour may signify members of the same

family attending a cultural function. However, "the aesthetic structure of contemporary" African dress (Ogbechie 2018:120) on the groom and bride, in Tunde Akinwumi's (1998:54) view, hints on examples of embroidery often designed used to embellish such dresses. For the groom, it is evident on the front and back of a voluminous tailored robe referred to as *agbada* and for the bride it is *buba* (blouse) in Yoruba culture. Nevertheless, this "African artistic expressions" (Kalilu 1991:15) was executed with flat metals and slim iron rods cut to different shapes and welded together. This is not only evident in their garments but in the shaping of their heads and the traditional Yoruba styled cap and headgear welded atop. Additionally, they are each adorned with red beaded necklaces around their necks which give a clue to personal "aesthetic decoration" (Ajiboye et al 2018:63).

Figure 43: Fidelis Odogwu, *Together Forever*, 2015, Welded Metal, 33/18 inches. (Courtesy of Fidelis Odogwu)

Further, the thematic interpretation of the trope that represents the African bride standing on the left side of the groom invokes the use of flat metals cut to suitable shapes and sizes twisted and folded together to create the 'gele' (headgear) constructed on her head and embellished with colourful patterns. In Ogbechie's (2018:120) view, they reflect formal elements of female Yoruba visual form. The 'gele' is however welded to the top of the head rendered without facial features, except a round red spot that symbolises her mouth. The ears are simulated from the projecting red earrings welded on both sides of the bride's head. A red beaded necklace that compliments the earrings and outfit drapes from her neck to her bust. To

further narrate the exploration of this vernacular imagery of the African woman welded to her spouse, strips of metal that depict the brides' wrapper are folded and placed over her left shoulder in a drapery form. The wrapper is embellished with different linear decorative motifs, elements that reflect patterns on a woman's wrappers. As Tunde Akinwumi (1998:55) observes, the designs signal "embroidery creative straigth line and curvilinear patterns on a Yoruba woman's traditional wrapper (*iro*) and blouse (*buba*)".

Although the formal elements represent the experience of mature adult physiognomies rooted in Yoruba culture, the cultural history could be presented from a point of view of a couple not only in African art (LaGamma 2004:25) but societies. However, marriage between a male and female couple is as old as the first couple, Adam and Eve. But the traditional practice of marriage, as LaRay Denzer (1994:3) posits, for example in "pre-colonial Yoruba society ... was a necessary condition of adulthood. All young women and men were expected to marry when they reached the appropriate age–women in their twenties, men in their thirties". Nonetheless, such marriage, in Johnson's view (quoted by Denzer 1994:4) was "traditionally monogamic' [except] the wealthy indulged in polygamy". To demonstrate an example of this idea of monogamy without divorce in Yoruba art, Alisa LaGamma (2004:26) reflects on past "Edan Osugbo[12][which] consists of male and female figure–representing a community's founders and an alliance of opposites ... joined at the sum by a chain". The chain that links these elements is significant because it underscores the idea of a sacred bond that unites ... male and female couple, which must not be broken, thus hinting at an indissoluble marriage.

This aim, in Odogwu's (2017) view, signifies "marriage vow that must be till death separates the partners in Yoruba culture". However, this does not negate such value among other cultures in Nigeria. Such demonstrates, as Ogbechie (2018:120) argues, the evocation of "contemporary narrative of love". But, according to Peek (2008:22), it signifies not merely twinness and completeness but the bond that exists between a male and a female couple. Alternatively, it invokes the idea of the marriage vow which a couple makes but soon sacrifice it on the altar of divorce because of marital strife and instability (Coontz 2005:2). Hence, Odogwu's philosophy is guided by the traditional practice of marraiage between a male and female adult who must live together until death separates them. *Custodian* (2016) (Figure 44), introduces a socio-cultural thematic thrust which unfolds differently but reflects

[12] This is a symbol adopted from African art object used by members of Yoruba Ogboni – cult of old age to signify their membership to the cult. However, it reveals expectation of the cult to a new member and becomes his possession till death.

a contemporary traditional practice. However, to contextualise the title, the portrayal presents a stylised metal mask which references a contemporary indigenous Yoruba Eyo masquerade rooted in the annual Eyo festival in Lagos. Although it reflects a masquerade, Odogwu (2017) claims that "Eyo masquerade is held in high regard by the citizens of Lagos State that is why I refer to the title as custodian". In contrast, Ajiboye et al (2018:62) argue that in Yoruba culture the elders are the custodians of knowledge and culture rather than a masquerade.

Although the vernacular symbolism references Eyo masquerade, it is a simulacrum of mask depiction rather than the masquerade. But the formal structure shows metals shaped into different patterns welded together. On the mask is a hat skilfully framed with small metals arranged into cubes and welded together to signify the covering over Eyo's head. Several small springs were welded to the round edges of the hat to create a drapery motif that provide shade for Eyo. A similar but large mask ensemble is evident in Ijele mask constructed by Michael Chukwukelu, an Igbo artist (Ogbechie 2009:133). Nevertheless, this depiction of Eyo which reflects concentration on the mask and the drapery covering on the face hints, as Kunle Filani (2018:19) notes, on the "use of traditional African forms and symbols" in engagement with Yoruba culture. In Ogbechie's (2008:204) words, it signals "African masking, [that is] ... central to engagements with modernity". This accounts for the triangular shaped portrayal that graciously narrows from the top to the base, which references the frontal view, to symbolise Eyo masquerade that is dressed in flowing white apparel during the robust traditional festival.

Aside from the construction of the mask, a simulacrum of a staff held by Eyo is constructed diagonally to the right side with metal, welded to a base. Given the fact that the depiction is a simulacrum of Eyo, no hands were constructed holding the staff, which suggests perhaps that the hand of Eyo masquerade is not to be revealed or seen even in a visual representation. In Odogwu's (2017) view "the rod or staffs is a symbol of authority so it is embellished with different linear motifs that blend 'uli' ideas of wealth, joy, hospitality and being accommodative". Although several slim shaped iron rods were cut to size and welded to create the linear embellishments, the mixture of cultural elements of uli rooted in Igbo culture, with the Eyo mask negates the claim of cultural specificity (Papastergiadis 2005:40). In narrating the history of traditional masquerades that varies in Nigerian cultures, Aremu (1991:6) argues that the social functions of masquerades are framed around beliefs that are deeply mythical, as well as reflecting realities of life. One of such beliefs, according to Ogbechie (2008:198), is that "masquerades also signify death in their invocation of ancestral

spirits". In a related belief, Aremu (1991:6) observes that "masquerades 'are the ancestors from heaven who had returned to hear and put right the complaints of their people left behind, to bless them with human and crop fertility and also with general prosperity".

Figure 44: Fidelis Odogwu Eze, *Custodian* 2016. Welded Metal, 84 inches.
(Courtesy of Fidelis Odogwu)

While these cultural beliefs may appear real, they could be mythological in those Nigerian cultures as well. But in the case of the Eyo masquerade festival which history suggests began in the 1850s in Lagos, Obasola Emmanuel (2014:528) notes that it is believed to be a "measure of [the] purity of the culture of Lagos and its origin. '*Eyo ni babatawa* is ... that which the indigenes of Lagos sing with utmost pride and dignity". It simply means, "Eyo" is our "illustrious father". It is, however, a contestable historical belief for a masquerade to assume fatherly role in a culture where there are elders, the actual custodian of cultural heritage. However, to demonstrate that belief, Odogwu titled the mask depiction the *Custodian* of Lagos culture. The aim of this portrayal, therefore, according to Odogwu (2017), is to symbolise "Eyo as a cultural symbolism entrusted with the responsibility of being the custodian of Yoruba culture in Lagos State". In addition, as Kennedy (1986:91) observes, Eyo as an illustrious father evokes a socio-cultural responsibility of setting things right, acting as a critic of wrong doers and honouring men of past communities. Alternatively, in Ogbechie's (2008:198) words, it indicates a "masquerade performance

[which] operate[s] as visual metaphor for the complexity of human existence". It is for this reason perhaps the people of Lagos State hold the event in high regard for promotion of traditional African masquerade festival. Thus, this sculptural rendition represents a philosophical idea that places value on the preservation of African cultural heritage in Yoruba culture.

6.7 Sub-conclusion

The interpretations of Odogwu Afrocentric sculptures in this research reveals that while he may have reflected on different Nigerian socio-cultural contexts, his renditions are deemed vernacular because he appropriates in them cultural imageries (Greaves 2015:7) rooted in different "aspects of indigenous, traditional and contemporary" Yoruba cultures (Filani 2018:19). Given that he is an Igbo man who practices in Lagos, his engagement with themes in Yoruba culture suggests, in Okeke-Agulu's (2006:27) words, "cultural confrontations with his host community". However, the cultural imageries depicted vary significantly and convey aims on disparate cultural heritages "about the experiences and world views" (Onyima 2016:274) of Yoruba cultures. For instance, his visual narrative reflects the significance of drumming, singing and dancing in Yoruba socio-cultural events. As Aromashodu (2017:1) argues, it may be festival that is associated with memorable events or funeral ceremonies.

Conversely, he reflects on an aim that echoes interrogation of self–knowledge in relationship to the social and physical world around him. But in Henry Drewal's (1977:546) view, it evokes a Yoruba philosophical belief on the character and personality of an individual which resides in the spiritual head or *oriinu* (inner head). Additionally, he did not only reflect on the esteemed cultural value of fertility (Ekwere et al 2007:35) in male and female couple in Nigerian context but, as Carol Hermer (2004:395) notes, retells the history of male and female monogamic marital bond as an African cultural heritage rooted in Yoruba culture. And lastly, he narrates, in Alan Donovan's (2007:10) view, masquerade as an African heritage festival rooted in Yoruba culture in Lagos. However, the aim draws attention not merely to the Eyo masquerade as the most respectable festival of Lagosians (Aromashodu 2017:2), but also as a traditional festival which in contemporary era incorporates the function of tourism as an event that attracts thousands of tourists from around the world who come to see costumed dancers or masquerades called 'Eyo'.

6.8 Conclusion and Comparison of the Aims in Ijisakin and Odogwu's Sculptures

Although the comparative analysis focuses on the aims that unfolded from the reading of the cultural symbolisms appropriated in their African vernacular rooted sculptures, as Gevin Griffiths (2017:491) argues, in a comparative analysis it is not enough to identify similarities and differences, but as far as possible the causes of such differences must be explained. Therefore, in comparing the aims that unfold from Ijisakin's vernacular rooted sculpture entitled *Embrace* (2009), and Odogwu's sculpture *Together Forever* (2015), similarities unfold in "physical linking of bodies [which] suggests affection" (Batchen 2000:265) and duality between couples. While Ijisakin's portrayal echoes ironic expression of love through embrace because of hidden evil motive of hatred and intent to harm which demonstrates, as Onyima (2016:10) argues, a lack of security fuelled by terrorism that results in liquidation of African heritage, Odogwu's depiction of male and female couple standing together hints on a permanent and indissoluble marriage union in "relation to African tradition" (Oni 1991:155; Okeke-Agulu 2006:27) rooted in Yoruba culture. Similarly, the comparison of the aims in Ijisakin's rendition *The Thinker* (2009), and Odogwu's depiction titled *Who Am I?* (2014) reveals similarities as both aims reflect on symbolic thinking rooted in Yoruba and Nigerian cultural belief in the head as the most important part of an individual because it coordinates his or her activities (Ajiboye et al 2018:62).

However, while the *Thinker* seeks to let reason rather than emotion control him, *Who Am I* ponder on thoughts aimed at self-discovery or, as Geoffrey Batchen (2000:268) notes "search for the true identity of" self. Although in De Jager's (sa:1) view, the two disparate figures narrate a bleak, neurotic environment created and expressed by solitariness, their thoughtfulness suggests reflection on their humanity as Africans in the past, present, and future (Dei 2012:47). Consequently, both renditions signify African humanism which gives birth to a deeply rooted human heritage (Nussbaum 2003:23). Furthermore, the comparative analysis of the aims in Ijisakin's rendition titled *The Priest* (2010), and Odogwu's sculpture *Custodian* (2016) reveal reliance on "practice of African religion". But both echo differences even though their ideas, as Sylvester Ogbechie (2018:119) observes, imply "preoccupation with Yoruba culture". Whereas Ijisakin's portrayal of Ifa priest, as George Sefa Dei (2012:45) argues, signals "African spirituality" in relation to "*ifa* in Yoruba religion" (Pogoson and Akande 2011:17 emphasis in original), Odogwu's depiction of Eyo mask

rooted in masquerade festival suggests, in Alan Donovan's (2007:10) words, a "purely traditional African heritage".

But the commentary conveyed in the priest echoes "*ifa* divination as a means of communication between man and god among the Yoruba" (Pogoson and Akande 2011:17), unlike Eyo which though has a religious and spiritual undertone, relays a cultural performance at the festival. The comparative analysis of the aims in Ijisakin's Afrocentric sculpture *Mother and Child* (2013), and Odogwu's depiction entitled *Fertility* (2013) reveals similarity in their reflections on fertility in marriage union. Nevertheless, the aim in *Mother and Child* traces a cultural belief and value for motherhood in Yoruba culture, while *Fertility* hints, in Geoffrey Batchen's (2000:267) view, on an "overall message of prosperity and well-being" in Nigerian space. Still, as Tunde Akinwumi (1998:60) notes, fertility may reflect a "wish, hope and aspiration to have children" which may never come true.

Lastly, the comparison of ideas in Ijisakin's *After Labour* (2015) and Odogwu's rendition *To the Dance* (2007) reflects differences in modes of cultural entertainment and refreshment. Whereas *After Labour* echoes a cultural practice of refreshing self through the consumption of palm wine as beverage after labour on the farm, in Armstrong's (1970:18) view, it hints on supplying self with "palm-wine"; *To the Dance* traces happiness and celebration linked to "African heritage band" (Donovan 2007:10) in Yoruba culture. As Ademola Adegbite (1988:17) argues, it signifies the Yoruba band or drummer using certain drum ensembles "for both social and religious occasions". Consequently, both works, in Chinua Achebe's words, (cited by Armstrong 1970:19) narrate individual "African experiences" on modes of indigenous refreshment and socio-cultural performances rooted in Yoruba culture.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

7.1 Findings on the African Vernacular-Rooted Symbolisms

The findings of this study which focuses on the contemporary African arts that is Africa-centred in a global age, reveals disparate appropriations of vernacular-rooted symbols and imageries that demonstrates not merely affiliations of the eight selected artists to African cultures but the construction of Africanness in their works. Thus, the interrogation reveals that the works of South African artists, beginning with Nelson Makamo demonstrates identification with representations of African vernacular-rooted symbolisms in contemporary paintings and drawings. Makamo's oeuvres draw inspiration from the black African child as the major theme and symbolic representations of Africa (Bauer 2016:363). He depicts the vernacular tropes of the black African child as his dominant motifs. The contexts of such works reflect young black boys sleeping together on the street, a lonely boy with a headphone, a girl returning from the mall holding a plastic bag, another girl walking away from viewers and a young African woman laughing. His works are deeply rooted in rural and urban areas in South Africa and the continent at large. Makamo uses these tropes to reflect on his past experiences as a black child, as well as the experiences of other black children, which in his view symbolises the future of Africa moving forward.

Similarly, Lebohang Sithole produces a body of oeuvres that articulates the vernacular tropes of young black African boys, as Moyo Okediji (2018:33) observes "that draws on memory" of his childhood experiences. Nonetheless, Sithole's tropes and the figure of a black man in a separate work are rooted in Zulu culture. The formal structures of his depictions show a boy carrying a bucket of water on his head walking towards the viewer wearing a torn shirt. A different depiction reveals a boy pushing a box in front, as he walks away from the viewers. In contrast, his vernacular trope unfolds a portrait of a black boy adorned with a cardigan staring at the viewers. Conversely, the only portrayal of a standing man reflects a musician performing with saxophone. His last trope shows a lonely boy bordered by two adults on either side. Like Makamo, Sithole's images are sourced from the rural and urban areas of South Africa. Furthermore, the portrayal of vernacular-rooted imageries unfolds the body of sculptures produced by Pitika Ntuli, which references black men and a woman, who were victims of past and present brutality as well as massacre. An installation shows three black men who were part of protesters at Marikana before police massacred them in 2012. A

different oeuvre shows an abstracted portrayal of a black woman with both hands raised above her head, as if in self defense as she was being tortured in apartheid prison. In contrast, a different depiction shows a monument with three faces in honour of three black South Africans killed at Silverton in the early 1980s. But another statue unfolds Mandela seated, as he carries six young children in his bosom, they symbolically represent the rainbow children. Lastly, a portrayal shows an anthropomorphic statue of Shaka Zulu holding a shield in his left hand and a short sword in his right hand; in a posture that invokes an attempt to attack a victim. In all, Ntuli's sculptures are deeply rooted in rural and urban areas of South Africa.

Moreover, the study also interrogated the African vernacular rooted installations executed by Sinethemba Ngubane, which shows new vernacular symbolisms of tortured and mutilated bodies of young black South African children identified as intersex. Despite these forms of cultural symbolisms that feature prominently in her works, their contexts are not the same. The first installation shows eight mutilated bodies placed in different postures but covered with diverse glaze colours rooted in Zulu culture in South Africa. Still, rooted in Zulu culture is a portrayal of heads arranged with other cultural elements in two separate basins hinting on paraphernalia used in witchcraft. In contrast, is a rendition of two bodies of different sizes arranged inside a clay pot, this appears to be a preparation to cook those bodies. A different vernacular installation rooted in Zulu culture reveals the only depiction of the two genitals cohabiting in the body of a young child, yet the arms, legs and vital organs were brutally removed. Conversely, her last vernacular sculpture unfolds a body of a young child without limbs, stitched with twine but covered with earth to invoke a body that was exhumed from the grave in Zulu culture.

On the other hand, the critical analysis of artworks produced by contemporary Nigerian artists show different articulations of cultural imageries that are deemed African vernacular-rooted arts. However, the contents and contexts of their representations differ significantly. For instance, the vernacular symbolisms that appear visible in Olatunbosun Shonibare's paintings were sourced from Hausa/Fulani traditional emirate council in northern Nigeria and womanhood from Yoruba culture in southwestern Nigeria. One of his depictions shows a vernacular architecture of an emir's palace, with traditional title-holders dressed in royal garments seated on horsebacks portrayed in a waiting posture in front of the palace. In a different context, the vernacular symbolisms references an emir with palace guards robed in colourful traditional royal attires on horsebacks, as they advance towards viewers in a procession. In addition, a depiction which reflects womanhood in a particular context reveals

a young black woman adorned with a large earring showing the symbol of African map, tying a wrapper highly embellished with linear patterns around her body, and a symbolic image of her husband depicted on her back.

Additionally, in a different rendition, Shonibare depicts a humorous black mother playing with her young child intersected with the intricate patterns on a blue African fabric rooted in Yoruba culture. However, this vernacular-rooted painting unfolds the image of the woman adorned with a large *gele* (headgear) and *iru* (blouse) blended with the patterns on the fabric. His last vernacular painting shows a representation of a black woman braiding the head of a young lady as they are seated in a close-up posture. Likewise, the African vernacular-rooted paintings produced by Chinedu Ogakwu, in Moyo Okediji's (2018:33) view, "links forms from ... African cultures with ideas borrowed from various sources" in Nigeria and Benin Republic. Ogakwu's painting shows a portrayal of five women and a man dressed in different colourful clothes, carrying different goods on their heads as they stand in a round meeting posture. In a particular painting, the representation reveals an abstracted portrait of a male and female couple adorned in cultural attires that reflect title holders in Igbo culture. Another context unfolds a standing but masculine male figure, looking upwards, as he is attired with only a colourful loincloth and armlets on both hands rooted in a past historic narrative in Igbo culture. Conversely, his retrospective vernacular painting shows two girls pushing a wheelbarrow in which four other children are seated. His fifth painting reveals vernacular-rooted symbolisms of men and women closely bonded, adorned in different colourful traditional garments, which references dress elements in Yoruba, Igbo, and other Nigerian cultures.

The analysis of the vernacular rooted symbols that describe Africanness in the sculptures of contemporary Nigerian artists Yemi Ijisakin and Fidelis Odogwu. Yemi Ijisakin's vernacular arts were all carved from stones, however, they do not merely show ideas that are deeply rooted in Yoruba culture but the cultural symbolisms reflect people and elements in Yoruba communities. In a particular rendition, a male figure is depicted sitting on the floor with his head slightly bowed, wearing a traditional cap folded to his right side and a beaded necklace over an exposed body, but a wrapper covers his waist downwards. In contrast, he depicts an abstracted male and female couple joined together through their arms in a posture that signifies a continuum of hands from one body to the other, as if engaged in dancing. Another vernacular symbolism shows a nursing mother sitting on a hard surface, while her two hands are used to safely carry her little baby wrapped with a swaddle. Nonetheless, a different

context unfolds an Ifa priest adorned with a robe, and a gourd hanging from his right side as he carries a calabash in his right hand, but the left hand is deep inside as though he would bring out ritual objects. Lastly, his portrayal shows an African man seated, but, carrying a gourd in his right hand as he pours out a liquid substance into a small calabash held with his right hand.

Conversely, the African vernacular rooted art produced by Fidelis Odogwu shows intricate but skillful use of metal as his major medium. The first sculpture is a relief rendition, which depicts a stylised African man adorned in traditional African garment, in a moving posture, as he carries two drums rooted in Yoruba culture. However, a different rendition shows another stylised but masculine African man, with no shirt, standing tall from a flat base. Despite the fact he appears adorned with a long flowing wrapper, it is intricately embellished with perforated metal and other forms of designs. A completely different relief sculpture shows a rectangular steel frame, a white ovary shaped in the middle, but bordered with several linear patterns and other design motifs. In contrast, another stylised depiction reveals a male and a female couple standing next to one another, garbed in African dress form referred to as *aso ebi* (clothes of the same colour) in Yoruba culture. Still, rooted in Yoruba culture is a simulacrum of the Eyo mask, which unfolds a hat worn over a mask that stretches to the base and supported by a staff held by eyo masquerade.

7.2 Comparison of Vernacular Symbolisms and Aims in the Artworks of Contemporary Nigerian and South African Artists

Given that this study focuses on a cross-national comparative analysis of the cultural symbolisms appropriated in the African vernacular rooted paintings and sculptures of contemporary Nigerian and South African artist, I attempt, as stated in objective four, to interrogate the possible ideas each artist represented in the context and content of their works and to analyse them for similarities and differences and explain the factors responsible for such similarities or differences.

As David Summers (2009:476) notes, “four painters ... set out to depict the same landscape at Tivoli, each following nature as closely as possible. Despite their resolve not to deviate from appearances, the result was four totally different pictures, in styles that reflected the differing personalities of the four artists”. For this reason, in Abe and Elsner’s (2017:11) view, in “a comparative approach where there is in principle no connection between the objects of study, one may attempt comparativism of areas that are contiguous and in certain senses

interconnected". Therefore, the area of interconnectedness between the paintings and sculptures of Nigerian and South African artists is the appropriation of vernacular symbolisms in each context. Still, given the fact that not even the representation of the same landscape reflected similarities, it then establishes that differences would manifest in the comparative analysis of vernacular symbolisms appropriated by contemporary Nigerian and South African artists. A major reason for the differences is because "works of art have their own stylistic and historical reality apart from the appearances they imitate" (Summers 2009:476). Thus, I seek to narrate not merely how possibly the individual styles and historical realities of the stories the artists tell about themselves, others or nations, account for the similarities and differences in the vernacular symbolisms and tropes, but also in the aims or ideas that unveil.

7.2.1 Comparison of the Aims in contemporary Paintings

In narrating this cross-national comparative analysis, I focus on the aims that unfold from the thematic interpretations of the paintings of two contemporary South African artists, in comparison with those of two Nigerian artists, to identify the similarities and differences and explain the factors responsible.

In view of that, the comparative interrogation of the aims in Nelson Makamo's work entitled *Somewhere I belong* (2010) (Figure 5), and Lebohang Sithole's rendition *Gone Too* (2015) (Figure 12) reveals similarities not merely in the idea of rural-urban migration that they narrate, but in speaking to a dialogue of homelessness in rural and urban areas in South Africa. Despite these similarities, the aims in both renditions are however different, as David Summers (2009:476) argues, not because of the different historical realities but also for their contents. Whereas the aim in Makamo's depiction narrates the experience of an African youth who, in Nontobeko Ntombela's (2011:15) view, redefines a sense of home and recreates a sense of belonging anywhere he finds to sleep as home, even though it is a roofless corner of a street, it is however unlike the aim in Lebohang Sithole's work which unveils a historical reality of a youth who, as Ntombela (2011:14) argues, was in the process of migrating from a rural area to an urban area because of homelessness. On the other hand, the aims that unfold from the reading of the paintings of two contemporary Nigerian artists, Olatubosun Shonibare's *In Expectation* (2007) (Figure 25) and Chinedu Ogakwu's *Hawkers' Meeting* (2010) (Figure 26) reveal differences. Because the representation *In Expectation* reveals an aim of underlying cultural attitude of loyalty from heterogeneous subjects to the

Emir in Hausa/Fulani cultures in Northern Nigeria, it recalls a history of loyalty that is traced not merely to the Emir, but from Emirs and their subjects to colonial rulers in the 1910s, except when African interest was endangered (Tibenderana 1988:68).

This, however, differs from the aim in Ogakwu's *Hawkers' Meeting* which reflects an aim on attitudes of organisation, dialogue and team spirit that is necessary for success in the market. As David Summers (2017:476) observes, the historical realities that account for the differences are because Shonibare's aim reflects loyalty in a traditional Hausa/Fulani emirate kingdom in Northern Nigeria, while the aim in Ogakwu's rendition mirrors planning and organisation among nomadic market people. Therefore, as Pickvance (2005:2) argues, to explain the seeming causes of the differences in the aims of works from both countries, I argue that it is not merely because of the historical realities that differ but because they are responses to different contemporary social issues.

While the ideas in the works of the South African artists, in Spivak's (2009:610) view, are "the result of the steady influx of [heterogeneous] people ... into the metropolis" which speaks to dialogue of migration and the challenges of homelessness in rural and urban areas, the ideas in the renditions of Nigerian artists relay commentaries on cultural loyalty to traditional rulers and value of planning daily activities for productivity. Similarly, although the comparative analysis of the aims in Nelson Makamo's portrayal titled *Moment Alone* (2011) (Figure 6), and Lebohang Sithole's depiction *From the Tap* (2010) (Figure 10) unfolds similarity in black South African cultural belief in making a black African child learn the act of taking responsibility of running errands early in life, in Richards' (2011:49) view, such training is intended to bring out the human in a child. Yet, their aims differ in contents and other areas. As Makamo (2017) claims, the aim in his rendition relays a cultural belief and value in migrating not merely from rural to urban areas, but across-national borders, which reflects xenophobia in search of better living condition. This is unlike the aim in Sithole's rendition which Sithole (2017) notes reflect not only loneliness of an African child, but the experience of suffering in search of water in rural areas. They are, however, in contrast to the aims that unfold from the readings of Shonibare's painting titled *Her Backbone* (2010) (Figure 26), and Ogakwu's painting *Chief and Lolo* (2012) (Figure 31), which reveal similarities in reflecting partnership, unity, and bond between male and female couples. Despite the similarities, differences are also evident in the reading of *Her Backbone* which echoes not just an aim on cultural belief, but value in patriarchal attitude of taking responsibility towards the well-being of a wife in contemporary Nigerian context. In *Chief*

and Lolo the aim reflects not only recognition and honour of a couple in Igbo culture for their contributions to the development of their community but is an expressive portrait of a couple.

In Jean Borgatti's (1990:36) view, the honour bestowed on them recognises "the level of reality they held for the community" through philanthropic gestures. Therefore, to explain the differences, as Pickvance argues, as David Summers (2009:476) notes, even though the differences unfold in the aims of renditions by artists from both countries, it is not merely because of the vernacular symbolisms referenced but the historical realities they reflect on in their depictions. While the aims in the two South African renditions reflect on black African children running errands, the aims in Nigerian works echo duality, bond, and unity in male and female couples.

In like manner, the comparative analysis of the aims in Makamo's painting *Smiles* (2015) (Figure 7), and Lebohang Sithole's rendition entitled *Bongumusa-Giving Thanks for Blessing* (2016) (Figure 13) relay differences rather than similarities. While the aim in Makamo's work acknowledges the humour of beauty in smiles and laughter, it also echoes, as Makamo (2017) observes, insincerity in motive which may be difficult to read in facial expressions. From another level, in Hartz and Hunt's (1991:299) view, it reflects the "philosophy of [the] mind" which on the one hand reflects beauty and on the other, the beastly nature in man. Though Sithole's aim relays a grateful heart for privilege in caring for his son better than his own father had when he was a child, it rather mirrors the portrait of a young African child. However, both ideas reflect on the heart and seem to resonate with the need for doing things from the heart in everyday social relationship. Conversely, the comparison of the aims in the context of Shonibare's rendition *Durbar* (2012) (Figure 27), and Ogakwu's *Once Upon A Time* (2014) (Figure 32) conveys differences. As Pickvance (2005:2) notes, the underlying cause of difference, I argue that it is because both aims hint on divergent views. Whereas Shonibare's work makes a commentary on the colourful royal adornments which "communicate[s] status, achievements ... [and] political power" (Lawal 1996: xiii), rather than celebration of the Muslim annual festival–Sallah, Ogakwu's work relays a historical statement on art which recalls past childhood activities as a relevant step for defining the present and future adulthood. Rather, as Albano (2014:2) argues, though Ogakwu's depiction records childhood events, "it constitutes and [is] interpret[ed] ... as meaningful parts of [a] meaningful whole".

Consequently, while the aims in the renditions of South African artists Makamo and Sithole reflect responses to social issues and the need to do things sincerely from the heart in terms of appreciation and social relationship, the aims that unfold from the thematic readings of works by contemporary Nigerian artists Shonibare and Ogakwu do not merely speak to colourful royal adornments rooted in Hausa/Fulani traditional kingdom, but to retrospective memory of past childhood playful moments rooted in Igbo culture. Conversely, Makamo's portrayal *I Belong to the World* (2016) (Figure 9), in comparison to Sithole's *Thousand Kisses* (2016) (Figure 14) unfolds differently. Makamo's depiction reflects a South African cultural belief on *Ubuntu* or the collective upbringing of a black African child in the rural community. Nevertheless, it does not relinquish the training of a black child from the parents to the rural community, but draws attention to "an indigenous philosophy about how persons, understood as *all Homo sapiens,* are interconnected" (Gade 2012:501 emphasis in original). It is unlike the aim in Sithole's vernacular rooted painting which does not only connote the hurts and pains orchestrated by the absence of both parents in raising an African child with love and companionship but as Gael Neke (1999:3) argues, it gives clue to "terrible solitude".

While many reasons may account for the absence of parents in a home in contemporary South African society, in de Jager's ([sa]:1) view, a mother, because of her social circumstances, may be forced to work in the city away from her child in rural areas. It suggests as Nsamenang (1987:287) reiterates, that certain priorities or changes in value are now preventing either a father or mother "from being the guides, companions, and models for their children". However, the comparative analysis of Shonibare's painting entitled *Kosefowora-Priceless* (2015) (Figure 28), and Ogakwu's rendition *Ikemba* (2016) (Figure 33) reveals differences in the aims that unfold from their thematic interpretations. In *Kosefowora-Priceless* the aim does not merely echo the cultural value of honouring motherhood as a priceless stage in a woman's life rooted in Yoruba culture but also, in Hartz and Hunt's (1991:302) view, demonstrates the usefulness of "external signals of an emotion like humour ... to offspring's in play situation". The aim in *Ikemba* differs because it narrates a title or honour bestowed on an individual as a reward in Igbo culture of south-eastern Nigeria. Although Amadi and Agena (2015:23) note that titles in contemporary Igbo culture may be awarded to the highest bidder, Oghojafor et al (2013:14) argue that Ikemba (the power house of his people) is a title given as a reward to befitting person's disposition, especially a successful warrior. Therefore, the comparative analysis of the aims that unfold from the two works of South African and Nigerian artists demonstrates differences.

Whereas the aims in the works of South African artists echo the hurts of loneliness in a forsaken or abandoned child and the need for communal involvement in the upbringing of a girl child, the aims in the works of Nigerian artists reflect the significance of a mother's humour to her child in play situation and the bestowing of titles as recognition of and reward for hard work. The major reason for the differences in aims is because the works reference different social and historical realities on parenting and upbringing of black children and reward systems in South Africa and Nigeria. Furthermore, the comparison of the aims that unfolded from the reading of two other vernacular rooted paintings of Nelson Makamo *Young Soul* (2016) (Figure 9), and Lebohang Sithole *KuzeKuse-Till Morning* (2013) (Figure 11), shows differences. While Makamo's depiction *Young Soul* elicits a recalling of childhood experiences once lived by every adult as significant in shaping each stage of growth in life, it might be argued, in Caterina Albano's (2014:2) view, that the narrative does not merely mirror what might have happened, but it also discovers what happens in contemporary black South African community.

The aim in Sithole's rendition does not merely reflect a musical performance till dawn but typifies a township past when black South Africans "enjoyed music that expressed a locally-rooted identity reflective of their everyday live" (Allen 2003:237). Likewise, the comparative analysis of the aims relayed from the vernacular-rooted paintings of contemporary Nigerian artists' Shonibare's *Onidiri-Hair Braider* (2016) (Figure 29), and Ogakwu's depiction *Wazobia* (2016) (Figure 34) reveal differences. Whereas, in *Onidiri-Hair Braider* the reading reveals not just, as Leora Farber (2017:12) observes, an assertion of a woman's creative agency, but of hair-stylisation as a form of self-fashioning and adornment rooted in Yoruba culture, *Wazobia* elicits not merely aims that reflect cultural value of promoting unity among the three major cultural groups in Nigeria, but all the ethnic identities that make up Nigeria. I argue, as Negro Digest (1965:47) notes, even though the aim connotes cultural unity, it hints on a dark political period in the 21st century when agitation for secession heightened.

Although the comparative analysis of the aims in Makamo and Sithole's renditions reveal differences, similarly the aims that unfold from the reading of Shonibare's and Ogakwu's renditions reveal differences as well. Still, the comparison of the aims in the works of South African artists with Nigerian artists further manifests differences. While the differences may be attributed to the contemporary social issues the artists responded to in their renditions, the South African works recall past experiences of childhood life, South African jazz music while Nigerian works reflect personal adornment and national unity in political context.

7.2.2 Comparison of Aims in Contemporary African Sculptures

The comparison of the aims in Pitika Ntuli's African vernacular rooted installation sculpture entitled *Marikana* (2012/13) (Figure 15), and Sinethemba Ngubane's installations *Rebirth of Bio-Politics* (2015) (Figure 16) reveal similarities in echoing social issues of murder in post-apartheid South Africa. But they differ in the ideas of murder that they reflect in each context and content. While Ntuli's depiction echoes the greed of wealthy mining tycoons (Klopper 2013:137) as a possible reason for killing some miners who were protesting over demand for wage increase and hints on lack of regard for their humanity, the aim in Ngubane's rendition gives a clue to what Dreger (2006:73) calls "poor treatment of families dealing with intersex" babies in rural areas of South Africa. In Ngubane's (2017) view, "they are seen as abnormal children, so they are not merely killed but their bodies are used for rituals". Conversely, the comparative analysis of the aims that unfold from Yemi Ijisakin's vernacular rooted sculpture *Embrace* (2009) (Figure 35), and Fidelis Odogwu's *Together Forever* (2015) (Figure 43), unfolds similarities in the aims of bond and duality between couples.

Still, they differ because the bond in Ijisakin's portrayal symbolises, in Ijisakin's (2017) words, "an evil embrace from someone who appears friendly but for the wrong motive, either to detonate a bomb or use the victim for ritual in contemporary Nigerian society". But the aim in Odogwu's depiction symbolises the marriage bond between a male and female couple in Yoruba culture of south western Nigeria. As Oti and Ayeni (2013:25) argue, it is against the mores of Yoruba culture for a man or woman who reaches marriageable age to remain single, so they marry even if the man is impotent. Thus, the cross-national comparison of the aims that unfold from the depictions of South African and Nigerian artists reveals differences. The differences are because the experiences reflected on in the South African renditions reveal killing perhaps because of greed and exploitation of miners for "cheap labour" (Manaka 1987:13), and family intolerance with intersex babies for the sake of rituals. Unlike the aims in the depictions of Nigerian artists, this reflects male and female marriage bonds, even though some evil practices against unsuspecting spouses may be identified. Conversely, the comparative analysis of Ntuli's vernacular sculpture *Silverton Three* (2013) (Figure 17), and Ngubane's *Nonkiloyi* (2016) (Figure 21) unfolds differently. The aim in Ntuli's depiction echoes, as Ntuli (2015:1) argues, honour for the "determination of those who gave their lives for the liberation of the country".

Alternatively, I argue, in consonance with Gael Neke's (1999:6) view, that the aim reflects a "site for the representation of a very different history" of a massacre in apartheid regime. The aim in Ngubane's depiction narrates the paraphernalia adopted in witchcraft, but Kombo (2003:83) argues that the "paraphernalia used in witchcraft have in themselves no power to cause misfortune or suffering". Hence, her work is read not merely as protest but "struggle against witchcraft" (Harnischfeger 2000:104). Ngubane (2017) claims it signifies the process through which witchcraft is consummated. Similarly, the comparison of the aims in Ijisakin's rendition *The Thinker* (2009) (Figure 36), and Odogwu's depiction *Who Am I* (2014) (Figure 42) reveals similarity as both aims reflect on "heightened exploration of memory and personal identity" (Neke 1999:6) aimed at making a better life. However, they differ because the thematic interpretation of Ijisakin's depiction reflects worrying, not just thinking, as suggested by the title. But Odogwu's portrayal does not merely elicit search for personal identity but self-knowledge. Hence, the comparative analyses of the aims from both countries do not only echo differences but different historical issues. While the aims from South African works are reflections not merely on apartheid political killings of black South Africans but witchcraft related activities which, in Neke's view, suggest "an exploration of painful ... experiences in the historical and national trauma" of individuals, the aims in the works of Nigerian artists invoke a search not merely for personal identities but, as Karen Johnson (2011:1) notes, the "use of art to explore and express identity". Thus, South African works convey commentaries on political repression and the evil of African spiritism.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of Ntuli's sculpture entitled *The Torture of a Woman Giving Birth in Prison* (2015) (Figure 17), and Ngubane's vernacular rooted sculpture *Impaired* (2016) (Figure 22) reveals differences. While Ntuli's depiction explores, as Christopher Merrett (1990:30) observes, systematic torture or physical abuse of detainees by security police during apartheid, it alternatively seems to be targeted at causing the loss of foetus rather than merely physical abuse. The aim in Ngubane's portrayal demonstrates, as Ndlovu (quoted by Olifant 2017:1) argues, is to convey that ritual killing of young children, intersex inclusive, and cooking of their flesh is done within 24 to 48 hours when a child is reported missing. As Ngubane (2017) observes, it signifies "muti murder and cooking of young intersex children by people who desire to be rich or have bumper harvest". It might be argued, in Rob Turrell"s (2001:22) views, that muti murder may also signal rebellion to authority rather than for affluence. The comparison of the aims in Ijisakin's rendition *The Priest* (2010) (Figure 37), and Odogwu's vernacular rooted sculpture *Custodian* (2016)

(Figure 44) reveal differences, even though both ideas, as Sylvester Ogbechie (2018:119) observes, are not merely "parochial focus on militant ethnicity" but are deeply rooted in Yoruba culture of south-western Nigeria.

While Ijisakin's depiction signals the process of Ifa divination which is marked by a priest "casting ... sixteen palm nuts or cowry shells" (Pogoson and Akande 2011:21) with his right hand in an attempt to predict the future for a client (Bascom 1941:43), Odogwu's portrayal hints on the cultural and spiritual significance of Eyo masquerade to Yoruba culture. As Odogwu (2017) notes, the "masquerade is believed to be the custodian of Yoruba culture" but in Obasola Emmanuel's (2014:528) view, Eyo masquerade is not merely perceived as the illustrious father of Lagos, but a purifier of the culture. Therefore, whereas the aims in South African depictions relay reflections on past political torture of black South African woman and the uncritical belief in getting rich through ritual murder, conversely, the aims in the depictions of Nigerian artists conveys a commentary on socio-cultural traditions of rituals of divination and Eyo masquerade festival rooted in indigenous Yoruba culture. Similarly, other comparisons reveal that Pitika Ntuli's African vernacular rooted sculpture titled *Mandela and The Rainbow Children* (2015) (Figure 18), and Sinethemba Ngubane's installation sculpture *Gaze of Disfigured* (2016) (Figure 23) do not echo similar aims.

This is because Ntuli's portrayal relays not merely a non-racial unification of the different races in South Africa as one, but reflects, as Ntuli (2017) notes, a process of Ubuntu by which Mandela puts behind the hurts of apartheid brutality and deliberately promotes interconnectedness of the races as South Africans. On the other hand, Ngubane's depictions, in Gael Neke's (1999:7) view, do not merely hint on mutilation as its subject indicates but, as Rob Turrell (2001:22) argues, "the ritual killing of a human ... required for the acquisition of extraordinary power". But the comparative analysis of the aims in Ijisakin's *Mother and Child* (2013) (Figure 38), and Odogwu's abstract relief entitled *Fertility* (2013) (Figure 41) reveal similarities in their reflections on fruitfulness in male and female marriage union. While the aim in *Mother and Child* is traced to the honour bestowed on motherhood in Yoruba culture which, in Ekwere et al's (2007:35) view, is " proof of her womanhood and a justification of her place in the family", the aim in infertility establishes the pride rather than the humiliation of a couple in Nigerian cultures (Ekwere et al 2007:35). From another angle, as Geoffrey Batchen (2000:267) argues, it evokes an idea of "well-being".

The cross-national comparative analysis of the aims that unfold from the thematic interpretations of the vernacular rooted sculptures executed by South African and Nigerian artists reveals dissimilarities. While the aims in the works of South African artists reflects a re-emphasis on the promotion of a non-racial country in the post-apartheid era, and ritual killings for extraordinary power, in contrast, the aims in the depictions of Nigerian artists draw attention to the pride and honour of motherhood not merely in Yoruba culture but in Nigeria. Likewise, the comparative analysis of aims in Ntuli's rendition *Shaka Zulu* (2015) (Figure 19), and Sinethemba Ngubane's depiction *Excavated* (2016) (Figure 24) echoes differences in the messages they relay to viewers. Whereas the aim in Ntuli's portrayal reflects not just the historical personality of Shaka Zulu, but also his anthropomorphic strength as a warrior in the 1800s (Manaka 1987:11), or perhaps, as Jean Borgatti (1990:39) argues, a symbolism invested with identity in ways that are meaningful not only to Pitika Ntuli but his audience, Ngubane's depiction unfolds differently echoing an aim on "grave desecration" caused by gross violation of cultural value for burial. As Maseko (2017:1) argues, though graves are desecrated by digging them in the middle of the night, the aim is "to make magic charms known locally as 'muti'".

Similarly, the comparison of ideas that unveil from Ijisakin's *After Labour* (2015) (Figure 39), and Odogwu's rendition *To the Dance* (2007) (Figure 40) reveals dissimilarities even though both reflect different modes of cultural entertainment in Yoruba culture of south-western Nigeria. While the aim in *After Labour* traces a cultural value and attitude towards the consumption of palm wine not merely as means of refreshment after labour but, as Abiodun (2014:1) argues, for its perceived medicinal value, the aim in *To the Dance* (2007) (Figure 40), in Odogwu's (2017) view, invokes the happiness and celebration created through a cultural drummer. But I argue that it is rather the significance of a drum or the drummer in Yoruba culture because the drummer is not yet drumming. However, Adegbite (1988:15) claims that "drum is the foundation of Yoruba instrumental music [As] early references to Yoruba music seem[s] to place a high value on its use". Thus, the comparison of aims in the works of South African and Nigerian artists reveals that while the aims in the works of South African artists relays the history of a traditional warrior and grave desecration rooted in Zulu culture, in contrast, the aims identified in Nigerian depictions hint not only on the consumption of palm wine, but its significance in refreshment and medicinal value and the importance of drums and drumming in Yoruba culture.

7.3 Contributions and limitations of the study

Given the fact that no study had interrogated the idea of African vernacular rooted arts which manifests in appropriations of cultural imageries and symbols in the artworks of contemporary African artists, this study as part of its major contribution to filling this gap interrogated the artworks of eight academically trained artists, four each from Nigeria and South Africa. The works that were selected and critically analysed are paintings and sculptures produced between 2007 and 2016. This study did not merely provide exhaustive close critical case study narratives on their works but conducted a comparative analysis of their contents and contexts. This is significant because it contributes to the narrative of contemporary art practices in Nigeria and South Africa.

The comparative analysis of the selected artworks affords an insight into a wider continental understanding of how the artists articulate cultural imageries in telling their personal stories and those of others in their engagement with cultural and national issues. The research findings reveal that these artists engaged with diverse issues on contemporary migration, rural and urban homelessness, and critical issues of sincerity in interpersonal relationships. Others include socio-cultural events, historical personalities in African cultures, reward system in indigenous cultures, family life and ways of life in indigenous cultures and cultural and racial unities. Additionally, other themes explored include issues of inhumanity not only from the apartheid regime to black Africans but killings as part of oppression and for rituals purposes.

In addition, the study contributes a mainstream narrative for the artists and their works, given that South African artists Nelson Makamo, Lebohang Sithole and Sinethemba Ngubane were excluded from such writings because their works were deemed outside the normative standard. Similarly, the oeuvres of Nigerian artists Olatunbosun Shonibare, Chinedu Ogakwu and Yemi Ijisakin have not also been studied or compared in any study, except Pitika Ntuli and Fidelis Odogwu. Thus, this study provides a critical reading of their personal influences, training, frames of reference, knowledge base, philosophy and receptions of their works. The study also established from the thematic interpretations of the renditions that were studied that Africanness is signified in different ways.

Although the analysis of contemporary art produced by Nigerian and South African artists conducted in this research reveals different themes on Africanness, it might be argued however that many of such signifiers of Africanness valorise Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo

cultures rooted in Nigerian context and black African identity and Zulu cultures in South Africa. Consequently, to demonstrate the construction of Africanness in their artworks it is evident not only in the modes of depiction but in the themes they narrate.

The scope of this study as an academic requirement is limited to the eight artists selected in pursuing a manageable task within a prescribed time frame. The limitation is also regarding the purposive sampling population as stated in Chapter One, which enabled the researcher to focus on the specific phenomena required for interrogation in the research.

7.4 Recommendations for future research.

There are other viable areas of research that can emanate from this study. A similar study can be conducted with a focus on other artists within the two countries since this study only selected eight artists from the large list of contemporary African artists in South Africa and Nigeria who reference cultural forms in their renditions. Other researchers may want to compare the vernacular-rooted arts of South Africa with any other African country or Nigeria with any other African country. In addition, other potential areas of research options for art historians include research methods like semiotics grounded in theoretical frameworks on feminism with specific focus on interrogating key concepts such as Africanness and nationalism; Africanness and neo-colonialism and Africanness and globalisation.

Appendices

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

FOCUS GROUP: SOME SELECTED ACADEMICALLY TRAINED SOUTH AFRICAN AND NIGERIAN CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

The purpose and primary objective of this interview schedule is to trace the idea of African vernacular-rooted artworks among some selected South African and Nigerian contemporary artists and to compare their similarities and differences.

1. What are the sources of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you depict in artworks?
2. What are the kinds of vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you adapt in artworks?
3. Do you consider the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in artworks to be African? If so, why do you consider them African?
4. Are your vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols associated with the social life of South Africans or Nigeria? If yes, explain the aspect of social life.
5. What kind of vernacular-rooted ideology do you represent in your artworks?
6. What are some of the possible factors that influence your choice of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in each artwork?
7. What media do you work with in the production of your artworks?
8. Why do you still paint or sculpt, in view of new media and installation arts?
9. Why do you still represent vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols in contemporary artworks?
10. How do you assess the reception of your vernacular-rooted artworks?

25 May 2017

Researcher: Sule A. James
Email: sulejames94@gmail.com
Phone: +2772112524

Informed Consent Form

Dear Sir/Madam

The interview you are being asked to participate in is part of a doctoral research study titled **"Tracing the Idea of African Vernacular-Rooted Art: A Critical Analysis of Selected Contemporary South African and Nigerian Artists (2007-2016)"**

The purpose of the study is based on contemporary African art in Nigeria and South Africa. I have selected you as one of eight academically trained artists, working in particular media. I want to see what you do and know about this field, and how you go about representing symbols and cultural imagery which you consider African, in other words vernacular-rooted art.

Your participation in this study will be voluntary and consist of an interview/discussion one-on-one. The interview will run for approximately one hour. The discussion/interview will be audio taped to allow me to capture your insights accurately. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time. You may also decline to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. There are no risks associated with participating in this study.

The benefit of your participation in this research is the contribution of information about your ideological stances in the representations of symbols and cultural imagery (vernacular-rooted symbols) in artworks that reflects South African and Nigerian cultures and to compare their similarities and differences which is not known to have been studied as yet.

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using. Please contact me at any time at the e-mail address or telephone number listed above. Please note that the research data will be stored for a minimum of 15 years at the Dept. of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria, for archiving, further research and publication purposes.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign this letter as a declaration of your consent, i.e. that you participate in this project willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw from the research project at any time.

Do you consent to your name being disclosed in the study? ☐ ☐

Participant's Name: …….. Signature: ……. Date: …….

Researcher's Name: …… Signature: ……. Date: ……..

Annexure

Nelson Makamo (b.1982)

To obtain the information necessary in answering research questions and achieving the stated objectives, an interview was conducted with Nelson Makamo and his responses are documented below. The responses have also been used to analyse the identified paintings and answer the research questions.

What are the sources of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you depict in artworks?

"The place you are born and grow can influence you by default or because of the scenes that catches your sight. So I was influenced to represent indigenous symbolisms from my African roots, reflecting on my community in visual language. I started scribbling at an early age. I was introduced to the works of artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Pablo Picasso, but that did not drive me as such to work, but when I was introduced to the artworks of George Pemba, David Koloane among other South African artists, I discovered myself. I observed that they depicted a lot of cultural imagery and symbols that reflect African societies and I said to myself, I can use similar visual language in communicating my experiences and cultural environment in a language everybody can understand".

What are the kinds of vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you adapt in artworks?

"I represent the black African child in my works, reflecting on what it takes to be an African child in the contemporary era. In my traveling I have had to reflect on Africa when conversation ensues about Africa, I look at the black child as a symbol of Africa in the future. The imageries of African children in my works reflect a generation that can be moulded to obtain the change we desire on the continent. Aside the African child, I depict other indigenous imageries that reference adults in my works as well".

Do you consider the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in artworks to be African? If so, why do you consider them African?

"The imageries I depict in my works are symbols that reflect the cultural lifestyles of my African society because I am an African. I always reflect my rural and urban surroundings in artworks. I attempt to write our history in every artwork I create, the history of our contemporary existence as Africans. There is never any other story for me to tell in my artworks other than being Africans. I also reference cultural symbolisms of the African child

from other African countries I have visited, because I see similarities with my South African community where I was born".

Are your vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols associated with the social life of South Africans or Nigerians? If yes, explain the aspect of social life.

"The indigenous symbolisms I depict reference the social life of Africans. They are mostly imagery of black children playing or moving on in life, which reflects Africans in general not just South Africans. We are living in an era wherein technology plays an important role in our lives, so I reflect on the role of technology in shaping the social life of African children. I portray them with earphones and glasses to signify how intelligent they are in this contemporary time. I observe African children when they are playing within their cultural milieu, where they were born most times from afar. I discovered that during such play time they do not care about where they come from or the clothes they are wearing. They did not choose to be born in those environments and so there is beauty in such scenarios of space in time rooted in specific moments. They reflect joy as dreamers and that sends into me good memories of African children who will hopefully become people to reckon with in the future".

What kind of vernacular-rooted ideology do you represent in your artworks?

"My ideology is framed around the concern and love for the future of South Africa and the African continent. I use the black child as a symbol of a better Africa; if well-modelled there is no better symbol to use. I portray them with confidence and they present proud moments showing where we are heading. I represent them in such a way that every African can mirror themselves in those children. For me that environment where they play today made me who I am as an artist".

What are some of the possible factors that influence your choice of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in each artwork?

"A major factor that influences me is how the world views an African child in contemporary era. When I spend time with an African child, I am inspired to reflect memories of childhood. I focus on the emotional expressions on the faces of children and attempt to summarise the expressions I captured in my depiction, which is why I sometimes depict them half-way from their foreheads. I represent the expressions on their faces, such expressions matter most to me. In some works I do not complete the imagery of a face at times. I endeavour to depict my artworks in realistic forms for people to understand and relate with them".

What media do you work with in the production of your artworks?

"I come from a drawing background, so I mastered how to use lines in depicting imagery from a very early age. The main media I use now are charcoal on canvas and on paper, watercolour, oil colour on canvas and paper-and-print making. I use stick and powdery charcoals in depicting my imagery. I apply oil on canvas using brushstrokes and my hands or fingers, even in applying the charcoal to the artworks made of charcoal, so as to create the texture and shades I desire. I paint with raw colours and blend the colours on the canvas, board or paper. I am not limited in my use of art media. When I work you see me in my work, my finger prints are visibly distributed on the imagery I depict".

Why do you still paint or sculpt, in view of new media and installation arts?

"I feel the history of contemporary African painting has not been fully explored. Painting enables me to tell and represent what I want to portray of African story by connecting to people in simple visual symbolisms that they can understand".

Why do you still represent vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols in contemporary artworks?

"I discovered that vernacular-rooted imagery and symbolisms reflects the core ideas I like to represent in the contemporary world. I also feel some subjects in African society have not being fully communicated visually for people to be able to relate with in painting. Art is not well collected in black South African communities, so I started focusing people on the concepts of my artworks and hope to introduce more blacks into appreciating and collecting my artworks".

How do you assess the reception of your vernacular-rooted artworks?

"There is always amazement when people view my artworks at exhibitions, Facebook timeline and my studio. People love my works and call me African Picasso and others call me "talent". Others say my works are incredible with amazing concepts and contents. I have about five major collectors of my works and this is because of their appreciation or reception for my works. The reception of my works can be seen from the point of view that I make a living through production and sales of artworks. The 21st century makes it easy to sell artworks because of technology. It was hard for many artists to make a living from their arts and that people start appreciating their works after they are dead.

My philosophy is framed around defining the image of the black child in my artworks".

Lebohang Sithole (b. 1989)

To obtain the information necessary in answering research questions and achieving the stated objectives, an interview was conducted with Lebohang Sithole and his responses are documented below. The responses have also been used to analyse the identified paintings and answer the research questions.

What are the sources of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you depict in artworks?

"The vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols I represent are from the society. I take photographs of people I know and use them as my references in painting. I use those pictures as a guide in forming compositions on the stories I would like to express in my paintings. In my works I tell stories of how families and the environment in general influence the upbringing of a child".

What are the kinds of vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you adapt in artworks?

"The kinds of vernacular-rooted imageries I depict are from the photographs of different scenarios I snap. In such imageries, I am conscious of the expressions on the faces of people whether they are sad, happy, smiling, laughing or joyful. The sources of my vernacular artworks are also drawn from my childhood experiences, which reflect the situations that surrounded how I grew. I also reference children in the society because of my background. I grew up a lonely child because I was violent, so most parents restricted their children from playing with me, this made me lonely. In looking for references to snap and represent in my works, I look for children playing, because during my childhood I missed that privilege of playing with other children. Most of my works reflect loneliness in children because such stories portray my experiences. Being conscious of that I am raising my child in a way he will enjoy his childhood.

Another kind of vernacular-rooted symbolism I represent is music. On the day I was born, my paternal grandfather died. He was a musician who used modern instruments to sing local South African songs and I also practice that as part of my socio-cultural engagements. When growing as a child, my family saw the person of my grandfather in me. The things he did during his life time were the things I also did".

Do you consider the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in artworks to be African? If so, why do you consider them African?

"Yes, I consider my vernacular-rooted imageries African because I have not travelled that much. Most of the imageries I depict in my paintings are from my neighbourhood, so they are African".

Are your vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols associated with the social life of South Africans or Nigerians? If yes, explain the aspect of social life.

"Yes, I consider my vernacular symbolism as depictions associated with the social life of South Africans. My works that reflect music portray the use of local songs with foreign music. Modern or foreign musical instruments are used to play African jazz. While in my depiction of children, I focus on their moods during play or when they are alone".

What kind of vernacular-rooted ideology do you represent in your artworks?

"The vernacular-rooted ideology I represent is revealed in portraying the beauty of an African child. My ideology on African music reflects the framing of African indigenous culture, which seeks to question where my grandfather learnt his music. I also want to understand myself better as an artist".

What are some of the possible factors that influence your choice of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in each artwork?

"The factors that influence my choice of vernacular symbolisms in my artworks are my lonely upbringing as a child and appreciation for my grandfather being a musician. I reference my grandfather's pictures a lot in my works".

What media do you work with in the production of your artworks?

"I use acrylic, charcoal, oil pastel and watercolour on paper".

Why do you still paint or sculpt, in view of new media and installation arts?

"I still paint because I find freedom of expression in painting subjects and contents that interests me".

Why do you still represent vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols in contemporary artworks?

"I still represent vernacular symbolisms on children because they help me to understand children and their expressions. Also I find it easy to frame life experiences, hardship and happiness among other concepts".

How do you assess the reception of your vernacular-rooted artworks?

"People appreciate my artworks because I do things that they can relate with. This is because my concepts and contents allow people to experience the life of a black South African child with which they can easily interact with in my work. The strange aspects of my works which people note is the story I frame around my composition".

Sinethemba Ngubane (b.1991)

To obtain the information necessary in answering research questions and achieving the stated objectives, an interview was conducted and the responses from Sinethemba Ngubane have been used to analyse the identified sculptures and answer research questions.

What are the sources of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you depict in artworks?

"The sources of my vernacular symbolisms are rooted in the indigenous cultures of South African society. I depict how we live our daily lives in ways other artists have not worked on in sculpture. I get information from the police and newspapers to establish the area of my interest".

What are the kinds of vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you adapt in artworks?

"The focus of my works is on the human body and how people use such human flesh for rituals and sacrifices. Specifically, I focus on the bodies of intersex babies otherwise called ambiguous biological sex and the attitude of the society toward such babies. During my B. Tech, I focused on the bodies of those babies in South African societies. These babies are now used for rituals by people who want to get rich, get power and gain good yield in farm produce. These are practiced around the rural areas of South Africa".

Do you consider the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in artworks to be African? If so, why do you consider them African?

"Yes, my works are rooted in indigenous traditions within African societies, with specific reference to South Africa. All of my sources are drawn from the rural communities in South Africa".

Are your vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols associated with the social life of South Africans or Nigerians? If yes, explain the aspect of social life.

"Yes, they are associated with the social life of South Africans in rural and urban areas. It is a common practice among people who want to start business and want the business to flourish or prosper".

What kind of vernacular-rooted ideology do you represent in your artworks?

"My ideology is portraying greediness, ignorance in denying such babies right to life. People feel they do not belong so they kill such babies instead of giving them the right to life".

What are some of the possible factors that influence your choice of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in each artwork?

"I was influenced to produce the kinds of sculptures I execute because of the concern I have for the killing of such babies who are denied the right to live. I knew someone who was demoralised and dejected because he was intersex, after he had operation performed on him to cover the female genital unfortunately it continued growing all over, eventually he committed suicide".

What media do you work with in the production of your artworks?

"The media I work with are clay, gelatine mixed with glue and water".

Why do you still paint or sculpt, in view of new media and installation arts?

"I was interested in ceramics at the beginning but later had a redirection of focus towards sculpture. So I produce sculptures and installations that represent the bodies of intersex".

Why do you still represent vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols in contemporary artworks?

"I still represent vernacular-rooted symbols in contemporary artworks because there are no works that reflect the concepts and subject-matters I am working on currently. This was the need I identified that made me to start working on the mutilated bodies of intersex babies".

How do you assess the reception of your vernacular-rooted artworks?

"The receptions of my works have been impressive so far because I won an award for the kind of works I am producing. People are easily attracted to my kind of works because the

concepts and contents are altogether new and they ask a lot of questions to understand what they mean. I also enjoy patronage of my works from some other people".

Olatunbosun Shonibare (b. 1976)

To obtain the information necessary in answering research questions and achieving the stated objectives, an interview was conducted and the responses from Shonibare Olatubosun have been used to analyse the identified paintings and answer research questions.

What are the sources of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you depict in artworks?

"As an artist, I am inspired by multiplicity of life generally, nature and socio-cultural themes, family life, my background and experiences. The symbolic cultural representations in my works is just my person, you can read me through my works. I have gone through life experiences, so I want to tell my stories through my artworks. I am confronted with the choice of what story to tell each time I have to paint, whether to depict subjects from my immediate environment, family, socio-cultural experiences or nature. What I paint have so much to say about my life experiences. These are the sources of the vernacular-rooted symbolisms that I adapt in paintings".

What are the kinds of vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you adapt in artworks?

"In producing vernacular-rooted imagery, I focus majorly on motherhood on the other hand, womanhood because of my background with my mother as an African child. My experiences when growing up with her, reveals her as a strong widow going through life struggles alone to cater for her children. This makes me appreciate motherhood so I endeavour to portray some the values I have seen in her and other women in general. The hardship I went through and the perception I have about womanhood inspire the kinds of vernacular-rooted symbolisms I depict. I depict nature as well, mostly in form of landscapes".

Do you consider the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in artworks to be African? If so, why do you consider them African?

"Yes, my artworks are African. I am an African even though I have been influenced by other cultures from the multiplicities of cultures in Nigeria and around the world, my immediate environment is Africa. My influences notwithstanding, I am an African, so my artworks reflect African subjects and cultures. The symbols, the patterns and the stories I tell are adapted from Africa because my experiences are African inclined".

Are your vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols associated with the social life of South Africans or Nigeria? If yes, explain the aspect of social life.

"Yes, my vernacular-rooted imageries and symbols are associated with the social life of Nigerians. In representing the social life of Nigerians in my artworks, I reflect on motherhood because of the values my mother held unto before she died. So in portraying these, am telling the story of an African mother who is a symbol of devotion and love. When I study African mothers, I see life, in fact the basis of life in general. Love is devotion and love is commitment. When I see my sisters, nieces growing up, I see the image of my mother in them. Some years ago, I went through trauma after my sister was raped. That brought me close to being identified with the women folks, because the society has failed them more so because they are weak and cannot defend themselves".

What kind of vernacular-rooted ideology do you represent in your artworks?

"Generally, my ideologies are seen in the stories I tell in each artwork, I create. In my view, the ideologies in my paintings are different reflections to viewers of my works. I portray ideologies that reflect on motherhood, love, womanhood, beauty of nature and immediate environment".

What are some of the possible factors that influence your choice of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in each artwork?

"I am influenced by African concepts, nature, motherhood and the environment in general. Whether I represent the motherhood in realism or abstraction, it comes from the inspiration I derive when I ponder on my mother's values even in her death. The strength of a woman influences me from Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa cultures in depicting my motifs and patterns. I am influenced to paint subject matters I never thought upon but portray through discovery in exploration of new exciting patterns on predesigned fabrics".

What media do you work with in the production of your artworks?

"The media I use mostly is oil colour and once in a while I use acrylic, whether painting on canvas or predesigned fabrics stretched over a canvas. I stretch the fabric over the canvas because it's too light in texture to paint on directly. I use brushstrokes of different linear motifs to create different patterns on canvas alongside the imagery I portray. When I use the predesigned fabric, I search for the one that will suit the concepts I wish to depict. This was during the phase of exploration of linear patterns with brushstrokes. Then comes the

exploration with predesigned fabrics which represents the mixed media I use in paintings and I enjoy working on them because they give me endless inspiration".

Why do you still paint or sculpt, in view of new media and installation arts?

"At the moment, I do not engage in installation or new media art. I still paint because that is the best way to tell my story. Whether making a three-dimensional or two-dimensional painting, I still prefer the traditional method of painting with oil colour on canvas. I can bring three paintings together in an installation to tell a story.

I go to market to source for new predesigned fabrics and I feel excited at the discoveries I make each time I discover new ones. This has helped my exploration in painting on predesigned fabric, which for me is an innovation that projects my stories of African cultures in a new way".

Why do you still represent vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols in contemporary artworks?

"Like it's said that "the river that forgets its source will dry up". Where I come from matters a lot in the vernacular-rooted symbolisms I represent in artworks. There are things to tell about our roots in feminism subjects that centre on motherhood. Some of the works or subject matters we depict today have been depicted before. Except that we are saying them in a different way and styles. For example, some masters execute painting by splashing paints on surfaces, and younger artists are doing the same things in modern times with no significant difference except in the name that is signed on the work. I do not forget drawing vernacular-rooted imageries from my Yoruba culture that reflects discussions I had with my mother several years ago or about my mother in particular".

How do you assess the reception of your vernacular-rooted artworks?

"I cannot boast of peoples' reception concerning my works. However, audience receptions have been great, while others will look and critique what they see in my work".

Chinedu Ogakwu (b. 1975)

To obtain the information necessary in answering research questions and achieving the stated objectives, an interview was conducted and the responses from Chinedu Ogakwu have been used to analyse the identified paintings and answer research questions.

What are the sources of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you depict in artworks?

"To answer, I am an Igbo man; in my works I depict African concepts and subject matters precisely from my root-Igbo culture, as well as universal subjects. I represent Igbo vernacular-rooted forms and patterns that have meanings. These symbolisms are drawn from Uli design motifs that are often depicted on walls of traditional houses, human bodies and in artworks. Uli is inspired from the inscriptions made on the walls of caves by cave man. Uli means designs. As an African ambassador, I decided to introduce Uli designs into my artworks which draw lessons from my past, rooted particularly in Igbo culture".

What are the kinds of vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you adapt in artworks?

"Although in works I represent vernacular-rooted imageries, I also reflect on motifs such as Uli decorative symbols like fish bones, cowries which symbolises wealth or treasures, lizards which connotes fertility. I anchor bull's head, which signifies a warrior and so many other design elements that have meanings. The human forms focus on subjects like rich harvest, farming concepts, African wrestling, and hunting and other symbolisms that reference everyday social life and historical concepts so as to merge the old with new. I don't want to be carried away with current happenings. Black forms in my works are used to describe the black man in simplified depictions".

Do you consider the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in artworks to be African? If so, why do you consider them African?

"Yes, they are African because they focus on subjects that reflect African lifestyle".

"In my works, I portray Uli designs that are drawn from the past activities of Igbo people this makes my depictions Africans. The concepts I depict are from my roots which is the Igbo culture located in Africa. Therefore the vernacular-rooted symbolisms I represent in my artworks are Afrocentric. Then the colours I adapt in my works are mostly colours that reflect the natural environment. The colours I use are African, basically earthy colours like brown, black and green".

Are your vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols associated with the social life of South Africans or Nigeria? If yes, explain the aspect of social life.

"My vernacular-rooted artworks are associated with the social life of Nigerians. I derive my inspiration from cultural events, ceremonies, different ethnic groups that make up Nigeria and daily positive activities around me. I am so careful about the subject matters I represent in my

artworks. I depict positive aspects about different cultures and subjects, endeavouring not to use my artworks to offend my audience. I send messages through my artworks on issues that concern current happenings in Nigeria as well".

What kind of vernacular-rooted ideology do you represent in your artworks?

"I work mostly on subject matters that depict the past, so my ideologies in such works are about historical relevance of the past to the present days. Those works tell stories about where we are coming from and the lessons we need to appropriate for our present societies. My work on "Tribes" seeks to remind Nigerians that though we have different cultures and tribes, we are one. This is against the background of agitations by MASSOB and other groups calling for cessation. The painting titled "Tribes" reflects on cultural styled dressings that represents different cultural groups in Nigeria. My ideology in the work is constructed around the necessity of our unity as Nigerians, which I believe keeps us stronger than being fragmented into smaller entities. My African vernacular-rooted ideology are best seen from each work I depict, not as one specific ideology for all my artworks. Togetherness is another ideology I represent a lot in my works".

What are some of the possible factors that influence your choice of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in each artwork?

"The possible factors that influence me are based on personal inspiration surrounding the kinds of works I like to produce. I think around the current happenings within the country-Nigeria, nature and then the colour scheme that will best portray the work. I like to create works that bear traces of African concepts and representations, without doubt or debate from the audience as to situating such artworks within the context of African symbolism. I look for the materials that will be good for each mixed media paintings that go with the ideas I am consistent with, my techniques and styles. I create works with materials that can be improvised, not necessarily the traditional oil colours or other western materials. The story lines I depict in my works are Afrocentric symbolism that can be traced representations".

What media do you work with in the production of your artworks?

"I do mix media painting. If I have to create or represent human forms, I like to apply black and earthy colours which will suggest the context and idea of Africanness in such works. The project and concepts I work on at any given time determines the kinds of materials I must use. I work with textured canvas to give me what I want to achieve, oil colour, acrylic most

times, particle boards along with glue and tissue papers mounted on canvas to create a new textured background. Presently, I am focused on working with mixed media in which I assemble tree barks and glue them to the surface of the canvas. I have introduced different forms of mixed media in my works, for example, I glue tree barks, nets, ropes, saw dusts and tissue papers to canvas to create rough texture before painting on them".

Why do you still paint or sculpt, in view of new media and installation arts?

"I still paint because painting is one and installations of different kinds are others. The arts I create are the ones that can stand the test of time and can be treasures when kept for a long time. While installation art is for a short time to communicate certain ideas after which they will be taken away. I paint because it is the medium I have chosen to express myself visually".

Why do you still represent vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols in contemporary artworks?

"I still represent vernacular-rooted symbolism because it forms the core of African social life and the interaction that takes place within our societies. When you meet someone and ask about where he or she is from that is cultural inclination. This confirms that culture is with us always. Our attitudes, dressings and behaviours are cultures which embody and incorporate all that we do. I cannot paint or sculpt as an African, without introducing a particular African culture in my work. I paint men and women with traditional wears that reference ethnocentrism. An artist has a culture which influences the concepts he represents in painting vernacular-rooted symbolism".

How do you assess the reception of your vernacular-rooted artworks?

"I try to get audience for my works when I stage exhibitions by identifying those that like specific kinds of works and then keep contacts with them. When I meet people who do not like my works, I create opportunity to talk with them so that I can convince them or make them see reasons why they should like my kind of artworks".

Yemi Olaolu Ijisakin (b. 1957)

To obtain the information necessary in answering research questions and achieving the stated objectives, an interview was conducted and the responses from Ijisakin have been used to analyse the identified sculptures and answer research questions.

What are the sources of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you depict in artworks?

"I am a sculptor working with different materials. The works I do reflects on things I see around me. I am an indigenous person. Most of the works I execute are based on things that happen within my environment in the south-western part of Nigeria among the Yoruba cultural group. The sources of my works are drawn from cultural beliefs, African religion, ecological things and politics. The religious works represents African traditional belief that reflects on worship. With the coming of Christianity and Islam people no longer have interest in those aspects of African religion like several decades back. In contemporary dispensation, people resent artworks that seem to promote idolatry or African religion. Although some traditional religion loyalists still indulge in the use of sculptural forms in their shrines, my artworks do not serve them".

What are the kinds of vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you adapt in artworks?

"Art cannot be separated from man and his environment. When I produce sculpture, my subjects reflect on men, youths, mother and child, the god and goddesses, as well as their paraphernalia (dressing and costumes) with focus on cultural beliefs, African traditional religion among others".

Do you consider the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in artworks to be African? If so, why do you consider them African?

"I consider my artworks African because they are replica of African cultures and embody symbols that reference African lifestyle. What we do is what we project for other people to see. The costumes we use in different cultures depend on the cultural group. The way Yoruba people dress may differ from the way Igbos dress but they all reflect cultures that are Africans".

Are your vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols associated with the social life of South Africans or Nigeria? If yes, explain the aspect of social life.

"I agree that my vernacular-rooted artworks are associated with Nigerian social life like, naming, house warming, funerals, ceremonies, celebrations and other daily activities".

What kind of vernacular-rooted ideology do you represent in your artworks?

"My ideology is inward looking into projecting the lifestyle and beliefs of African cultures so that we do not lose them completely. This includes representing communal thinking and

action in events and ceremonies that will bring people together rather than separate or isolate them. For example, a Yoruba family will organise a naming ceremony and invite people to attend even if it is sponsored on borrowed money. During such an occasion, relatives and friends will buy, make and wear clothes of the same colours called "Aso ebi" in Yoruba culture. The same applies to funeral ceremonies, people will gladly lend or borrow the bereaved person money to organise the ceremony and afterwards come to ask for a refund. This may not be a western kind of life".

What are some of the possible factors that influence your choice of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in each artwork?

"One of the factors that influence the production of my vernacular-rooted artworks is passion. The love of what belongs to Yoruba culture as well as promoting the ideals of our local life. Being a grass root person, I canvas for projection of African way of life in the face of hybridity of western cultures with African cultures. The influences from foreign cultures have led to the loss of certain elements in our culture. So my artworks are executed to promote the various cultural beliefs and values of the Yoruba culture because any nation that forgets its own culture is already a dead nation".

What media do you work with in the production of your artworks?

"I work with different media like terracotta, stone and wood, metal in welded or cast forms. This is to show that I am versatile in other media other than stone which is my major medium".

Why do you still paint or sculpt, in view of new media and installation arts?

"I love sculpting stone because of the finishing effects I get and the fact that people appreciate seeing my stone sculptures. Even though in executing a stone sculpture, I can hardly finish it in one month, I still love to work with the medium. Aside from the appreciation of people for my stone sculpture, the easy access to soap stones I work with, which is locally sourced from my immediate environment, is another reason for using the medium. In addition, works sculpted in stones are more durable than other media, which is a reason I still sculpt stones.

In my opinion, the materials used for installation arts are industrial products while some are foreign mediums that are expensive, unlike my stone that I can easily access at no cost. Installation is foreign to me and the composition that it is made from it looks like out of sense

though is gaining ground. Generally, Nigerians have a problem of accepting the known sculptures, except where they are to be used for specific purposes as in the case of African traditional religion. For the western society, installation art is more for decoration and aesthetics but in Nigeria art is for specific purposes even though decoration and aesthetics are part of contemporary artworks. All artists cannot be doing the same thing, so I would like to continue with the use of the traditional media of sculpting to create variety in contemporary African arts".

Why do you still represent vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols in contemporary artworks?

"I still represent vernacular-rooted symbolism in artworks so as to propagate our indigenous culture even though they have blended with other cultures. In terms of behaviour, dressing and other traditional ways of doing things we have changed".

How do you assess the reception of your vernacular-rooted artworks?

"People respect dexterity in stone sculpture, even though some assume them to be idols which inhibit their appreciation. When people come for my stone sculptures I am motivated because of their appreciation which is not so much patronised".

Fidelis Odogwu Eze (b. 1970)

An interview was conducted to obtain the information necessary in answering research questions and achieving the stated objectives. The responses to the interview conducted with Fidelis Odogwu Eze have been used to analyse the identified sculptures and answer research questions.

What are the sources of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you depict in artworks?

"I am a metal sculptor, an African, Nigerian to be precise. I work from Universal Studios, National Theatre - Lagos. Our cultures are so diverse and I try as much as I can to give a trace of these cultures to my sculptures. I am an artist, a universal being and I work on universal concepts but have to give such works traces of the cultures that inspire or influence me. I like to reflect on Nigerian cultures in most of my works".

What are the kinds of vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you adapt in artworks?

"My art is visual and I do sculpture. I try to reflect the sounds of the languages we speak in the motifs and embellishments of my works, in whichever subject I am treating. I may be working on the Fulani milk maiden from the northern part of Nigeria; there are traditional motifs that I appropriate to give an impression of Fulani or northern Nigeria representation. The same goes for the Uli motifs that I represent from Igbo. There are embellishments that will give the trace of South-south representation. As an artist, I have liberty on the kinds of images that I work on. I like to work on several human concepts and the architecture that surrounds them. The architectures on northern landscape are different from the ones in south-south landscape. Subject matters from whichever cultural group in Nigeria reflects on elements that would situate the representations".

Do you consider the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in artworks to be African? If so, why do you consider them African?

"I consider the vernacular-rooted symbols I represent to be African. I buy a lot of Nigerian magazines that bear elements of cultural groups in Nigeria. When I travel to any part of Nigeria, I take note of the architectural designs and embellishment on them. Thereafter, I ask questions from people who understand their meanings and try to reflect them in my artworks. For example, there are embellishments on the walls of Emir Palace or Obi Palace that have meanings around royalty to the cultural groups. Some aspects of such embellishments are adapted as motifs in some of my sculptural works to give them the definitions I like. I add motifs and symbols that make my works graceful and elegant.

I was close to my paternal grandmother and often asked her questions on the traditional motifs scarified on her body. One of her responses gave me insight that some of the motifs were inscribed on the body of sick people to heal them".

Are your vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols associated with the social life of South Africans or Nigeria? If yes, explain the aspect of social life.

"Yes, my vernacular-rooted symbolisms are associated with the social life of Nigerians. I am an African artist, this is where I reside. The majority of the influences on the artworks I produce are from Africa, precisely Nigeria, even though we live in a global village today. So my artworks are associated with the social life of Nigerians. There are artworks I produce that reflect on universal concepts as well.

As a person I like to be in joyous mood and be happy most times. I create artworks like music, dance and togetherness that show happiness within architectural landscapes of cultural groups that I depict".

What kind of vernacular-rooted ideology do you represent in your artworks?

"My ideologies revolve around togetherness, happiness, peace, love and unity within African cultures. These ideologies are represented in the African vernacular-rooted symbolisms I create in my artworks".

What are some of the possible factors that influence your choice of the vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols you represent in each artwork?

"When I am influenced from the Fulani milk maiden, I try to depict the elegance I see in them, because Nigerian women are beautiful. The cat-walking, the movement and graceful features that characterise women influence my vernacular-rooted symbolisms that reflect on women in general. Those traditional motifs are represented to appeal to the eyes, so that people that see such works will appreciate them. Other artworks have specific influences that make me represent them, with traces to the cultural traditions of Nigerians that I depict".

What media do you work with in the production of your artworks?

"I work on mild metal sheets, that can be panel beaten to different sizes or shapes that I desire. Wire rod, perforated metal sheets are among the metals I work with. Since I left school in 1991, I do not produce works in other media aside metal, because I want to understand and know metal well. Today, people call me "the prince of metal", because I have understood my material and work with it as if I am using clay".

Why do you still paint or sculpt, in view of new media and installation arts?

"An artist decides for himself what he wants to do. We have artists who have decided that they like to work with installation art. I like to work or sculpt with media that would stand the test of time not like some installation arts that are created for an exhibition and after such exhibitions that last one week, such works are gone. I like to do works that will leave traces of me for generations that will come after me".

Why do you still represent vernacular-rooted imagery and symbols in contemporary artworks?

"I still represent vernacular-rooted symbolisms in my artworks because they bear traces of who we are in the contemporary era. The foundation of what I do matters to me because it is said that "train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he would not depart from them". I am an African and a Nigerian, who I am, must be given a trace to my tradition in which ever artwork I create. I like to dwell in our beliefs and cultures so that they do not die. These are historical accounts that must be documented for future generations".

How do you assess the reception of your vernacular-rooted artworks?

"The reception of my vernacular-rooted art has been great. People feel refreshed when they see the subject matters that reflect on everyday lifestyles of Nigerians that I represent in my sculpture. Home and abroad, my works are appreciated when people see and understand the subjects that I represent. These appreciations are not only monetary but in form of the comments they make regarding those works. They ask how I did such works though from Nigeria. My style has evolved, so that I do not become bored with what I do. These are the elements that have drawn the receptions to the different concepts I create".

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