

Rhodes University

**Queering Boundaries: Visual Activism and Representations of
Sexuality in the Work of Contemporary South African Artists**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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by

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Abstract

Zanele Muholi, a photographer and visual activist, and Sabelo Mlangeni, a photographer, explore the different ways of representing gender, particularly transgenderism, and sexuality, particularly homosexuality, in their photography. Muholi and Mlangeni document the daily lives and lived realities of people who are black and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) in South Africa. African sexuality remains a contested subject that is difficult to discuss in light of the controversies it provokes due to colonial attitudes toward African bodies. In this instance, colonial attitudes toward African sexuality have exoticised African bodies. Moreover, hyper-sexuality is ascribed to bodies that are black and male, whilst fetishising and objectifying black female bodies. Furthermore, representations of homoeroticism in Africa transgress and challenge dominant ideologies of sexuality and gender in an African context. In this sense, Muholi and Mlangeni directly address tension and resistance between individual and community. Such tensions are found within and between categories of African-ness, whereby homosexuality and transgenderism are regarded as being ‘un-African’ and an import from the West. For example, Muholi represents the existence of homosexuality and transgenderism in her photography in order to subvert the notion that homosexuality is ‘un-African’, attempting to complicate the conceptions of identity, gender and sexuality in South Africa. Muholi’s photography is used as a vehicle for her ‘visual activism’, which purports to create socio-political awareness surrounding homophobia, transgenderism, and epistemic injustice in South Africa.

The visual imagery of these two artists investigates the boundaries that are set by various social, political and cultural constructs. These boundaries inform existing social, political and cultural attitudes toward homosexuality and transgenderism, and these homophobic and transphobic attitudes result in crimes committed against homosexual and transgender individuals, such as hate crimes, which includes ‘curative/corrective’ rape, the prevalence of

which is rising at an alarming rate. Muholi's photography and visual activism seek to create visibility in order to raise public awareness of hate crimes, victimisation, alienation and stigmatisation that homosexual and transgender South Africans, specifically those individuals living in township areas, face on a daily basis. These two artists represent sexuality as a site of contestation and, as such, heteronormative traditions, hegemonic social structures, and cultural conventions are transgressed and contested in their photography.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Arts at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

Lara Littleford

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List of Acronyms

AIDS	-	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ANC	-	African National Congress
BSM	-	Black Student Movement
CPU	-	Campus Protection Unit
eNCA	-	eNews Channel Africa
FEW	-	Forum for the Empowerment of Women
FMF	-	Fees must Fall
FTM	-	Female-to-Male
ISS	-	Institute for Security Studies
LGBT	-	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LGBTI	-	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LGBTIAQQ	-	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual, Queer and Questioning
MTF	-	Male-to-Female
NGO	-	Non-governmental Organisation
RU	-	Rhodes University
SAPS	-	South African Police Service
SRC	-	Student Representative Council
UCKAR	-	University Currently Known As Rhodes
UCT	-	University of Cape Town
USA	-	United States of America

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Preface

This preface provides some insight into the personal experiences that motivate and inform my research topic. In questioning the role of visual activism in relation to homosexuality in a South African context, my research highlights social, political and cultural conventions related to issues pertaining to sexuality, gender, race and class. Such conventions lead to violence, discrimination, prejudice and alienation. The prevalence of violence, discrimination, prejudice and inequality, and its multiple effects, including the prevalence of stereotyping, is addressed from the outset and throughout my thesis.

In part, I hope that my thesis can function as a form of visual activism in itself, by subverting socio-political conventions and cultural appropriation, and providing primary and secondary research that can expose and provide much-needed insight into the daily lives of certain social groups in South Africa. As a woman, I am concerned with regulations pertaining to the female body, and the threat of rape, especially in a country where rape is statistically high and under-prosecuted, and issues pertaining to gender-based violence motivate my research and my attempt to deconstruct rape culture. As a lesbian, the threat of ‘curative/corrective’ rape and other hate crimes serves as a constant reminder of the ways in which society can reduce a person to their sexuality and gender. In other words, your identity and personality become irrelevant. Your sexual orientation is regarded as an aberration that can be deemed to be a punishable offence. In this sense, I have grappled with my own issues pertaining to societal and religious expectations and their contrast to my sexuality. It took many years for me to establish my own sense of worth and belonging in a society that pushes homosexuality and transgenderism to its margins. Furthermore, I have come to realise that, despite the issues I face by being a woman and a lesbian, because of my race I remain privileged in a racist society, and black people who are homosexual and transgender are not as fortunate.

In 2006, “The One in Nine”¹ campaign was formed. The formation of the campaign occurred during Jacob Zuma’s rape trial, in order to provide consistent and unapologetic support for Khwesi² from feminists and various organisations. After the campaign was founded, the silent

¹ The “One in Nine” campaign was formed in 2006, at the start of the Jacob Zuma rape trial, in South Africa and consists of a collective of individuals and organisations that are motivated by feminist principles. The campaign supports survivors of sexual violence; this includes survivors who decide to report the crime to the South African Police Service (SAPS) and survivors who do not report or are unable to report the crime. The name of the campaign, “One in Nine”, refers to the number of rapes that get reported to the police. Statistically, only one in nine rapes get reported to the police and only 4% of rapes are successfully prosecuted.

² Khwesi is the name given to Jacob Zuma’s accuser, by the media, in order to protect her identity. However, her identity was made public and Khwesi and her family were subjected to threats from supporters of Jacob Zuma.

protest was established in 2009 at Rhodes University, forming part of the “One in Nine” campaign. In 2010, I partook in the silent protest for the first time with two of my friends (Fig. 1). I have never felt more self-conscious or more vulnerable than when I have taken part in the silent protest. In its early years, the silent protest was not as supported as it is now, since the protest has only gathered momentum over the last couple of years. There were not as many participants and the reactions, mostly by male students, were disheartening. Walking on campus, while wearing your purple shirt and unable to communicate due to your mouth being taped shut, is frightening. I can only imagine how rape survivors must feel under the constant gaze of the public, watching their every move and subjecting them to the court of public opinion. Moreover, many rape survivors do not report their rape³ and live in silence because of the fear of secondary victimisation⁴. Often, survivors are subjected to seeing their rapists almost daily and live in constant fear that their rapist might rape them again.

During the protest, I experienced many things. I experienced numerous reactions from fellow students that ranged from stares to laughter to whispering. However, occasionally and disconcertingly, a male student would deem it appropriate to make a comment directly to me, knowing full well that I am incapable of defending myself⁵, and this usually occurred when nobody was close enough to hear this commentary. One male student told me he could drag me into the bushes and rape me right there and I would not be able to scream for help. Another male student told me that he was tired of the “attention-seeking feminists” running around campus with tape on their faces, who were making a non-issue out of rape, because women should learn their place in society and remain subservient. Female students remained largely silent and did not offer any commentary nor support or encouragement. I am not sure if it was because the protest was new and they did not know how to react or if they did not

³ According to *Africa Check*, which is an online research database, in 2015/16 a total of 51, 895 sexual offences were recorded, an average of 142.2 sexual offences per day. According to *Africa Check* the number of reported sexual offences have decreased from previous years; however, according to the *Institute for Security Studies* (ISS): “Research shows that this crime is underreported and a decrease suggests that fewer people are reporting sexual offences” (2017). The link is available at: <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-south-africas-201516-crime-statistics/>

⁴ According to Pumla Gqola (2015:147), “research findings on rape reporting show that only a small percentage of those who are sexually violated report the crime to the police for a range of reasons from stigma, to fear of secondary victimisation, to knowledge of how low the chances of a successful prosecution are”. Gqola (2015:147) refers to the 2005 *Medical Research Council* report that show that only one in nine women reported their rape to the police and that roughly only one in twenty-five rapes are reported to police in Gauteng. For further information, see <http://genderlinks.org.za/article/the-war-at-home-gbv-indicators-project-2011-08-16> , [Online], Accessed: 3 April 2017, Gqola (2015) and Thomas (2013).

⁵ I would imagine that many rapists experience the exact same ease in addressing their victims after the assault and that they experience a sense of ease knowing that rape is under-prosecuted and that they can commit the same crime again.

fully comprehend what the protest was about. However, the moment that truly saddened me and continuously motivates my research is when I saw a friend of mine, who is a black lesbian, wearing a “rape survivor” t-shirt. Words are not enough to express how I felt in that moment. I was furious and saddened to realise that a person who I had come to know as a caring, loving, sympathetic and giving person had been subjected to such a heinous and violent crime, and an extreme violation of her body merely because of her sexuality, gender and race.

I will never forget the words spoken by male students. However, their commentary, the prevalence and under-prosecution of rape, and the knowledge that many people suffer from hate crimes and that no person deserves to be violated, and subjected to violence and discrimination because of reasons beyond their control continuously motivate me to speak out against the blatant rape culture, homophobia and transphobia that are ever-present in our society.



Fig. 1 Photographic documentation of the “Silent Protest” in 2010, which is affiliated with the “One in Nine” campaign. In the image is, from left: Rachel Jump, Lara Littleford and Grant Goodwin. Nikon, 2010. Photograph by Rozz Dlamini (2010)

Introduction

Despite legislative protections included within the South African constitution, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people living in South Africa face gross violations of their human rights, and remain targets of both homophobic and transphobic discrimination and violence. Although Section 9(3) of the constitution, that is, on grounds of sexual orientation, promotes the recognition of LGBTI rights, heterosexist discrimination, misogynistic violence and stigmatisation remain daily realities affecting many South Africans.

The majority of homophobic and transphobic hate crimes are perpetrated against black lesbian and transgender people in township areas. Such violence is used to impose the heteronormative social order onto society; a means of maintaining patriarchal control and ideological systems of power. Hate crimes are acts that seek to violate, victimise, hurt, demean and dehumanise their victims based on gender identity, sexual orientation or other factors such as race and class. However, hate crimes not only intimidate, and physically as well as psychologically harm victims, but also impact entire communities by establishing a culture of intolerance, which erodes a person's sense of safety and belonging. Evidently, such crimes are in direct violation of Section 12 in the South African constitution, which pertains to the right to freedom and security, that is, "freedom from all forms of violence from either public or private sources"⁶. Yet, such acts persist against marginalised groups, such as LGBTI people, notably lesbian women; for example, black lesbians are frequent targets of hate crimes, which result in violations against both constitutional rights and the right to dignity. However, the pervasive failure, in terms of the state, to implement and address positive action with regard to homophobic and transphobic hate crimes and gender-based violence is illustrative of its failure regarding its constitutional obligations.

Compulsory heterosexuality⁷, due to various myths regarding homosexuality in Africa, reinforces and maintains patriarchal transphobic and homophobic oppression. For example, black lesbian women living in township areas in South Africa live in a community where patriarchal social order and heterosexuality are regularly violently enforced, which results in hate crimes, 'curative/corrective' rape and in some instances death. The reason for this is that lesbianism is perceived as being a deviation from heterosexuality and African cultural norms,

⁶ *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996, ss12(1)(c), 12(2).

⁷ See the article *Compulsory Heterosexuality* by Adrienne Rich.

resulting in a perceived transgression of a (African) woman's prescribed gender role, that is, a woman's 'place' in society⁸. Gender roles are social constructs that are used to regulate social control and to impose a social hierarchy. Therefore, hate crimes, in all its forms, is used as a punishment and serves as a form of intimidation toward other LGBTI persons.

It is imperative to note that such intolerances do not exclusively come from the community: political leaders often exacerbate intolerance toward certain communities and/or persons by their own prejudiced, discriminatory and stigmatising commentary in the media. For example, Simon Lokodo, ironically Uganda's minister of "Ethics and Integrity", has previously stated that he cannot imagine kissing a man. According to Lokodo (2014), with regard to kissing a man, "I think I would die. I would not exist. It is inhuman. I would be mad. Just imagine eating your own faeces"⁹. By stating that homosexuality is 'inhuman', Lokodo further reinforces the perception that homosexuality is 'unnatural', sinful and an aberration. This, by extension, also reinforces the belief that homosexuality is 'un-African' and a depraved import from the West. Many African countries, such as Uganda, have draconian laws in place against homosexuality in their constitutions and as such reiterate notions regarding homosexuality as being 'un-African', instilling fear in all LGBTI people in these countries¹⁰. These dominant patriarchal and heteronormative¹¹ structures silence LGBTI people and render them invisible.

In order to transform LGBTI rights into a social reality, and to dispel myths regarding homosexuality, a hate crimes bill should be implemented; services for the LGBTI community should be widely accessible; and informative workshops should be implemented. Moreover, current LGBTI activism needs increasing support from communities in order to strengthen community-based empowerment and socio-cultural awareness. Additionally, rape remains an

⁸ This is a means of reinforcing male dominance by maintaining social and cultural order, including the 'right' to the female body both physically and emotionally.

⁹ Smith, D. 2014. "Why Africa is the most homophobic continent".

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/23/Africa-homophobia-uganda-anti-gay-law> . Accessed on 27 September 2016.

¹⁰ According to Amnesty International UK, homosexuality is illegal in 36 African countries: Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. African countries that enforce the death penalty against homosexuality are the following: Mauritania, Sudan, Northern Nigeria and Southern Somalia. Amnesty International. 2015. "Mapping anti-gay laws in Africa". <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/lgbti-lgbt-gay-human-rights-law-africa-uganda-kenya-nigeria-cameroon> . Accessed on 10 October 2016.

¹¹ Heteronormativity pertains to a belief that assumes that heterosexuality is the only norm and that men and women fall into distinct and complementary gender categories.

under-prosecuted crime in many countries; as such, the high statistics regarding the occurrence of rape in South Africa should be investigated and addressed in a more direct and pro-active approach. Failure to comply in addressing and investigating gender-based violence, sexual assault and rape, would be a failure to uphold judicial constitutional obligations. However, in certain cases, reports regarding the targeting of homosexual and/or transgender persons are frequently not recognised by the justice system, therefore such reports fail to be investigated by the South African Police Service (SAPS), nor are such reports viewed by the prosecution as being hate crimes. Regrettably, many families and friends of victims are left with more questions than answers, and rarely obtain justice for their loved ones. Therefore, it is imperative to create a visual archive of the lived reality of homosexual and transgendered persons living in South Africa, both as a means of promoting queer activism and to dispel myths surrounding homosexuality in Africa.

Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni are two South African artists who document the daily lives and lived reality of people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender in order to dispel myths regarding homosexuality in Africa, and to illustrate that such people are human (as opposed to Lokodo's notion that LGBTI people are 'inhuman').

Zanele Muholi was born in Umlazi, Durban in 1972. She completed her studies in an advanced photography course at the Market Photo Shop in Newton in 1994. Muholi co-founded and worked as a community relations officer for the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW). FEW is a non-profit organisation based in Gauteng, which aims to provide black lesbians and transgender persons with a safe social space in which individuals can work towards political and personal empowerment. Muholi has worked as both a reporter and a photographer for an online magazine called *Behind the Mask*, which addresses lesbian and gay issues, as well as founding the online forum titled *Inkanyiso*. Her works have earned her numerous accolades such as the Casa African award for best female photographer and a Blachère award at Les Recontres de Bamako biennial of African photography held in 2009. She has also received a Fanny Ann Eddy accolade from The International Resource Network (IRN) in Africa for her outstanding contributions in the study of sexuality in Africa, at the gender and sexualities conference, which was held in Syracuse, New York. In addition, her work is included in the Museion Collection: New acquisitions at the Museion – Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Bolzano, Italy (held until 14 February 2010); 'A Life Less Ordinary: Performance and Display in South African Art', at the Djanogly Gallery, held at Nottingham, the United Kingdom (5 September – 15 November 2010); and the exhibition

‘Undercover: Performing and Transforming Black Female Identities’ at the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, GA (10 September – 5 December)¹².

Sabelo Mlangeni was born in 1980 in Driefontein and lives in Johannesburg. He graduated from the Market Photo Workshop in 2004. In 2006 he won the Edward Ruiz award, an award that assists the artist to develop a substantial body of work over a year; in 2007 he was selected as the ‘Second Bright Young Thing’; and in 2009 he won the Tollman Award for visual art. His series titled *Country Girls* is his most extensive body of work (2003–2009), and includes images of men in drag that are juxtaposed with other images depicting both couples and individuals.

Both Muholi and Mlangeni focus on representing aspects of black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender life in South Africa. Whereas Mlangeni chooses to focus on capturing joyful moments of individuals and couples who are gay, transgender or in drag, despite the pervasive discrimination against homosexuals, Muholi documents aspects of LGBT life in South Africa that remain primarily invisible, such as hate crimes, discrimination and violence that LGBT people in South Africa experience. Her images include visual representations of the aftermath of ‘curative/corrective’ rape and other violent acts perpetrated against black lesbian, gay and transgender people, specifically those individuals who live in township areas, although at times she also does represent tender moments between couples. Her work juxtaposes the lived reality of black LGBT people in all its facets – from joyful and tender moments to emotional images representing the pain and violence that black LGBT people frequently face.

As Gabea Baderoon (2011:402) notes, “embodying a new vision of African sexuality, Muholi mobilizes a vision of queer privacy with an intimate, collective, autobiographical visual project through which she makes a powerful claim on public visibility for queer lives”. Therefore, both invisibility and visibility are important aspects regarding changing and challenging various forms of censorship. In this instance, by making LGBT people in township areas visible, Mlangeni and Muholi transgress heteronormative and gender-normative conventions. Furthermore, making the private lives of LGBT people visible forms part of what Muholi terms ‘visual activism’. However, such works can provoke controversy; for example, during an exhibition in which Muholi’s work was featured, the then minister of

¹² Zanele Muholi’s biography is taken from her website. The url: <http://www.zanelemuholi.com/about20%mehtm>. Accessed on: 19/08/2012

Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana, ‘walked out’ of the exhibition in reaction to the depiction of same-sex couples, which she described as ‘immoral’¹³. Since homosexuality and transgenderism are still regarded as a taboo topic for some, such utterances from officials not only reinforce notions of homosexuality and transgenderism as being ‘un-African’ but also create a culture of intolerance. This has dire consequences for LGBT people living in township areas since such people lack support from both the state and the judicial system, thereby rendering them vulnerable to hate crimes including ‘corrective/curative’ rape¹⁴.

Some of Muholi’s images appear to be masculine, thereby instantly identifying a woman as being different – ‘other’. The same applies for Mlangeni’s images of drag queens, whereby any indications of femininity either in dress or personality traits in a man are instantly and incorrectly associated with homosexuality, and these men are identified as being ‘other’. Therefore, changing conceptions regarding femininity implies a changing of conceptions about masculinity. According to bell hooks (1984:1), patriarchy is a political social system that “insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females ...”. Since men in Mlangeni’s images often appear to be more feminine, they are regarded as denying their ‘birth right’, that is, their dominance over women and their bodies. Similarly, women who appear to be more masculine in Muholi’s images are regarded as transgressing from their assigned ‘feminine’ gender role, that is, of the weak, passive and subservient female. Muholi (2011) believes that it is pertinent to use visibility to challenge social norms, and the aesthetics of ‘shock’ that could potentially be regarded as ‘immoral’ or obscene are in all actuality politically potent¹⁵.

Since the photographic medium is associated with representing the world ‘as it is’ and things ‘as they are’, it can be regarded as audacious. Mlangeni and Muholi’s images represent things that would otherwise be regarded as being a ‘deviation’ or ‘marginal’; that is, the performance of deviation seen in the work of Mlangeni and Muholi can be regarded as a transgression, defiance and a form of visual activism. Therefore, the use of visual activism in the LGBT community can be regarded as being illustrative of a wide variety of possibilities for empowerment for marginalised communities. According to Steven Dubin (1992:2), “deviance ... has a dual character ... [it] is transgressive yet positive; within it are the seeds for

¹³ See, Chapter 4 regarding the exhibition and Lulu Xingwana.

¹⁴ Often it is believed that ‘corrective/curative’ rape is a means of ‘curing’ women of their lesbianism and arguably reflects a crisis in the conceptualisation of gender, that is, the dominant and violent assertion of maleness in order to intimidate lesbian women in order to hide their sexual orientation, thereby silencing them and rendering them ‘invisible’.

¹⁵ See Kristeva (1982), Betterton (1996) and Douglas (1966).

change, but also the potential for social inflexibility and stasis”. Therefore, notions regarding deviance in ‘truthful’ representations of the body can serve as a metaphor for social structures, and render the photographic medium a powerful tool for challenging aesthetics that are exclusivist. Such images of homoeroticism can be interpreted as being a transgression of, as well as a challenge to dominant ideologies.

My research, then, is an investigation into the ways in which cultural conventions, heteronormative traditions and gender roles are transgressed through these photographs. In my research, I use Muholi’s work more extensively, as a result of the variety of issues that she explores and addresses in her work, such as hate crimes, intimate moments between couples, weddings, funerals and so forth. Therefore, Muholi’s work features prominently in this research, whereas Mlangeni’s photography does not feature as prominently since his work does not delve into most of the issues which Muholi’s work addresses. Additionally, the work of the sculptor Nicholas Hlobo is briefly examined in its interrogation of sexuality, authenticity, culture and traditionalism. The question remains: what is the role of visual activism in relation to homosexuality and transgender issues in a South African context? This research explores representations of sexuality and gender as sites of resistance and contestation in South Africa, and also Muholi’s assertion that her photographs function as a vehicle for visual activism that aims to reveal continued prejudice and discrimination.

In Chapter 1, titled *Transgenderism and Homosexuality in a South African Context*, I investigate various myths pertaining to homosexuality in Africa and South Africa, specifically the notion that homosexuality is ‘un-African’. In relation to the notion of homosexuality being ‘un-African’, I address and examine the South African constitution and the various atrocities that many LGBT South Africans face on a daily basis. Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni’s documentary photography includes works from within their communities and includes intimate moments between same-sex couples. Their work has an international and national appeal due to their observations pertaining to the human condition, that is, the interactions, the people and the cultures that constitute a community¹⁶. The people

¹⁶ It is imperative to note that that the term ‘community’ or ‘communities’ will be used as a general term and will be applied loosely throughout this thesis. I realise the problematic use of the term; however, it is not used in any capacity to suggest a single entity. Groups of people are diverse and complex, and despite forming part of a social group of people who may share the same beliefs, intent, resources and so forth, such groupings of people do not become homogenised. In this instance, ‘community’ does not refer to singularity; instead, it refers to the multiplicity of the wants, needs, personalities, identities and so forth of a particular grouping of people.

they document are primarily from township¹⁷ areas and they identify as black and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)¹⁸. The people they document are under-represented and marginalised because of their race, class, sexual orientation and gender identity. Their works include representations of the socio-political and economic problems gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people experience in South Africa, specifically in township areas, in order to establish a dialectic of transformation. A ‘dialectic of transformation’ pertains to deconstructing existing binaries with regard to the construction of ‘difference’ and can construct a new dialogue that can produce meaning based on a more humanist approach, and can deconstruct normative social conventions. This dialogue refers to the activist work as an antithesis that challenges the thesis of the status quo with regard to patriarchal gender norms and homophobia. It is imperative to look at both past and contemporary issues regarding marginalised groups and the prejudice and discrimination they experience. Furthermore, Chapter 1 briefly examines the role of activism, and specifically the issues homosexual and transgender persons face daily, especially with reference to the works of Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni, and how their visual archives effectively create a dialectic of liberation.

Chapter 2, titled *Queering Boundaries: Arts and Activism*, focuses on the social, political and cultural conventions with regard to the construction of an ‘authentic’ African identity. The construction of ‘authentic’ African-ness is related to notions and ideas surrounding the binarism of visibility/invisibility and traditionalism/modernity. Furthermore, the social constructions of sexuality and gender influence the constructions of ‘authenticity’ and ‘inauthenticity’, including the other binarisms noted above. A key concept of the chapter is the capacity of visual activism to analyse, re-appropriate and subvert normative conventions and hegemonic power structures. Additionally, I refer to the recent rise in student protests across South African campuses in response to the lack of social transformation in institutions and in the country. The prevalence of these protests and the use of visual activism are illustrative of a need for social change and cultural re-appropriation, and a need to address

¹⁷ In South Africa, a township is an underdeveloped urban living area situated on the peripheries of cities or towns and was designated for black, coloured and Indian South Africans during Apartheid by the ruling party.

¹⁸ LGBT is an initialism which is used to replace the term gay when in reference to the more detailed initialism LGBTIAQQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual, Queer and Questioning) community, and is primarily intended to emphasise and illustrate the diversity that exists within the community, and as a means of being inclusive of every individual and their self-identification, without them being overlooked within another facet of society. I have chosen to use the shortened version of the initialism, that is, LGBT, since the work of Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni documents persons who are gay, lesbian and transgender. I have included bisexuality; although it is not specifically referred to, it does not mean that same-sex relationships that are documented do not have at least one partner who is bisexual.

epistemic injustice. With regard to the protests, I especially refer to the protests regarding the “RU reference list” and “Chapter 2.12” protests at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. These protests regarding gender-based violence and the continuous rise of rape statistics in South Africa raise important social issues and expose the ways in which the constitution fails many women. Women frequently face re-victimisation when seeking medical attention or when reporting either sexual assault or rape to the police. Furthermore, rape is used as a punishment for lesbians because of their perceived transgression of heteronormativity and their assigned gender roles, and, as such, the chapter includes images of drag, which has a capacity to effectively subvert and transgress gender roles and dominant social structures pertaining to femininity and masculinity.

Chapter 3, titled *Signifying Practices and Sites of Resistance*, builds on Chapter 2, as it focuses specifically on the transgender community and the prejudice and discrimination they encounter daily. Transgender people and the discrimination they face remain largely invisible, even more so than homosexual people. Additionally, gender-expression and transgenderism are capable of subverting normative conventions of gender and sexuality through non-conformity to the binarism of sex and gender, especially in their capacity to avoid classification. I specifically refer to Zanele Muholi’s series titled *Brave Beauties*, and the reactions the series garnered during the *Somnyama Ngonyama* exhibition at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. I investigate the social construction of sex, gender and identity specifically pertaining to the transgender community and how representations of drag and transgender persons transgress various socio-cultural boundaries, specifically in South Africa.

Chapter 4, titled *Queering Borders: Transgression, Sexuality and Being*, focuses on the exhibitions *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2016), *Only Half the Picture* (2006) and *Being* (2007). In *Somnyama Ngonyama*, Muholi uses various props in order to convey various characters and archetypes. Muholi references South African political history and dispels myths regarding what it means to be ‘African’ as well as addressing stereotypes regarding lesbianism and the black female body. *Only Half the Picture* and *Being* are two of Muholi’s earlier exhibitions. These exhibitions juxtapose images pertaining to violence, such as hate crimes and ‘corrective/curative’ rape, against images pertaining to intimate and tender moments shared between couples. These images show all aspects of LGBT life in South Africa as a means of subverting notions pertaining to African-ness and what it means to be ‘African’. This is achieved through the use of visual activism which purports to change the way we see the world in order to change dominant social structures and to transform dominant modes of

thinking. In order for transformation to occur, society needs to break away from constructed societal norms and stereotypes in order to accept and realise that our differences as individuals are what makes our society and country diverse. This includes a LGBT-specific narrative included within a dialectic of transformation through visual activism.

Chapter One

Transgenderism and Homosexuality in a South African Context

To recognise the stereotype as an ambivalent mode of knowledge and power demands a theoretical and political response that challenges deterministic or functionalist modes of conceiving of the relationship between discourse, politics, and questions dogmatic and moralistic positions on the meaning of oppression and discrimination.

- Homi Bhabha (1999:370)

1.1) Introduction

The lived reality of people who are black and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) in South Africa has largely been invisible and a taboo subject. However, artists such as the South African photographers, Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni, document the lived reality, in all its facets, of LGBT life in South Africa in order to ‘speak out’ regarding the discrimination, prejudice, alienation and violence many LGBT people experience, especially in township areas. In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*¹⁹, Michel Foucault (1978:5) writes, “the least glimmer of truth is conditioned by politics”. Furthermore/Critically, Foucault (1978:5) argues that society is informed that, if repression truly were the fundamental link between power, sexuality and knowledge, then it would make sense that the only way for society to free itself would be at a considerable cost. He suggests that this can only be achieved by means which are “nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new

¹⁹ “La Volonté de savoir”, first published in 1976. This translation was first published under the title, “The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction” in Canada and the United States in 1978.

economy in the mechanisms of power ...” (Foucault 1978:5). Arguably, repression and the act of silencing are the result of centuries of oppression and social structures of dominance, such as patriarchy. This is done by banning websites, books, music and any other media-related aspect that is deemed transgressive and subversive by the state, and, distressingly, activists often face jail time, are executed or are murdered²⁰. This in turn creates a dichotomy of silence versus speaking out. Speaking out becomes synonymous with defiance, or at least acts thereof, whereas silence is seen not only as being complicit, but also as being the ‘good citizen’, who supports nation building and is opposed to social deviants. Despite all these obstacles, and facing severe adversity, activists still fight for their cause, simply because ‘speaking out’, especially against authoritative regimes, is so important. After all, the only way for one to break stigma is to break silence.

Transformation cannot occur if no one is willing to voice her or his opinions and to oppose certain socio-political structures imposed on society. The aforementioned is precisely what artists such as Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni achieve through their photography and their chosen subject matters. In this instance, creating visibility of LGBT socio-political circumstances enables these two artists to create a dialectic of transformation by constructing a South African specific LGBT narrative in order to combat various myths and stigmas pertaining to homosexuality and transgenderism. Through their use of subversive resistance, these artists are able to create a visual representation of the lived reality both they and their community face daily. Raél Jero Salley (2012:58) notes that “subversive resistance is a metaphor for strategies that produce visual images to counter dominant meanings or stereotypes ... it operates by offering alternative views, and its force often comes through nuanced presentation of one’s self and community”. Thus, Muholi and Mlangeni offer an alternative view of life, that is, the lives of LGBT persons and the reality of being homosexual or transgender in South Africa. The lived reality of LGBT persons has largely been invisible and a taboo subject; however, these artists bring out of the shadows issues related to and faced by LGBT persons, and engage in activism in order to address these issues.

²⁰ For example, David Kato, a Ugandan gay rights campaigner who served as an advocacy officer for “Sexual Minorities Uganda”, was murdered in 2011 by a male co-worker after he had won a lawsuit against a magazine. The magazine had published his name and photograph (along with other LGBT Ugandans), identifying him as gay and urging that he, along with the other LGBT identified individuals, be executed. Source: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12295718>. Accessed: 19 June 2015.

Homosexuality is often regarded as being a social danger, therefore many individuals who form part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community face various forms of discrimination, violence, oppression and marginalisation by society at large, on the basis not only that they are immoral, but also that homosexuality is unnatural and a threat to the nuclear family²¹ dynamic. This sort of oppression is still seen within several countries, especially in a number of countries in Africa. South African photographers Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni create photographic visual archives as a means of combating oppression and stigmatisation, and that illustrate existence and resistance against heteropatriarchal²² power structures in South Africa. Despite often facing immeasurable amounts of adversity, these artists use their artworks as a means of resisting and subverting many stereotypical ideas relating to homosexuality, especially with regard to homosexuals who are black and live within South African townships. Muholi and Mlangeni have been vocal about their activism as a means of creating awareness about the atrocities many homosexual South Africans face daily, often at the hands of relatives, community members and so-called friends.

1.2) LGBT Struggles: A Lived Reality in South Africa

Legislative transformation has occurred in South Africa over the last two decades since the formal abolition of Apartheid in 1994. During this period of time, the previous social order has moved toward a new social order²³, “in which human rights are sacrosanct to the ideals contained in the Constitution” (Reid 2013:13). However, in *How to be a Real Gay: Gay Identities in Small-Town South Africa*, Graeme Reid²⁴ (2013:13) notes, “the ideals of the Constitution do not always reflect the values of ordinary citizens”. In fact, despite the

²¹ The nuclear family is a social family dynamic consisting of parents of both sexes who are heterosexual. The parents have two or more children, either adopted or biological, and often it is preferable for the nuclear family to have a son and a daughter, though it is not a prerequisite for the nuclear family to have children of both sexes.

²² Heteropatriarchal refers to socio-political systems in which men and heterosexuality have dominance over other genders and sexual orientations.

²³ According to Nigel Gibson (2011:14), “as post-apartheid cities have changed, the poor have been increasingly marginalised or removed by ‘development’. Feeling abused by their elected leaders and fed up with the endless broken promises, new struggles have emerged over urban space by those with only negative political identities, stigmatised or marginal, criminal and ‘lost’”.

²⁴ Graeme Reid is an academic and writer who has a BA and Master’s degree from the University of Witwatersrand and a PhD from the University of Amsterdam. Reid primarily studied anthropology and is the founder of the Gay and Lesbian Archives of South Africa, founded in 1997. Source:

<http://www.cca.ukzn.ac.za/index.php/tow-past-participants/46-tow-2013/202-graeme-reid-south-africa>. Accessed: 5 June 2015.

extensive protections provided by the South African Constitution²⁵, which is founded on the principles of freedom, equality, and human dignity, it remains evident that, despite the Bill of Rights, South Africans are still subject to discrimination, oppression and marginalisation. This is especially seen in the amount of discrimination and violence against LGBT youths and adults, and gender-based violence, which remains widespread in the country.

Violence against women and children in South Africa has been foregrounded in a number of interventions, campaigns and socio-political movements, such as the “One in Nine” campaign and the “16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children”²⁶ campaign, both held annually. These campaigns are used to create awareness in order to address various legal issues, including the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence, and the ensuring of patronage, rehabilitation and medical care of rape survivors. However, campaigns against sexual violence based on sexual orientation are not as widespread. There has been a definite lack in both media reports and research based on violence against the LGBT community, and also a lack of intervention by the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to adequately address this violence. Notably, South African lesbians²⁷ are vulnerable to hate crimes, violence, abuse and torment. Reid (2013:14) suggests that this may be due to the fact that public visibility²⁸ of lesbians and, to a lesser extent, gay men has increased over the years. However, it is believed, through statistical reports, that the majority of cases are not reported, thus logically it would be fair to assume that the rape and hate crime figures are much higher than those stated within official police statistics.

²⁵ *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996, ss12(1)(c), 12(2). Chapter 2.3 of the constitution states that “the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth”. Chapter 2.10 states that, “everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected”. Subsection 11 in Chapter 2 further states that “everyone has a right to life”.

²⁶ “16 Days of Activism for No Violence Againsts Women and Children” is an international awareness campaign that takes place annually from 25 November to 10 December. The campaign attempts to eradicate violence against women and children by raising awareness pertaining to the impact violence has on women and children. Typically a white ribbon is worn in support of the campaign and various events and activities are held across South Africa.

²⁷ Hate crimes and ‘curative’ rapes are especially prevalent amongst black lesbians living in township areas. Although the South African Constitution promotes equal rights, Nigel Gibson (2011:86) notes that property rights, in rural areas, are usually controlled by men, thus maintaining the legacy of how women were and are bound and subjected to various forms of traditional male authority, which still manages to command power along with conservative notions of a women’s ‘place’, role and sexuality.

²⁸ Similarly, Pumla Dineo Gqola (2011:623) suggests that it is less about making lesbian women visible than it is about the regimes, which have used such women’s hypervisibility as a means of violating them.

According to Reid (2013:14), equality is “a principle that enjoys a high level of consensus”; however, “paradoxically this is also why gender features so strongly as one of the fault lines between constitutional democracy and traditional norms, values and practices”. As Reid (2013:13) notes, this situation is not unique to South Africa²⁹. Reid (2013:15–16) states that the above-mentioned fault lines in South Africa are particularly evident within the public discourse about homosexuality. Reid (2013:15) reflects on various questions posed that are related to homosexual and transgender South Africans. These questions directly relate to various myths with regard to homosexuality by questioning whether sexual orientation is a ‘natural characteristic’, which was vigorously argued in a variety of submissions that were made by representatives of the lesbian and gay movement in South Africa, or whether sexual orientation is a perversion imported from the West or merely a ‘fashionable’ choice. (Reid 2013:15). Reid (2013:15) further questions whether gender equality is natural or a disruption pertaining to the natural order. Reid (2013:15) states that since “the Constitution was rectified in 1996 gay and lesbian issues (more than any other single issue) have been the subject of Constitutional Court deliberations”, and that through this process “gay and lesbian equality, precisely because it is ‘unpopular’, has taken on the status of a litmus test for the success of constitutional democracy in South Africa”.

Yet, despite the current legal climate in South Africa, which is supposed to guarantee protection of all South African citizens, the gay community is still subjected to prejudice, alienation, stigma, disempowerment, rejection and severe ignorance. The cultural sanctioning of homophobia and hate speech has not only led to physical harm being inflicted on black lesbians, transmen and gay men, but has also led to both emotional and psychological harm being inflicted upon these men and women. Many explanations have been suggested for this continual marginalisation of lesbian, gay and transgendered persons. These explanations include, but are not limited to, the belief that homosexuality comes from the West, thus

²⁹ The following is a list of countries that have anti-homosexuality laws:

Africa: Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Comoros, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Americas: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago.

Oceania: Cook Islands, Indonesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu.

Other countries include: India, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.

The detailed list is available at the following link: <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/criminal-laws-on-homosexuality/african-nations-laws.php>

creating the perception that homosexuality is ‘un-African’; the perception that homosexuality is criminal and should, therefore, be criminalised, often resulting in the death penalty; and the belief that gays and lesbians should not be afforded the same constitutional rights and protections as their fellow heterosexual citizens. There is cultural³⁰ and religious intolerance, stemming from perceptions of what is the ‘correct’ or acceptable gender and sexual expression³¹. In this instance, cultural intolerance affects an individual’s sense of belonging, and effectually polices identity and expression of self, as is seen in Sabelo Mlangeni’s series titled *Black Men in Dress* (2012). The series comprises of a series of photographs that were taken at Johannesburg and Soweto Pride in 2011, an event held annually for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, queer and questioning (LGBTIAQQ) community. In his artist’s statement³², Mlangeni (2012) recalls his childhood, where he describes the concept of “uSis’bhuti”. He explains:

[M]ost communities had what we call ‘uSis’bhuti’. This is a term used to describe a boy who behaves like a girl. Why then do we hate these boys when they have grown up to be men who dress as women? Why do we turn and call them names, pretending that we’ve never seen it? These are some of the issues I try to bring to the fore in this series (Mlangeni 2012).

South African photographers, such as Mlangeni and Muholi, are counteracting decades of photographic misrepresentation, cultural appropriation and preconceived notions of societal norms. By depicting certain aspects of South African life within their photographs, these artists represent their own experiences of the country. These representations are far removed from the kinds of representations of LGBT communities in South Africa that are seen across the world. For example, in Africa, there is a tendency to act as though homosexuality, transgenderism and cross-dressing do not exist, to which the lack of LGBT representation can attest.

The image titled *Identity* (2011) (Fig. 1.1) is a photograph of a patron attending Pride. He stands to the side of a stage. His body is positioned in a confident pose that some gay men would describe as ‘fierce’. He leans slightly backward, hands on hips. Identity is shirtless,

³⁰ Much injustice and discrimination occur in the name of ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’, as a means of oppressing certain marginalised groups of people, such as homosexuals, and as a result of the belief that homosexuality is ‘un-African’. The notion of ‘traditionalism’ and its relation to cultural appropriation is thoroughly unpacked in Chapter 2.

³¹ See Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion pertaining to gender expression and sexual expression.

³² The artist’s statement is available on the Michael Stevenson website at the following link: <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/mlangeni/index2012.html>

and wears ripped denim cut-off shorts complete with suspenders, and his underwear peeks over the top of his denims. The name of his underwear, “iDENTiTY”, is visible and directly denotes one of the key issues that Mlangeni raises in the series. Furthermore, Identity’s naked torso reveals a belly ring, which is customarily worn by women, and his hair is plaited into two very long and impressive dreadlocks. In this instance, questions surrounding identity and belonging correlate with preconceived ideas regarding what it means to be ‘African’ and ‘un-African’. In other words, persons such as Identity, who do not conform to ideas surrounding African-ness, become displaced, in the sense they may not experience a sense of belonging in South Africa; since the way they dress, or the way in which they live their lives, does not conform to ideas pertaining to African sexuality, their lives and existence are therefore pushed to the margins of cultural acceptability.



Fig. 1.1 Sabelo Mlangeni, *Identity* (2011), Hand-printed silver gelatin print, 36 x 36cm.

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/mlangeni/identity.html>

In *Homophobia, Human Rights and Gay and Lesbian Equality in Africa*, Vasu Reddy (2001:83) suggests that homophobic discourse demonstrates that it is a form of hate speech,

as it claims “to recuperate a ‘natural’ heterosexual order for society”. As Reddy (2001:83) notes, “homophobia as a form of discrimination about sexualities has implications for gender oppression and the construction of African identities more broadly”. In post-Apartheid South Africa, many artists have dealt with issues regarding identity and authenticity within their works. Ashraf Jamal (1996:13) states that “dogged by history, South Africa is in the throes of re-imagining and re-imaging itself”. What this means is that, through consciousness-raising of different kinds that has occurred during and after Apartheid, not only has South Africa been re-imagined, but also South African citizens have had to re-imagine themselves.

Ben Anderson (2007:123) argues that for “modern Western democracy it is easy to assume that homosexuality is a civil liberty similarly debated throughout the world”, and that “while gay rights remain contentious even in the most liberal of forums, their popular dissemination and subsequent prevalence in today’s democratic discourse is not universal”. In this instance, Anderson asks, “how is homosexuality treated in the diverse, ethnic, and religious environment in continental Africa?” (Anderson 2007:123), especially since “African sexuality, as a study, is a topic that is difficult to pin down; it has a long history of theoretical speculation and is fraught with many racist issues” (Clarke 2013:175). Anderson (2007:126) notes that, in all fairness, “a broad spectrum of sexual law exists in the world, representing a vast continuum of social liberalism. However, the intolerance of most of Africa is strikingly different to policy elsewhere in the world”. According to Anderson (2007:123), this has to do with the fact that “no other comparative geopolitical regions, such as Asia or the Americas, have such a high rate of anti-gay legislations”. In this instance, Anderson is referring to several African countries that have made homosexuality illegal. Homosexuality is punishable by either imprisonment or death, depending on the country where one is found guilty of homosexuality or transgenderism. There is historical evidence that homosexuality existed in Africa during pre-colonial times³³; however, it is still believed by many Africans that homosexuality was introduced by colonialists. Anderson (2007:125) refers to scholars who have argued that “the colonialists did not introduce homosexuality in Africa but rather intolerance of it” because this “colonially induced homophobia ... is reflected by the legal status of homosexuality in Africa, and the related disposition towards it”. Therefore, it is

³³ In “LGBT–Queer struggles like other struggles in Africa”, Gathoni Blessol (2013:224) draws attention to the Kikuyu in Kenya, where women–women marriages were common practice. Blessol provides a variety of historical evidence that effectively manages to support the veracity of claims made about the existence of homosexuality in pre-colonial Africa by providing anthropological evidence in his article.

imperative that contemporary treatment of homosexuals in Africa cannot and should not be considered without any appreciation of its colonial past. However,

... the denial of homosexuality in pre-historical history has combined with the meddlesome influence of colonialism to allow the ahistorical malignment that denounces contemporary homosexuals as “un-African” to linger on as a neo-colonial legacy (Anderson 2007:125).

Yet, even if colonialism is responsible for introducing homosexuality into Africa, “her contemporary independence era began ... years ago in 1951” (Anderson 2007:126). It is for the above-mentioned reason that Anderson (2007:126) asks the question, “can one therefore accuse Africa of being slow to ‘modernise’, or is her comparative lack of civil liberty due to a different end rather than a different pace?”

Carl Stychin (1996:455) focuses on African rights, and believes that African rights, “unlike the Western paradigm of rights”, are “human rights”, which has “proven a central discourse deployed in the name of a majority which historically has been denied”. Yet, this discourse is increasingly dependent upon its own potential “as a socially transformative instrument – as a tool for nation building and the reparation of past injustices” (Stychin 1996:455). However, at the same time, the self-described “minorities” who seek protection from the actions of the majority (Stychin 1996:455) invoke a South African rights discourse. Stychin (1996:455) notes:

... [This] creates an interesting dynamic between majoritarian and minority interventions. Moreover, South Africans have reached the culmination of constitutional progress, which has been explicitly billed as inclusionary and participatory, in which the nation reached a ‘consensus’. It may well be crucial that South Africans identify with their new Constitution, and its Bill of Rights, to prevent the perception that rights are simply the product of an agreement between political elites. But, simultaneously, the protection of rights which do not enjoy popular support may be justified by the antimajoritarianism of rights claims, and constitutional players thus at times have been faced with constructing a consensus document which may not, in all respects, reflect popular opinion.

Yet, with the acceptance of the Constitution at the sitting of the South African Constitutional Assembly on 8 May 1996, it appears that gay and lesbian activists in South Africa managed to gain an unqualified victory (Stychin 1996:456). Activists, as well as activist groups, who had been working endlessly and tirelessly over the two years prior to the Constitutional Assembly, could not have reached this goal had it not been for their single-minded pursuit. It

was for this very reason that the South African Interim Constitution was the first constitution anywhere to include sexual orientation within a vast list of several constitutional guarantees. Stychin (1996:456) notes that this is obviously no small achievement, and that its success “speaks to the extraordinary legal and political context of South Africa today”. Yet, Stychin questions whether the inclusion of sexual orientation within the South African Bill of Rights remains to be seen. Given the amount of homophobia present in South Africa and the lack of adherence to the inclusion of homosexuality within the Bill of Rights, this would appear to be not only a valid question, but also a very important question to pose, especially with regard to the success of effectively protecting the LGBT community, and the success rate of the various constitutional guarantees within the Bill of Rights. Arguably, LGBT persons have not effectively been protected by the constitution, nor have such persons been effectively represented beyond stereotypical ideas pertaining to persons who are LGBT. Yet, as Stychin (1996:126) notes, “obviously this issue can appear marginal in comparison to the extraordinary liberation struggle in which so many South Africans have laboured for so long”. After all, had it not been for this immense struggle, the discourse³⁴ of human rights would not have become central within the public sphere in South Africa, as well as the “frequently articulated goals of ‘reconstruction’ and ‘reconciliation’” (Stychin 1996:126).

Although Stychin makes a valid point regarding the liberation struggle, it should in no way delegitimise current LGBT struggles and activism in South Africa. Various NGOs such as Triangle Project and Gender Dynamix work tirelessly in order to improve LGBT rights, which are fundamentally human rights. Muholi and Mlangeni continue to support LGBT activism by visually promoting activism in their work, and illustrating that homosexual and transgender persons are only different from heterosexuals in terms of who they love. This can be seen in the series titled *Of Love and Loss* (2014), in which Muholi documents funerals and same-sex weddings in South Africa, which are moments that depict both joy and loss. These moments appear to co-exist because of the prevalence of hate crimes. The image titled *Diptych* (2013) (Fig. 1.2) is a self-portrait of Muholi. The first part of the diptych frames Muholi lying on a bed. Her body is naked and shown from below her shoulders to her feet. Her body assumes the foetal position, which is suggestive of vulnerability, but could also be interpreted as a defence mechanism used as a tool in order to protect her from loss – the loss of her friends because of hate crimes. The feeling of loss can be overwhelming, which is

³⁴ Discourse is always implicated in power. See Foucault’s *Power/Knowledge* 1980.

conveyed in the framing of the image. Muholi (2011:120) states that “in a socio-cultural context where rape is still a fairly taboo subject, these feelings are overwhelming”. Muholi interviews many survivors of ‘corrective/curative’ rape and other hate crimes. In this instance, Muholi (2011:122) has stated that, after listening to the life journeys of the women in her community, she is “filled with a deep sense of sadness and respect for them”. The majority of the stories she listens to are deeply traumatic and painful. As such, these stories weigh heavily on her mind. Consequentially, Muholi experiences overwhelming emotions; however, despite the immense difficulty of listening to stories of violence and discrimination, Muholi continues to use her photography as a vehicle for her visual activism in order to ‘tell’ the stories of her community to create visibility of their lived realities, and in order to seek social justice. The second part of the diptych frames Muholi lying on the same bed, however, in this image Muholi is lying on her side and her hands are placed under her head. Her eyes are closed, perhaps in an attempt to shut out the world. Her body language and pose suggests that she is mourning the loss of a friend, acquaintance or a participant in one of her works³⁵. Images such as *Diptych*, and their representations and documentation of mourning, stand in stark contrast to the joyful documentation of same-sex weddings.

The image *Promise and Gift’s wedding I* (2013) (Fig. 1.3) frames the subjects, Promise and Gift, during a tender embrace after they have said their vows. The shot is a close-up of their faces and it is evident that both men are smiling as they embrace. Similarly, *Ayanda and Nhlanhla Moremi’s wedding II* (2013) (Fig. 1.4) is an image taken at the time when the brides, Ayanda and Nhlanhla, are in the process of placing the rings on their ring fingers. The image is a close-up of their hands and the rings, which, in effect, signify eternity. The hand of the wedding official lightly holds onto the hands of the brides as they exchange rings. This is suggestive of bringing two individuals together in order to form a union – a partnership. In 2006, same-sex marriage was legalised in South Africa and constitutionally affords same-sex couples many of the same legislative protections that marriage affords heterosexual couples. However, individuals may refuse to marry same-sex couples based on religious grounds, and couples often struggle to find officials who are willing to marry them. In this regard, their human rights, that is, the right to marry, are violated because of continued discrimination and prejudice. Despite the atrocities that many gay, lesbian and transgender people endure, and

³⁵ Since the start of Muholi’s ongoing series titled, *Faces and Phases*, several of the participants have since passed on due to hate crimes and targeted attacks, such as the attack on Muholi’s close friend, Busi Sigasa, whose memory lives on in her portrait.

despite reports of hate crimes, such images are a refreshing reminder that there are many joyful, tender, loving and content moments in the lives of people who are persecuted for reasons that they do not have any control over.



Fig. 1.2: Zanele Muholi, *Diptych* (2013), C-print, 33 x 49cm each.

Source: http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/love_loss/muholi_zava.html



Fig. 1.3 Zanele Muholi, *Promise and Gift's wedding I* (2013), C-print, 55 x 60cm

Source: http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/love_loss/promise_and_gifts_wedding1.html



Fig. 1.4 Zanele Muholi, *Ayanda and Nlhanhla Moremi's wedding II* (2013), C-print, 20.9 x 31.4cm.

Source:

http://stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/love_loss/ayanda_and_nhlanhla_moremis_wedding2.html

Stychin (1996:457) argues that one of the most transformative changes within this political discourse is “the current centrality of the language of human rights, which has come to be articulated through a constitutionally entrenched document”. The unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1990 was the key event which occurred during the time that led the shift towards legal entrenchment of South African laws (Stychin 1996:457). This is because with the unbanning came recognition – the recognition of the importance of constitutionally entrenched laws for minorities, that is, once the inevitability of majority rule became apparent (Stychin 1996:457). Stychin (1996:462) suggests that:

... [T]he achievement must also be understood in terms of the historically widespread and continuing sexual conservatism of South Africa. Only in the past few years has the Calvinist³⁶ hegemony been dislodged, and religious conservatism remains an important force, which crosses all racial and class lines. Until quite recently, those gay organizations, which did exist, were overwhelmingly white, male, and ‘apolitical’, and, to this day, gay culture continues to fall far short of the goals of integration and ‘diversity’ along race, gender, and class lines.

³⁶ Afrikaners adopted different elements of seventeenth century Calvinist doctrines during Apartheid. Calvinist Christian doctrines are rooted in Biblical understandings pertaining to racial difference. The Afrikaner Calvinist ideology adopted an ideology of ‘chosen people’, which led to the subordination and oppression of various ethnic and racial groups, while claiming the superiority of white Afrikaners.

Certainly, there was a definite and overwhelming lack of a diverse representation within lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities during this time. However, it should be noted that, toward the end of the 1980s, groups with diverse memberships and representatives did start to emerge, which also managed to achieve a great deal of credibility for gay and lesbian struggles within the South African progressive political circles (Stychin 1996:462). However, it is important to note that the reality of South Africa today is that the effects of Apartheid are still profoundly felt by South African citizens, and the primary focus of the government must be socio-economic reform for all citizens, the demands of which have then to be translated into the language of rights (Stychin 1996:462). It is in this regard that Stychin (1996:462) notes, “the South African context differs from the dominant western rights paradigm, with the focus of the latter on anti-collectivism and formal equality”. Therefore, for the majority of gay and lesbian South Africans, the rights claim should be grounded within that of the overriding socio-economic reality, this being an essential factor in order to create a national agenda that is credible. Stychin (1996:462) suggests that the very fact that LGBT folk have exhibited a tremendous amount of unity, despite their differences, may in part be a result of the lack of resources that characterises South Africa, thus distinguishing its politics from Western movements.

Queer theory predominantly remains within a Western context, and, as Douglas Clarke (2013:173) notes, “there is a distinct lack of consideration for African same-sex desiring culture. It is as if Western queer theory attempts to erase both African-ness and African-centred homosexuality”. Clarke (2013:176) notes that Africa is marginalised in Western queer theory, which results in a lack of representation of queer Africans in both leading literature and various theoretical frameworks pertaining to gender and sexuality. Clark (2013:176) states that African queer studies³⁷ are even less common or widely distributed than gay and lesbian sociology. This results in a lack of an African queer voice within emerging literature, and thus African sexuality is continuously pushed beyond the margins and into obscurity (Clark 2013:176). The lack of African queer literature and theoretical frameworks further silences African queer voices, and myths regarding homosexuality and transgenderism in African cannot be dispelled within a theoretical framework and academic setting. The effects are devastating since “whole identities are not being accepted or

³⁷ Research on same-sex relationships in Africa is not as widespread as research on same-sex relationships in the West. See Clarke (2013).

contributing to the overwhelmingly White and North American canon of queer theory” (Clark 2013:176).

It is evident, then, that Western queer theory has largely overlooked multi-ethnic aspects of identity creation, including its failure to look at both the multicultural dimensions of sexuality and its own reality (Clarke 2013:176). Therefore, by “focussing so closely on sexuality, western queer has overlooked race and essentially ‘white washed’ the figure of the homosexual” (Clarke 2013:176).

It is for this reason that it is so fundamentally important for queer theory to take South Africa, its economic circumstances, and its citizens into account, but it is also why the inclusion of sexual orientation within the Bill of Rights became a form of advocacy. The inclusion of homosexuality and the ability to effectively be able to define and describe what constitutes forming a part of African sexualities is pertinent, as one must first be able to recognise, define and theorise within one’s context of origin before incorporating it within a global sphere. One of the ways that South Africa has started to create its own history, advocacy, research and information in a uniquely South African context with regard to homosexuality is through the use of activism. Of course, one cannot exclude the fact that activism arose as a means of empowerment and of educating South Africans, as well as a means of dispelling many myths surrounding homosexuality. However, it is evident that the omission of a uniquely African queer theory from the dominant Western queer theory, illustrating the very exclusionary basis of African sexuality within the global sphere, further silences homosexuality in Africa, and moreover it renders the (South) African situation of extreme violence and oppression invisible, since nothing in Western queer theory destabilises the many myths surrounding African homosexuality today. Stychin (1996:466) states that:

... in activist struggles around both gender and sexuality, the obfuscation of difference through rights mobilization has been largely the product of the constitutional process itself, one to which activists were forced to respond. The agenda demanded a high degree of movement unity to influence decision makers (or so it was perceived) as well as the translation of political aims into rights – a language around which the unity of the group could be maintained. In this way, it is the Constitution which has disciplined lesbian and gay activism so successfully, constituting and holding together a coalition which crosses lines of race, gender, class, and political allegiance. Of course, those differences raise difficult political issues in South Africa, as they do elsewhere. Activists speak of their close working relations with the women’s movement, but those (generally male) activists do not explicitly describe their activism as informed by feminists. So too, the leadership is at pains to emphasize that the Coalition is anti-racist, but at the same time some activists find counterproductive the interrogation of Coalition politics for its delicate race and gender implications. A delicate balancing act has thus been undertaken to maintain

the unity perceived as necessary for successfully intervening in the constitutional process.

However, as much as it is attempted to maintain some semblance of a balancing act, the reality is that differences still exist. Some of the differences arise among activists themselves, some feminists believing that men know nothing of feminist politics or the situation of women and can, therefore, not write about such issues. Some activists believe that only someone from their own community can do research on and voice the concerns of the community, by being a part of the community itself. South Africa is exceptionally dynamic and multi-layered; therefore, the lived experiences of citizens differ immensely. It follows, then, that it is important for activists to have an understanding of the lived reality of the very people they are not only advocating for, but also representing. For example, as Stychin (1996:466) notes, “the prevalence of violence in South African society cannot be divorced from homophobic violence, particularly in the former townships. A middle-class, white, male constituency are largely shielded from these issues”.

1.3) Cultural Acceptability: Perceptions of Homosexuality as (un)African

In *African Sexualities: a Reader*, Sylvia Tamale (2011:1) suggests that the use of the term “African sexualities” is capable of invoking various questions with regard to the construction of an African identity, such as questions pertaining to: What is sexuality? Who qualifies as being African? What qualifies as African? Who or what determines what does or does not qualify as African sexualities? According to Tamale (2011:2):

[T]he notion of a homogenous, unchanging sexuality for all Africans is out of touch not only with the realities of lives, experiences, identities and relationships but also with current activism and scholarship... Because these phenomena are at play elsewhere in the world, and because of the various historical links that connect Africa to the rest of humankind, some theoretical and conceptual approaches that have informed sexualities studies elsewhere have relevance to the way writers think through questions of African sexualities.

As Tamale (2011:3) notes, the majority of studies based on sexuality, and that are published about Africa, have been written by Western scholars, and most of the literature about cultures and civilizations has been written from and based upon a Eurocentric perspective. Consequentially, these scholars have not fully experienced what it is like to live in South Africa and how, for various socio-political and cultural reasons, it is not always possible for

individuals to come out of the closet. Awino Okech (2013:10) states that the onslaught of violence against those men and women who perform their sexuality differently, that is, against normative heterosexuality³⁸, has also managed to re-craft discourses on autonomy, and sexual orientation (as an advocacy subject) and as such has the potential to take control over the struggle. As Okech (2013:23) notes, the dictum of the personal within the political, which seeks to dismantle the public/private dichotomy, is sequentially followed by placing same-sex relationships within the private domain as a space which should not be 'regulated', and thus the performance of such relationships is limited only to the 'private' domain and prohibited from entering the 'public' domain by seemingly adopting some kind of a 'don't ask, don't tell' approach. Thus, attempting to render same-sex relationships invisible by confining them to the 'private' domain, whilst heterosexuality is able to enter the 'public' domain, illustrates effectively how heterosexuality serves not only as a means of reinforcing various hierarchies in sexualities, but also as a means of maintaining patriarchal societal order, through church, family and state.

Lyn Ossome (2013:34) notes that nationalist, ethnic and morally-bound hegemonies employ a variety of tactics, which are aimed at both displacing and rendering invisible the active voices of various non-conforming groups. Ossome (2013:34) further states that, in Africa, such tactics have been included within the widespread use of alienating myths, discrimination and violence. However, the increasing growth of activism, research and art has managed to show comprehensively the falseness of the 'fact' that Africans are exclusively heterosexual. The avoidance of research and the onset of heterosexual panic result in the insistent and recurring refrain that there is no homosexuality in Africa. Often this refrain is accompanied by an insidious accusation that homosexuality "is a 'western perversion' imposed upon or adopted by African populations" (Ossome 2013:35). Ossome (2013:35) notes that this outlook regarding queerness stems, in part, from "an exclusionary heterosexual citizenship that ignores the fact that queer represents resistance to anything that is socially defined as normal". In this sense, then, queer can exclude a number of lesbian and gay practices that have "a 'normative perspective'", which is an exceedingly prejudicial viewpoint that results in and "alienates from the mainstream and invisibilises legitimate claims of economic and political inclusion and diversity by queer groups" (Ossome 2013:35). Ossome (2013:36)

³⁸ 'Normative heterosexuality' or 'heteronormative' is used to refer to various structures of understandings, institutions and practical orientations that make heterosexuality appear as a privileged sexuality. Heteronormative does not refer to that which is 'normal', but rather refers to what is *perceived* to be 'normal'.

suggests that it is a necessity to destabilise myths surrounding homosexuality in Africa and acknowledges that class struggles represent one of the sites in which myths regarding homosexuality are entrenched and reproduced. The very perpetuation of homogenising notions appears to subsume all homosexual and transgender people into one contentious and alienating category.

The works of Muholi and Mlangeni form a subversive resistance against myths surrounding homosexuality in Africa and homogenised notions pertaining to gay, lesbian and transgender people. Clearly, the myth about homosexuality being elitist is, in itself, a “prejudicial and racially manipulated classification” (Ossome 2013:36), because it seeks to disassociate sexual identity from all of its intersections with gender, racial and ethnic subjectivities, and “in so doing essentially diminishes the range of issues upon which sexual minority groups might ground their struggles” (Ossome 2013:36). The effect of the myth is to deny homosexual and transgender persons, especially those who are poor, the necessary support and solidarity of many other constituencies that are similarly economically marginalised, for example, the extent of lesbians’ vulnerabilities as women, or as ethnic minorities, or as wage workers – these aspects may be concealed under homogenising discourses of elitism (Ossome 2013:36). Ossome (2013:39) states that sexual minority groups become remarkably vulnerable to scapegoating and witch-hunting during times of economic hardship. When it comes down to economics and fundamentalism, sexuality is arguably highly contentious, since at the heart of this lies the principle of choice, which can in turn be based upon the principle of freedom (Ossome 2013:39). Ossome (2013: 39–40) states that:

[At] the nexus between freedom and choice is presumed the ability of individuals to access, express and enjoy rights, the most basic ones relating to issues of survival. This ability is at present circumscribed for many working class populations in Africa, disenfranchised by neo-liberal economic policies. One outcome of this state of affairs is increasing cultural and religious fundamentalism that manifests in exclusion, false compartmentalisation, separation and silencing of oppression. For LGBTI groups this silencing has been subsumed within the classical struggle between progressive social movements and nationalist hegemonies, especially conservative political parties and ruling elites, to control popular support and retain power in the face of global economic and social changes. Social movements exist primarily as a counterweight to bureaucratic excesses: as an alternative voice they appeal to a conscious majority that is marginalised economically, politically, socially and culturally by dominant individuals, institutions and processes within society.

The very use of silencing within research of LGBT struggles is an approach which appears often, although this is not at all surprising. It is evident that a dichotomy exists – the

dichotomy of silencing and of speaking out. Furthermore, Osome refers to the ‘principle of freedom’, yet freedom of expression is often ignored as forming part of said principle. The work titled *East Rand Girls* (Fig. 1.5) (2011) from the series *Black men in a dress* by Mlangeni ‘speaks’ of freedom of expression. The black and white image shows three participants in a park. One participant is sitting on a spiral slide while another leans against the slide. The third individual leans gently against his friend. Each person in the image expresses his individual style and gender expression in his own way. Such an expression forms part of an individual’s identity and, since their style does not conform to gender and societal norms, they are at risk of being silenced and their style is at risk of being policed. The individual who is seated wears a wig and jacket that would be termed as ‘feminine’, while another individual wears a skirt and leggings, which are items also associated with femininity. However, the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity is both problematic and repressive. Yet, Mlangeni and Muholi avoid the dichotomy of silencing and speaking out by representing such individuals who do not conform to the status quo, which exists primarily because of social conditioning. It is imperative, then, to break the culture of silencing.

In *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, Michel Foucault (1978:27) notes that silence in itself, that is, things that a person refuses to say, or what is forbidden to name, the discretion required between different speakers, is less “the absolute limit of discourse” than “an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies”. In this instance, there is no separation between what a person does not say and what a person says; instead a determination should be made regarding the different ways of “not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case” (Foucault 1978:27). As Foucault (1978:27) notes, “there is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourse”. Thus, silencing is an effective means of policing boundaries – oppression and repression not only serve as a sentence to disappear, but they also serve as an injunction to silence (Foucault 1978:4).

It is through imposed silence that censorship, in an informal capacity, occurs: for silencing the voices of many marginalised groups of people, in this specific case LGBT persons and artists such as Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni, causes their voices, their message, and their truth to become silenced – censored. However, it is clear from the photographic works

produced by Muholi and Mlangeni that these artists cannot be silenced, and it is through their visual imagery that they create a voice that is not silenced; thus, it becomes a form of activism that is able to transcend boundaries. Foucault (1978:6) states that, in deliberately transcending such boundaries, “a person who holds forth such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom”. Arguably, both Muholi and Mlangeni do exactly just that – the Bill of Rights might include sexual orientation as something that is not only a human right but something which is guaranteed protection; however, given the political, cultural, social and religious climate in South Africa, it becomes apparent that, although on paper the constitution appears to be something that is not only progressive but that also appears to be a step toward freedom, the reality is that, in South Africa today, it still seems that this inclusion is nothing but another piece of paper.



Fig. 1.5 Sabelo Mlangeni, *East Rand Girls* (2011), Hand-printed silver gelatin print, 36 x 36cm. Source: http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/mlangeni/east_rand.html

Political leaders in many African countries are not exempt, and have made homophobic comments, for example, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and the South African

president, Jacob Zuma³⁹. How can it be expected, then, that queer youth remain proud of their identity and citizenship if their country's president does not recognise or accept such a fundamental part of themselves? How can it be expected, then, that these youths do not feel a sense of alienation, of exclusion and even of shame? In primary school, children would say, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me" – well, words have an immense psychological impact and, contrary to what this popular nursery rhyme may say, words do hurt and can have a lasting impact on an individual. This is why hate speech is regarded as a form of abuse – as a form of violence. The psychological scars may not always be visible, but they do exist. Moreover, hate speech can instil fear, which effectively silences an individual. This fear is instilled especially when a person is intimidated and/or threatened, and since, by law, law enforcers are unable to do anything until a person is attacked or hurt physically, when it comes down to hate speech, it becomes a 'it is my word against yours' situation, which is devoid of any tangible evidence. However, living with this kind of fear can be extremely crippling, and one can certainly argue that it profoundly impacts a person's quality of life.

The photography of Muholi and Mlangeni is profoundly important in its capacity of creating visibility in order to reach adolescents who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, in order to illustrate that they need not be afraid, because they are not alone, and that there is nothing 'queer' about them. Ossome (2013:40–41) states that it is not surprising that:

[At] a time when Africa and Africans are assailed from scores of media outlets with the 'un-Africanness' of homosexuality, a highly publicised claim sanctioned and agitated through apathetic states, the most visible reaction from social movements has been weak rejoinders in the same politicised breath, and in the process of submerging core issues of economic hardship, livelihoods and survival around which these polarising discourses are structured. Simply put, states and societies need social movements to self-identify from among themselves diversionary sacrificial lambs, and Africa has witnessed a number in the past: Asians in Idi Amin's Uganda, foreigners in South Africa, albinos in Tanzania, witches in Kenya, Mozambique,

³⁹ President Robert Mugabe has made various homophobic speeches and uttered various homophobic slurs over the years. Mugabe once stated that homosexuals are worse than pigs and dogs since pigs and dogs know that there are males and females.

Buchanan, R. 2015. *Zimbabwe's leader criticised Western nations' attempts to 'proscribe new rights contrary to our values, norms, traditions and beliefs'*, [Online], Available:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/robert-mugabe-tells-un-general-assembly-we-are-not-gays-a6671316.html> .

Similarly, president Jacob Zuma has made various homophobic commentaries over the years, such as the comments he made during a Heritage Day speech in 2006. Zuma stated that "same-sex marriage is a disgrace to the nation and to God" and added that "when I was growing up, unqingili (homosexuals) could not stand in front of me".

Unknown. 2006. *Zuma Apologises*, [Online], Available: <http://mambaonline.com/2006/09/28/zuma-apologises/>

Tanzania and Uganda. Paradoxically, despite the seeming appearance of a backlash, queer activism is at present experiencing a resurgent push on the continent: the visibility created by public awareness and discussions carried in the media, debates within academia and, for the general public, curiosity around the subject are resources that can once again be harnessed towards the aims of social and economic justice.

The photographic works of Muholi and Mlangeni also form a part of “the visibility created by public awareness”, and can indeed be “harnessed towards aims of social and economic justice” (Ossome 2013:40–41). Moreover, despite the research conducted and evidence presented of examples and instances of homosexuality in pre-colonial Africa, this evidence remains blatantly disregarded, and it is still perceived that homosexuality is ‘un-African’. However, it is through the visual archive of the works produced by Muholi and Mlangeni that it becomes apparent through extensive documentation that Africans can be homosexual, thus effectively providing evidence to all those who believe that homosexuality is ‘un-African’. Their works show LGBT persons for who they are – no different, apart from their sexual orientation, from heterosexuals – but, more importantly, these works show a very human side to people – that is, expression of self, expression of love toward another person, vulnerabilities and insecurities, as well as pride of self. In addition, although not evident, if you look closely – especially at the visual archive produced by Muholi of rape survivors and survivors of hate crimes – these works show immense bravery and an unwavering notion of never giving up. Many stereotypes exist surrounding black lives and homosexuality; often these stereotypes influence society, usually negatively, and dominant ideologies are still used as a means of oppressing various marginalised groups of people.

1.4) Ideology, Colonial Discourse and Stereotypes

According to Louis Althusser⁴⁰ (1999:317), “ideology is a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence”. Often, ideology is believed to be a fixed entity. One of the most important features within colonial discourse is its very dependence on the concept of “fixity” “in the ideological construction of otherness” (Bhabha 1999:370). Homi Bhabha⁴¹ (1999:370) explains that fixity, “as a sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of

⁴⁰ Louis Althusser (1918–1990) was a French Marxist philosopher. He is widely known as a theorist of ideology, and his own ideology draws on the ideologies of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci.

⁴¹ Homi Bhabha is the director of the Humanities Center at Harvard University and the Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of English and American Literature and Language. Bhabha is one of the most influential figures in the development of key concepts such as difference and ambivalence.

representation” because “it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition”. Similarly, the stereotype, which is also a major discursive strategy, is a form of identification and knowledge “that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated – as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved” (Bhabha 1999:370). Discourse remains something that cannot ever really be proved since it forms a part of a process of ambivalence, which is central to the stereotype (Bhabha 1999:370). Bhabha (1999:370) explains that ambivalence gives colonial stereotypes their currency by ensuring that it informs both its strategies of marginalisation and individuation, and its respectability in changing discursive and historical conjunctures. Bhabha (1999:370) states that the “effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed”. The recognition of the stereotype as an ambivalent mode of power and knowledge demands a theoretical framework, and a political response that is capable of challenging deterministic modes that envisage the relationship between politics and discourse, and is also capable of questioning moralistic and dogmatic positions on “the meaning of oppression and discrimination” (Bhabha 1999:370).

Bhabha (1999:370) suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the identification of images – as positive or negative – to a process of understanding. This is a process which seeks to understand the processes of subjectification, which is made possible and plausible through stereotypical discourse. Bhabha (1990:370) states that judging an image based upon its prior political normativity does not displace it: instead, it becomes dismissed. However, this is only possible through an engagement with the effectivity of stereotypical discourse, including the repertoires of positions of resistance and power, and of dependence and domination, that construct the colonial subject (both colonised and coloniser). It is then, and only then, that it becomes possible to understand “the ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse – the ‘otherness’ which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity” (Bhabha 1999:370). In this instance, the construction of the colonial subject within discourse, including the exercise of power through colonial discourse, then, demands an articulation of “forms of difference”, that is, racial and sexual (Bhabha 1999:370). Bhabha (1999:370) believes that this articulation is crucial in that the body is inscribed in the “economy of pleasure and desire” and the economy of “discourse, domination and power”. Thus, colonial discourse is a mechanism that manages

to turn on both disavowal and recognition of racial/historical/cultural differences, since its predominant strategic function is to create spaces for “subject peoples” (Bhabha 1999:371). In other words, “subject peoples” designates groups of people that are positioned socially, culturally, politically and geographically outside of hegemonic power structures of patriarchy and colonialism. In this instance, Bhabha refers to social relations of power. This is achieved by identifying and defining social groups that are oppressed by social relations of power, such as racial minorities; however, social groups are capable of subverting notions of hegemonic power. The work of Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni contests and subverts such hegemonic power structures. Social groups documented by these artists denote people who are oppressed and located at the margins of society, and who struggle daily against hegemonic globalisation. This is because heteronormative, patriarchal discourse is produced and reinforced by the West in order to maintain dominance⁴². This is achieved through the construction of the ‘other’, that is, social groups located at the margins of society due to their perceived deviance from societal norms. Colonial discourse is achieved through the production of knowledges in which surveillance is exercised, as well as the complex form of unpleasure/pleasure that is incited (Bhabha 1999:371). Through its production of knowledge of colonised and coloniser, colonial discourse seeks authorisation and, although this production of knowledge is stereotypical, it is antithetically evaluated (Bhabha 1999:371). Therefore, the objective of colonial discourse is the interpretation of the colonised as “a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (Bhabha 1999:371). However, despite the power play within colonial discourse, as well as the shifting personalities of its subjects, what Bhabha is referring to is the governmentality which marks out a “subject nation”; this “subject nation” then directs, appropriates and dominates its various spheres of activity (Bhabha 1999:371). Thus, according to Bhabha (1999:371), there is a ‘play’ within the colonial that is a crucial component in its exercise of power, and colonial discourse “produces the colonised as a fixed reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible”. Bhabha (1999:371) notes that this resembles a form of narrative in which the circulation of subjects and signs and productivity are “bound in a reformed and recognisable

⁴² For more information on discourse and power, see Stuart Hall.

totality” which employs “a system of representation, a regime of truth that is structurally similar to Realism”⁴³.

Yet, for Bhabha (1999:373), it is important to read stereotypes with regard to fetishism⁴⁴, which is found within colonial discourse. It is for this reason that Bhabha (1999:373) poses the following questions:

What is this other scene of colonial discourse played out around the ‘medium category’? What is this theory of encapsulation or fixation, which moves between the recognition of cultural and racial difference and its disavowal, by affixing the unfamiliar to something established, in a form that is repetitious and vacillates between delight and fear? Is it not analogous to the Freudian fable of fetishism (and disavowal) that circulates within the discourse of colonial power, requiring the articulation of modes of differentiation – sexual and racial – as well as different modes of discourse – psychoanalytic and historical?

Thus, the myth of this historical origination, that of cultural priority and racial purity, is produced in relation to that of colonial stereotypes, and functions as a means to “normalise” the multiple beliefs, including split subjects that constitute colonial discourse serving as a consequence of its very process of disavowal (Bhabha 1999:373). According to Bhabha (1999:373), fetishism functions both as a reactivation of the original fantasy (sexual difference and anxiety of castration) and a normalisation of that very difference and disturbance – the fetish-object as substitute for the mother’s penis. Moreover, it is within the method of colonial power – that is, the discourses of race and sexuality – that it relates in a process of “functional overdetermination, ‘because each effect ... enters into resonance of contradiction with the others and thereby calls for a readjustment or a re-working of the heterogeneous elements that surface at various points’”. As Bhabha (1999:374) notes, it is the recognition of sexual difference, then, that becomes the pre-condition for the circulation of the chain of both presence and absence within the realm of the symbolic. The recognition of

⁴³ As a means of intervening within that system of representation, Edward Said proposed a semiotic of “Orientalist” power. This was achieved through examining various European discourses that constitute “the Orient” as a unified racial, political, geographical and cultural zone of the world (Bhabha (1999:371). Orientalism is regarded as a discursive formation by Said, who believed that the dominance of the West over the East was justified in terms of its supposedly innate superiority. However, I do not believe that it can be justified for any reason.

⁴⁴ Broadly speaking within the psychoanalytic theory of sexual perversion, fetishism is defined as any activity that deviates from heterosexual intercourse. A fetish is described as being a non-sexual part of the body or an object which highly cathected (cathexis) with libido. As described by Sigmund Freud, a fetish is a substitute for the mother’s penis that the little boy once believed in (1927a). It is the realisation that the mother does in fact not possess a penis that gives rise to the child’s “sexual theory” (Freud 1980s) that she had once possessed one and has since been deprived of one, which adds to the child’s fear that he may too be castrated. Therefore, the fetish-object is both a means of denying the existence of sexual difference, whilst remaining a defence against the fear of castration. The term was first coined by the French psychologist Alfred Binet (1857–1911); see Macey 2000:126.

sexual difference becomes disavowed by the very fixation on an object that has the power to mask that difference whilst restoring its original presence (Bhabha 1999:374). Therefore, the fetish object, within discourse, represents a simultaneous play between metaphor as substitution and metonymy (Bhabha 1999:374).

Bhabha (1999:374) points out a very important element, which is that either the stereotype or the fetish can give access to an 'identity', that is, an identity which is primarily predicated "as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence", in order to form part of multiple and contradictory beliefs "in its recognition and disavowal of it". Therefore, according to Bhabha (1999:374), "conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence, has a fundamental significance for colonial discourse" and a subject's desire for "a pure origin" is constantly threatened by its division since the "subject must be gendered to be engendered, to be spoken". The notion of an identity which is predicated on mastery and pleasure as well as on anxiety and defence, because of the contradictory recognition of difference and the disavowal of it, is a notion that many people can relate to, especially in authoritative countries.

I believe that homosexuals undeniably do have an element of anxiety in their lives – fear of discrimination – and yet some queer folk still make themselves visible, despite anxiety and personal fears, in order to reach out toward the community in their various modes of activism, such as, for example, Zanele Muholi and her work in visual activism. In this instance, social groups that have been silenced can be heard through their political actions, such as through visual activism. In other words, visual activism, as seen in the work of Muholi, generates or catalyses socio-cultural and political movements that have the capacity and potential to contest hegemonic power structures. Moreover, subverting hegemonic structures can dismantle social constructions of the 'other' in order to restore the human dignity of such social groups that are lost through multiple structures of dominance. As Ziauddin Sader (2008:vii) notes, "dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization" since "it is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing". In other words, "it is about being true to one's Self" (Sader 2008:vii). For example, Muholi and Mlangeni remain true not only explicitly to their 'Self'; they also remain true to the selves of the people who they document and in their subjugation of racial and gender/sexual stereotypes.

Thus, one can come to find that the stereotype becomes the primary point of subjectification within colonial discourse, for both colonised and coloniser, in which a similar scene of defence and fantasy exists – that is, the desire for an originality, which, again, becomes threatened by differences of colour, culture and race (Bhabha 1999:374). Bhabha (1999:374) refers to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*⁴⁵, since, here, disavowal of difference “turns the colonial subject into a misfit – a grotesque mimicry or ‘doubling’ that threatens to split the soul and whole, undifferentiated skin of the ego”. Therefore, the stereotype is a simplification because “it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (that the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations” and not because it is a simplification of a false representation of any one given reality (Bhabha 1999:374).

Stuart Hall (1997:231) notes that other dimensions can be added into the representation of “difference”, which includes race, sexuality, gender, ethnicity and colour. ‘Difference’, here, refers to the ways in which one makes sense of things, such as through visual activism, and is, therefore, central to understanding. It becomes imperative, then, to address social conventions in relation to ‘difference’. In other words, labelling or classification is a cultural product, which purports to emphasise ‘difference’; however, classifications are social conventions which are used to control and silence various social groups. In this sense, classifications should be challenged politically, socially and culturally in order to be seen and to deconstruct the social construction of ‘difference’, and herein lies the importance of social transformation.

Bhabha (1999:375) alludes to the problematic of seeing/being seen by suggesting that, in order for the colonial subject to be conceivable as the effect of a power that is productive, both “pleasurable” and disciplinary, it must be seen that surveillance of colonial power functions in relation to the scopic drive. The scopic drive is the drive that represents pleasure in “seeing”, “which has to look as its object of desire, is related both to the myth of origins, the primal scene, and the problematic of fetishism and locates the surveyed object within the

⁴⁵ Franz Fanon (1925–1961) was a revolutionary activist and psychiatrist (Macey 2000:121). Fanon supported decolonisation after the Second World War by introducing his liberatory theories in many of his published works such as *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. His writings remain extremely influential today. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p.79. This is Fanon's first book (1952; and it should be noted that the published English translation can be very unreliable), and serves as an important study of the cultural and psychological alienation induced by colonialism, and of the psychology of racism – the book draws on a wide range of authorities, such as Adler, Lacan and Sartre (Macey 2000:121).

‘imaginary’ relation” (Bhabha 1999:375). For its effectivity, like voyeurism, surveillance must depend upon “the active consent which is its real or mythical correlate (but always real as myth) and establishes in the scopic space the illusion of the object relation” (Bhabha 1999:375).

Bhabha (1999:375) states that “the imaginary is the transformation that takes place in the subject at the formative mirror phase, when it assumes a discrete image which allows it to postulate a series of equivalences, samenesses, identities, between the objects of the surrounding world”. However, Bhabha (1999:375) notes that “this positioning is itself problematic, for the subject finds or recognises itself through an image which is simultaneously alienating and hence potentially confrontational”, and that “this is the basis of the Imaginary – narcissism and aggressivity”. It is these different forms of “identification” “that constitute the dominant strategy of colonial power exercise in relation to the stereotype which, as a form of multiple and contradictory belief, gives knowledge of difference and simultaneously disavows or masks it” (Bhabha 1999:375). Thus, just “like the mirror phase ‘the fullness’ of the stereotype – its image as identity – is always threatened by ‘lack’” (Bhabha 1999:375). Therefore, the construction of colonial discourse consists of a complex articulation of the tropes of fetishism, metonymy and metaphor, as well as including the forms of aggressive and narcissistic identification available to the Imaginary (Bhabha 1999:375). However, it is important to acknowledge a few of the significant differences between the general theory of fetishism⁴⁶ and its uses for an understanding of racist discourses (Bhabha 1999:376). Bhabha (1999:376) states that the fetish of colonial discourse differs from the sexual fetish. In this instance, skin functions as the key signifier of racial and cultural difference in the stereotype, which is “the most visible of fetishes” because it is “recognised as ‘common knowledge’ in a range of cultural, political, historical discourses and plays a public part in the racial drama that is enacted every day in colonial societies”. Therefore, it may be said that the “sexual fetish is closely likened to the ‘good object’; it is the prop that makes the whole object desirable and lovable, facilitates colonial relations, and sets up a discursive form of racial and cultural opposition in terms of which colonial power is exercised” (Bhabha 1999:377). Thus, the role of fetishistic identification is dependent upon the construction of discriminatory knowledges, which, in turn, depend on the “presence of difference” (Bhabha 1999:377). Moreover, it “is to provide a process of splitting and multiple-contradictory belief at the point of enunciation and subjectification”, and “it is this

⁴⁶ See Freud (1999), “Fetishism”, p. 357. Also see, Kobena Mercer (1986), “Reading Racial Fetishism”.

crucial splitting of the ego which is presented in Fanon's description of the construction of the colonial subject as effect of stereotypical discourse" (Bhabha 1999:377). Thus, "the subject primordially fixed and yet triply split between the incongruent knowledges of body, race, and ancestors" is "assailed by the stereotype, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racist epidermal schema" (Bhabha 1999:377).

It is through this very notion of splitting and multiple beliefs that Bhabha believes that it can become easier to see the bind of knowledge and fantasy, pleasure and power that is able to inform the particular regime of visibility which is deployed within colonial discourse (1999:377). Yet, "the visibility of the colonial/racial other is at once a point of identity ('Look a Negro') and at the same time a problem for the 'imaginary' points of identity and origin – such as Black and White – and is disturbed by the representation of splitting in the discourse" (Bhabha 1999:377). According to Bhabha (1999:377),

In the scopic drive there is always the threatened return of the look; in the identification of the imaginary relation there is always the alienating other (or mirror) which crucially return its image to the subject; and in that form of substitution and fixation that is fetishism there is always the trace of loss, absence. To put it succinctly, the recognition and disavowal of 'difference' is always disturbed by the question of its re-presentation or construction. The stereotype is in fact an 'impossible' object.

Thus, the stereotype is not setting up a false image, which can become the scapegoat of discriminatory practices; instead it is an ambivalent text consisting of introjection and projection, metonymic and metaphoric strategies (Bhabha 1999:377). Moreover, the chain of stereotypical signification is mixed and split, perverse and polymorphous – creating an articulation of multiple beliefs (Bhabha 1999:377).

Stereotypes play a significant role in the work of Zanele Muholi, since her work aims to subvert stereotypical concepts related to race, sexuality and gender. Lynda Nead (1992) and Judith Butler (1990; 1993) refer to 'unrepresentable borders'; similarly, Zanele Muholi refers to the means in which 'the unspeakable' (such as the fetishised 'other'), can enter representation. This is achieved by the various subject matters Muholi explores within her photographic archive. According to Kylie Thomas⁴⁷ (2015), Muholi's work is:

... personal work and deeply felt and what she makes visible in much of her work is that which is often silenced and repressed. She has made work representing her own experience of painful menstruation that both exposes her own pain, inside and out, and also brings into the light what is often made shameful and what young women are

⁴⁷ Interview with Kylie Thomas, 19 November 2015, e-mail.

often taught not to speak about. Muholi also engages with issues of sexual violence and rape, aspects of our society people often prefer not to look upon or think about. One of the ways she brings the unrepresentable into representation and finds ways to prevent viewers from immediately turning away or dismissing what she is portraying is by what Ross Chambers has termed 'genre hijacking', where a writer or artist draws upon but also subverts conventions and takes their reader or viewer by surprise. Muholi also achieves this by showing the everyday intimacies of queer lives.

Kylie Thomas (2013:366) believes that the term 'genre hijacking' is useful in its capacity to use established generic conventions in order to "speak what culture has deemed unspeakable". In this instance, the 'unspeakable' refers to Muholi's work in South Africa, a country which is largely still homophobic and transphobic, and her representations of lesbian desire and loss (Thomas 2013:366).

Arguably, it is imperative to explore the notion of colonial discourse before delving into the work of the South African photographers Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni, since colonial discourse certainly has had a major role in the production of their works, as well as their chosen subject matters. It is imperative to explore stereotypes and ideology because of their profound effect on society and societal perceptions with regard to various groups of people, especially the marginalised and misunderstood, such as members of the LGBT community. The only means of working towards social transformation is to explore the injustices which have occurred, and still occur on a daily basis, before any kind of hypothesis can be presented as a counter-attack. It is also essential as a means of providing representations, in the form of documentary photography, as a means of fighting stigma and contemporary representations of race, sexuality and gender, which are often stereotypical. It is for this reason that it is so important for activists and artists to know the history of whichever social struggle they are involved in, in order to effectively create a dialogue informed by facts and theories that are able to support their aims.

1.5) Conclusion

Despite the implementation of a new and progressive constitution in 1996 which includes legislative protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in South Africa, the human rights of these individuals are continuously violated. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender South Africans remain targets of homophobic and transphobic violence, discrimination, marginalisation, stigma, prejudice and alienation. Homophobic hate crimes against black lesbians, gay men and transgender men and transgender women, are particularly prevalent in townships. Such violence is perpetuated as a means of maintaining hegemonic

social structures through the oppression of certain social groups, such as racial minorities and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. This violence is compounded by various socio-cultural and political factors, including the inherited legacy of violence, structural inequality and epistemic injustice from the Apartheid regime.

The socio-cultural and political factors noted above pertain to issues and ideas which include cultural appropriation, social conventions and norms, and heteropatriarchy. Each factor (socio-cultural and political) raises a multitude of issues that influence discrimination, prejudice, violence, and oppression against certain social groups, including the construction of myths pertaining to such social groups. These myths are entrenched in a culture of stereotyping, misrecognition, misconceptions and normative conventions. Furthermore, in (South) Africa, these factors directly relate to perceptions with regard to an 'authentic' African identity, that is, the perceived notions that certain ways of being and behaving denote African-ness, while non-conformity is perceived as 'un-African'. These factors consist of the intersectionality of race, class, sexuality and gender in relation to notions pertaining to authenticity, traditionalism, African-ness, discourse and stereotypes. These notions are extensive and cannot, therefore, be analysed within a single chapter. In this instance, Chapter 1, in many ways, provides a discursive departure with regard to the social, cultural and political factors that inform a conception of what is 'un-African'. These notions and conventions will be analysed, re-analysed, re-appropriated, subverted and counter-argued within the chapters that follow. Due to the intersectional nature of oppression, many factors will influence certain notions repeatedly, but in different ways; therefore, issues pertaining to race, class, sexuality and gender will be discussed from the outset of this thesis, and their relation to visual activism, social conventions, cultural appropriation, and homosexuality and transgenderism within a South African context will be explored throughout.

Chapter Two

Queering Boundaries: Arts and Activism

Rape is never mild, never minor, never acceptable. It is not just sex. The cost to survivors who speak out is so significant that it does not make sense to fabricate rape except as an exercise in self-immolation because in a patriarchal society, the dominant response to a human being 'breaking the silence' is disbelief.

- Pumla Gqola (2015:12)

2.1) Introduction

Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni address, re-analyse, re-appropriate and subvert notions pertaining to four different, yet interrelated, notions through their use of visual activism: authenticity; visibility; sexuality and gender; and traditionalism and modernity. All four ideas relate to conceptions of African-ness, that is, what is and what is not regarded as being 'African'. These four themes are pivotal in addressing, assessing and subjugating the current social, cultural and political climate in South Africa. A key focus of Chapter 2 is the role of visual activism in the work of the artists, and how visual activism reveals continued prejudice in South Africa because of the country's history, cultural appropriation and heteropatriarchy.

Furthermore, activism and protests are increasing in South Africa because of the prevalence of violence, epistemic injustice, homophobia, transphobia, hate crimes, gender-based violence, discrimination and prejudice. Student protests from 2015–2016 in South Africa increased dramatically and gained momentum. Although the current wave of student protests started back in 2014, they have only recently reached a level of visibility that has forced the nation to confront institutionalised racism and sexism, discrimination and prejudice on campus, rape on campuses, antiquated language policies, and the need for free higher education⁴⁸. Since more than half of South Africans live in poverty, while 10% statistically⁴⁹ live in extreme poverty, free higher education would afford more opportunities to every South African. This would allow students the opportunity to study without fear of financial

⁴⁸ The "Rhodes must Fall" protests initially started as a protest for the removal of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the central campus of the University of Cape Town (UCT), but these protests later turned into a movement that advocates for decolonised education. Eventually the movement resulted in the "Fees must Fall" protests, which is a movement that advocates for free and decolonised education.

⁴⁹ The statistics of the levels of poverty in South Africa is available on the *Business Tech* website and is available at the following link: <http://businesstech.co.za/news/general/94849/shocking-levels-of-poverty-in-south-africa-revealed/>

exclusion, while persons who would not have been able to afford tuition fees would then be able to receive a higher education. One premise of the call for free higher education is that it would greatly benefit the economy. However, in April 2016, new protests arose on the Rhodes University campus in Grahamstown, which focused on protesting against the number of occurrences of rape on campus, and against rape culture, which purports to defend the violence perpetrated, while blaming the victim/survivor. The objective of the protest at Rhodes University in April 2016 was to create public awareness and visibility regarding the prevalence of rape and rape culture, and to destabilise dominant social structures, such as institutionalised violence and epistemic injustice. Visual activism, through art, media, theatre etc, and socio-political and cultural activism have the same objective – their goal is to change dominant socio-cultural modes of thinking by exposing the devastating effects that preconceived ideas, social conditioning, cultural appropriation, and socio-cultural normativity have on persons who do not conform to such ideas or norms.

2.2) Visual Culture and Contexts of Authenticity

Visual culture⁵⁰, in the 1990s, focused on how people centrally concerned themselves with regard to how “identity, especially gender and sexual identity, was represented in popular culture, and the ways in which artists and filmmakers responded to those representations” (Mirzoeff 2015:289–90). Consequently, as Nicholas Mirzoeff (2015:289) observes, “visual culture practice has gone through several versions in the past twenty-five years and has now converged around visual activism”. In other words, “for many artists, academics and others who see themselves as visual activists, visual culture is a way to create forms of change” due to the fact that visual culture has evolved into “a form of practice that might be called visual thinking” (Mirzoeff 2015:289). Visual thinking, then, is a practice that involves the engagement with visual material by an individual, since it is not something which can simply be studied (Mirzoeff 2015:289).

The South African photographers, Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni, are key examples of individuals who engage with visual material in order to construct a form of visual thinking that reconstructs representation which is concerned with the consequences of socio-cultural problems with regard to homosexuality and transgenderism in South Africa. Muholi, a self-proclaimed ‘visual activist’ and lesbian, primarily uses her photography as a vehicle for her visual activism; however, she uses other media-related platforms, such as her documentary

⁵⁰ See Mirzoeff (2015), *How to See the World*, Afterword, pp. 289–301.

*Enraged by a Picture*⁵¹ and the Wordpress site *Inkanyiso*⁵², in order to further her work in visual activism. Since visual culture is not single-handedly dependent upon imagery, its focus is based on a “modern tendency to picture or visualize existence” (Mirzoeff 1998:6), it would stand to reason that word meanings should be “circulated visually, in addition to orally and textually” (Rogoff 1998:15). Therefore, in order for Muholi to convey information to a larger expanse of individuals, it would be sensible to employ a variety of platforms in order to promote her visual activism, especially since she regards herself to be primarily an activist. Mirzoeff (2015:285) notes that one of the notable features of visual activism is its potential for an improved imagining of the future, and the image is located at the core of this imagining. In this sense, the work of Muholi and Mlangeni not only provides representations of the lived reality of LGBT persons, but additionally provides an imagining of change, and implements and presents a re-imagining of the current socio-political and cultural situation in South Africa. The potency of visual activism, then, originates from its ability to visualise, re-imagine, and represent the world differently by subverting antiquated heteropatriarchal⁵³ concepts that have resulted in myths, stereotypes, misrepresentation, misrecognition and under-representation with regard to homosexuality, transgenderism, race, class, sex and gender. The aforementioned is particularly imperative regarding the construction of binarism⁵⁴, such as, visible/invisible, traditional/modern, masculine/feminine, and concepts

⁵¹ *Enraged by a Picture* is a documentary produced in 2005. The documentary, directed by Zanele Muholi, captures the hatred, abuse and stigmatisation faced by many persons who are black and lesbian by providing a window into their daily lives. The documentary is available at the following link: <http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=g1l0p8-fWvQ>. The documentary will be discussed in more detail at a later stage.

⁵² *Inkanyiso* is an online platform which aims to document issues pertaining to gender-based violence and LGBT activism in South Africa. The site provides a much-needed and critical resource for members of the LGBT community in South Africa and countries outside of South Africa. *Inkanyiso* contains information pertaining to news reports, such as hate crimes and other reports relevant to LGBT persons, and contains poetry, personal stories, testimonials and information regarding exhibitions that may be of interest to feminists and LGBT activists. Members of the non-governmental organisation *Inkanyiso*, which was founded by Zanele Muholi, run the site. *Inkanyiso* offers an important space for LGBT persons to connect, develop, and remain informed regarding current issues and to share personal experiences that may have a cathartic effect on each individual who shares her personal experiences. *Inkanyiso* can be found at the following web address: <http://www.inkanyiso.org>

⁵³ Arguably, not all African cultures are heteropatriarchal; however, the effects of heteropatriarchy are widespread and can, therefore, not be overlooked.

⁵⁴ The key problem with the construction of binarism is its implementation of the oppositional marked and unmarked terms; these are the dominant means of representing ‘difference’, that is, the ‘other’, as well as its justification of subordinating ‘difference’ in society. In contrast to the hierarchical construction of binarism, both Muholi and Mlangeni frame their subjects in their photographic archives in order to subjugate ‘difference’.

pertaining to authenticity/inauthenticity, and African/un-African, which are recurring themes addressed in the photography of the work of Mlangeni and Muholi.

These themes are imperative, because Muholi's work aims to make "visible the tension between freedoms offered by the South African constitution" and "the realities of homophobic violence encountered by LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and intersex) people everyday" (Mirzoeff 2015:290). In other words, the prevalence of such themes is consequential in addressing and challenging the socio-political and cultural climate in South Africa. Muholi examines these themes in four ways. First, the polarisation of visibility and invisibility directly relates to representation, since there has been a definite lack in representation of people who are black gay, lesbian or transgender. It is of the utmost importance to represent such persons in order to demand their right to be seen, as well as the acknowledgement of their existence. Secondly, the claim of African-ness and what it means to be 'African' is immensely multifaceted and relates to notions regarding authenticity. In other words, notions of authenticity refer to claims regarding an 'authentic' African identity, which ostensibly does not include homosexuality and transgenderism. Thirdly, the juxtaposition of traditional and modern further complicates the positionality of a perceived African identity in a changing global climate. Lastly, the construction of sex and gender roles relates to the three points noted above in a multitude of ways that have a direct impact on people who are black and identify as gay, lesbian or transgender, and on the violence they experience.

2.3) Emerging Queer Voices in Representation

Gender diversity and same-sex sexuality in Africa have been a widely debated and contested issue. LGBT visibility in Africa has strengthened and gained momentum over the years as a consequence of globalisation, and a greater availability and access to information, such as from *Inkanyiso* for example. However, that is not to say that representations have accurately (if at all) portrayed the lived reality of LGBT persons in Africa. As a result, visual activism emerged as a means of counteracting misrepresentations, misconceptions, misrecognition and stereotypical notions pertaining to homosexuality and transgenderism. Furthermore, as Muholi's work attests, legal protection for "people of all sexual orientations exist[s] in theory but is ineffective day-to-day in the townships" (Mirzoeff 2015:290). Therefore, visual activism can be regarded as an emerging 'voice' that seeks to dispel myths and

misrepresentation in order to subvert heteropatriarchal socio-political systems and institutionalised racism, and to effectively address epistemic injustices.

Mirzoeff (2015:290–91) suggests that Muholi’s work in visual activism raises questions that are of global importance, since her work questions what it means to be seen as a citizen in a global era, and he further questions who represents black LGBT South Africans at both national and international levels within globalised society. Consequentially, this raises the question of how LGBT South Africans can represent themselves politically and visually when the state is incapable of upholding its own promises with actions (Mirzoeff 2015:291).

Muholi, then, uses the idea of ‘they do not represent us’ (Mirzoeff 2015:292) in order to represent herself and her community both politically and visually in response to heteropatriarchy, institutionalised racism and epistemic injustices faced by persons who are black and gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. The idea that ‘they do not represent us’ and the idea to ‘be the change you want to see’ appears to converge in the visual activism of Muholi. In other words, it is imperative to represent yourself, when there is a lack of representation, in order to change the world. It is not sufficient to be ‘seen’, since being ‘seen’ and being ‘understood’ and ‘accepted’ are entirely different concepts. The polarisation of visible and invisible, then, relates to being ‘seen’, that is, the visible; however, injustices perpetrated against LGBT persons essentially remain out of sight, that is, the invisible. Therefore, visual activism plays a vital role in bringing epistemic injustices into public view by making hate crimes visible to the public and, at the same time, it promotes awareness of the lived reality of persons who are black and gay, lesbian or transgender living in South Africa in order to promote social transformation. Additionally, visibility has, for the most part, been associated with heteropatriarchy – in other words, visibility has always been on the side of the white heterosexual male – whereas invisibility has always been on the side of minority groups.

Muholi and Mlangeni subvert the aforementioned conception of the polarisation of visibility and invisibility precisely because they make the invisible visible⁵⁵, in relation to individuals situated socio-politically and culturally at the margins of representation. As Mirzoeff (2015:297–98) observes:

Visual activism is the interaction of pixels and actions to make change. Pixels are the visible result of everything produced by a computer, from words created by a word

⁵⁵ See Lynda Nead.

processor to all forms of image, sound and video. Actions are things we do with those cultural forms to make changes, small or large, from a direct political action to a performance – whether in everyday life or in a theatre – a conversation or a work of art. Once we have learned how to see the world, we have taken only one of the required steps. The point is to change it.

One key example of the way in which Muholi incorporates all of the aspects of visual activism noted by Mirzoeff above, such as, pixels, words, images, sound and video, is in her documentary *Enraged by a Picture*. The documentary was produced for the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in South Africa, and for Out in Africa, in 2005. The documentary opens by showing viewers at the exhibition titled *Worlds beyond Worlds* (18–25 January 2005), which is described as “a Visual Arts Platform of Contemporary Women’s Art in Africa” and included the works of the following artists: Bongikile Bengu, Gabrielle le Roux, Ingrid Masondo, Zanele Muholi, Ntsoaki Molefe, Cynthia Nair, Gabi Ngcobo, Payne Phalane and Berni Searle. Accompanying images of the viewers in the gallery space and images of newspaper articles about Zanele Muholi’s work is narration provided by Muholi. She explains that “for the past three years I’ve been capturing images of black lesbian lives, exploring our sexualities” and continues by stating that “it doesn’t matter whether the viewer is black or white, it actually always is the same”. Muholi states that she always wonders what the response would be if she were to show her works on the streets. On a more personal level, she says that she “wasn’t prepared for the effects that my photographs would have on people”; that she “only wanted to share with the viewers that there is more to lesbianism than what normally meets the eye – our lives, our relationships, our struggle”; and that “all around us there’s still violence, there’s still prejudice”. Muholi invited the audience who attended her exhibitions to write down comments regarding their thoughts and reactions to her images, and some of the commentary received attests to the ongoing violence and prejudice that LGBT people in South Africa face daily.

In the documentary, different commentary cards are shown with comments ranging from blatant homophobia to shock, whilst others express anger and distress. One card (Fig. 2.1) reads, “I think the pictures on sexuality were taken to shock people, it is bound to get people talking. I think sometimes the essence/story behind the pictures is lost in an attempt to shock. I really don’t see what the picture with the soiled pad⁵⁶ tries to say”. At the bottom of the same card (Fig. 2.2), another viewer drew an image of a penis with big balls and an arrow pointing towards it stating, “I believe that this is art, but then this would also be Art”. A

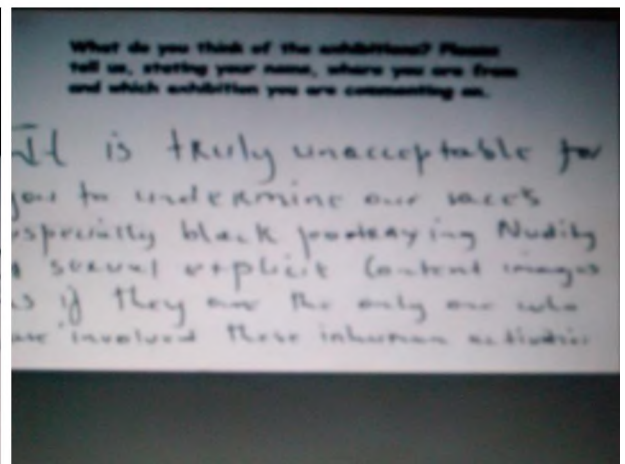
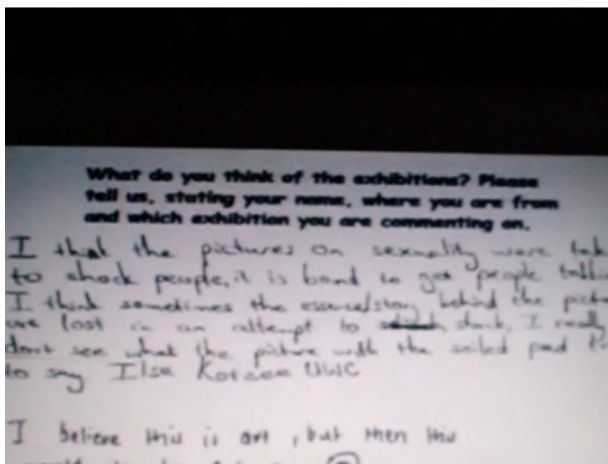
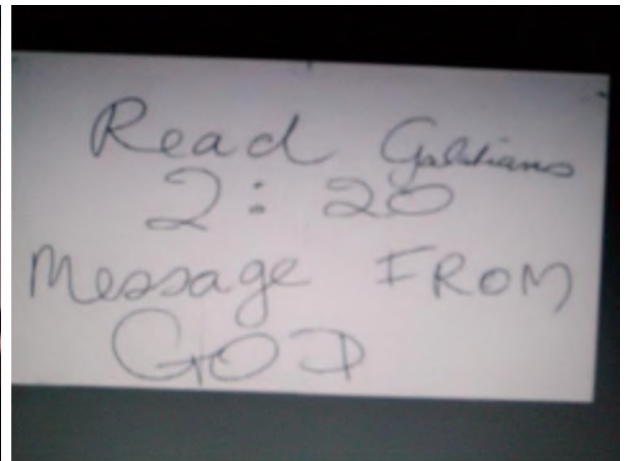
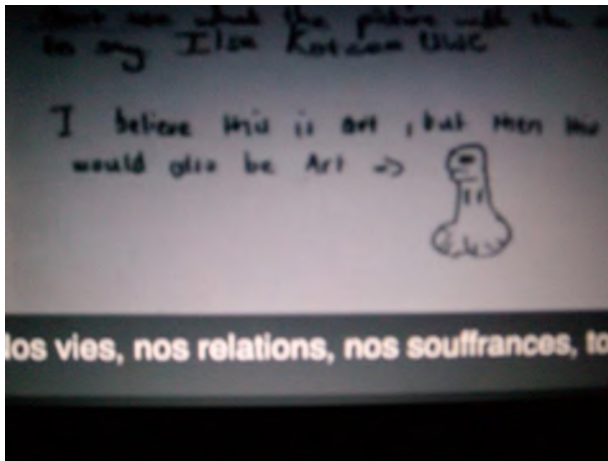
⁵⁶ The image the viewer is referring to is from Muholi’s series titled *Period* (2003).

second card (Fig. 2.3) states that the artist should read Galatians 2:20 and accompanies this by writing, “Message FROM GOD”. The third (Fig. 2.4) commentary card expresses strong anger toward the works and the representation of same-sex intimacy shared by two black lesbians by stating that “it is truly unacceptable for you to undermine our race’s especially black portraying nudity and sexual explicit content images as if they are the only one who are involved these inhuman activities [sic]”.

Unfortunately, the aforementioned commentary is not uncommon, especially the statement regarding same-sex intimacy and the notion that such acts are ‘inhuman’, which is why hate crimes, including ‘curative/corrective’ rape, are so prevalent in South Africa. The documentary shows Muholi’s work on the streets in Johannesburg, and glimpses of individuals on the street show reactions ranging from shock to laughter to disbelief. However, despite negative commentary and/or reactions, Muholi continues her work in visual activism. In the documentary, she explains her reasons for her photographic archive through texts, by stating that the film is “about my work as a photographer, capturing images of black female sexuality”, and continues by adding that “some people look at photographs, others look into them” (2005). The documentary ends by adding a brief explanation pertaining to Muholi’s reasons for capturing images of sexuality. Muholi (2005) writes:

Why I capture images of sexuality is because I believe that our experiences as black lesbians add to a history of struggle that has not yet been written or recorded. But our voices are here now, in this visual ‘text’ and perhaps we will be allowed, for the first time, to speak to all the languages and cultures within our communities. We are **HERE!**

Muholi’s explanation at the end of the documentary relates to the polarisation of visible and invisible. First, she took her works out of the gallery space and placed them around Johannesburg, thereby creating further visibility for her photographs about black female sexuality. Secondly, since black lesbians have largely remained invisible in documented history, that is, African and South African historical archives, she creates visibility by inserting lesbian existence into South African history by creating a photographic archive that transcends various languages and cultures by way of Muholi’s visual ‘text’. Lastly, Muholi’s work, in essence, demands to be seen and acknowledged. In this sense, these works ‘speak’ of a refusal to remain invisible, and this refusal has nothing to do with the works per se, but rather demands that the viewer ‘looks into them’ to really comprehend and really see the lived reality, the struggle, the prejudice and the stigmatisation faced by LGBT South Africans.



Figs. 2.1–2.4 Stills taken from the documentary *Enraged by a Picture*, which is taken of commentary cards. Acer, 2016. Photographs by Lara Littleford (2016c).

2.4) The Inauthenticity of ‘Authentic’ African-ness

Have homosexuality and transgenderism always been present in South Africa? How do African people feel about homosexuality and transgenderism? In Africa, it is often alleged that homosexuality and transgenderism are an import from the West; that is, that homosexuality did not exist before Europeans colonised the continent. However, same-sex relationships have always been part of various African cultures. In certain contexts, same-sex relationships were historically not hidden; for example in the Congo and Central African Republic, warriors married teenage boys, and same-sex relationships were never regarded as being an aberration⁵⁷. However, when European settlers arrived in Africa, they turned

⁵⁷ See Murray and Roscoe’s book titled *Boy-wives and Female Husbands*.

homosexuality and transgenderism into something that was perceived as a crime. Similarly, when missionaries arrived in Africa, they preached that homosexuality and transgenderism are a sin. Consequentially, homosexuality and transgenderism are still regarded as being unacceptable, 'unnatural', 'un-African', 'inauthentic' and sinful in many African countries and cultures. Such views have led to various punitive laws being constructed against homosexuality and transgenderism.

Nomusa Makhubu (2009:10) observes that the designation of an 'authentic' African-ness is compounded by various factors such as "a history of displacement, ventures of unity (such as Pan-Africanism), and constantly changing political and economic systems". Makhubu (2009:10) explains that the capitalist system has contrived different versions of national identities and "accredits object creation through the illusion of authenticity". Since South African land has been claimed and re-claimed throughout history by different factions of people declaring the land as their origin, and by the formulation of certain traditions through environments of diversity, cross-referentiality and religion, the claim of 'authentic' African traditions, therefore, becomes problematic (Makhubu 2009:10). As Makhubu (2009:10) notes, "it becomes problematic ... to assume that there exist particular tenets of 'authentic African tradition' pertaining to black, socio-linguistic groups only". In this sense, the South African artists Zanele Muholi, Sabelo Mlangeni and Nicholas Hlobo challenge the notion of an 'authentic' African tradition with regard to ethnocentricity, nationalism, transnationalism, sexuality and gender. Furthermore, to claim an 'authentic' African identity is to suggest that an 'inauthentic' African identity exists. In this sense, then, one could argue that the idea of 'authenticity' refers to a homogenised African identity by implicitly suggesting that there are specific ways of being 'African' and anyone who transgresses the boundaries in the formulation of African-ness is, therefore, 'un-African'. The construction of a homogenised identity is problematic in and of itself. Such constructions do not allow for any type of flexibility or individual identity, and anyone who transgresses the set boundaries is regarded as 'inauthentic' and 'other'. This leads to the alienation and victimisation of individuals who do not conform to the framework of an 'authentic' African identity. Furthermore, identities are subject to change, since identity is not a fixed entity, however, the conception of an 'authentic' African identity remains mostly fixed in its formulation.

According to Makhubu (2009:11), "Muholi's photographs represent identities that are dispelled from areas of belonging in specific (South) African spaces". The issues surrounding

being, belonging and displacement feature recurringly in the photographic work of Zanele Muholi⁵⁸. According to Makhubu (2009:15),

... the spatial contexts (the urban spaces, the township spaces and rural areas) that are implicit in Hlobo's and Muholi's works complicate simplified and homogenous constructions of identity. The notions that homosexuality is un-African (a comment that has been directed towards Muholi's photographs in particular) assumes that spatial contexts characterize particular behaviours.

Makhubu (2009:27) observes that:

... what is apparent in Hlobo's and Muholi's work is this ability to flexibly 'move in and out of identities' in contrast to strict obligations now associated with 'traditionalism'. For instance, that homosexuality is un-African means that there are strong prescriptions of 'traditional' African sexuality, which is dubious because it presumes a single prescriber of African sexuality ... masculinity is appropriated as part of identity by the women in Muholi's photographs through dress, language and bodily manipulation.

Muholi's photography, much like queer theory, offers anti-identitarian and anti-normative critique (Jagose 2009:160), therefore her work avoids direct classification. In this regard, Muholi's work attests to Makhubu's concept of 'ability for flexibility', since her work is about people's identities, specifically those individuals who are black and gay, lesbian or transgender, and their lives, relationships and struggles in South Africa. When documenting communities, it is imperative to document their diversity. This diversity exposes the fallacy of the notion of an 'authentic' African-ness, and further aims to represent African-ness in its complexity which includes the representation of homosexual and transgender Africans. The polarisation of 'traditionalism' and 'modernism' further complicates the construction of identity and the perceived immutability of African-ness.

2.5) 'Traditionalism' versus 'Modernism'

A rigid dichotomy of tradition and modernity can be repressive and disempowering. 'Traditionalism' is associated with the upholding of tradition, which typically suggests a resistance to change, whereas 'modernity' tends to be associated with change and advancement. These associations are clearly problematic when the dichotomy 'tradition/modernity' is linked to the often-racialised polarisation of 'African' and the 'Western' (Makhubu 2009:15).

Conceptions pertaining to so-called traditional African identities are intensely encoded with stereotypical representations conditioned by conceptions of African-ness largely from the

⁵⁸ See Chapter 4 for discussions with regard to being, belonging and displacement

West. In this instance, subjectivity that is considered to be more modern is constituted as superior and fundamentally dissimilar to a perceived ‘traditional’ African identity, which is a conception that has largely been constructed by the West. As Makhubu (2009:15) observes, a concept that is more prone to the commencement of a more ‘modernised’ Africa is the issue of race, since urban spaces, meant to encompass different ethnicities, are obscured by the categorisation of race. Despite the diversity of African-ness seen in urban spaces, it is presumed to fall short of the ideals of ‘authenticity’ (Makhubu 2009:15). Makhubu (2009:16) notes that the term ‘black’ fails to specify ethnicity and that new definitions continuously make reference to past definitions, which result in “misconceived truths and realities that must be challenged to create new ones”, such as Achille Mbembe’s assertion that to be ‘African’ is to be ‘black’ and not ‘white’. Since ‘authenticity’ is a contested term that defers to social construction (Makhubu 2009:16), it becomes imperative to construct a new social narrative which is capable of dispelling myths pertaining to the polarisations of traditionalism/modernism and authenticity/inauthenticity. This is accomplished through visual activism, and the subordination of dominant narratives and social structures. The South African sculptor, Nicholas Hlobo, often deals with the construction of masculinity and the realities of being homosexual in South Africa, which can be distressing. Hlobo often situates his works within a specifically isiXhosa context, specifically isiXhosa customs and traditions. In this instance, the work of Hlobo refers to the complexities of traditionalism and modernity (Makhubu 2009:2). As Makhubu (2009:2) observes, Hlobo’s artwork “highlights the racial disparities that create margins within homosexual communities and the different societies they reside in”.

According to a statement from the Stevenson Gallery (2006)⁵⁹, in his first solo exhibition, titled *Izele* (2006), Hlobo “engages the viewer in conversations about sexual identity, masculinity and ethnicity”. In his engagement with viewers, he incorporates the use of materials, with their associative potential, such as ribbon, soap, rubber tubes, silicon, other found objects and his own body in performance (Stevenson, 2006). *Izele*, meaning “someone or something has given birth”, has a “double meaning” according to Hlobo (Stevenson, 2006). Hlobo (Stevenson 2006) explains possible meanings of *Izele*: “for example, when you go to a tap and fill up a jug – *Izele ijug*, is the jug full? *Zalisa ijug ngamanzi*, fill the jug with water. It means filling something or adding to something”. The idea of ‘filling something’ suggests that something has not yet reached completion, which entails searching for a means

⁵⁹ <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/hlobo/hlobo.htm>

of completion in order to be whole. For example, Hlobo's installation titled *Ndiyafuna* (Fig. 2.5) shows a man who is bent over and balancing on his toes whilst he rummages through a large black rubber bag. The man is wearing a leather jacket complete with frills made from lace, and he is wearing jeans that are positioned really low, revealing the man's buttocks, which are covered in rubber like that of the garbage bag. The sexual connotations of the positionality of the jeans are evident: it is suggestive of same-sex sexual encounters between men and the idea of 'getting behind' another man. The work remains ambiguous, since the viewer never discovers what is in the bag or what the man is searching for in the bag. Furthermore, the viewer never sees the face of the man; instead, Hlobo provides visual clues in order for viewers to reach their own conclusions. Evidently, the construction of the masculine/feminine dichotomy comes into play through the choice of clothing. The leather biker jacket is often associated with hyper-masculinity, that is, the conception of a 'macho' facade, however, the frills added onto the jacket stand in stark contrast to the 'macho' jacket, since frills, especially made from lace, are traditionally associated with femininity. Historically, male homosexuality has, for the most part, been associated with femininity, especially when a man is a 'bottom'⁶⁰ during sex. Whereas, stereotypically, the black male body has largely been associated with hyper-masculinity, in this instance, Hlobo subverts the stereotypical conceptions related to the black male body and the homosexual male. The figure is neither hyper-masculine nor overtly feminine, thereby effectively destabilising myths, misconceptions, misrepresentations and stereotypes related to the overtly sexualised black male body and the overtly feminised body of the homosexual male.

Another exhibition by Hlobo, titled *Umtshotsho* (2009), which won the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Art, was a touring exhibition, which started at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 2009. The exhibition references various isiXhosa idioms and is an exploration of the ways in which tradition evolves with changing times. Hlobo's own sexual identity is a prominent feature in the exhibition, especially his place as a self-identifying gay man in isiXhosa culture and tradition.

The central installation of Hlobo's exhibition titled *Izithunzi* (Fig. 2.6), meaning "shadows", comprises of eight figures, constructed primarily from rubber and tubing, that resemble ghosts, jellyfish and pumpkins. A red glow is cast over the exhibition and the figures cast dark shadows. The exhibition is about *umtshotsho*, which is described by Hlobo (2009) in his

⁶⁰ A 'bottom' is an individual who is penetrated by his male partner, referred to as a 'top'.

artist statement as a party for young people, and references a time when children begin to act and think like adults; it is a time to start dating and explore life. In this context, Hlobo also references a time when many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people begin to discover or at least understand their feelings, whether it is attraction to someone of the same sex or discovering your gender expression. This is a time of self-discovery and of self-identification. Often self-identification is in conflict with one's culture and tradition; however, including a LGBT specific narrative in representation affords individuals the opportunity to see and identify with people whose self-identification is similar to their own.



Fig. 2.5 Nicholas Hlobo, *Ndiyafuna* (2006), glass, fibre, ribbon, rubber inner tube, wood, jeans, sneakers, lace, wood, 110 x 170 x 100cm (approximate)

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/hlobo/ndiyafunda.htm>



Fig. 2.6 Nicholas Hlobo, *Izithunzi* (2009), rubber inner tube, ribbon, organza, lace, found objects, steel, couch, installation view, Monument Gallery, Grahamstown. Photography by Carla Liesching (2009).

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/hlobo/sbya-gtown9.htm>

2.6) Gendered Performances in the Work of Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni

Individuals define themselves, in part, through their sexuality. Arguably, sexuality is not a collective, biological, natural or unwavering experience. Different cultures, at different times, form different concepts pertaining to sexuality. However, invariably sexuality is shaped by social and political factors that are influenced by power relations around sex, gender, class and race. Gender is a concept that takes into account social constructions such as the polarisation of masculinity and femininity, including the meanings that cultures attach to such social constructions. In other words, understandings of sexuality have essentially been influenced by cultural appropriation, that is cross-cultural influence and misappropriation, since gender, sexuality and sex are inter-related, and are structured by socio-political and cultural norms.

Normativity reflects social definitions and is structured through social conditioning. In this instance, normative conceptions of gender and sexuality become a means of subordination in order for dominant social structures to maintain relations of power. Representations of sexuality and gender that are not regarded as normative, such as homosexuality and transgenderism, can destabilise social and cultural conventions. Destabilising such conventions is imperative in challenging dominant social structures and in creating social awareness with regard to inequality and injustice. In this regard, then, Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni destabilise social and cultural conventions in their representations of sexuality and gender. This subsection will focus on the works *Big Boy*, *Madlisa*, and *Kgomotso and his Boyfriend* by Mlangeni, and the works *La Rochelle* and *Miss D'vine* by Muholi, looking at their ability to subvert socio-cultural conventions and their capacity to provide counter-arguments against the biological model of sex and gender.

According to Graeme Reid (2010:52), “glamour and grittiness combine in Sabelo Mlangeni’s *Country Girls* series, an intimate portrait of gay life in the countryside”. He explains that Mlangeni “took the photographs in small towns and rural areas in the Mpumalanga province, Driefontein, Ermelo, Bethal, Piet Retief, Standerton and Sekunda – nodes of mining, agriculture, forestry, and coal-fed power stations”. It is pertinent to note the areas where Mlangeni took his photographs, because “these can be bleak environments where, by and large, township life is rough and poor”; however, “there is also glamour here” (Reid 2010:52). Mlangeni’s photographic archive consists of images of drag queens, beauty pageant contestants parading in an unadorned municipal hall, and hairstylists at work (Reid 2010:52). These images are vivid because, according to Reid (2010:52), they are “scenes of aspiration, of making do, fashioning a dream from what is available”. Reid (2010:52) notes that:

Fashion and gay life go hand in hand in Mpumalanga. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear of gay lifestyles referred to, with some disapproval, as ‘a fashion’, a modern phenomenon. To some, gays are seen as un-African, un-Christian or the unfortunate by-product of a liberal constitution. But, as the photographs vividly demonstrate, this is only a small part of the story. Gays have also carved spaces for themselves in these unlikely places where they work, love, worship and find community. Gays are both visible and vulnerable, an assertive presence in places that can be accepting or hostile.

Kgomotso and his boyfriend (Fig. 2.7) is an example of gay men carving a space for themselves in society. The image shows two men who are standing in what appears to be the backyard of the home in which they live. This can suggest that both men have built a life together, which is their own haven, since their home is a personal and private space which

consequentially will always be the one space that is undoubtedly free from prejudice, judgement and discrimination. The body language of both men in the image appears to be flirtatious, yet tender. One of the men stands upright holding a plastic bag – perhaps they had just come back from town – whilst the other, either Kgomotso or his boyfriend, gently leans backward into the other man. He is shirtless and holding a towel. It is clear that the photograph must have been taken on a hot day; perhaps they had gone to the local swimming pool. Similarly, the photograph entitled *Bigboy* (Fig. 2.8) is a representation of a drag queen named *Bigboy*, who stands in front of a tent, either before or after the start of a beauty pageant. *Bigboy's* confident pose and unreserved laughter is illustrative that she is confident to be who she is, and that she is in a space, perhaps the only space, that allows her to express her gender identity freely without societal pressures of gender conformity. *BigBoy* wears a beautiful off the shoulder dress complete with tights and heels. She wears impressive and large hoop earrings. The demeanour of *Bigboy* appears to be jovial and light-hearted as she is in a space that could be regarded as safe, since she is surrounded by her fellow drag queens at an event specifically for drag queens.

Contrary to the image of *Bigboy* is the image titled *Madlisa* (Fig. 2.9). Despite the smile on *Madlisa's* face, she is crossing the street in an area which appears to be situated within a township. In this instance, *Madlisa* is in a space which could be considered unsafe, since she is a drag queen, and her gender expression, which through dress is regarded as feminine, is, therefore, a threat to men because of the fragility of the construction of masculinity. As Thabo Msibi (2011:50) notes, “violence, whether verbal, physical, implied or potential, is largely caught up in notions of masculinity, and is highly gendered”. Since violence is often the most evident indicator of manhood, it is used as a tool by men in order to exert power and authority over women, and other men (Msibi 2011:50). *Madlisa* wears a dress, jacket, tights and high heels. Despite the area that she is in, she crosses the street confidently, without reservation. Socially, drag queens are often excluded from other men, because of the association of drag with homosexuality, however, this is a misconception. Many drag queens are gay, but some drag queens and transvestites, such as Eddie Izzard, identify as heterosexual. Since South African society remains largely patriarchal, ideas around manhood persist and are deeply entrenched (Msibi 2011:51). In this instance, homophobic and transphobic violence, used as means of maintaining patriarchal power, relates to notions that “effeminate gay men betray the superiority of masculinity, and masculine lesbian women

challenge and try to usurp male superiority and therefore these individuals need to be punished for being a threat to the ‘natural’ social order” (Wells 2006, cited in Msibi 2011).

Representations of drag queens, then, have the potential to deconstruct polarisations of masculinity and femininity, including preconceived ideas pertaining to social conditioning with regard to manhood and womanhood. In other words, drag illustrates that there is no fixed or singular way of being a man or being a woman. Conforming to societal norms can restrict a person’s needs, desires and personal expression; however, not conforming to societal norms can lead to violence in the form of hate crimes, including ‘curative/corrective’ rape. As Msibi (2011:53) notes, “men are scared of their own deviation from the norm, and try to manoeuvre themselves within that norm”, and any “deviance from normative constructions of masculinity may result in homophobia or homophobic violence at those who do not conform” (Msibi 2011:53). In order to address the source of this problem, that is, ideas about masculinity “predicated on marked gender hierarchy and sexual entitlement of men”, there would need to be understanding that homophobic violence is a manifestation of gendered violence (Msibi 2011:53). Visual activism, especially in art, has the potential to subvert traditional socio-cultural conventions and re-appropriate cultural norms.



Fig. 2.7 Sabelo Mlangeni, *Kgomotso and his Boyfriend* (2008), Silver gelatin print, 44 x 44cm (variable). Source: *Country Girls*, Michael Stevenson Catalogue no. 52

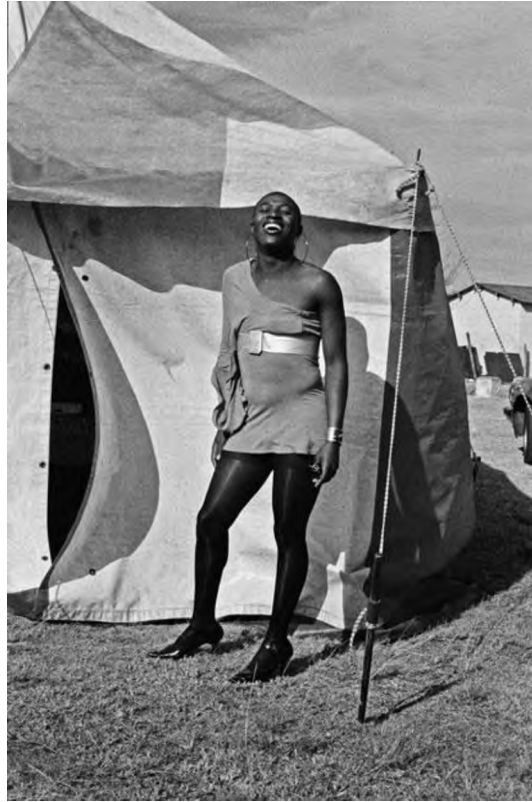


Fig. 2.8 Sabelo Mlangeni, *Bigboy* (2009), Silver gelatin print, 56 x 37cm. Source: *Country Girls*, Michael Stevenson Catalogue no. 52



Fig. 2.9 Sabelo Mlangeni, *Madlisa* (2009), Large silver gelatin print, 56 x 37cm. Source: *Country Girls*, Michael Stevenson Catalogue no. 52

For example, Zanele Muholi's series of the drag queen, *Miss D'vine*, is an exploration and subversion of traditional⁶¹ notions of gender, examining dominant notions of race, gender and sexuality. In this instance, the representation of *Miss D'vine* challenges dominant meanings associated with femininity and African-ness in South Africa. According to Muholi (2010:92), *Miss D'vine*, born Kae Mogogole, adores Ru Paul, wishes to perform abroad someday, is a part of a drag queens' and artists' movement that aims to bend the political attitudes of a 'less than' democratic society, and hangs around her mentor *La Rochelle*. In the first image of the series, *Miss D'vine I* (Fig. 2.10), she is seated in a veld wearing nothing but a skirt made from beads, traditional garb that is associated with Africa, and a red pair of high heels, which is associated with modernity⁶². *Miss D'vine* is seated on the ground and her legs curve to the side while she leans slightly backward. This type of posing is frequently associated with femininity. The image appears to be constructed in a way that reminds one of a postcard of 'traditional African' life, yet the incorporation of a pair of red high heels and 'African' beads, and the image of a man dressed in clothing associated with femininity, is arguably not as it appears to be at first glance. Furthermore, the image of *Miss D'vine* is a key example of what is regarded as 'un-African'⁶³ by some individuals, since *Miss D'vine*'s gender expression and choice of clothing transgress various social and cultural boundaries.

According to Nomusa Makhubu (2009:90), "the particular masculinities and femininities documented by Muholi are hyper-genders. The genders that are mimicked can be argued to be versions of stereotypes and theatrical representations". However, it is important to note that, despite our intense dislike for stereotypes, I cannot deny the fact that some people do have an affinity to fit within certain stereotypical niches, thus, in this case, it might have nothing to do with portraying hyper-gender and cannot necessarily be reduced to a theatrical representation in Muholi's work. (Arguably, performances by the South African artist Steven Cohen, currently based in France, can be construed as being theatrical.) The images entitled *Miss D'vine II* (Fig. 2.11) and *Miss D'vine IV* (Fig. 2.12) show *Miss D'vine* in various states of dress, or rather undress. In Figure 2.11, *Miss D'vine* is photographed in the same setting as Figure 2.10, but this time the figure is standing, wearing a dress, which she holds onto at the hem, showing off her legs, whilst wearing the same red high heels as in *Miss D'vine I*, while she stares into the distance. In *Miss D'vine IV* (Figure 2.12), the figure is photographed in a

⁶¹ Traditional notions of gender refers to notions of gender imposed by the West; however, gender norms are neither historically fixed or the same across cultures.

⁶² Subsection 2.5) 'Traditionalism' versus 'Modernism'

⁶³ See Subsection 2.4) The Inauthenticity of 'Authentic' African-ness

different setting; she is kneeling on tar in front of a fence covered with a black sheer draping. *Miss D'vine* is wearing black underwear – she is sporting a matching bra and panties. Her gaze engages the viewer. She appears proud and seems to hold onto her autonomy whilst remaining in charge – she might be the subject of the viewer's gaze to some degree, but she asserts power by returning the gaze. According to Amanda du Preez (2010:399), Muholi's images of "black queens and drag artists provide a form of material resistance through their mere existence". That is, Muholi's work emphasises how her photographs "examine how gender-queer identities and bodies are shaped by – but also resist, through their very existence – dominant notions of what it means to be black and feminine" (Muholi cited in du Preez 2010:399). Du Preez (2010:399) suggests that Muholi's work can disrupt and disclose oppression in two significant ways. First, Muholi's work effectively erases the stigmatisation of (notably lesbian) sexualities as 'unAfrican'⁶⁴, and secondly, Muholi depicts bodies that are out of bounds⁶⁵ through their indelible corporeal⁶⁶ being (du Preez 2010:399). As du Preez (2010:399) notes,

It is argued here that through their brute manifestation, these sex and gender outsiders evoke a material sublime encounter by suspending categories of form and the formless. Through the suspension of these previously neatly contained categories, it is possible for beautiful (form) to become formless (sublime) and for the formless, in turn, to become beautiful.

Elizabeth Grosz (1994:12) notes that "bodies, individualities, are historical, social, cultural weavings of biology", and that "the organism or entity strives to affirm, to maximize its potentialities, its powers, its possibilities". Therefore, "the impetus is not simply an effect of its inner constitution but can only be gauged, actualized, in terms of the concrete options its situation affords it", and by "not being self-identical, the body must be seen as a series of processes of becoming, rather than as a fixed state of being" because "the body is both active and productive, although not originary: its specificity is a function of its degrees and modes of organization, which are in turn the results or consequences of its ability to be affected by other bodies" (Grosz 1994:12). Sexuality can be flexible, just as one's gender expression can be flexible; although concepts of gender are socio-politically and culturally constructed and frequently leave no room for flexibility, this does not suggest that flexibility cannot occur. There is no singular way to be female or male. Society constructs an ideal that is often unattainable. Thus, as du Preez (2010:399) notes, "as illustrated in the series of *Miss D'vine*

⁶⁴ See, Corrigan, M. (2007)

⁶⁵ See, Nead, L. (1992). *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*. New York: Routledge, pp. 5-34.

⁶⁶ See, Grosz, E. (1994). *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. USA: Indiana University Press.

(2007–2008), the mere existence of the cross dresser's⁶⁷ somewhat fragile, yet brave embodiment resist any preconceived ideas of how matter should preferably (according to hetero-normative standards) come to matter in its brute 'thingness' and 'realness'. That is, "the ways in which matter comes to materialise (as in the case of *Miss D'vine*) cannot entirely be predetermined or dictated, and neither can discourse sufficiently contain it" (du Preez 2010:399). Thus, according to du Preez (2010:399–400),

She dallies between the endless possibilities of discursive gendered becomings and the manifestation of her own flesh, where self and other meet head-on. As in the encounter of the material sublime, which is materialised 'eventhood' not frozen into finality, but rather matter inscribed potential, *Miss D'vine* embodies her quandary valiantly. She is left 'court[ing] the approaching storm' of 'material-discursive intra-activity', since no quick fix is possible for her physical circumstances. The fact that her mere physical instantiation, as cross dresser, is possibly not tolerated and rather unwelcome in her own community cannot stop her from materialising defiantly. *Miss D'vine* wears her body nimbly as it, in turn, bears her with dignity. Through the specific forms she takes, a 'textual' gesture towards transcendence is made and all attempts at suppressing her unique embodiment are disrupted.

That is, the performativity of gender in the form of drag is subversive in its performance to the extent that it is imitative of the dominant hegemonic structure of gender itself, which is produced by society and both disputes and disrupts the claim that heterosexuality is 'natural' and 'original'⁶⁸ (Butler 1990). For example, Simone de Beauvoir (1949:295) claimed that "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman"⁶⁹. De Beauvoir re-interprets and re-appropriates doctrines which constitute acts that are deeply imbedded within the tradition of phenomenology. Thus, like Butler, de Beauvoir does not believe that gender is a fixed identity – identity, then, is constituted in time through the repetition of acts. Furthermore, gender exists as a stylisation of the body, in other words, gender is constituted by everyday acts, movements, enactments or gestures of the body that effectively create an illusion of a fixed gendered self. Thus, gender is a corporeal style which could be regarded as both

⁶⁷ For Judith Butler, retaining the illusion of an interior core which determines gender identity is a regulatory device: it masks the constitution of heterosexuality as normative, implying that, rather than being political, this is something "natural" or biological. Butler argues that, if one shows that the idea of this interior organising core determining gender identity is a fiction, one exposes all the political constructs which attach themselves to such notions. She sees drag as liberating and transgressive because it highlights the distinctions between anatomical sex and gender which we are taught to think of as 'normal' and 'natural': it forces us to recognise that the construction of such a link as normative is in fact political. According to Butler (1990:180), "the construction of stable bodily contours relies upon fixed sites of corporeal permeability and impermeability. Those sexual practices in both homosexual and heterosexual contexts that open surfaces and orifices to erotic signification or close down others effectively reinscribe the boundaries of the body along new cultural lines". Butler (1990:187) further states that "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency".

⁶⁸ See, Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble*.

⁶⁹ "Le Deuxième Sexe" first published in 1949. This translation was first published by Jonathan Cape 1953 and then published in Penguin Books in 1972.

intentional and performative, in that it carries various meanings pertaining to sex being an ahistorical ideal based on a biological facticity, whereby gender becomes the cultural and social interpretation of that facticity. Therefore, since sex is biological⁷⁰, in this instance your sex organs can be changed because of modern medicine and technology and do not have to be fixed, for example transgendered individuals who either transition from female-to-male (ftm) or from male-to-female (mtf); however, gender identity cannot be changed, and it is largely cultural and or social. In this instance, gender identity refers to the ways in which individuals identify as: male, female or non-binary.



Fig. 2.10 Zanele Muholi, *Miss D'vine I* (2006), Lambda print, 45 x 45cm. Courtesy of the Michael Stevenson Gallery

⁷⁰ It is important to note that various feminist theorists argue that the idea that sex is biological is fixed (see, Rubin, G) whereas other theorists argue that sex is either culturally constructed (see, Butler, J) or that sex is the creation of the sexual objectification of women (see, MacKinnon, C).



Fig. 2.11 Zanele Muholi, *Miss D'vine II* (2006), Lambda print, 45 x 45cm.
Courtesy of the Michael Stevenson Gallery



Fig. 2.12 Zanele Muholi, *Miss D'vine V* (2006), Lambda print, 45 x 45cm.
Courtesy of the Michael Stevenson Gallery

There are three images of *Miss D'vine's* mentor, *La Rochelle*, creating a triptych. What is striking about these images is the stark black background, which is in complete contrast to the figure in the foreground, since *La Rochelle* is in the light of the camera. In the first image, *La Rochelle I* (Fig. 2.13), the figure is wearing a sheer nightgown and a matching black bra, whilst holding her weave in one hand. In *La Rochelle II* (Fig. 2.14), the figure has taken off all her garments and holds her hands over her breasts; she has her weave on and returns the gaze to the viewer, thus asserting power. However, in *La Rochelle III* (Fig. 2.15), there are two noticeable differences. First, the figure is not covered in any capacity – she is neither wearing clothes nor covering herself with her hands; instead she is framed sitting and her chest is exposed. Secondly, the figure does not directly look into the camera, thereby returning the viewer's gaze; instead, she looks away. This is suggestive of her vulnerability – she is completely exposed and vulnerable, therefore she is unable to look at the camera directly in order to assert power, since she has lost her confidence. The masquerade of gender, seen in the works mentioned above, is as much about attracting as it is about deflecting attention. According to Joost Boland (2008:8),

In popular culture, the archetypal disguise is Superman's pair of glasses, which turns him into Clark Kent. This story reminds us that, often, that which is disguised is hidden in plain view. Everyone familiar with the movies or comic strips has wondered why Lois Lane does not recognise that her two love interests are one and the same. It is easy to consign disguise to a world of superheroes and spies. However, disguise is everywhere, from innocuous fancy-dress parties to people who create their entire personalities down to their names. The reciprocity between a disguise and the disguised is at once perilous and appealing ... the self is at stake. It can be concealed but also exposed and ultimately transformed ... disguise has a special relevance in Africa. The implications of outward appearance are amplified because of the historical significance of skin colour ... the exhibition⁷¹ navigates between stillness and cacophony. Like disguise itself, it alternates between attracting and deflecting attention – attention to work, to its maker and to its subject matter.

The identity of the individual in drag can be one that is used to deflect attention as much as is desired, or the individual may use this identity as an extension of the self, in order to attract attention, especially when the extension of the self has a propensity to make the drag artist feel comfortable and attractive in her skin. Since the identity of the drag artist is neither feminine nor masculine, drag is able to challenge the societal view of, and binary opposition of, traditional concepts of gender. In this instance, drag can effectively challenge dominant

⁷¹ The exhibition to which Boland is referring is the 2008 Michael Stevenson exhibition entitled *Disguise: The Art of Attracting and Deflecting Attention*, in which Zanele Muholi featured her work *La Rochelle* along with various other South African artists, such as Dineo Bopape and her work *Dreamweaver*.

gender roles, especially that of the stereotypical representation of the feminine, as a means of illustrating just how normative the boundaries of gender and of the construction of masculine and feminine truly are: in effect, drag artists are able to transgress these restrictive classifications of what it “means to be a man” and what it “means to be a woman”. According to Butler (1993:237), “the resignification of norms is thus a function of their inefficacy, and so the question of subversion, of working the weakness in the norm, becomes a matter of inhabiting the practices of rearticulation”. Butler (1990:186) further notes that “drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive notion of gender and the notion of a true gender identity”. Boland (2008:2) suggests that drag can be empowering in the way that a person can completely disregard societal expectations by showing their ‘true’ self.

According to Muholi (2008:92), her objective was to look at the lives of young, black queens and drag artists because she wanted to examine “how their gender-queer identities and bodies are shaped by – but also resist through their very existence – dominant notions of what it means to be black and feminine, and to give queens and drag artists some visual voice in the cultural landscape of post-lives, not just victims. In reality, their lives, our lives, as gender queers are more than just a drag”. According to Kim Michasiw (1997:160), “gay male masquerade ... would be a mode of appropriating and articulating the gap between masculinity understood in heterosexist terms – as being bounded by heterosexual object-choice and masculinity understood differently”. The visual activism and photography of Muholi and Mlangeni, then, bridges the gap between masculinity that is understood and perpetuated through heteropatriarchy, through cultural re-appropriation of gender and the subversion of racist stereotypes pertaining to representations of the sexuality of persons who are black; for example, the fetishising of black women’s sexuality, the representation of hyper-sexuality of black men, and the idea that homosexuality is incompatible with black sexuality.



Figs. 2.13–2.15 Zanele Muholi, *La Rochelle I–III* (2008), Lambda print, 76.5 x 76.5cm. Courtesy of the Michael Stevenson Gallery

2.7) We are All the Same: Politics of Difference

Zanele Muholi’s photographic archive frequently includes representations of hate crimes, especially images that are illustrative, for example her *Period I–V* (Fig. 2.16) series, or a documentation of ‘curative/corrective’ rape, for example the work *Aftermath* (Fig. 2.17). These works directly relate to the body politic and black women’s bodies, specifically the violation thereof that occurs because of their race, class, sexuality and gender. Notably, Muholi’s work is unapologetic in her representation of the lived reality of black lesbian lives in South Africa, nor do these representations seek sympathy. Her archive attests to the political climate in South Africa and resists socio-cultural conformity. In order to do so, Muholi constructs a visual ‘text’, which forms part of her visual activism; moreover, Muholi concerns herself with translating the emotional, such as hate crimes, in such a way that can make it potent politically, while simultaneously creating a politics of visibility.

According to Andrew van der Vlies (2012:140), the photographs of Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni are concerned with:

The visibility of sexual minorities, the politics of the gaze, the construction of archives, the role of photography that is activism, and the generation of new ideas about community and citizenship. Muholi’s work, in particular, speaks of tensions between the body politic and the biopolitics of the black body, the autochthonous subject of tradition and the queer agent of utopian possibility.

Yet, as van der Vlies (2012:140) notes, visual art such as that of Muholi and Mlangeni appears to be vulnerable to narrow-minded views⁷², suspicion and censure⁷³. Muholi's work is thus important in that it raises questions with regard to the politics of visibility⁷⁴ and of the gaze; questions of affiliation that privilege a particular understanding of the family and the nation in the project of the 'new' South Africa (van der Vlies 2012:141). The aforementioned is achieved through Muholi's ongoing productive engagement with temporality as well as both the time of the nation and the time of her artwork (van der Vlies 2012:141). Van der Vlies (2012:142) states that "Muholi frequently highlights the scourge of so-called 'curative rape'", and that it is "on behalf of these women, members of a putative community, that Muholi herself elects to speak" since her "work is directed at raising consciousness and also attesting to the fact of black lesbians". Moreover, "her images are also self-consciously affirmative records for queer people themselves; they constitute an archive and 'create new taxonomies of difference to counter the spectacular orthodoxies and clichés of previous regimes'" (van der Vlies 2012:142).

Zanele Muholi describes the reasons why she chose to create her ongoing photographic series entitled *Faces and Phases* as follows:

I decided to capture the positive images of community in order to contribute toward a more democratic and representative South African lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex history. I embarked on a journey of visual activism to ensure that there is a black LGBTI visibility, to showcase our existence and resistance in our democratic society, to present a positive imagery of (especially) black lesbians and trans people. The first phase of 'Faces and Phases' began in 2006 and the series, which is ongoing, is now in its third phase. Aside from the dictionary definition of what a 'face' is (the front of the head, from forehead to chin), the face also expresses the person. For me, 'Faces' means me, photographer and community worker, being face to face with the

⁷² For example, the narrow-minded views of former Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana (mentioned earlier in the thesis). What unsettled the minister was that someone such as herself could unexpectedly be made to look upon photographic images of lesbians (van der Vlies 2012:140).

⁷³ The placement and context of the photographs was in question, not necessarily the images themselves (Eck, 2001:606). Goffman (1956:308) notes that, when individuals "misframe" an event, they work to explain the phenomena in a way that makes sense. Eck (2001:607) suggests that the interpretation of cultural objects is partially determined by the context within which they are situated. Lynda Nead (1992:6) notes that "it is in the margins, the very edges of categories, that are most critical in the construction of symbolic meaning". She argues that the "lines of competing definitions of acceptability and unacceptability" are drawn somewhere between the poles of fine art and pornography.

⁷⁴ In the article entitled "Thinking through lesbian rape", Zanele Muholi (2011:117) states that "physical assaults and sexual violence against our sexual/gender queer bodies encourages our invisibility. Post-assault victimisation by state institutions and representatives carefully shapes how, and to whom, we will choose to speak about our lives". For example, a woman name "Kid", who Muholi photographed for her work entitled, *Aftermath* (2004), experienced an immense amount of post-assault victimisation. First, no rape kit was immediately available at either hospital that she went to with Muholi. Secondly, the police officer who was sent to deal with her case had not felt a need to take Kid's statement immediately. Thirdly, no doctor was readily available either and eventually a doctor had made several remarks regarding her virginity, and once Kid's sexual orientation was known, the doctor had interrogated her regarding her identity and integrity (Muholi 2011:121).

many lesbians and trans persons I interact with from different Gauteng townships ... individuals of this series of photographs hold different positions and play many different roles within the black LGBTI community ... However, each time we are represented by outsiders, we are merely seen as victims of rape and homophobia. Our lives are always sensationalised, rarely understood. This is the reason for 'Faces': our lives are not just what makes the newspaper headlines every time one of us are attacked. We go through many stages, we express many identities, which unfold in parallel in our existence. From an insider's perspective, this project is meant as a commemoration and a celebration of the lives of black lesbians and trans that I have met in my journeys through the townships. Lives and narratives are told with both pain and joy, as some of these were going through hardships in their lives (2013:169–170).

Evidently, the creation of a visual narrative is of vital importance for Muholi, a narrative that pertains to an activist initiative. One of the most important aspects of her activism depends upon a collaboration with individuals from various townships. Since many of the theories and articles written on queer theory and queer Africa come from Western writers who rarely understand the realities of the African situation, it is both refreshing and of utmost importance for someone, such as Muholi, to provide her voice – a voice who knows, who is aware of the situation; moreover a voice of someone who is not only speculating and theorising, but someone who has lived the very reality they bring to the attention of the public. As Muholi states, the articles written are often sensationalised, casting these women in the roles of victims – they are vulnerable, weak, powerless and they have lost their autonomy; whereas, through her photographic images and her understanding of the lived lives of these women, Muholi reflects their power and autonomy, and represents them not as victims but as survivors. I would like to highlight the phrase “some of these were going through hardships in their lives”. Here, Muholi mediates on how “to represent sexual violation and how to translate emotion into the visual” (Munro 2012:222). Muholi (2011:117) states that:

Despite formal constitutional protections against discrimination based on a person's gender and sexual orientation – one of the liberation struggle's most impressive achievements – black lesbian women are still refused entry into the nation's most public spaces and are punished for their same-sex desires and relationships. The lived realities and experiences of lesbian-identified women, such as those living in and around urban townships, are still overwhelmingly dominated by a set of intersecting raced, classed and heterogendered politics that blur the lines between our apartheid past and our new constitutional democracy. As lesbians, educational discrimination and unemployment continue to shape our collective experience of poverty. Our blackness still excludes us from the mainstream, mainly, white, gay and lesbian voice.

Muholi (2011:117) further explains that she spends most of her time with women who live their lives as “lesbians, as lesbian men, as femme and butch mothers, as women loving

women who push against the boundaries of who is, and what is, an ‘African’ woman”, and that they have taught each other about their own and their collective experiences. Her community consists of those women who are either too poor for some or too ‘uneducated’ for others, who are either too African for some people or too un-African for others, to be “entrusted with any meaningful participation as citizens” of South Africa (Muholi 2011:117). Muholi locates herself, then, as both an insider and an outsider of the community. She explains (2011:117) that she is an insider since it is where she finds her past, that is, where she finds some of her own life experiences in a way that is reflected back to her, and where she finds legitimisation for loving other women. Yet, she also finds herself as an outsider due to her employment and tertiary education, both of which she believes afford her an unfair degree of access to economic, social and cultural resources that are not as readily available to the vast majority of women within her community (Muholi 2011:117). However, it is partially this fluid position she inhabits, of being both an insider and an outsider, that has moved her to claim “this privileged space within the pages of a feminist journal that my community will most likely never have the chance to read” (Muholi 2011:117). However, this space does not come without a price, since Muholi had to learn to speak a language that is foreign to her as well as presenting her knowledge in a way that is “more familiar to the colonisers than the colonised” (Muholi 2011:117). Muholi (2011:117) states that:

It is at this moment between performance, articulation and agency where both the continuities and the breaks with our colonial past are made clear to me. I am left searching for how to negotiate the path ahead, and I conclude tentatively that it may only be through this process of reciprocal dialogue, which we as reader and author can create, that will move us into a new space where a politics of decolonisation is possible. But mostly, I just need to talk things through and be heard.

This is due to the relatively small amount of resources that are spent on “studying the nature and dynamic of violence against women”, and fewer resources are spent on “the particular form of homophobic violence that non-heterosexual people such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual people face” (Muholi 2011:118). According to Muholi (2011:118), the abovementioned is in itself a barrier toward the “meaningful realisation of legal protections in people’s everyday lives”. Muholi spent two years listening to as well as recording the stories of hate crimes against 47 lesbian women and lesbian men from various townships in Gauteng (East Rand, West Rand, Alexandria, Soweto, Katorus, Orange Farm, Vereeniging). Of the 47 women she interviewed, 20 women were raped explicitly because of their gender or sexual non-conformity, while 4 women experienced attempted rape, 17 women were assaulted physically – three of whom with a weapon, 8 other women

experienced verbal abuse, and 2 women were abducted. According to Muholi (2011:118), 29 women knew their attackers, whilst only 16 survivors had reported these crimes to the police, and several of these women have experienced hate crimes more than once. Muholi (2011:118) explains why the women in her community are reluctant to report hate crimes and explains that:

The silence in my community over the issue of hate crime has meant that it has, at times, been difficult to access women who experience lesbophobia. In many cases, the women could not relate to the terms 'lesbophobia' or 'hate crime'. However, when asked in their own languages if they had ever experienced discomfort or assault due to their lesbian identity, they were eager to share their stories with someone who understood, someone who was like them. I have learned that women choose their silence for a multitude of reasons.

An instance of why some women choose silence is that some butch lesbians “spoke ... about their silence in terms of the emotional trauma they feel when speaking about their rape, an admission that cuts into their gendered and sexualised selves in very different ways than it does for heterosexual or femme women” (Muholi 2011:118). Thus, for many butch lesbians, “their masculine identities are structured through the power they possess not to be touched intimately during sexual encounters”, and “revealing intimate violation to anyone is painful, and can be delegitimising and disempowering” (Muholi 2011:118).

Problematically, this exposes the reality of how sexuality is constructed within and is mediated through gender identity, and of how any analysis of lesbophobic hate crimes “must incorporate also the interplay between sexual and gendered relations of power⁷⁵” (Muholi 2011:118). For example, in *Hate Crime Survivor I* (2004) (Fig. 2.18), the image of the survivor is framed from the hips to above the knees. The participant’s hands are lightly clasped in front of her crotch. She has three hospital bracelets around her wrist, which testifies to her victimisation. Similarly, in *Hate Crime Survivor II* (2004) (Fig. 2.19), a figure is lying on a hospital bed and is lightly covered by a blanket over her legs. Her back is turned toward the viewer, but the figure appears to curve in a way that is close to positioning her body into the foetal position. Medical charts are located at the front of the bed, which includes the patient files. Muholi shows a great deal of empathy when documenting survivors

⁷⁵ According to Muholi (2011:118-119), “women ... spoke of their silence in terms of the fear of exposure that comes with telling their stories, since many black LGBTs are not yet ‘out’ to their families and communities. But mostly, women spoke about the shame and humiliation that comes along with the systematic revictimisation by the very people who are constitutionally obliged to protect their rights as women, as lesbians, as rape survivors. The women spoke of the police who do not take lesbian rape seriously; assault crises and shelter workers who are not sensitised to the specific emotional traumas and needs that come with a homophobic assault and rape; and health care workers who are either uncomfortable with or hostile to women who claim their lesbian identity when reporting assault or rape”.

of hate crimes. This is articulated in the way in which Muholi frames the photographs – the focus is not on the identities of the survivors, in other words, their faces; instead she chooses to focus on the violations the survivors have experienced. In this instance, the focus is on bodily violation and violations against the safety, freedom and dignity of the survivors.

In the image, entitled *Aftermath* (Fig. 2.17) (2004), the woman, named Kid (a pseudonym), who is photographed, had contacted Zanele Muholi only hours after her assault and the image was taken only days later (Munro 2012:222). Kid was a teenage lesbian at the time and was raped repeatedly in Kagiso on 7 March 2004, by a ‘friend’ who was aware of her sexual orientation and who pretended to be fine with it (Muholi 2011:119). The incident occurred on a night after Kid and the man had spent the afternoon drinking and sharing food at a local eatery (Muholi 2011:119). According to Muholi (2011:119), Kid did not “suspect that he would become violent towards her since he had requested to meet other gays and lesbians, and both of their families were aware of their friendship”. Unfortunately, “the extent to which violence against lesbians is rooted in a deep fear of female erotic autonomy from patriarchal familial, social, and community structures is sadly made clear by the fact that the majority of lesbians are victimised by someone familiar to them or to their families” (Muholi 2011:119). Although lengthy, I find it important to include Kid’s account of her ordeal, which is in her own words but has been translated by Muholi from the original Zulu interview; Kid’s account is as follows:

On Sunday afternoon I went to make a call at a phone around the corner where I met with this guy. We started chatting as usual and he asked me to accompany him to buy food and drinks. We then went there, bought some few items and we stayed there till late. I noticed that it was really late and was worried about my safety. I told him that I wanted to go home since I had the house keys with me. He said to me, ‘do not worry, I will accompany you’. A few minutes later we left the place, but he told me that he needed to go to his room first because it was chilly that night and I had on warm clothes and could see that he did not. On our way I noticed that he was drunk but I could think of nothing else except being accompanied home. Then we arrived and entered the outside room attached to the side of the house. He started asking me funny questions. He demanded to know what I do in Johannesburg so frequently, and I told him that I go there to visit my friends and check my girlfriend. He said I was lying and accused me of being involved with foreign guys who in return for whatever favours I give them, give me money. As I was trying to process this, [his words were] followed by a slap and heavy blows with fists. He took a screwdriver and threatened to stab me with it. I attempted to fight back, but the man was stronger than me. He forced me to take off my clothes and told me that he wanted to prove to me that I was a woman, that he always wanted to have a child with me and added that he was going to rape me and give me AIDS as well. I cried but that did not stop him from raping me. He started at 22h30 for about an hour, slept for a while and woke up and did it for a second time at about 2am. I was in so much pain. As he raped me, he kept on asking

me if I loved him, and I was crying. He then went back to sleep. (cited in Muholi 2011:119–120)

Kid had managed to escape afterwards and had cried until morning but had not told anyone about the rape. She had then contacted Muholi, a person she barely knew at the time, and had taken a train to meet her in Johannesburg. After being referred to various clinics and hospitals, Kid was finally attended to by a male doctor on duty who appeared to be “sleepy and resentful at having been called at all”. After he had examined Kid, he “handed over the file to the trauma unit counsellor who informed her that she was neither pregnant nor thankfully, HIV positive” (Muholi 2011:120). However, as Muholi (2011:120-121) notes, “by that time Kid had already experienced further humiliation and victimisation by her doctor who very crudely remarked that he could not see any signs of forceful penetration, and that she was not a virgin” and “his insensitive commentary suggested to us that he questioned why we even bothered to come to the hospital at all”.

In the image of Kid, a black-and-white photograph frames her abdomen/lower torso, her thighs and her knees, and she is clad in ‘Jockey’ underwear, whilst her hands are held protectively over her genital area. Muholi again frames the image in order to focus on the violation of Kid’s body, as opposed to focusing on her face and exposing her identity. Arguably, Muholi’s choice of framing avoids secondary victimisation, which many survivors endure at the hands of medical and legal professionals, and also law enforcement.

According to Andrew van der Vlies (2012:143), the ‘Jockey’ logo, which is traditionally associated with a range of men’s underwear, but now has a women’s line, is clearly visible, like a badge that could be read as signifying Kid’s lesbian identity. Van der Vlies (2012:143) further notes that ‘Jockey’ is “legible as marking the wearer in a transnational circuit of mainstream commodity ... dictated by American cultural norms”. Thus, ‘Jockey’ being an American brand, to the American and especially the African-American viewer of the photograph, the “significance of labelling a black body with the word ‘Jockey’ would likely also suggest a host of complex and complicated cultural signifiers, likely not lost on Muholi”; these range from “the masculine construction of the sporty ‘jock’ to the figure and trope of the ‘lawn jockey’, a decorative garden figure – frequently a black man” (van der Vlies 2012:143). Additionally, “whether or not Muholi intends the allusion, ‘Jockey’ might put one in mind of the infamous ‘Jockey Club’ ... whose members were notorious for their procurement of sexual ‘favours’ from lower-class women” (van der Vlies 2012:143). Van der Vlies (2012:144) further notes that ‘Jockey’ might also signify “sexual availability for men

presuming privileged access to women whose economic circumstances render them liable to victimisation”, and “it is precisely such a presumption of sexual availability that is in part to blame for the attack that has preceded the particular ‘aftermath’ pictured by Muholi, and which Muholi’s photographic project as a whole challenges”. What stands out the most about the figure, by virtue of illumination and lighting, is the large, long, oval shaped scar running down her thigh. The scar is clearly visible; it is fair to deduce that the scar came from the attack as it is still fresh since the scar has not started to fade, and since the photography was taken days after the attack. The image speaks volumes about the subject’s experience, of her victimisation. One needs no other additional information in order to know what has happened. According to Munro (2012:222–224),

... the image also encodes a complex temporality, through which the cumulative and long-term psychic after effects of physical trauma are registered. The scar invokes a past that seems sealed over but has left a permanent mark, while the protective gesture makes present the invisible effects of what has just happened. ‘Aftermath’ also encodes issues of exposure and privacy, since the subject is allowing Muholi to photograph her in her underwear yet is simultaneously making that gesture of protective self-covering. Muholi’s photos often produce a sense of intense, quiet intimacy, but her images also highlight the boundaries beyond which the viewer is not allowed, partly through her regular technique of giving us only portions of the subject’s body.

Munro’s observation is exactly what makes the portraits in this series so endearing. Van der Vlies (2012:144) makes similar observations, but also refers to two aspects that he feels are less obvious about the scar in *Aftermath*, which are worthy of comment. First, just like an orifice that has been sewn up, the figure is also blocking another orifice with her hands (van der Vlies 2012:144). Secondly, the scar leads van der Vlies toward the ‘metaphor of the seam’, that is, “it has an utopian impulse, or at the least a forward-thinking one, while it cannot but draw attention back to the site of the trauma that frustrates such an impulse ... we see this clearly in Muholi’s image, and thinking of the scar as a kind of multivalent or multiply signifying seam adds to the photograph’s power” (van der Vlies 2012:144). It is impossible to forget that the woman pictured is a victim of trauma, which is a literal wound both visible and invisible on her body.

The visible wound refers to the scar, yet various invisible scars and wounds exist. Such scars are unseen as they are psychological scars related to the trauma; thus they are internal. I find that, often, the psychological unseen scars can be worse than the physical scars – the scars on the surface heal, but it is immensely difficult to heal the unseen scars that are psychological, as well as the memories of the event, that will never entirely go away and often haunt victims

of trauma. According to van der Vlies (2012:144), “the subject’s ostensibly demure, protective hand gesture, which vies for the viewer’s attention as the focal point of the photograph, suggests the subtext that is also the text, if you like: the aftermath occurs after a so-call ‘curative rape’”⁷⁶. Van der Vlies (2012:144) notes that “in many cases ... Muholi’s photographs *are* – and *are not* – the photographs of victims”. This is because “the woman in ‘Aftermath’ is a victim, but she is not subjected to a prying gaze: we do not see her genitalia or her breasts” and “we do not see her face” (van der Vlies 2012:144). Thus, “she is an individual whose dignity is respected, whose privacy is restored, whose experience is recorded – and whose scars can be read also as standing for the scars of others” (van der Vlies 2012:144). I do not find this to be surprising, since Muholi creates a deep bond with all the women she photographs and documents. They spend so much time together, talking and sharing their lived experiences, that it would be imperative for Muholi to protect these women from further violations and to restore their sense of self-worth and human dignity, by capturing them in a moment that is subtly powerful and dignified in its intensity and in its representation of a person who has been victimised in many ways and who has experienced so much gross violation of human dignity by society. It is as respectful as it is powerful.

It is this series that provides “an occasion for critical engagement with ‘a regime of visibility’ within which black queer marginality achieves coherence” and, “as a result, the project offers a moment for a nuanced and attentive examination, one that has the potential to reconfigure currently exploitative socio-cultural relations and produce new arenas of expression”. Muholi (2013:172) both recognises and states that human beings deserves to be treated with both love and respect, which is what I believe she expresses toward each and every woman she photographs. As Muholi (2013:172) states, it is her aim to capture the subtle complexities that challenge our prejudices due to hate and ignorance.

⁷⁶ This troubling event is the subject of many other works by Muholi in her earlier photographs. Her ongoing photographic essay “Faces and Phases” refers to a collective struggle and lived reality of black lesbians living in township areas, many of whom have experienced various violations. “Mo(u)rning” is another photographic piece which includes videos, documents and re-enactments of crime scenes. The images of “love and loss”, which depict Muholi and her partner in times of mourning and of loss, have a beautiful tender feel to them, despite the clear vulnerability of the subjects and the fact that these images often re-enact and/or refer to various crime scenes where black lesbians have been attacked or murdered in South Africa. The subjects are clearly in a state of mourning as yet another friend, a lover, a member of the community has been lost due to the senseless and ongoing violence, discrimination, hate and murder of women who are black and who are lesbians. I find that the mourning can also refer to the lack of justice for these women – the subjects are as much in mourning over the loss of the person as they are over the state of the justice system; they know that justice will likely not prevail or, if it does, it will become a long and difficult process that is drawn out over several years.

In her image of *Mbali* (Fig. 2.20), the subject stands close to a wall by her side, with her closely shaven blond head slightly tilted and her left arm folded behind her back (Salley 2013:108). As Raél Salley (2013:108) notes, *Mbali* confronts us with a confident gaze and an open, three-quarter pose”. This is a pose that proudly displays her t-shirt, which is emblazoned with the iconic Superwoman symbol (Salley 2013:108). Salley (2013:109) states that Muholi’s engagement with *Mbali* came after violence, a hate crime during 2008, in which Eudy Simelane was murdered, and Mbali’s portrait was made with this in mind. Muholi describes the picture, according to Salley (2013:109), “as a commemoration, memorial and historical record of the roles brave women play in the face of pain and suffering. Mbali’s choice to wear an icon of heroism communicates a defiance, resilience and fearlessness in the face of violence, stigma and homophobia”. On a final note, I would like to refer to questions which Muholi (2013:172) asks herself every time she photographs another participant for her photographic archive, *Faces and Phases*:

... what does it mean to have a travelling exhibition which was first shown at Documenta? Documenta is a specific and highly selective space that comes together once every five years. What does it mean to exhibit black lesbian, queer art in such a white space at the height of hate crimes taking place in South Africa? Note that none of the portraits are smiling. Now, there is an intensity, a piercing of stance and of eyes. There is almost an accusation – Where are YOU? What have YOU been doing? You look but you are always silent – nothing but a gaze.

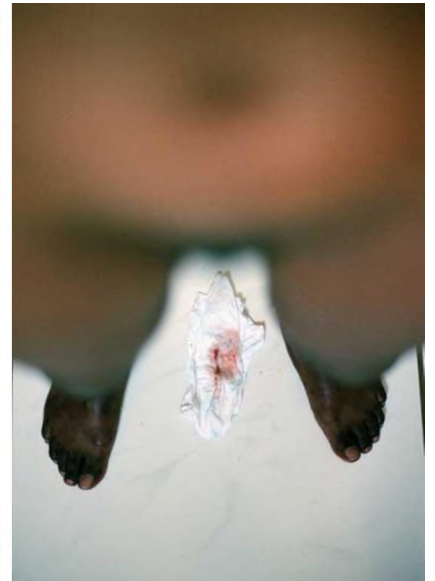


Fig. 2.16 Zanele Muholi, *Period I-V* (2005), Lambda print, 500 x 375mm.

Source: <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/muholi.htm>



Fig. 2.17 Zanele Muholi, *Aftermath* (2004), Silver gelatin print, 600 x 395mm.

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/aftermath.htm>



Fig. 2.18 Zanele Muholi, *Hate Crime Survivor I* (2004), Silver gelatin print, 254 x 385mm.

Source : <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/baragwanath2.htm>



Fig. 2.19 Zanele Muholi, *Hate Crime Survivor II* (2004), Silver gelatin print, 254 x 385mm.

Source: <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/baragwanath3.htm>



Fig. 2.20 Zanele Muholi, *Mbali* (2010), Silver gelatin print, 76.5 x 50.5cm.

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/faces76.html>

2.8) Institutionalised Racism and Decolonising Education

The culmination of 20 years' worth of broken promises, since the abolition of Apartheid in 1994, has reached a boiling point in South Africa, and the 2015/2016 student protests feature prominently as a key example. The first wave of protests started at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2014 when protesting students called for the removal of a statue of the colonialist Cecil John Rhodes, which was situated in a central location on the campus grounds. The protests that occurred at UCT had ignited the first wave of protests calling for the decolonisation of higher education in South African. These protests started trending on social media and are referred to as the "Rhodes must Fall" movement. Similar protests, calling for the decolonisation of universities, spread across the country. These included the "Rhodes must Fall" campaign at Rhodes University, where protesting students called for the decolonisation of the institution, starting with a name change, by referring to the university as the "University Currently Known as Rhodes" (UCKAR). These protests were led primarily by the Black Student Movement (BSM). Other protests related to the "Fees must Fall" campaign ignited all over university campuses across the country a few months later. Students protested against the rising cost of higher education, and urged that education be free for all by appealing directly to the state, especially the Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande.

The various forms of discontent experienced by students are evident. This is especially apparent in moments of protest caught on camera and images published extensively in the media. Scenes of protesting students and police brutality were daily features on eNews Channel Africa (eNCA), social media and in newspaper articles during the months of August, September and October 2016. Arguably, based on commentary posted on social media, many South Africans dismissed the police brutality by stating that the students are 'hooligans', 'criminals', 'entitled' and 'vandals'. The sound of stun grenades regularly exploding and the burning smoke from the grenades permeating the air on campus grounds, outside union buildings, in the streets and outside parliament were firm features in news outlets and attest to the level of police brutality. However, according to students interviewed on news outlets, such as eNCA, video material was often edited and never showed scenes of the students' side of the story, either before or after police intervention. Many students stated that they were protecting themselves when police intervened and insisted that the attacks against them were unprovoked. Disturbingly, scenes of police entering student residences at Rhodes University, in which stun grenades and rubber bullets were used, were posted on the "Rhodes SRC" and

“UCKAR Student Body”⁷⁷ pages on Facebook during October 2016; however, unsurprisingly, these videos were not shown on eNCA. As ours is, in theory, a democratic country, it becomes the constitutional and moral obligation of the state and South African citizens to provide the youth with every possible opportunity available in order for them to obtain necessary skills and qualifications in order to invest in the social, political and economic prosperity and the future of South Africa.

In the article titled *Deciphering the Meanings, and Explaining the South African Higher Education Student Protests 2015–2016*⁷⁸, Saleem Badat (2016:4) observes that the “consequences of the ‘economics’ of the ‘organic crisis’ in and of higher education are pervasive, disturbing and destructive”. Badat (2016:6) further notes that “the ideological (the concept ‘ideology’ is used capaciously) aspects of the ‘organic crisis’ are evident in a number of features of contemporary South African higher education” and that “institutional change in post-1994 South African higher education has occurred in an epoch of globalization and in a conjuncture of the dominance of the ideology of neo-liberalism”. The neo-liberal discourse has socio-political and cultural dimensions, beyond the economic dimension. However, neo-liberal discourse has, for the most part, ignored struggles faced in basic and higher education. In other words, education, especially the call for free decolonised higher education, has reduced education to economics. In this instance, reducing the right to education poses an ‘organic crisis’ in that reducing the value of education to merely economics. In other words, education has been reduced to a commodity – hence to call for free higher education. Additionally, the neo-liberal heteropatriarchal, racist and classist capitalist structure further complicates the call for free higher education. Consequentially, the “Fees must Fall” protests provide a social movement which challenges dominant social structures whilst exposing their oppressive and authoritarian nature. Badat (2016:7) suggests that the tendency to “reduce ‘transformation’ to numbers has had its corollary in the lack of significant engagement with critical issues” such as “the decolonizing, deracialization, degendering, and demasculinization of the academic and institutional structures and cultures of universities”. As such, it becomes “painfully clear that the greater presence of black students and staff has not automatically

⁷⁷ The acronym UCKAR stands for the University Currently Known as Rhodes. This acronym is used by students from Rhodes University who are protesting for free decolonised higher education, starting with a call for changing the name of Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. Many students feel that, given the history of South Africa and of Apartheid, the name “Rhodes” is inappropriate, since it directly relates to the British imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes. Rhodes was instrumental in developing British imperial policies in South Africa, consequentially disenfranchising the black population in South Africa during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

⁷⁸ See, Badat (2016).

translated into genuine respect for difference, appreciation of diversity, and meaningful social and educational inclusion ...” (Badat 2016:11). In this sense, it becomes imperative to promote socio-political and cultural liberation from the rigid framework and institutionalised structures in order to promote educational inclusion socially, academically, linguistically and culturally.

According to Nigel Gibson (2011:xv), “South Africa’s liberation struggle was of historic importance, but from a Fanonian standpoint what has happened in its aftermath is equally important”⁷⁹. Arguably, the transformation that occurred after the formal abolishment of Apartheid is consequential within South African history. In Chapter 1 I referred to the South African constitution and the inclusion of guaranteed protections for all South Africans; however, it becomes evident that, despite these protections, discrimination, marginalisation and gross violations of human dignity still persist. Although Chapter 1 primarily focuses on homophobia and hate crimes in South Africa, it is imperative to note that the above-mentioned is indicative of only a fraction of the discontents that South Africans face on a daily basis; furthermore, these issues do not only affect South African society, but are issues that persist the world over. However, for the intents and purposes of my research, I will focus on issues pertaining primarily to South Africa and, to a lesser extent, to the African continent.

The discontents I referred to earlier are manifold. These issues weave an intricate web that connects in a variety of ways. First, violence, such as hate crimes, rape/curative rape, sexual harassment, gender-based and institutional violence, prominently features within South African society, including within tertiary institutions. Such violence is illustrative of the lack of social, political and cultural change within tertiary institutions and the need for a revised dialectic of transformation in South Africa. In other words, despite the progressive constitution implemented in 1996, social change is not a given. Social change pertains to a significant change in cultural norms and values and should, therefore, be something that is fought for and implemented. The recent rise in student protests in South Africa, during the 2015/2016 academic years, attests to the need for social transformation. In this instance, social transformation pertains to the adherence to socio-political and cultural change in relation to institutionalised racism and free decolonised higher education, and the impatience

⁷⁹ Nigel Gibson (2011:79) refers to Fanon’s ‘Power of Ideology’ as the ‘Philosophy of Ideology’. What this means is that Fanon’s notion of an ‘absence of ideology’ refers to the lack of a social, or rather unifying, liberatory ideology (Gibson 2011:79). A liberatory ideology is fundamentally important as a means of helping to create a new rhythm, that is, a new dialogue and essentially new modes of being human, and the aforementioned is exactly what is needed in order to develop new openings that are created by social movements (Gibson 2011:79).

experienced by many citizens given the slow transformation process that is currently in its twenty-second year of the new democratic South Africa. As Pumla Gqola (2015:56) notes,

The romance of a new country is gone, and the children that should have inherited Mandela's dream continue to live under the brutalisation of raced, gendered terror. Their strategies and rage are not entirely different from the energy, anger and hope that we associate with the Soweto 1976 student uprising. As we celebrate, commemorate and reflect on milestones along our liberation timeline, Soweto 1976 reminds us of how actively contested education and language once were, and how important it is not to take activities in those spheres for granted. When the Black staff at the University of Cape Town who organise under #TransformUCT insist on curriculum change, they also drive home the failure of the transformation agenda and the urgency of unapologetically decolonising universities. These are strong statements against institutional violence, often met with criminalisation and violence that should not be the norm twenty-one years after 1994.

First, the romance of a new country, the mythologised idea of a rainbow nation, is replaced with what Gqola terms "a South African nightmare". The idea of a 'rainbow nation' suggests that race, class and gender no longer matter in post-Apartheid South Africa. In this instance, the aforementioned worldview focuses on aspects of multiculturalism that the majority of white South Africans are comfortable with, in other words, the idea that 'all lives matter' since all persons are 'the same internally', therefore, epistemic injustices and structural inequality remain essentially ignored. Consequentially, the lived realities of the majority of South Africans are silenced and their struggles become invalidated when the idea of a 'rainbow nation' is used as a counter-argument with regard to discussions pertaining to structural inequality and institutionalised racism. Secondly, as Gqola notes, institutional violence and all forms of violence that I referred to in my first point have seemingly become a norm within contemporary South African society. It is for this precise reason that activism and, by extension, student protests are needed in South Africa. These protests and campaigns illustrate a definite shift in the status quo, or at least a challenge to the status quo. Through this challenge, students are opening a new world of pro-active social movement, while at the same time transgressing the socio-cultural normative conventions that have been present in South African society for far too long. As Corinne Knowles⁸⁰ observes,

... these campaigns reflect a particular moment of our history – a tipping point – that was waiting to happen. For years some people have been urging universities towards transformation. The way the university system works though, favours keeping the status quo. So any changes over the last decade have been painfully slow and without real will and commitment. So the student protests this year ... have compelled our

⁸⁰ Interview with Corinne Knowles, 20 November 2015, e-mail.

engagement with transformation, and no longer on the terms of the university, but on the terms of the students.

Therefore, the protests illustrate that racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia still play a substantial role in the disparities within the country. Furthermore, the student protests and visual activism create visibility⁸¹ pertaining to inequality, violence and stigmatisation. In this instance, inequality remains mostly invisible, meaning that visibility is usually only created through the work of activists in order to publicise injustices that may go unreported in the media, such as the murders of lesbians in the townships.

An example of the silencing that forms part of the normative violence seen in the country is seen in a documentary called, *Luister*⁸², which was filmed and released online by the student organisation “Open Stellenbosch”. *Luister* is a documentary about the lives of students of colour and the instances of racial prejudice they experience at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, including the linguistic challenges they face every day because of the use of Afrikaans as the primary medium of instruction. The documentary consists of a series of interviews with students and also one lecturer from Stellenbosch. In the interviews, students recount their individual experiences of racial prejudice on campus and the use of Afrikaans as both a medium of instruction and as a culture. The interviews illustrate that the stories of racial prejudice of students are ignored and remain invisible, therefore students made the documentary in order to have their voices heard and in order to create visibility with regard to the socio-cultural restrictions, and the prejudice and discrimination they experience on campus. An article appeared in *The Guardian*, on 7 September 2015, regarding the *Luister* documentary. The article noted that, since the release of the documentary on 20 August 2015, the video had been viewed 290 000 times on YouTube (at the time of print), and that the documentary had begun to trend on social media in South Africa and was starting to spread across the world⁸³. A quotation is included within the margins of the article. Perhaps this

⁸¹ See Subsection 2.2 “Visual Culture and Contexts of Authenticity”

⁸² The documentary effectively highlights the silencing of black voices in South Africa. The title *Luister* is an Afrikaans word meaning “listen” or “to listen” – the title is therefore indicative of the long history of silencing and the fact that silencing still persists, and the fact that people need to listen to the plight and grievances of different marginalised groups. To hear and to listen are two very different actions, and to listen implies that one has taken in the given information and/or arguments and is equipped to debate the issues that have been presented. *Luister* was uploaded online on 20 August 2015 and is 35 minutes in length. The documentary *Luister* is available online at the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF3rTBQTQk4>.

⁸³ The article in *The Guardian* regarding the *Luister* documentary is available at the following link: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/07/luister-south-africa-film-racism-stellenbosch>. An earlier version of the article, in *The Daily Maverick* is available at the following link: <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-09-01-stellenbosch-luister-could-lead-to-change/#.VehiOipVhBd>.

quotation, which is taken from a statement made by “Open Stellenbosch”, is the most telling comment on the lack of transformation and a need for social change in the form of activism: “As the testimonies in *Luister* demonstrate, the culture of apartheid is alive and well in Stellenbosch”. Therefore, the documentary creates awareness about the prevailing racism in a predominantly Afrikaans university and the predominantly Afrikaans university town, Stellenbosch. Several of the students interviewed in the documentary speak about their experiences at the university. Additionally, they refer to the ways they are treated; this treatment from other students and staff directly relates to their home language, race and ethnicity. Evidently, students who partook in the documentary are transgressing the boundaries of silencing⁸⁴, but it is already clear, from the start of the documentary, that they have experienced a gross violation of human dignity. For example, one of the students in the documentary states that sometimes when he is alone late at night, he asks God why He made him black. Evidently, the discrimination and marginalisation that this young man faces on an almost daily basis has significantly affected his sense of self-worth. The protests and debates at Stellenbosch University, as mentioned, are not isolated events. However, the first wave of protests seen in 2015 caused a resurgence in social action taken by the community in order to pave the way for other campaigns to challenge the status quo. Consequentially, by challenging the status quo, the long-standing history of silencing became contested and rape survivors began to break their silence, especially against institutionalised violence, such as was seen during the first half of 2016 when the “Chapter 2.12” campaign at Rhodes University made headlines in various publications and on social media.

2.8.1) “Breaking the Silence”: Chapter 2.12

An awareness campaign titled “Chapter 2.12”, consisting of posters relating to rape and rape culture, was introduced on 11 April 2016 at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. The title of the campaign, “Chapter 2.12”, refers to the South African constitution’s Chapter 2.12 regarding

The Times Live included thirteen hard-hitting quotes from the documentary in another article, which is available at the following link: <http://www.timeslive.co.za/sundaytimes/stnews/2015/08/24/13-hard-hitting-quotes-from-Luister-the-documentary-about-Stellenbosch-University-racism>. *The Mail & Guardian* has an article regarding *Luister* available at the following link: <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-09-01-stellenbosch-university-not-racist-committed-to-transformationstellenbosch-is-not-racist-but-we-do-have-racists>.

⁸⁴ Silencing, regarding violations pertaining to race, class, gender and sexual orientations, is a widespread practice in South Africa. One of the ways of counteracting this silencing process is through activism. Visual activism provides a way, such as through visual ‘texts’, media, articles and performance, of changing the way we see the world. This includes subverting various dominant socio-political and cultural structures that create normative conventions with regard to how the world is and has been seen. Zanele Muholi’s photography, that forms the basis of her visual activism, is one of the most effective ways in which to both break silence and create visibility with regard to specific socio-political and cultural conventions, and her work represents marginalised groups of people within our society, specifically in South Africa.

both the dignity and safety of students. An article titled “Chapter 2.12: The Campaign Against Rape Culture” by Mishka Wazar appeared in the Rhodes University newspaper “Activate”⁸⁵, and stated that “the posters are meant to raise awareness of the policies regarding sexual assault and rape on campus”. However, the article further states that the “Campus Protection Unit (CPU) removed the posters the morning after they were put up, but the Student Representative Council (SRC) succeeded in reposting the posters around the Library and Kaif area”. These posters consist of statements from prosecutors, management, staff members and students from Rhodes University.

Another article that appeared in “Eyewitness News”⁸⁶ reported on 18 May 2016 that “some students and staff members have questioned whether sufficient systems are in place for sexual assault and rape on various university campuses”. The article notes that students have also “challenged the sexual offences policies at tertiary institutions, saying they alienate survivors and protect the alleged perpetrators”. Yet, as Pumla Gqola (2015:11) notes, “to treat women as though they do not matter is deeply engrained in our culture as South Africans”. Although rape culture on campuses is widespread and needs to be addressed – as well as properly implementing policies to protect rape survivors, prosecute perpetrators and eliminate secondary victimisation – it is important to note that violence against women is almost epidemic in South Africa as a whole, and the policies that are currently in place remain largely ineffectual.

During the “Chapter 2.12” protest, police presence increased, resulting in the arrest of four Rhodes University students. The police also fired rubber bullets and used stun grenades on protesters. Katherine Simons⁸⁷, a fourth year BA student at Rhodes University, shared her experience of the protest. Simons describes her experience of the protest as follows:

The whole week of protests was chaotic and traumatic. I had heard the horrific accounts of sexual assault and rape, which had now no longer come from strangers, but from my closest friends. I saw topless women⁸⁸ being humiliated despite their

⁸⁵ Wazar, M. 2016. “Chapter 2.12: The Campaign against Rape Culture”.

<http://www.activateonline.co.za/chapter-2-12-the-campaign-against-rape-culture/>. Accessed on 1 June 2016

⁸⁶ The “Eyewitness News” article is available at the following link:

<http://www.ewn.co.za/2016/05/18/Universities-overhaul-policies-amid-protests-over-rape-culture>.

⁸⁷ Katherine Simons is a pseudonym I have chosen to use in order to protect the identity of my source, since she is currently a registered student and will re-register as a postgraduate for the 2017 academic year. Interview with Katherine Simons, 18 August 2016, Grahamstown.

⁸⁸ About 40 female students protested either topless or in their bras, and these protesters had written either “Still not asking for it” or “no means no” onto their torsos. However, police officers deemed their naked torsos to be public indecency, despite the fact that several of the male protesters were topless as well, yet their naked torsos were not regarded as indecent. This incident illustrates how patriarchy continuously fails women and non-binary

attempts at trying to take a stance against the toxic rape culture at the university currently known as Rhodes. I was shot at with rubber bullets – one hit me on my arm, and I now have a scar which can be seen and extends deep beneath my skin. I had two stun grenades explode next to me, temporarily losing my hearing in my left ear. I went to a cancelled tutorial that day and I sat in disbelief. I had sobbed, and screamed and felt the pain ripple throughout my body and soul. I was so angry, confused and hopeless. The interdict set against that only intensified those feelings.

Despite Simons' negative experiences of the protests, she adds that if she "had to go through all of it again, I would in a heartbeat because despite the fact that I had been physically and emotionally hurt, I knew that this was a cause which I truly and utterly believe in. I would go back fighting any day". As Simons' account of the protest and police presence illustrates, secondary victimisation often comes from those who are meant to protect victims of hate crimes and survivors of rape; however, more often than not, rape survivors, including activists and protesters, endure further humiliation, violence and victimisation⁸⁹.

Deborah Seddon, a lecturer in the English Department at Rhodes University, wrote an article for *The Daily Maverick* on 1 June 2016⁹⁰. In the article titled, "'We will not be Silenced': Rape Culture, #RURReferencelist, and the University Currently Known as Rhodes", Seddon states that, "it began with a list. Eleven men's names and the words 'et al' (meaning 'and others'). Nothing more. No descriptions were offered. No allegations were made". Seddon is referring to a list that was anonymously posted on the "RU Queer Confessions and Crushes"⁹¹ page, and the post had become viral within hours. In the article, Seddon states that

... to post the 'Reference List' anonymously on social media; to seek out those listed individually, and to demand the university take immediate action to suspend and investigate them, have drawn condemnation from the university management, and from many in the press and on social media, raising questions about balancing the rights of the accused versus the rights of the abused in a constitutional democracy.

people. Historically, body activism, or topless protesting as it is currently known, dates back to 1929 in Nigeria. Nigerian women were protesting against white colonisers and the compliance of local chiefs, through body activism. They used their bodies in a powerful way in order to counter imperialism, oppression and sexism. According to Maryam Kazeem (2012), "significant manifestations of black women's resistance to colonial authority and racialised notions of the body" occurred through the use of body activism. Kazeem's article titled "Bodies that Matter: The African History of Naked Protest, FEMEN Aside" is available on the "OkayAfrica" website and is available at the following link: <https://google.co.za/amp/www.okayafrica.com/news/naked-protest-bodies-that-matter-femen-african-history/amp/>

⁸⁹ The following link pertains to the "Chapter 2.12" protest, including the heavy police presence:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1Bb5nnSTZE>. Other videos pertaining to the protest are available on the "Activate" page on YouTube, which is available at the following link: <https://m.youtube.com>user>Activate>

⁹⁰ Seddon, D. 2016. "'We will not be Silenced': Rape Culture, #RURReferencelist, and the University Currently Known as Rhodes" <http://dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2016-06-01-we-will-not-be-silenced-rape-culture-rureferencelist-and-the-university-currently-known-as-rhodes/#.V7LcZNJ97Mw>. Accessed on 2 August 2016.

⁹¹ The "RU Queer Confessions and Crushes" Facebook page has been taken down since the reference list was posted.

Survivors of rape are faced on a daily basis with this troublesome dilemma. Although Chapter 2.12 in the constitution states that every person has the right to security, the right to freedom, and the right to be free from all forms of violence, society still attempts to blame victims of gender-based violence in order to “balance the rights of the accused” by invalidating the claims of the victim/survivor. For example, one of the posters that was put up around the Rhodes University campus during the protest reads as follows, “Are you sure you want to go through with this? You’ll ruin his reputation”. In this instance, the quote used on the poster is illustrative of secondary victimisation. In other words, secondary victimisation pertains to blaming victims by being less concerned with the rape survivor than with the reputation of the accused. Asking a rape survivor whether s/he is sure that s/he wants to go through with reporting a rape is absolutely adding insult to injury. Although the process of lodging a complaint is emotionally and physically draining during the proceedings that follow, rape survivors instead are asked whether they truly want to ruin the life of the accused. What about the life and security of the rape survivor? Has her/his sexual violation not ruined her/his life? The bruises and scars from the rape may heal after a certain period of time, but the emotional trauma and sense of shame that many survivors experience will remain a constant reminder of the trauma the rape survivor experienced. As Gqola (2015:27) observes, “... there is something wrong with a society that stigmatises survivors, and dissuades others from supporting them publicly and privately rather than shaming perpetrators”. Instead, rape survivors are the ones who are often publicly shamed, either by members of the community, or by the police, or even by the prosecution. For example, another poster reads as follows: “I don’t have to be empathetic. I’m a lawyer, not a therapist”. Another example of secondary victimisation is a poster that reads as follows, “Girls shouldn’t get too drunk or else they will get raped”. In this instance, the rape survivor’s sobriety and judgement are brought into question as if to suggest that, if she were to have been inebriated, that somehow makes the rape permissible. Rape is never permissible and survivors are never at fault. According to Pumla Gqola (2015:12),

Rape is never mild, never minor, and never acceptable. It is not just sex. The cost to survivors who speak out is so significant that it does not make sense to fabricate rape except as an exercise in self-immolation because patriarchal society, the dominant response to a human being ‘breaking the silence’ is disbelief. Therefore, those people who constantly say ‘but women sometimes lie’ are part of the problem. Each time someone says, hears and believes that most women lie about rape – or that saying so is the legitimate response to someone telling you that s/he or they were raped – they make it more unlikely that someone else will speak of their own violation.

This is how rape culture works in society. Survivors are stigmatised and are forced to endure further victimisation. The well-being of the accused is frequently prioritised over that of the accuser. Rape apologists construct various arguments to invalidate the statement that the accuser has given. In this instance, the character of the rape survivor is brought into question. The plausibility of her story is doubted and discredited. She will be asked whether she had been drinking and what she had been wearing. Furthermore, she will repeatedly be asked whether she is sure she did not give the accused any indication that she was/would be a willing participant. These questions are repeatedly asked, it almost seems as though the interviewer tries to gauge a different response; perhaps if s/he keeps asking the same questions the victim will drop her case or, at the very least, become doubtful about her own story. This is how society silences the oppressed, the marginalised, the victim, the survivor, the activist, but moreover this is how society keeps patriarchy firmly in place.

2.8.2) The Silent Protest

In 2006, “The One in Nine” campaign was formed during the Jacob Zuma rape trial, in order to provide consistent and unapologetic support for Khwezi. Khwezi was a name given to the accuser by feminists, especially those who wrote for national newspapers, in order to protect the identity of the woman who was at the centre of the trial. Gqola (2015:10) notes that “in One in Nine, like other feminists everywhere in the world, we know that women cannot be free for as long as rape exists in the world”. She further notes that “ending rape is going to require that we interrupt all the narratives of rape culture”. During the trial, Khwezi faced further victimisation by many supporters of Jacob Zuma. The abuse and victim-blaming eventually lead to Kkwezi leaving the country.

In 2016, ten years after the trial, four protesters staged a silent protest during Zuma’s address at the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) briefing on 6 August 2016. Each one of the four protesters held up a hand-written placard. The four placards read as follows: 1. “I am 1 in 3”; 2. “10 years later”; 3. “Khanga”; and lastly 4. “remember Khwezi”. The four protesters decided to stage the protest in order both to stand against rape culture in South Africa and to remind the public of Khwezi and the rape trial⁹². Feminists, activists and rape survivors are breaking the silence. Silence effectively creates a dichotomy of visibility and invisibility. That is, silence equates invisibility, while ‘speaking out’ to create visibility

⁹² Shange, Z. 2016. “Anti-rape protesters disrupt Zuma’s IEC address”. <http://ewn.co.za/2016/08/06/Anti-rape-protesters-disrupt-Zumas-speech>. Accessed on 25 August 2016.

pertaining to issues that are usually made to be invisible in our society. The perception remains: if it is not something that is spoken about, then it is not an issue that plagues our society. Visibility is remarkable in the ways in which it challenges different forms of censorship. Zanele Muholi realised the potency of creating visibility and ‘speaking out’ about certain issues pertaining to race, class, gender and sexual orientation from the beginning of her career as a photographer.

2.9) Conclusion

Muholi and Mlangeni’s work raises questions pertaining to African sexuality and gender expression. This is achieved by providing a re-analysis of notions that are firmly rooted in the past and entrenched in Western conceptions of African sexuality. They provide a counter-argument against long-standing notions, definitions and representations of African-ness which are imposed on black bodies. Such stereotypical notions are frequently addressed in the work of Muholi, such as in *Miss D’vine*. This can be seen in the use of props such as a headband or bead skirt, in order to reflect to the viewer where society has positioned black men and women historically, as well as presently. In this instance, Muholi employs both gendered performances and performative ‘African-ness’. Arguably, she is creating a narrative with history through her visual ‘texts’, while simultaneously subverting, re-appropriating, re-analysing, and subjugating dominant social, cultural and political structures, which police, frame, oppress and marginalise certain minority groups, such as black lesbian women living in townships. Furthermore, the student protests are illustrative of a need for social transformation, including a new dialectic of transformation applicable to South Africa today. Artists such as Muholi, who use their art as a vehicle for social transformation through visual activism, aim to change dominant social structures, which are challenged through such protests.

Chapter Three

Signifying Practices and Sites of Resistance

Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological makeup; it is created in culture.

- Michael Kimmel (2005:25)

For vulnerable people who were not women, reporting rape also meant dealing with the kind of incomprehension and humiliation that comes with masculinist culture, such as the questioning of a man's own masculinity in not being able to defend himself against another man's violation.

- Pumla Gqola (2015:14)

3.1) Introduction

Societies remain characterised by various inequalities such as inequalities pertaining to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender. One of the dangers that plays out within identity politics relates to the idea that there can be an 'authentic' identity. This so-called authentic identity is defined in its opposition to an 'other', and as such reinforces an oppressive hierarchy. However, identity politics is not solely responsible for the polarisation of self and 'other'. In this instance, the polarisation existed long before the advent of identity politics. Arguably, one of the first accounts of this binarism could have stemmed from a notion of 'survival of the fittest'; in other words a defence mechanism employed as a means of ensuring the survival of one's own community, family and/or the society of which a person was a part, and 'other' may have been regarded as anyone or anything which did not form part of that community, thus posing a potential threat.

Another account for this binary opposition is found in religion. Often arguments pertaining to Christianity⁹³ are that the Bible refers to Adam and Eve and not 'Adam and Steve'; thus homosexuality is seen as 'other' in relation to heterosexuality because of the perceived notion that heterosexuality is the 'right way' and 'the Christian way', and anything that deflects

⁹³ It is imperative to note that the relationship between homosexuality and religion differs across time and place. Christianity is not the only denomination that has negative attitudes toward homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism. However, there are certain religions, such as Hinduism, that do not view homosexuality as a sin.

from this notion is perceived as ‘other’ and a threat to Christian morality⁹⁴. Therefore, there are various examples which indicate that identity politics are not the only reason for the construction of this opposition (various other examples exist but are not named above). It should be noted that the only reason for the existence of such binary oppositions is to continue oppressive measures and social control over various cultures, communities, societies and individuals. Unfortunately, this is done by inflicting fear on individuals due to discrimination, violations and laws against certain societies, for example anti-homosexuality laws in various countries⁹⁵.

Restrictive expectations related to social roles exist because of the social constructedness of identity. That is, identity stems from culturally and historically constructed concepts, and individuals regularly learn of themselves and their identity through interactions with other individuals, as well as through the media and various institutions. Unfortunately, cultural and social identity are linked to patriarchal value systems, power, knowledge and ideology. I say unfortunately, since discourse can limit the ways in which certain topics are constructed, and those individuals who control discourse also control power⁹⁶. Another problem that exists is media representation, whereby the media can control certain representations through images or language to convey specific ideas of certain social groups and/or individual identities – such representations can be misguided and occasionally rely on stereotypical concepts of such social groups, for example, representations of LGBT people and representations of individuals who are black. Since such representations are repeated by the media and certain institutions, these become regarded as the norm and as the ‘natural’ representation of various communities. Therefore, it is imperative to understand, critically examine and debate such representations⁹⁷ in order to counteract stereotypical views that are being presented as a social norm. Social constructs do not represent individual identities accurately. They create connotations of certain groups of people or objects, which can be dangerous and often lead to violations of individual rights⁹⁸.

⁹⁴ See Subsection 2.5 titled ‘Traditionalism’ versus ‘Modernism’ for arguments pertaining to morality.

⁹⁵ For example, there are countries where young women are kidnapped and used as sex slaves in order to enforce dominance over women and to inflict fear on other women so that they do not divert from their social expectations, social conventions and social roles.

⁹⁶ See Foucault, M. (1980) regarding discussions pertaining to discourse and power.

⁹⁷ See Hall, S. (1997). Chapters 1 and 4 are particularly pertinent to discussions surrounding representation.

⁹⁸ One example is the recent rise in xenophobic attacks in South Africa due to the connotation and assumption made that foreign nationals are attempting to steal the jobs of South African citizens, thus causing them to be perceived to be a threat to certain communities.

Identity, then, can be constructed through various means, such as the use of stereotypes, and because of the constructs and their implications of a ‘natural’ order, people often justify inequality, discrimination, violations and gross violations of human dignity.

3.2) The Gendered Gaze: Transphobia and the Threat of Masculinity

Dominant ideology⁹⁹ creates a discourteous (mis)conception of sex and gender, by reducing sex and gender to an unyielding set of regulations pertaining to biological characteristics. In doing so, the ‘essence’, in a manner of speaking, of what it means to be either male or female becomes diminished. That is, in this instance, ideology functions as a means to justify, reinforce and perpetuate the oppression of women, and arguably the transgender community, due to their gender non-conformity. Therefore, the dichotomy of sex and gender forms part of patriarchal society, as both sex and gender are social constructs that are interdependent. Children are socially conditioned from a young age to fit into societal conceptions of sex and gender. Parents and guardians who reinforce the gender/sex binary by buying clothes and toys that are considered ‘appropriate’ for a boy or a girl achieve this conditioning through repetition¹⁰⁰. Since society is socially conditioned through repetitive acts of confirming sex and gender¹⁰¹, and because of the stigma attached to non-conforming individuals, the reinforcement of the gender/sex binary will remain intact (Butler 1990; 1993).

Stigma remains a means of regulating society and maintaining socio-cultural control; however, non-conformity disrupts regulating power and threatens to overthrow ideology, hegemony and patriarchy. Fear is a strong motivating factor used to reinforce oppression, stigma and prejudice toward certain marginalised groups of people who threaten to disrupt long-standing normative conventions, and societal boundaries, and a tactic sometimes used is to create fear¹⁰² and panic within the general public. Pumla Gqola (2015:78) refers to this state of fear as the “female fear factory” with regard to rape/assault, since rape can be referred to as an epidemic in South Africa and many women live in constant fear of being raped or assaulted. Gqola (2015:78) notes that the female fear factory is regularly performed

⁹⁹ See Subsection 1.4, titled Ideology, Colonial Discourse and Stereotypes, in Chapter 1 for discussion pertaining to ideology, discourse and stereotypes by Louis Althusser, Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha.

¹⁰⁰ For example, my sister and brother-in-law decided that they wanted to find out the sex of my nephew during their 20 week ultrasound scan. Notably, before the scan, friends and family bought an item of clothing here and there, nothing particularly special and in neutral colours. However, once everyone was told that they were expecting a boy, friends and family instantly bought clothes in various shades of blue and started buying toys that are deemed ‘appropriate’ for a boy.

¹⁰¹ Butler’s theory of a “repetition of acts” is also relevant in arguments pertaining to drag. See Chapter 2.

¹⁰² See, Gqola, P. 2015. “The Female Fear Factory” in *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, pp. 78–100.

in both mediated forms and public space, since it relies on audible, visible and other recognisable cues in order to control and project fear. According to Gqola (2015:78), the female fear factory is “both mythologised, sometimes through a language of respectability and at other times through shame”. Gqola’s focus, here, is primarily on the fear that society instils in women; however, the notion of a ‘fear factory’ is applicable to various marginalised groups of individuals, for example the LGBT community in South Africa¹⁰³.

Violence, both in the public and private domain, if reoccurring frequently, has the potency of regulating various communities by implanting a constant state of fear in individuals and communities alike. This is achieved either through the media, politicians or law enforcement, although it may often consist of a combination of all three aforementioned factors. For example, in 2015 conservatives in the United States of America introduced a so-called bathroom law in order to keep children ‘safe’. The ways in which stories were reported in national newspapers suggested that letting male-to-female (MTF) and female-to-male (FTM) transgender persons use the restrooms that are not male (if MTF) or female (if FTM) would put children using said bathrooms in considerable risk of getting molested by ‘perverts’ using the ‘wrong’ restroom in order to prey on unsuspecting children. Despite the absurdity of creating something like a ‘bathroom law’, misconceptions about the transgender community still reinforce the prevailing prejudice and hatred directed toward the transgender community, by constructing and perpetuating a societal “fear factory” (Gqola 2015:78).

3.2.1) Transphobia and Patriarchy

Transphobia¹⁰⁴ has been on the rise over the last couple of years. This fear for transgendered persons is projected through the media and various other platforms in order to instil fear in the public, yet the public does not have anything to fear¹⁰⁵. Moreover, the so-called ‘phobia’ is emphasised by those individuals in their attempts to maintain patriarchal, imperialist and

¹⁰³ The recent rise in police brutality towards African-American citizens in the United States that has dominated the media in recent years also attests to this concept of the ‘fear factory’.

¹⁰⁴ Transphobia can be described as an irrational fear, hatred and severe hostility directed toward people who identify as being transgendered. This hostility originates from long-standing misconceptions surrounding the sex and gender binary, which forms part of a normative gender paradigm. However, transgendered individuals, drag kings and drag queens, including the intersex community and androgeny, is considered as being a transgression of traditional gender norms.

¹⁰⁵ For example, the proposed ‘bathroom law’ in the United States of America, which suggests that everyone who enters a public restroom should be checked in order to determine whether their gender matches the bathroom facility that they enter in order to ‘protect’ children in public restrooms from ‘perverts’ who dress ‘as women’. The aforementioned negatively affects public perceptions regarding the transgender community and transgender individuals.

ideological control – it is these individuals who fear the transgender community and other non-conforming communities due to both their non-conformity and their liberatory ideology.

In *Understanding Patriarchy* (1984), bell hooks formulates the notion of the “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” in order to challenge these social structures. Fear is pervasively utilized to regulate whole communities and to police individual cultural beliefs, bodies, and gender identities. This phenomenon is frequently associated with the perceived threat of masculinity. In *The Gender of Desire: Essays on Male Sexuality*, Michael Kimmel (2005:25) notes that:

Manhood is neither static nor timeless; it is historical. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological makeup; it is created in culture. Manhood means different things at different times to different people. We come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of “others” – racial minorities sexual minorities, and, above all, women.

In other words, ‘manhood’ in relation to a male-centred identity, like any identity, is constructed and identified in terms of what it is not, which means that identity is subject to becoming destabilised and threatened. Masculinity is sustained by normative conventions, that is, despite various commonalities between masculinity and femininity, male behaviour is characterised by a signifying practice related to traits or roles that are supposedly indicators of an ‘authentic’ masculine identity, such as ‘the protector’, ‘the breadwinner’, ‘toughness’, ‘independence’, ‘a lack of emotional display’, ‘dominance’. This is due to the supposed ‘inferiority’ of women and a deep-rooted fear pertaining to the characteristics that are perceived to be indicative of femininity such as fragility or weakness¹⁰⁶. A process of identification frequently frames identity. In social situations, men may display a sense of hyper-masculinity¹⁰⁷ in front of their friends, especially when their self-identification is directed toward women. In this instance, the hyper-masculine psyche attempts to affirm ‘domination’ and ‘superiority’ through social actions deemed ‘appropriate’ for their gender identity. However, when a man displays so-called feminine traits, the hyper-masculine psyche becomes threatened, and hostility and violence can ensue. If it is (falsely) believed that being a woman is degrading, either in certain cultures or society in general, then it is perceived to be even more degrading for a man to exhibit any traits associated with

¹⁰⁶ I am reminded of the song titled *What it feels like for a girl* by Madonna. In the song, she states that “girls can wear jeans and cut their hair short, wear shirts and boots ’cause it’s OK to be a boy”; however, “for a boy to look like a girl is degrading ’cause you think that being a girl is degrading”.

¹⁰⁷ Hyper-masculinity is a psychological term referring to the exaggeration of stereotypical masculinity.

femininity¹⁰⁸. These men are often subjected to violent hate crimes in the guise of ‘teaching them a lesson’ and ‘if they want to be women, then they should be treated as such’. The aforementioned is especially prevalent within cultures which hold male authority within the highest regard socially, culturally, politically and economically.

The emphasis on the notion of ‘male authority’ is still prevalent and dominant within different cultures and communities across the world. The social conditions that generate and perpetuate patriarchy remain unchanged¹⁰⁹. According to Nigel Gibson (2011:86), in South Africa “women in rural areas ... remain subject to patriarchal structures that treat women as perpetual minors”. That is, just as conservative notions related to a woman’s ‘place’, ‘sexuality’ and ‘role’ still prevail, so do conservative notions related to a man’s ‘place’, ‘sexuality’ and ‘role’, which is still held in high regard within certain cultures. The role, place and sexuality of a man leave no room for subjugation related to male authority, therefore those who conform to this ideology cannot allow homosexuality, femininity, bisexuality, and especially transgenderism to threaten prevailing conservative cultural notions and social conventions related to male authority. Transgender women are perceived to be a ‘triple threat’ in this regard. There is a misunderstanding that transgender women are gay, which is, in itself, not proven since some transgender women identify as either gay if they are attracted to women, straight if they are attracted to men or bisexual if they are attracted to both women and men. This may originate from the notion that transgender women are not ‘real’ women¹¹⁰, yet masculinity and femininity are social constructs in and of themselves and do not designate a ‘real’ gender expression. Gender expression forms part of self-expression and does not constitute an innate form of being. Identities are therefore inconsistent and often contradictory. Unlike a photograph, for example, identities are not fixed in time and space – they are not frozen within constructed and stereotypical boundaries related to gender

¹⁰⁸ According to Pumla Gqola (2015:39), “part of violent gender power is in celebrating attributes associated with the masculine, and ordering the world in terms of opposites, or binaries. If masculine and feminine are opposites, and there is nothing in between, then when masculine is celebrated, feminine as its opposite has to be debased. This means that those who are marked as feminine are also debased in relation to those marked as masculine. Debasing is another way of saying made to feel inferior ... in the end, patriarchy produces a condition of women’s unease in their bodies”.

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter 2 for discussions pertaining to institutionalised racism and violence, especially related to the recent rise in student protests on university campuses.

¹¹⁰ It is imperative to note that women often discriminate against transgender women on the basis that they are not ‘real’ women. For example, the feminist Germaine Greer went on a transphobic rant during an interview in 2015. The rant occurred after news broke that Caitlyn Jenner would be honoured as one of *Glamour* magazine’s Women of the Year. An article about the incident was published in the *Advocate* and the link can be found at: <http://advocate.com/caitlyn-jenner/2015/10/26/feminist-germaine-greer-goes-anti-trans-rant-over-caitlyn-jenner>

expression. Despite the above-mentioned, violence still persists and will continue, unless patriarchal power and notions are overthrown. According to Gqola (2015:14),

For vulnerable people who were not women, reporting rape also meant dealing with the kind of incomprehension and humiliation that comes with masculinist culture, such as the questioning of a man's own masculinity in not being able to defend himself against another man's violation. Rape is an exercise of patriarchal violent power against those who are safe to violate: mostly women, girls and boys but also adult men and trans-people deemed safe to violate.

In this regard, transgender women find themselves to be in a vulnerable position 'to be raped', just like cisgender¹¹¹ females are vulnerable to rape due to 'male authority'. The reason is twofold: first, transgender women are vulnerable because by being raped they are 'taught' a lesson in being a woman. If they 'want' to be women, then they 'need' to experience inferiority and subservience. Secondly, they are seen as both threatening and non-threatening. That is, they are deemed to be non-threatening on the basis of being 'safe to violate', as Gqola affirms, yet they are threatening because of the fragility of masculinity – they threaten to disrupt 'traditional' notions of masculinity and social conventions. Gender policing is so ingrained within the masculine psyche that some men become fearful that any evidence of emotionality will threaten their social standing, thus rendering them 'safe to violate'¹¹².

3.2.2) Breaking the Binary

In order for society to realise that identity does not consist of a single fixed entity, or rather way of being, requires a re-appropriation of gender identity – that is, a realisation that a third sex¹¹³ is entirely plausible. A 'third sex', then, is a form of sexual pluralism that transgresses the polarity of gender; effectively, to borrow Judith Butler's (2004) term, a means of 'undoing gender'. That is, sociologically speaking, 'undoing gender' is associated with the belief that gender is a social construct, as referred to earlier, and as such can be undone. However, the notion of undoing gender does not take various socio-cultural beliefs into account; in fact, the entire notion of undoing gender is based on a concept that is entirely

¹¹¹ A cisgender person is someone who identifies with the gender associated with the gender assigned to them by society based on their sex. That is, a cisgender female is someone who was born biologically female and identifies as being female. A transgender female is someone who was born biologically male, however, they identify as female, often describing that they were 'born in the wrong body'.

¹¹² This is illustrated by, for example, the way in which a close friendship between men is often referred to as a 'bromance' in order to illustrate that there are no emotional and/or romantic entanglements between two straight males who happen to be close friends. Similarly, the slang term 'bro-cation' refers to two heterosexual men who take a holiday together.

¹¹³ See Krafft-Ebing, R. (1965) for his psychological study of sexual behaviour. Although some of the beliefs and the state of knowledge of the time it was written is dated, it still remains an essential study.

Westernised. However, in saying this, it is imperative to keep in mind that there are various ways in which one can intersect the West/Africa cultural divide. This can be achieved through artworks produced by artists such as Zanele Muholi and Sabelo Mlangeni, due to the visual potency of their work. As Stuart Hall (1997:21) notes,

The meaning is *not* the object or person or thing, nor is it *in* the word. It is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable. The meaning is *constructed by the system of representation*. It is constructed and fixed by the *code*, which sets up the correlation between our conceptual system and our language system.

The cultural code, then, is not a fixed entity. Although the cultural code exists as a result of signifying practices, that is, in the production of meaning (Hall 1997:24), it can become re-signified. The photographic medium can be a means to re-signify the cultural code. Its appropriation is specific to a certain culture, socio-political situation, group or country. Whereas theory provides a general discursive departure, other mediums, such as photography, are capable of reaching a wider range of people. Social injustice, perpetuated through homophobia, transphobia, racism and sexism, is challenged within the work of Muholi, and her work is able to reach a broader scope of people. Academia remains a privilege accessible to a small number of people, and as such is not an effective means of reaching the majority of people in a country. For example, although theory is a necessity, it is not the most effective means of promoting visibility and activism, and in continents where poverty and illiteracy are still prominently featured in society, visual mediums are able to break the language barrier and cultural code.

3.3) Visual Culture and its Social Challenge

The emergence of visual culture in South Africa develops the capacity to break away from Eurocentric visuality. In other words, whereas visual culture has largely privileged the West, it can be re-appropriated to be culturally specific in order to create a visual ‘code’ that is socio-politically, culturally and geographically specific, such as is done in the photography of Zanele Muholi. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1998:27) note, questions with regard to modernism and postmodernism are frequently ‘centred’ in the limited provincial frame of European art. However, the emerging field of ‘visual culture’ can potentially represent a break with Eurocentrism in terms “not only of conservative ‘good eye’ art history but also with presumably radical, high-modernist avant-gardism, which perhaps explains the apoplectic reactions that ‘visual culture’ has sometimes provoked” (Shohat and Stam

1998:27). According to Shohat and Stam (1998:27), visual culture is a field that is capable of interrogating the ways in which visual culture and art history have been narrativised in order to privilege certain geographies and locations of art over others.

However, “one of the most striking features of the new visual culture is the visualization of things that are not in themselves visual”, and “visual culture does not depend on pictures but on this modern tendency to picture or visualize existence” (Mirzoeff 1998:6). First, visual culture is capable of breaking away from the Eurocentred art canon and by creating alternative visualisations of communities. Secondly, as Mirzoeff notes above, visual culture is dependent upon its ability to visualise existence. Therefore, lived experiences of persons who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender become visualised. Despite the notion that homosexuality and gender non-conformity are ‘un-African’, such visual representations illustrate this notion to be untrue by contesting it through visual ‘proof’ of existence. Although homosexuality and gender non-conformity remain largely taboo subjects in Africa and South Africa, the visualisation of queer existence is capable of destabilising myths pertaining to homosexuality and gender identity, as well as re-signifying cultural practices of appropriation. Since identity, as mentioned earlier, is not a fixed entity, the visualisations effectively dispel myths pertaining to stereotypical views of first, the sex and gender binary, and secondly, stereotypical representations of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. According to Martin Barnes (2011:9),

One of the most compelling aspects of photography is its capacity to tangle fact with fiction. It is here, when handled consciously, that subtle creative possibilities abound. A photograph is always a translation, distillation or filter of reality seen from the physical and conceptual standpoint of the person creating the image – as well as that of the viewer ... Photographs can be like a ‘figure’ of speech, composed of familiar words but containing an ambiguity between literal and figurative interpretation. As photography continues to be an expanding field of exciting possibilities, South African photographers have taken their places at its forefront.

Therefore, the photographic medium and, by extension, visual culture, allow the photographer to represent, define and re-signify on their own terms. Herein lies the potency of the photographic medium¹¹⁴ and in the work of Zanele Muholi.

Muholi avoids classification from various spheres, that is, public opinion, the media and so forth; instead she defines herself on her own terms and chooses to define the participants in her works based on their own sexual and or gender expression, while at the same time her

¹¹⁴ For further reading regarding the medium of photography, see Sontag (1977) and Barthes (1981).

works create an inner dialogue pertaining to lived experience. This dialogue is able to ‘speak’; to ‘speak for’ and ‘speak about’ the individual and the community who may live at odds with dominant culture, that is, at odds within a monolithic structure. In other words, marginalised groups, whether gay, lesbian, black, working class and so forth, can be brought into the forefront of culture and made visible. An important aspect regarding such representation is the importance of understanding. It is imperative for the artist to understand the relevant knowledge pertaining to the socio-cultural issues that they bring to the forefront in their work. For artists such as Muholi and Mlangeni, this knowledge is obtained through lived experience – the communities they photograph are representative of a community they have always formed a part of and understand through experience. These artists are not disillusioned by the realities their community faces on a daily basis. Instead, Muholi provides different stories, told by different people within her visual archive, thus including stories in the national narrative of a newly-found democratic South Africa, by including narratives that have never been ‘heard’ or incorporated. Social change, then, is set into motion through the establishment of these newly-included narratives in a national archive that has essentially been exclusionary.

3.4) Toward a New Visual Narrative

In order for visual activists such as Muholi and Mlangeni to construct a new visual narrative, they first need to employ introspection with regard to the past of South Africa, in order to inform their new visual dialogue and dialectic of transformation. In *Figures and Fictions*, Tamar Garb¹¹⁵ (2011:17) notes,

In Muholi’s hands, photographic history provides a resource, not only of critique but of play. Deadly serious about the visual clichés of an oppressive iconographic tradition, she, like the people she portrays, feels free to use them as she likes, exposing their ethnic essentialism while queering their mode of address.

Garb (2011:17) further asserts, “these projects reveal, it is the visual culture of the past that provides the material for poetic and parodic subversions”. Therefore, the past informs the future, in that it provides the material that artists such as Muholi and Mlangeni need in order to subvert and transgress previous narratives constructed in relation to the ‘other’.

Mkhize et al. (2010:12) suggest that “accept[ing] that it is necessary to focus on the ways in which black lesbians in South Africa are currently overt targets of social, cultural and

¹¹⁵ Tamar Garb is the Durning Lawrence Professor in the Department of Art History at University College, London.

political violence means accepting that ‘black lesbians’ can be spoken of collectively”, and they goes on to state that “clearly this is an absurdity”. The “question of self-identification, modes of family creation, sexual desire and practices and other concerns challenge the notion that ‘lesbian’ usefully describes a relation to sexuality”. Additionally, the term, within its ‘northern roots’, is a term that explicitly segregates ‘lesbians’ from two other constituencies, which are ‘heterosexual people’ and ‘men’ (Mkhize et al. 2010:12). As Mkhize et al. (2010:12) note, “the politics of this segregation were grounded in several political needs”. The first is “the need to surface the heterosexism of women active against and/or imperial norms, and to claim space for discussion of the experiences and rights of women who choose other women as sexual and life partners” (Mkhize et al. 2010:12). The second is “the need to recognise that queer northern activism, powerfully driven by gay white men, could not acknowledge the terrain through which lesbian women fought for rights and recognition” (Mkhize et al. 2010:12). Lastly, there is “the historical reality that social proscriptions against same-sex desire and relationships have never succeeded in eliminating these desires and that women, while always caught within the heterosexual norms of the day, have fought hard to find ways to love and have relationships with other women” (Mkhize et al. 2010:12–13). Nigel Gibson (2011:84) suggests that this is due to the post-Apartheid South African condition, in which “far from any liberation, social conditions have remained the same, if not worsened”; and “politically, South Africa has become more authoritarian, more partisan and more dependent on what Butler (2009) calls an ‘overbearing security apparatus’”.

In this regard, ‘black lesbians’ living in post-Apartheid South Africa are often subjected to a wide range of discriminatory practices as well as violence, which leads to ‘curative/corrective’ rape and the brutal murders of many black lesbians, particularly those women living in township areas, for example the murders of Zoliswa Nkonyana and Anene Booysen. These instances of hate, violence, homophobia and discrimination emerge from the belief that first, these women transgress from traditional, societal and biological¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Western philosophy, that is, the philosophy of embodiment, conceptualises the female body as a biological object among other biological factors, which exists as part of biological nature. It is because of this belief that it is regarded as being an irrational faculty innate to women, which separates women from men (regarded as culture). Therefore, because of this perceived irrationality, it is believed that women are potentially a source of disruption, which needs to be controlled and directed by ‘rational’ men. Furthermore, women are stripped down to the biological. This means that, when a woman takes a stance (social and or political), either for herself or others, her words and actions often become dismissed on the basis of her biological makeup. This can be seen when an ‘angry’ woman is questioned as to whether she is on her period or not as a means of dismissing her anger and attributing it to biology, as though women have no agency nor a right to be angry. Thus, women’s social actions are frequently reduced to nothing more than the ‘irrational’ ranting of a hormonal woman.

expectations of women; secondly, that these women betray their cultural¹¹⁷ heritage and expected subordination to men; and lastly, that these women challenge traditional male authority as well as challenging dominant structures imposed on them by society regarding sex and gender. Brenna Munro (2012:xiii) suggests that this could be attributed to notions surrounding modernity and Africa. Munro (2012:xiii) explains that

Homosexuality in Africa is bound up with a contradictory modernity that has been produced both within and against imperialism, and this is what makes the question of gay rights in Africa so politically fraught. Europe's 'civilizing mission' constituted itself, through attempts to eradicate indigenous social formations that were deemed deviant, from polygamy to 'female husbands', all while unruly new sexual cultures were being forged in the cities, industries, and institutions of a changing Africa. Ideas about what constitute 'sex', as well as the formation of sexual identities and the production of sexual taboos and desires, were thus shaped by these histories, on both sides of the colonial divide.

These structures revolve around issues relating to gender and social subordination. Women who are non-conforming and reject the patriarchal structure by rejecting societal roles imposed on them are often regarded as a threat to male domination and masculinity. It is for this reason that 'black lesbians' face an immense amount of hate, abuse, injustice and hostility. These women are regarded both as sexually deviant¹¹⁸ and socially defiant: this is a direct result of the contestations that surround gender equality as well as sexual rights (Reid 2013:13). Sexuality, gender, sex and race are directly intertwined¹¹⁹ and interwoven; that is to say that various cultural understandings regarding sex, gender and sexuality have been structured around normative ideas, specific to that culture.

Zanele Muholi's photography includes a multitude of ongoing projects, often collecting accounts firsthand regarding the lived experiences of individuals, including the systemic violence individuals are subject to based on their sexual orientation and/or gender expression. However, her work in 'visual' activism is not limited to her photographic works. Her ongoing documentation, ranging from interviews to weddings and even funerals, testifies to her wide-ranging use of visual media – this also includes documentaries such as *Enraged by*

¹¹⁷ It is imperative to note that culture has been used as a means of suppressing female voices, and is used as a justification in order to commit crimes against women and the LGBT community, and to commit gross violations of human dignity. Too often injustice, violence, abuse and discrimination occur in the name of culture.

¹¹⁸ 'Deviant behaviour' is behaviour that is neither necessarily unacceptable or awful. The term can, and in this instance does, imply 'non-conformity', such as non-conformity to social roles, social conventions and cultural appropriation, thus breaking the status quo.

¹¹⁹ See Ferguson, R. (2004); Werbner, P. (2013).

*a Picture*¹²⁰ and *Rape for who I am*¹²¹, which take Muholi's activism out of the (gallery) exhibition space. More recently, Muholi has documented the transgender community more frequently within her visual archive.

3.5) Coming Out: Transgender Representation

Back in 2006, Zanele Muholi's work was included in a catalogue which showcased the work of fourteen South African artists. The catalogue came out before Muholi's first solo exhibition, that is, her *Being* exhibition the following year. However, the catalogue had gathered an immense amount of attention from the South African art scene due to the photographic image on the cover. The cover was emblazoned with Muholi's photograph of the singer *Martin Machapa* (Fig. 3.1). In the image, Machapa stands toward the camera in a quarter turn and directs his gaze directly toward the camera. He is dressed in a blouse, which is tied at the waist to reveal a taut stomach. He wears tight jeans and finishes the ensemble off with a fedora, tilted at a slight angle on his head. The blouse, and a choker around Machapa's neck, are used as props. These props have designs that are regarded as being 'African' and allude to stereotypical notions related to the African-ness and stereotypical representations of the black male body. In this instance, the use of costume inverts normative gender roles. The image of Machapa was the starting point for Muholi's 'visual' activism, which highlights the invisibility of LGBT representation in the visual narrative of South African history and culture. Muholi's photographs fall somewhere between what can be described as documentary photography and portraiture; furthermore, she uses natural light and no subsequent manipulation within her photographic images, in order to provide as truthful a representation as is possible that is characteristically documentary.

¹²⁰ See Chapter 2 for discussion and analysis of the documentary *Enraged by a Picture*.

¹²¹ The video for *Rape for who I am* is available at the following link: <http://vimeo.com/86903666>.



Fig. 3.1: Zanele Muholi, *Martin Machapa* (2006), Lambda print, 100 x 76.5cm.

Source: <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/season2006/muholi.1.htm>

In the same year, Muholi began her ongoing photographic essay *Faces and Phases*¹²² (2006), that seeks to represent queer visibility in a manner that ‘says’ that the women she photographs are real, they are diverse¹²³ and they are numerous. The *Faces and Phases* series

¹²² See Chapter 2 for more information pertaining to the *Faces and Phases* exhibition.

¹²³ Diverse in the sense that the representations illustrate that there is not a single fixed way that pertains to queer representation and that such representations are often stereotypical; in other words, when a person thinks of a lesbian, they instantly think of a butch woman. Similarly, when some people think of a gay man, they

has inspired and informed the majority of Muholi's later works. This inspiration has been garnered from the stories, friendships and shared moments that Muholi has experienced with every single participant in the series, and the experiences they continue to share.

After the *Machapa* image, further images with regard to the inversion of normative gender roles were featured in other exhibitions, such as *Miss D'vine* and *La Rochelle*¹²⁴ that were featured in the Stevenson exhibition titled *Disguise: The Art of Attracting and Deflecting Attention*, which was curated by Joost Boland, and Muholi's solo exhibition titled *Indawo Yami*. These exhibitions communicate specific ideas regarding contemporary masculinities within a South African context. Hyper-masculinity is associated with African males, a notion that is both stereotypical and racist. In *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, bell hooks (2004:x) notes that:

Black males often exist in a prison of the mind unable to find their way out. In patriarchal culture, all males learn a role that restricts and confines. When race and class enter the picture, along with patriarchy, then black males endure the worst impositions of gendered masculine patriarchal identity. Seen as animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers, black men have had no real dramatic say when it comes to the way they are represented. They have made few interventions on the stereotype. As a consequence they are victimized by stereotypes that were first articulated in the nineteenth century but hold sway over the minds and imaginations of citizens of this nation in the present day. Black males who refuse categorization are rare, for the price of visibility in the contemporary world of white supremacy is that black male identity be defined in relation to the stereotype whether by embodying it or seeking to be other than it.

However, Muholi's image of black male masculinity both inverts normative gender roles and defies categorisation by subverting stereotypical notions regarding the black male body. As hooks notes in the above-mentioned quote, the black male body becomes confined within a patriarchal culture that restricts and confines individual representation. Muholi's photographic images, then, defy any form of socio-cultural classification through cultural re-appropriation, and allude to stereotypical notions predicated in a colonial past.

instantly associate femininity with his persona and the way he dresses. However, lesbians can be butch, femme, tomboys, soft-butch, lipstick lesbians and so forth. The same applies to gay men – gay men can be feminine, often referred to as a 'twink'; they can be 'bears', that is, gay men who are overweight and mostly hairy; or they can be masculine, within the normative sense of the word.

¹²⁴ See Chapter 2 regarding the *La Rochelle* and *Miss D'vine* exhibitions.

3.6) From Beulahs to Beauties

Zanele Muholi's photographic documentation of queer lives in South Africa has incorporated the representation of drag queens and transgender women more frequently over the last couple of years. Arguably, Muholi has always included the transgender community, as is seen in *La Rochelle* and *Miss D'vine*; however, it was her work with the participants featured in the ongoing *Faces and Phases* series that inspired the artist to include self-portraits and representations of the transgender community in order to expand her 'visual' activism. Her exhibition titled *Indawo Yami* (2010), which means 'my space/place', continues to address the diverse implications of what it means to be black and either gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender in South Africa. In the series, Muholi included 22 images of her 'beulahs', meaning transmen.

In the image *Ms Le Shishi I* (2010) (Fig. 3.2), Le Shishi is framed squatting in front of a backdrop that resembles a rock surface. Her palms rest lightly on her knees and she directs her gaze toward the viewer. Le Shishi is not smiling and her expression is uncompromising. She is wearing a skirt with patterns which are stereotypically associated with Africa, and a range of beads around her neck. In *Mini Mbatha* (2010) (Fig. 3.3), Mbatha is standing in front of the same backdrop as Le Shishi. She wears a similar skirt to that of Le Shishi. Her hand is framed in front of her face; the viewer cannot see what she is doing, but the position suggests that she is biting her nails. The biting of the nails contrasts her gaze. Biting of nails represents a sense of tentativeness, but her gaze, directed toward the viewer, is authoritative and engaging. This contradiction could be illustrative of the human condition, as a person can experience contradictory emotions at the same time: in other words, a person can experience fear or anxiety, yet they are capable of projecting confidence toward others in an attempt to hide their true feelings.

In the work *Mini and Le Shishi* (2010) (Fig. 3.4), Le Shishi is framed striking a confident pose. She stands facing the viewer directly, legs apart and hand on hip. Le Shishi's confidence is evident, since Mini is framed standing close to Le Shishi. Mini turns her body into the side of Le Shishi and her hands are draped over Le Shishi's shoulder. Mini directs her gaze toward the viewer, yet, in contrast to Le Shishi, Mini appears to be less confident, which may have prompted Le Shishi to adopt the persona of 'protector'. The photographs of these beulahs re-appropriate the cultural and social conventions of the construction of an African identity. Mini Mbatha and Le Shishi are transmen, therefore their gender expression

stands in contrast to the conceptions of African-ness pertaining to sexuality and gender; however, they are wearing skirts and beads traditionally associated with Africa. The implication is that they are African, regardless of their sexuality or gender expression, since there is no one way or ‘authentic’ way to be African.



Fig. 3.2: Zanele Muholi, *Ms Le Shishi I* (2010), C-print, 76.5 x 50.5cm.

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/shishi I.htm>



Fig. 3.3: Zanele Muholi, *Mini Mbatha* (2010), C-print, 76.5 x 50.5cm.

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/mini.htm>



Fig. 3.4: Zanele Muholi, *Mini and Le Shishi* (2010), C-print, 76.5 x 50.5cm.

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/mini1.htm>

In 2011, Muholi had a solo exhibition titled *Inkanyiso*, which means “illumination” or “light” in IsiZulu. The exhibition consisted of three new (at the time) photographic bodies of work, such as new portraits featured in her *Faces and Phases* series, and images from two other series *Beulahs* (2007–2011) and *Transfigures* (2010–2011). According to the Stevenson Gallery¹²⁵ (2011), “it is Muholi’s aim to shine light onto viewers’ understanding of gender and sexuality”. In her artist statement for the exhibition, Muholi explains:

Inkanyiso speaks about the complexities of gender and sexuality terminologies in which lesbianism or gayness (homosexuality) equals sexual orientation, and transgenderism equals gender. *Inkanyiso* presents those who have given of themselves to shed light on the vast issues that continue to affect sexual minorities, especially black queers. These are people found in spaces that are sometimes disadvantaged. They are the ones who want but cannot express themselves freely without fearing atrocious prejudice for being themselves.

Gender is as fluid as it is performative (Butler 1990; 1993); however, within rural and urban spaces in South Africa, both individual and community are faced with immense prejudice against self-expression. It is, arguably, a well-established fact that various violent ideologies, over time, have deployed language as a primary tool for the dehumanisation and violation of those people who are constructed as being ‘different’ or ‘other’ by society (Mkhize et al. 2010:11). Mkhize et al. (2010:11) refer to the history of racism within South Africa, which is

¹²⁵ The statement from the Stevenson Gallery is available at: <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/index2011.html>

saturated with terminologies that are designed to denigrate people, and even the construction of race itself “deploys antagonistic colour terms (‘white’ versus ‘black’) with all the symbolic weight of western mythologies around connections between ‘whiteness’ and purity, and between ‘blackness’ as evil”¹²⁶. Similarly, homophobia and transphobia draw on a wide range of terms in order to describe “people who are sexually drawn to those of their own gender to disgrace and humiliate them, and to attack anyone whose gender identification is unconventional” (Mkhize et al. 2010:11–12). Furthermore, Mkhize et al. (2010:12) note that:

The term ‘moffie’¹²⁷ or ‘isitabane’ are used to police schoolboys (the majority of whom would choose heterosexuality as a life orientation) whose masculinities are ‘questionable’. Similarly, ‘dyke’ can be as easily used with a heterosexual woman who is disliked as with someone identifying as a lesbian. Alongside an array of stigmatising names, lesbians and gay men are simultaneously woven into a network of ‘myths’ concerning their promiscuity, their violations of children, their perversion, their sinfulness, their sickness and their mental ill health. While at an activist level it is always possible to transform negative names (such as ‘dyke’) into slogans of pride, or to challenge absurd ‘myths’, it is nonetheless true that the weight of homophobic stigma and prejudice is so strong in many South African environments that even to be termed ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’ is sufficient inducement for (verbal or physical) attack.

We see, therefore, that various tactics are employed in South Africa, in order to police the self-expression of individuals. These include the widespread use of various alienating myths, outright discrimination, and violence, in ways which undermine participation and directly destabilise those members of the LGBT community “who are also members of oppressed and disadvantaged classes” (Ossome 2013:34).

Muholi’s *Beulahs* are indicative that, despite these prejudices, it is still possible, not to mention necessary, to represent the fluidity of gender and self-expression in order to destabilise myths related to what is and is not conceived as being ‘African’. Tinky is one of the participants in Muholi’s series *Beulahs*. In the image, titled *Tinky I* (Fig. 3.5), Tinky is

¹²⁶ This argument reminds me of the following quote in *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon, in which Fanon states that “the Negro is the genetal. Is this the whole story? Unfortunately not. The Negro is something else. Here again we find the Jew. He and I may be separated by the sexual question, but we have one point in common. Both of us stand for Evil. The black man more so, for the good reason that he is black. Is not whiteness in symbols always ascribed in French to Justice, Truth, Virginity? I knew an Antillean who said of another Antillean, ‘His body is black, his language is black, his soul must be black too’. This logic is put into daily practice by the white man. The black man is the symbol of Evil and Ugliness” (pp.138–139).

¹²⁷ ‘Moffie’ is a derogatory term that was originally used to refer to gay men and men perceived to be gay. ‘Moffie’ implies that all gay men are effeminate. The term originated in the Western Cape, but has since been reclaimed to transform a negative term, as Mkhize et al. note, into a slogan of pride and as a means of self-identification. However, that is not to say that the term is not still used as a means of violating human dignity, in that the term is still used to demean and discriminate. The term ‘queer’ has become re-appropriated in a similar way to ‘moffie’. ‘Isitabane’ is an isiXhosa word, and translated refers to a man who has chosen to act like a woman. This term is directed toward homosexual men and attests to the misconceptions pertaining to homosexuality and the construction of femininity and masculinity.

shown sitting on a rock by the ocean. She is wearing a red single-piece bathing suit. Tinky sits at an angle, but she openly directs her gaze toward the viewer. Her fingernails and toenails are painted red, which complements her bathing suit, yet she wears a watch which society would classify as a man's watch on her left wrist, while wearing a silver bangle on her right wrist. Tinky's dress sense is her own and speaks of her personal taste, which remains devoid of any societal expectation. Her ensemble is a combination of clothes and accessories that are both 'masculine' and 'feminine'. She uses her agency in order to dress the way she feels most comfortable and chooses objects she likes aesthetically, and not according to preconceived notions related to gender expression. Similarly, in the work, *Christina Mavuma IV* (2010) (Fig. 3.6), Mavuma is framed sitting on a beach. She looks back at the viewer over her shoulder. Her hands are placed on the sand in order to provide support. She is wearing all black, which contrasts with the red flower in her hair and her bright red lipstick. Her pose is confident and powerful. She knows who she is and she wears it proudly, as seen in her pose. Her style is her own and she does not conform for fear of persecution. According to Susan Kaiser (2001:88),

Articulating contradictions through style may seem like a futile political exercise at times, both because the resulting innovations may in some way reinforce dominant culture and because they can be easily appropriated by designers looking for new inspirations. However, it is evident that those who strive to represent themselves in new ways, or who are committed to subjectivities of renewal are creating syntheses that are beyond the scope of the modern Western 'disconnect' between the mind and the body ...

In other words, style and subjectivity can be utilised in a way that challenges the dominant Western structures that consist of a diverse framing and classification.



Fig. 3.5: Zanele Muholi, *Tinky I* (2010), C-print, 50.5 x 76.5cm.

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/tinky1.html>



Fig. 3.6: Zanele Muholi, *Christina Mavuma IV* (2010), C-print, 50.5 x 76.5cm.

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/christina4.html>

3.6.1) Muholi's 'Brave Beauties'

According to Deslynne Hille¹²⁸ from Stevenson, Cape Town, Muholi's latest series, titled *Brave Beauties*, which forms part of her series *Somnyama Ngonyama*, is a continuation of her series *Beulahs*. *Brave Beauties* is ongoing, consisting of twelve photographs, which continues Muholi's renowned practice of documenting the lives of the LGBT community in South Africa. This collection of black and white silver gelatin prints references portraiture and fashion photography. According to the statement from the Stevenson website (2015)¹²⁹, the series "is a celebratory look at the body and politics of expression", and "in this collection, Muholi recalls her own second-place win at a Ms Sappho contest in Johannesburg in 1997". The series was taken in 2014, which also marked the twentieth anniversary of democracy in South Africa, and, according to Stevenson (2015), "acknowledges the radical transformation of South African society even though many shadows remain, especially in terms of crimes against the LGBTQ community". In her artist statement about *Brave Beauties*, Muholi (2015) says:

Each person is striking their own confident pose, expressing and claiming their femininity and affirming their existence and love for looking beautiful. Most of the participants have won Miss Gay beauty pageants in their communities. The contest takes place in various locations around South Africa, especially in the townships, as a way of creating awareness through cultural activities – drag performance, music and dance.

According to Hille, many of the participants were photographed either before or after participating in the Miss Gay beauty pageants, and the clothes and accessories they wear were all chosen by each participant to reflect her own sense of style. One of the images, *Somizy Sincwala* (Fig. 3.7), shows Sincwala wearing nothing but underwear and various beads around her neck. She wears her hair in an 'afro' style, and although she is not directing her gaze toward the viewer, she is still striking a confident pose. This pose is suggestive of her level of comfort in her own skin; it is as fierce as it is unapologetic: a testimony of being free to be oneself. In the work *Yaya Mavundla* (Fig. 3.8), Yaya confidently directs her gaze toward the camera. She has placed both of her hands on her thigh and wears an off the

¹²⁸ In conversation with Deslynne Hille during the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, 2016. *Brave Beauties* is a re-naming of *Beulahs* in order to convey the bravery that the participants, drag artists and transgendered females illustrate.

¹²⁹ <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/index2015.html>

shoulder black dress, complete with beads and a ‘doek’¹³⁰ on her head. Her smile is suggestive of ‘knowing’. What she ‘knows’ is open to the viewer’s interpretation, but Mavundla holds the power in this regard. She knows that the viewer may never know the ‘truth’ behind her smile. Each image, whether it is *Lee Siba* (Fig. 3.9), who poses with her hand on her hip, tilting her back at a slight arc, wearing underwear, a necklace and a headband, or another participant, illustrates that gender expression is as fluid as it is vast.

During the National Arts Festival in 2016, which is held annually in Grahamstown, South Africa, I worked on the exhibition *Somnyama Ngonyama* as a gallery assistant. As such, I was able to observe the reactions of patrons, and I was also able to speak to patrons regarding their thoughts on the exhibition. The reactions were mostly positive toward the series *Somnyama Ngonyama*; however, reactions regarding the series *Brave Beauties* were mixed.

In one instance, a group of young people came into the Standard Bank Gallery, located in the Albany Museum in Grahamstown. They took no notice of the self-portraits positioned near the entrance to the gallery, flying through the exhibition until they reached the *Brave Beauties* series, located in the back of the space in an alcove. Upon reaching the artworks that make up the *Brave Beauties* series, one of the individuals shouted toward the group in Afrikaans: “Hey! Julle check dit uit! Dis dan ouens!” (roughly translated, “Hey! Guys, look at this! These are blokes”). The others in the group rushed to join their friend in mocking the artworks, and hysterical laughter and pointing followed. Another member of the group then said, “Dis nie reg nie. Waar sit hy sy ding?” (roughly translated, “This is not right. Where does he put his thing?”). This sparked a debate regarding how and where the participant’s penis had gone. I personally found their reactions incredibly disturbing, especially given the bravery the participants had shown by virtue of being photographed. My observation of this response to the artwork further confirmed the amount of courage required to expose oneself in the way that the individuals within the series had done within an environment that is clearly hostile towards their personal expressions of gender identity.

The image that the group were specifically referring to was the work titled *Miss Tee Menu* (2014) (Fig. 3.10). In the work, *Miss Tee Menu*, the participant, is framed half sitting on a cube. She is dressed in a black and white bikini and her gaze is directed at the viewer, effectively asserting her authority. In order to assert power, the image, then, returns the gaze

¹³⁰ A ‘doek’ refers to a type of headscarf that has symbolic significance within African culture. A ‘doek’ is associated with an important expression of heritage, and traditionally it is associated with a sign of respect.

of the viewer, which, in turn, challenges their own notions pertaining to social conventions and cultural appropriation. One hand is placed on the cube in order to provide support while her other hand is placed on her knee. A few minutes later, when the men were leaving, I asked them what they had thought about the exhibition and I was told that “Die goeters is onnatuurlik”, meaning “These things are unnatural”. In one sweeping statement, the participants had become reduced to being ‘a thing’, something unnatural – an aberration. These kinds of commentary are the reason why visibility is needed in a country where stereotypes, myths and misconceptions are rife. This group of men were not the only people who had reduced drag and transgenderism to ‘thingness’; in other words, many participants would question out loud whether ‘it’ is a man or a woman. The use of the pronoun ‘it’ is problematic for a multitude of reasons, each originating from the normative binary code and violating human dignity.

Social conditioning with regard to what is and is not defined as ‘other’ forms immensely in the reception of the viewer. Furthermore, the reactions often attest to prejudice, bigotry and discrimination. These prejudices are often masked under the guise of ‘freedom of speech’ and ‘public opinion’. Arguably, each person has a right to ‘freedom of speech’, but at what point do we re-examine exactly what this means? For example, cyber-bullying is on the rise, and many teenagers commit suicide due to the abuse they suffer online, yet no one is held accountable. So, too, are the comments made by the public, mostly ill-informed and prejudicial, toward such images. Their reactions are illustrative of a much larger social problem, disguised in the form of ethical morality: that is, the notion that children should be protected from images, media and so forth, that include representations of people who are categorised as being ‘other’. Yet, such images not only create visibility, but are able to reach an audience that can recognise a familiarity – a ‘sameness’. In terms of working towards social acceptability, such representations are a necessity.



Fig. 3.7: Zanele Muholi, *Somizy Sincwala* (2014), Silver gelatin print, 76.5 x 51cm. Source: http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/somnyama/somizy_sincwala_2014.html

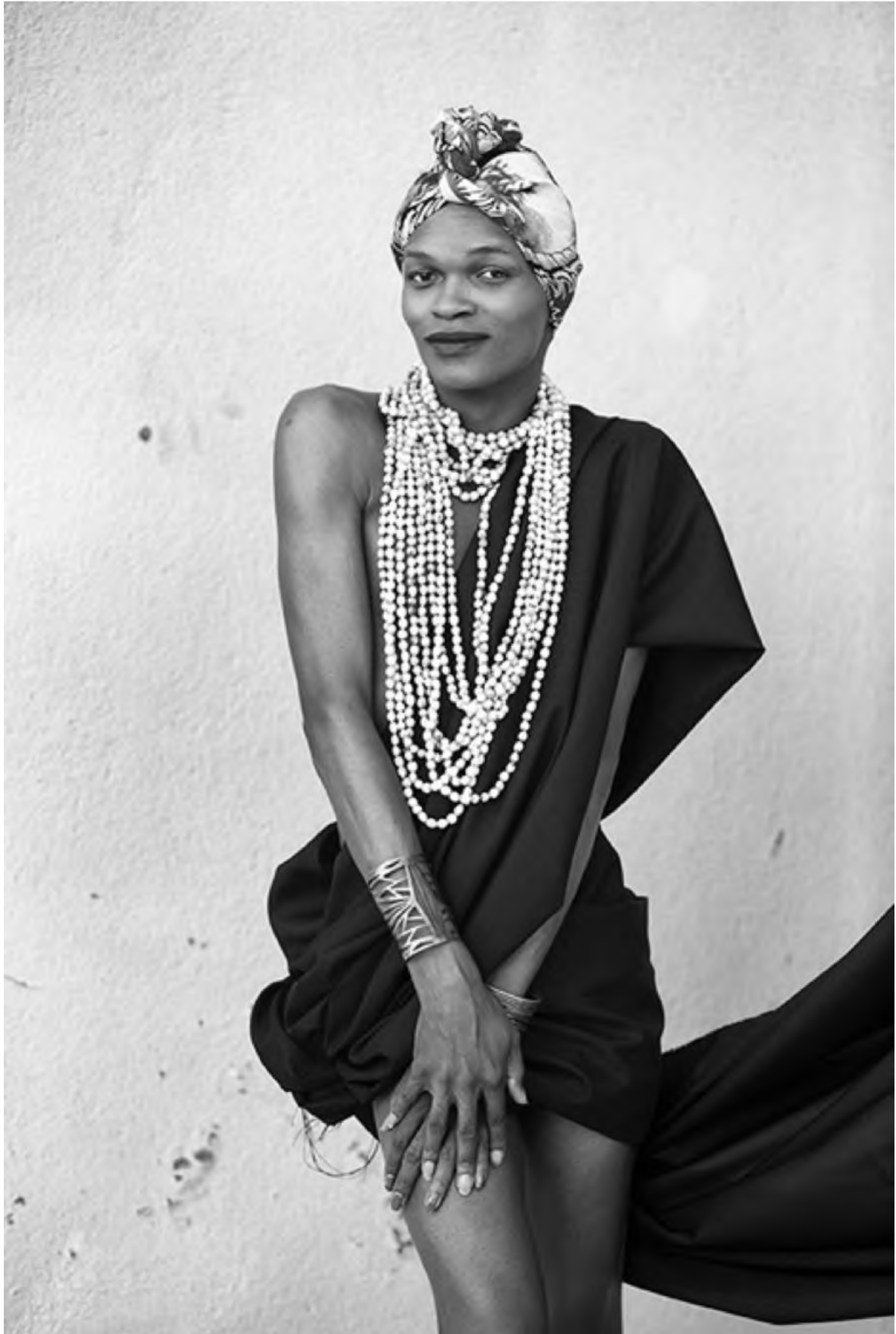


Fig. 3.8: Zanele Muholi, *Yaya Mavundla* (2014), Silver gelatin print, 76.5 x 51cm. Source: http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/somnyama/yaya_mavundla_parktown_2014.html

3.7) Conclusion

Transgenderism is capable of deconstructing and subverting social and cultural conventions related to notions of sexuality and gender. In this instance, representations of transgenderism expose the fallacy of gender correlating with one's sex. Furthermore, conceptions of sexuality and gender are entrenched in socio-political conventions and cultural appropriation. These conventions create identity categories, which serve as instruments to further regulatory regimes: this is done by normalising a multitude of oppressive hegemonic social structures. Therefore, transgenderism can, in turn, result in political resistance against appropriation and normative conventions by inverting normative notions of sexuality and gender. Muholi's series *Beulahs* and *Brave Beauties* are two key examples of artworks that invert gender norms. These representations resist, contest, subjugate and re-appropriate arguments pertaining to identity politics.

Identity, then, is frequently linked to social constructions. In other words, conformity to social conventions can result in a change in identity and personality, since the individual is essentially playing a role: the image they project of themselves is not a projection of self, but a rejection of 'other'. Identifying as the 'other' in society results in violence, discrimination, prejudice and alienation. When a person forms part of a minority group, they may reject the part of self in order to project an image of conformity, out of fear of the implications resultant from non-conformity. However, Muholi's 'Brave Beauties' are brave in every sense of the word. Despite being subjected to discrimination, they remain true to their individual identities through rejecting gender conformity, and they bravely participate in Muholi's photographic archive. Judith Butler (1990; 1993) refers to gender as a repetition of acts. In this instance, a person conforms to social conventions through the repetition of acts associated with their sex; for example, girls are expected to be contained, since women are perceived to be submissive, whereas boys are expected to be rough and robust in order to 'man' up. However, transgenderism subverts, resists and contradicts the binarism of male/female and feminine/masculine. In this sense, it rejects the repetition of acts that constitute socio-cultural and political conformity.



Fig. 3.9: Zanele Muholi, *Lee Siba* (2014), Silver gelatin print, 76.5 x 51cm. Source: http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/somnyama/lee_siba_2014.html



Fig. 3.10: Zanele Muholi, *Miss Tee Menu* (2014), Silver gelatin print, 76.5 x 51cm. Source: http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/somnyama/miss_tee_2014.html

Chapter Four

Queering Borders: Transgression, Sexuality and Being

Stable cultures require things to stay in their appointed place. Symbolic boundaries keep categories 'pure', giving cultures their unique meaning and identity.

- Stuart Hall (1997:237)

The power of images lies not in the fact that we are made to witness display, but are, rather, involved in the processes through which identity is formed.

- Lynda Nead (1992:81)

4.1) Introduction

The South African photographer Zanele Muholi documents all aspects of the daily lives of people who are black and identify as gay, lesbian and transgender in townships. Her artworks include representations of love, loss, mourning and the aftermath of hate crimes, such as 'curative/corrective' rape. In this instance, homosexuality and transgenderism play a central role in her work as an artist and visual activist, since her work represents the violence, discrimination and prejudice that gay, lesbian and transgender people endure because of their sexuality, race and gender expression. As Brenna Munro (2012:198) notes, "queer subjects are major, rather than minor in the work of ... the black lesbian photographer Zanele Muholi". In Muholi's works, both queer sexualities and subjectivities, as well as the dangers and pleasures of queer life, are of central concern (Munro 2012:198). Muholi's late-transition career has been marked by a very important departure from "the dominance of white artists in South African gay and lesbian public culture and the representation of queer sexualities" (Munro 2012:198). According to Munro (2012:198), since there has been a lack of self-representation of black lesbians in South Africa, literary or otherwise, Muholi's vivid photographic images of black lesbian life manage to constitute a belated and dramatic 'coming out'. Munro (2012:1989) continues to explain that "Muholi's works are also, however, self-reflective about the vulnerabilities ... [of] 'lesbian' visibility in a postcolonial context, and indeed the fraught legacies of imperialist visual renditions of the black female body". It is through her works that Muholi takes a critical look at the economic injustices and

violences of post-Apartheid South Africa, and she grapples with rape as an experience, “rather than merely as an allegorical freighted symbol” (Munro 2012:198). Thus, Muholi engages with “newly legitimised notions of a Western-style gay identity”, since she manages to “intersect with the national coming-out narrative, and indeed with the vexed national discourse about rape and AIDS” (Munro 2012:199). Therefore, the queer postcolonial politics of Muholi “questions the terms of ‘rainbow’ modernity and imagines them anew” (Munro 2012:199).

Muholi, then, constructs her own narrative, which creates an affirming space for black lesbian South Africans, while at the same time challenging the pervasive discriminatory attitudes and blatant homophobia within South African society. This challenge tackles from all angles the notion of homosexuality being ‘un-African’, whilst resisting racist, sexist and homophobic definitions through her photographic archive and representations. Furthermore, her works address lived lesbian experience and create visibility pertaining to these lived realities, which include images related to intimate moments between lovers and the aftermath of violence (including ‘curative’ rape), and in the end afford the opportunity to mourn the loss of lesbian lives in South Africa. The reason for such violence can be traced to normative societal constructs entrenched in hegemonic power structures; that is, the black lesbian body is targeted both because it transgresses normative concepts of ‘acceptability’ and also because of its potential to disrupt such normative ways of thinking. At the same time, through her representations of queer existence, that is, of the existence of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, Muholi effectively challenges the notion that homosexuality and gender expression are dependent on a notion of ‘acceptable’ ‘African’ behaviour and identity. Through her photographic archives, Muholi illustrates the fallacy pertaining to a ‘true’ ‘African’ identity, and the fallacy that homosexuality and gender expression are ‘un-African’.

4.2) Subjectivity, Identity and the Self

Ontologies of gender¹³¹ regulate which identities may or may not exist. Arguably, identity is both historically and culturally specific, and as such should be regarded as being context

¹³¹ According to Judith Butler (1990:44-45), if “the regulatory fictions of sex and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning, then the very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disruption of their univocal posturing”. According to Butler (1990:45), this project “does not propose to lay out within traditional philosophical terms an *ontology* of gender whereby the meaning of *being* a woman or a man is elucidated within the terms of phenomenology”. In this instance, the presumption is that “the ‘being’ of gender is *an affect*, an object of a genealogical investigation that maps out the political parameters of its construction in the mode of ontology” (Butler 1990:45), and that “sexual practice has the power to destabilize gender” (Butler 1990:xi). See Chapter 3 for discussion pertaining to sexuality, gender and social conditioning.

specific. However, a policing of identity, much like the policing of the female body, is still present in many societies today: that is, stigmatising of alleged ‘unnatural’ desires, actions and identities is still prevalent within various countries and communities. In this context, stigmatisation and policing reaffirm those desires, actions and identities that are assumed to be ‘normal’¹³². However, when a person’s identity is policed, his or her subjectivity becomes categorised, interpreted and evaluated. The aforementioned process results in a reconstitution of a person’s sense of self. For example, hate crimes, ‘curative’/‘corrective’ rape, homophobia, transphobia, sexism and racism, to name a few, are ways in which identity is policed and in some cases regarded as a punishable offence, based on the notions regarding the ‘other’ and what is regarded as being ‘unnatural’.

Undeniably, then, identity forms the core of our being¹³³ – our sense of self. Bhabha (1986:xxvi) refers to the ontological question of a person’s being; that is, an articulation of “the problem of colonial alienation”. Therefore, according to Homi Bhabha (1986:xxv),

The black presence ruins the representative narrative of Western personhood: its past tethered to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneracy will not produce a history of civil progress, a space for the *Socius*; its present, dismembered and dislocated, will not contain the image of identity that is questioned in the dialectic of mind/body and resolved in the epistemology of “appearance and reality”.

Bhabha (1986:xxvi) goes on to explain that:

Social virtues of historical rationality, cultural cohesion, the autonomy of individual consciousness assume an immediate, Utopian identity with the subjects upon whom they confer a civil status. The civil state is the ultimate expression of the innate ethical and rational bent of the human mind; the social instinct is the progressive destiny of human nature, the necessary transition from Nature to Culture ... [F]orms of social and psychic alienation and aggression – madness, self-hate, treason, violence – can never be acknowledged as determinate and constitutive conditions of civil authority, or as the ambivalent effects of the social instinct itself. They are always explained away as alien presences, occlusions of historical progress, the ultimate misrecognition of Man [sic].

That is, as Bhabha (1986:xxvii) notes, the ambivalence is thus an “identification of the racist world”; Bhabha expands by speaking of “the idea of Man [sic] as his alienated image, not Self and ‘Other-ness’ of the Self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity”. In other words, a division between individual and social authority is present. The configuration

¹³² It is imperative to note that ‘normative’ refers to what is perceived as ‘normal’; that is, what society perpetuates as being the norm. For example, heterosexuality is more common in society by a dominant group of people and projected onto others as the ‘norm’, but that does not make it more ‘normal’ than homosexuality.

¹³³ The notion of ‘being’ will be explored in more detail in relation to the work of Zanele Muholi later in the chapter.

of colonial otherness is, then, regarded as a deferral and displacement based on “the White man’s [sic] artifice inscribed on the black man’s [sic] body” (Bhabha 1986:xxviii). Bhabha (1986:xxix) goes on to explain that “the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy – it is always the production of an ‘image’ of identity and the transformation of the subject assuming that image”. Therefore, “the demand of identification ... entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating order of Otherness” (Bhabha 1986:xxix). In this instance, the process of identification always returns an image of identity “which bears the mark of splitting in that ‘Other’ place from which it comes” (Bhabha 1986:xxix). Both race and ethnicity construct boundaries around notions pertaining to ‘being’ and ‘non-being’, that is, an idea surrounding a sense of ‘belonging’ and ‘non-belonging’. Such constructs are reliant on the above-mentioned production of an ‘image’ of identity¹³⁴. This production consists of various subjective constituents related to identity construction and the process of identification regarding certain social groups, including labels attached to identity. Problematically, then, such a construction becomes reliant on misconceptions and stereotypical views regarding certain groups of people.

Often misconceptions and stereotypes are constructed intentionally in order to maintain social control through creating a ‘fear factory’¹³⁵. Destabilising myths in relation to social order is essential in promoting transformation and negating social change. According to Stuart Hall (1997:234), ‘difference’ is both “necessary and dangerous”; and ‘difference’ is necessary in order to “construct meaning through a dialogue with the ‘Other’”¹³⁶. However, I believe that the construction of a dialectic of transformation can both deconstruct existing binaries regarding the construction of ‘difference’ and can construct a new, more relevant, dialogue that can produce meaning based on a more humanist approach. According to Hall (1997:237),

Stable cultures require things to stay in their appointed place. Symbolic boundaries keep categories ‘pure’, giving cultures their unique meaning and identity. What unsettles culture is ‘matter out of place’ – the breaking of our unwritten rules and codes ... [S]ymbolic boundaries are central to all culture. Marking ‘difference’ leads us, symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything, which is defined as impure, abnormal¹³⁷.

¹³⁴ It is imperative to note that constructs surrounding the notions of ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ also include various other factors such as culture, gender and sexual orientation.

¹³⁵ See Chapter 3 for discussion regarding the construction of the ‘fear factory’.

¹³⁶ The ‘Other’ is, therefore, essential to meaning (Hall 1997:236).

¹³⁷ See Kristeva (1982) and Douglas (1966).

In other words, then, breaking these unwritten rules and codes effectively manages to unsettle culture by deconstructing the very foundation on which the status quo is built. The representation of race includes dimensions regarding sexuality and gender, and colour and ethnicity (Hall 1997:231). Deconstruction of the status quo is, therefore, dependent on all of the aforementioned dimensions. It is essential, then, to address all of these dimensions and their accompanying stereotypes when confronting the notion of what is and is not regarded as being ‘African’¹³⁸. The photographic archives of Zanele Muholi effectively challenge all the dimensions of representation, as well as unsettling culture, through images of individuals who, by societal standards, are regarded as being ‘matter out of place’.

4.3) Representations of Race in *Somnyama Ngonyama*

Zanele Muholi’s latest exhibition titled *Somnyama Ngonyama* (Figs. 4.1–4.4)¹³⁹ was shown to the public at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa. The exhibition was located in the Standard Bank Gallery in the Albany History Museum, from 30 June to 10 July 2016. *Somnyama Ngonyama* (Figs. 4.1–4.4), meaning ‘Hail, the Dark Lioness’, confronts the politics of race and political history in South Africa, drawing from the Marikana Massacre¹⁴⁰ and the incident of racism involving two students from the University of Pretoria¹⁴¹. The exhibition consists of black and white self-portraits that reference fashion photography. These self-portraits were taken while Muholi was travelling in Europe, South Africa and the United States of America, and form part of her project of taking 365 photographs over the period of a year. By turning the camera on herself, Muholi is able to experiment with various personas while wearing various outfits. The result of her new body of work is twofold. First, the work is deeply personal, since the images are related to South African history, but also include images that pay homage to her mother, Bester. Secondly, *Somnyama Ngonyama* affords Muholi the opportunity to explore additional nuances regarding the intersectionality (Gunkel

¹³⁸ See Chapters 1 and 2 for discussions pertaining to African-ness and the notion that homosexuality is ‘un-African’.

¹³⁹ See Chapter 3 regarding the inclusion of the series *Brave Beauties* and the inversion of gender norms in the *Somnyama Ngonyama* exhibition. *Somnyama Ngonyama* was first exhibited at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Johannesburg, 19 November – 19 December 2015, and again from 4 – 29 January 2016.

¹⁴⁰ The Marikana Massacre occurred on 16 August 2012. The South African Police Service (SAPS) opened fire on striking miners, 100km northwest of Johannesburg. This resulted in the deaths of 34 miners. A further 78 miners were wounded and more than 250 people were arrested. An article regarding the massacre is available at the following link: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/marikana-massacre-16-august-2012>

¹⁴¹ Two students from the University of Pretoria wore blackface to a fancy dress party in 2014. The students took a photo and posted it on Facebook. The photograph in question shows the students covered in brown paint and wearing scarves over their heads. The students used pillows in order to create the illusion of big buttocks. A link regarding the incident is available at: <http://www.m.news24.com/news24/SouthAfrica/News/Students-face-action-after-blackface-20140806>

2010) of race, sexuality and gender, while maintaining her connection with the very community she has dedicated her body of work and activism to.



Figs. 4.1–4.4 Installation views of *Somnyama Ngonyama*, Standard Bank Gallery, Grahamstown, 2016. Photograph by Lara Littleford (2016c).

One of the most striking aspects of the images of the *Somnyama Ngonyama* exhibition is the pigmentation of Muholi's skin: her skin complexion is darkened through the process of developing the images. Her dark skin stands in stark contrast to the whites of her eyes, creating a potent oppositional gaze. In this context, Muholi's darkened skin complexion references socio-political notions in relation to the constructedness of normative conventions, colonialism and the history of South Africa's racialised past. For example, in 2014 two white female students from the University of Pretoria in South Africa faced disciplinary action after they posted a photograph of themselves dressed as domestic workers, on the social media platform, Facebook. The photograph shows the students covered in brown paint. Additionally, the students stuffed pillows into their skirts in order to make their buttocks appear bigger. Obscene fascination pertaining to the black female body was evident historically when Sarah Baartman, nicknamed the "Hottentot Venus" by Europeans, was put on display in Europe in the form of a 'freak' show. Baartman was inhumanely exhibited and her body became fetishised because of the size of her buttocks and labia. Thus, like many African women, Baartman became a "victim of sexual and physical aggression" (Farrington 2004:16). Farrington (2004:16-17) argues that the pseudo-science comparisons between the size of the buttocks and the formation of the labia resulted in African women becoming synonymous with sexual deviance, an evaluation "designated to regulate female behaviour". In the recent Pretoria incident, the photograph combined two historically painful regulations of social control and victimisation. The first is the regulation of the black female body through sexual stereotypes, and turning the black female body into a fetishised object. This results in a construction of the 'other'. Farrington (2004:19) refers to

... the black woman's body, whose 'otherness' lies with both her gender and ethnicity – in her dark skin, her broad features, and her curly hair – attributes that, for much of Western history since the 1700s, undoubtedly have been 'loathed'.

In contrast, Muholi's photography deconstructs notions of black female sexuality and perceptions of 'otherness'. The second aspect of the Pretoria incident is that the history of blackface relates to racial stereotyping, which "underscores the white fascination with commodified 'black' bodies" (Lott 1992:27). According to Eric Lott (1992:28), the primary purpose of the early minstrel shows of blackface performance was to "display the 'black' male body, to fetishize it in a spectacle". That is to say, as Lott (1992:28) notes, "'black' figures were there *to be looked at*, shaped to the demands of desire; they were screens on which audience fantasy could rest, securing white spectators' position as superior, controlling, not to say owning figures". Thus, the primary purpose of blackface was to create

a spectacle pertaining to racial stereotypes, and to fetishise and exoticise the black body in order to denote perceived white superiority and black inferiority. As such, the Pretoria incident, which references two historically painful modes of stereotyping and regulation, angered Muholi, and influenced her use of blackface in her self-portraits, including her performative use of archetypes of African-ness, which is constantly performed through white privilege. In her artist statement¹⁴², Muholi explains the use of the various personas and writes:

Experimenting with different characters and archetypes, I have portrayed myself in highly stylised fashion using the performative and expressive language of theatre. The black face and its details become the focal point, forcing the viewer to question their desire to gaze at images of my black figure¹⁴³. By exaggerating the darkness of my skin tone, I'm reclaiming my blackness, which I feel is continuously performed by the privileged other.

That is, forcing individuals to question the reason behind his/her desire to gaze involves a reflection of self. The viewer needs to question his/her reasons behind his/her desire to gaze – this desire to gaze¹⁴⁴ also reminds one of exhibitionism, and the way in which Sarah Baartman, mentioned above, was fetishised and exhibited in ‘freak’ shows. Through Muholi’s reclaiming of her blackness and exaggerating her skin tone, Muholi is referencing the various stereotypes of Africa that the West has created and continues to create. For example, one viewer at the exhibition in Grahamstown (who had not read the exhibition handout) questioned whether Muholi was Nigerian. When I, working as a gallery assistant¹⁴⁵, informed the viewer that Muholi is South African, she responded by stating that it cannot be possible because she is “too dark” and that “only Nigerians are that dark”. The first impulse the viewer had was to classify the images based on the skin tone of the subject. This is deeply problematic and indicative of the racist and xenophobic attitudes and perceptions that persist in South African society, creating fixed identities as a means of maintaining social control. However, as Muholi illustrates by creating various personas and archetypes, there are multiple identities that are constructed through various dimensions. Yet, complexities of self-identification remain prevalent; that is, the prevalence of social conventions and cultural appropriation can influence individual identity, in that the individual assumes an identity

¹⁴² Available at the following link: <http://www.archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/index2015.html>

¹⁴³ For further analysis of violence and visuality in the medium of photography, see Sontag (1977); hooks (1992); Hobson (2005); and Wallace (2010).

¹⁴⁴ For further analysis of visuality and the gaze in the medium of photography, see Mirzoeff (2006;2011).

¹⁴⁵ During the *Somnyama Ngonyama* exhibition in Grahamstown, I worked as a gallery assistant. I was involved in every aspect of the installation process, and during the exhibition my role was to greet patrons and answer any questions that they had. I also conducted the third walkabout on 7 July 2016.

through the complexities of self-identification, in relation to entrenched gender norms. For example, social conditioning results in a person assuming the identity of male or female in terms of their gender expression, which corresponds to one's sex. However, with regard to transgenderism, transgendered individuals assume their expected gender roles, which results in assuming an identity through the process of self-identification. This identification, then, is a misrecognition. It is only when the individual realises that they are transgender that they assume their 'true' identity and gender expression.

A reoccurring incident at the *Somnyama Ngonyama* exhibition involved one of the other gallery assistants. Mihlali Mbunge¹⁴⁶, a third year B.Sc student from Rhodes University who was working as a gallery assistant, was frequently mistaken by viewers for Zanele Muholi. Mbunge (2016) explains her experience of the exhibition as follows:

Walking into the Standard Bank gallery, one is called to attention by the highly contrasted photographs of the artist. It is at this moment where I would note faces contorted in expressions of curiosity or glee. Among my other jobs [as a gallery assistant], it was my duty to deliver a handout that would explain the subject matter of the exhibition in the absence of both artist and curator. Among a – mainly white – portion of the visitors at the gallery, I was frequently asked whether I was the artist. This question regularly made me pause. Since, in my inner dialogue I regularly questioned the meaning behind 'self-portrait'. I continuously held back from asking whether I genuinely looked like Zanele or whether her and my being black was enough. Zanele's exhibition gave the experience created by an artist who deals with an activism founded in identity. It was a melting of society where questions were asked and answers given that brought one to discomfort and in other times comfort as would be expected in the unlearning and relearning of ideas about the other.

Mbunge's statement regarding a sense of discomfort and comfort reflects the different experiences of the three gallery assistants, that is, myself, Mihlali Mbunge and Akissi Beukman. More than once Mihlali was asked whether or not she was the artist. On one occasion when Mbunge was unsure of a question addressed to her, she suggested that the viewer ask me, but the viewer responded that she would prefer to speak to someone "like the artist". The way in which the viewer drew attention to Mihlali's skin colour was deeply unsettling. The language she used suggested that Mihlali's opinion only mattered by virtue of the colour of her skin and possibly her cultural background.

My experience as a gallery assistant also resulted, at times, in moments of discomfort due to entrenched perceptions. The gallery assistants had shifts during the period of the exhibition. At times two of us would be present and at other times only one gallery assistant would be on

¹⁴⁶ I obtained permission from Mbunge to use her name in my thesis.

duty. Unfortunately it was evident that white viewers felt more inclined to reveal their prejudice regarding the work of Muholi when I was on shift alone, and when Akissi or Mihlali were on duty with me viewers tended to police the way they spoke about their interpretation of the exhibition. For example, a woman who asked me to discuss the works with her stood in front of the work *Bester I* (Fig. 4.5) and commented that it is “wonderful how these people choose to be domestic workers and gardeners”. This statement is very problematic in terms of at least two points. Firstly, describing individuals as “these people” is not only facile and homogenising, but in this context is also extremely racist and dehumanising. Secondly, the presumption that black people choose to be domestic workers and gardeners is indicative of white privilege and the failure to acknowledge that, given the history of South Africa, white people have been afforded more opportunities than black South Africans. When I asked the viewer whether she truly believed that such occupations are a choice and not a matter of circumstance, she still maintained that it is a personal choice and as such they could get “better jobs if they decided to, but there is nothing wrong with being a domestic worker”. Unfortunately, the viewer repeatedly failed to accept the reality of the South African situation and how Apartheid played a major role in the disenfranchisement of many South Africans. The fact that she felt free to share this opinion with me implies that she assumed that I would agree with her just because I am white. As gallery assistants, both Mbunge and I were expected by some viewers to read Muholi’s works in particular ways based on the colour of our own skin.

Bester I (Fig. 4.5) is a black and white photographic self-portrait, printed on cotton paper. The title of the work references Muholi’s mother, Bester. In the image, Muholi stands facing forward and directing her gaze toward the viewer. It is as if Muholi both challenges the viewer to try to classify her while at the same time defying any form of classification. In the image, Muholi uses two different types of props. The first prop is a blanket covering the figure and fastened by a single clothes peg in the middle. The blanket has a design, which is stereotypically associated with Africa and is, therefore, regarded as being traditionally ‘African’. Such props are associated with Africa, and yet it is nonsensical to stereotype like that; however, such stereotypes project an idea of keeping African identities in the past and exempt from modernity. The other props included using clothes pegs in the hair of the artist, thus creating a form of headgear¹⁴⁷. Muholi also uses clothes pegs as earrings and has used

¹⁴⁷ In the series, Muholi frequently uses her hair as part of an idea related to headgear. Her hair, therefore, is used as a framing device; however, it also becomes a means of exploring subjugation. That is, her hair is used as

toothpaste on her lips. The white of the toothpaste on her lips stands in stark contrast to the darkened skin pigmentation. In my conversation with Deslynne Hille (2016), from the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, Hille states that Muholi's reference to Bester is a means of paying tribute to her mother, a domestic worker in a white setting, who never had an opportunity to be celebrated. Muholi, therefore, felt compelled to produce an image that pays homage to her mother and her contribution both to the South African economy and the labour of people in the country. However, *Bester I* can also reference displacement; that is, notions pertaining to 'belonging' and 'non-belonging'. Given South Africa's racial history, it would be fair to assume that, even apart from being geographically displaced, black people could have felt that they did not 'belong' in South Africa. In this instance, notions of 'non-belonging' can be seen in the reference to blackface, through the whitening of the lips, which may be indicative of a sort of screen that references historic and a continued lack of acceptance regarding full humanity of people who are seen as 'other'. Therefore, 'non-belonging' invokes feelings of loss; that is, the loss of human dignity through dehumanising racist hegemonic power structures.

In my conversation with Hille (2016), she stated that Bester was born in 1936 and, during this time, either a Home Affairs official or one's employer would issue a new name that they thought would suit the individual. In many cases, these new names were only issued because the employer did not want to bother to learn how to pronounce the names of their employees. However, a person's given name forms an essential part of that person's identity. In some cases, your given name references your cultural heritage, but, on a deeper level, a name is something that was usually personally chosen by a person's parents. Stripping a person of

a means of resistance. Muholi uses various props in order to convey the idea of headgear; some of these props include a sheepskin rug, clothes pegs and chopsticks. The chopstick for example, reminds one of the notion of pencil testing, and how cultural racism was placed on black hair, by white people, without having any real knowledge or understanding of it. (Pencil testing refers to a test in which a pencil was pushed through a person's hair and the way it comes out of a person's hair, easily or not, determines whether a person has passed the test.) This test was performed during Apartheid in order to distinguish white people from coloured and black people. In terms of policing the black female body, hair is one of the aspects that often becomes policed, since, stereotypically, an afro is regarded as being untamed – this is indicative of the binary regard of culture and nature. At the end of August 2016, black students at Pretoria Girls' High started protesting against the school's rigid policy regarding afros. However, the issue regarding the hair policy is not the only issue. Allegations of racism perpetuated by members of the teaching staff have been made – in an interview on eNCA, Malaika Maoh Eyoh stated that some of her friends had been called 'monkeys' by the teaching staff and that the students may not speak their home language on school grounds. The students feel that the rigid policing from the school results in sacrificing their identities and their cultures. Currently an investigation is underway in order to investigate all the allegations regarding racism. An article written for Eyewitness News by N. Koza (2016 – *Why SA is behind the Pretoria High School for Girls protest*) can be found at: <http://www.m.ewn.co.za/2016/08/29/Why-SA-is-backing-the-PTA-Girls-High-School-hair-protest> Accessed: 9 September 2016.

his/her given name entails a violation and erasure of his/her culture, personal identity and personal history. This demonstrates a disregard for individual identity and the construction of a collective identity, which is a deeply racist notion. On this basis, changing the given name extends this racist and stereotypical notion, by adding generic names that are continuously recycled and given to employees. Arguably, Muholi's work may not always be successful since the use of blackface in the *Somnyama Ngonyama* exhibition raises questions regarding the use of blackface by a black person. In a review titled, "Zanele Muholi, Somnyama Ngonyama @ Yancey Richardson"¹⁴⁸ in the *Collector Daily*, Richard Woodward (2015) notes that "Muholi has purposefully darkened her own skin in the printing of her photographs", and that "by making herself as purely dark as the gelatin-silver process will allow ... she may be harnessing an oppressive prejudice for her own ends", since, for decades, there was a tendency of the media in the United States of America "to darken the skin of black men accused of crimes", which relates to racial archetypes.

¹⁴⁸ Woodward, R.B. 2015. "Zanele Muholi, Somnyama Ngonyama @ Yancey Richardson". [Online]: <http://www.collectorydaily/zanele-muholi-somnyama-ngonyama-yancey/richardson/>

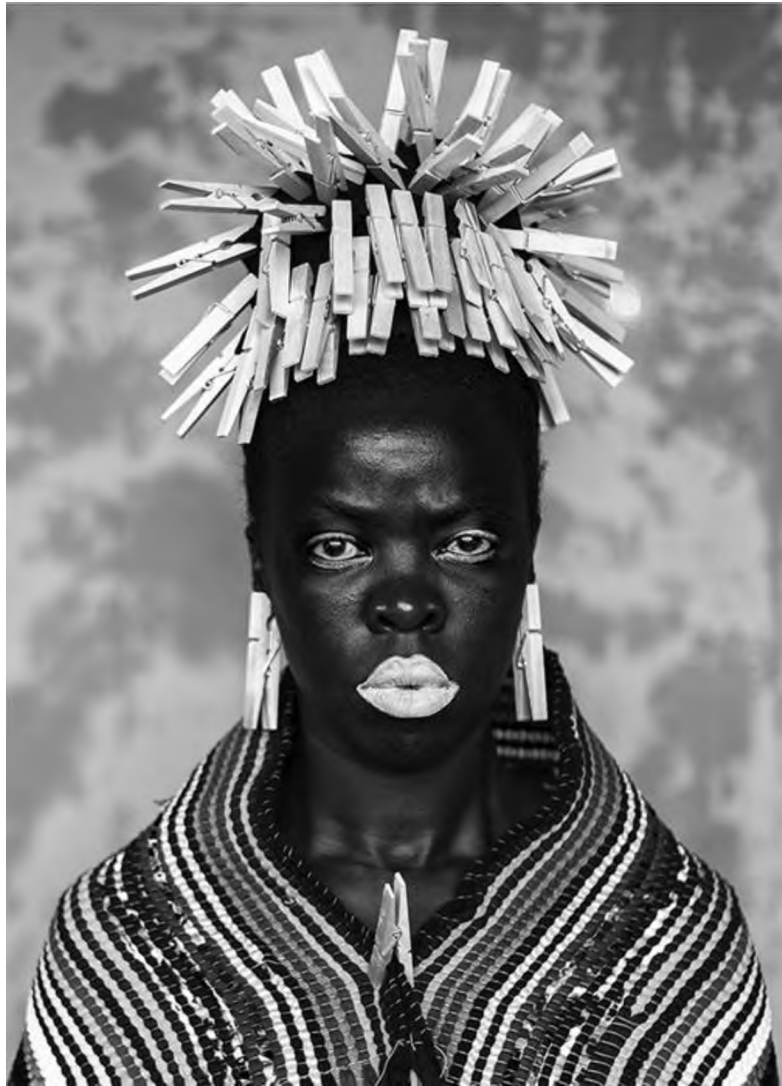


Fig. 4.5 Zanele Muholi, *Bester I* (2015), Silver gelatin print, 70 x 50.5cm.

Source: http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/somnyama/bester1_mayotte_2015.html

Somnyama Ngonyama II (Fig. 4.6) is a black and white self-portrait¹⁴⁹. The work is cropped at the bust and shows Muholi directing her gaze toward the viewer. Muholi wears nothing except for a sheepskin rug on her head. The effect is very powerful. Similar to the use of headgear in *Bester I*, the idea of headgear plays an important role in this work. According to Neelika Jayawardane (2016)¹⁵⁰ during the walkabout, the work is constructed in a way to project power; however, the work is also a joke because it is a play on a ‘lion king’ wig, which directly relates to stereotypes that are projected onto Africa. While Jayawardane points

¹⁴⁹ The use of self-portraiture can be regarded as a means of providing self-commentary.

¹⁵⁰ Neelika Jayawardane is an Associate Professor of English at Oswego University in New York City. The walkabout Jayawardane conducted was on 2 July 2016 in the Standard Bank Gallery, Albany Museum, Grahamstown.

to a comical element in this work, it can also be interpreted to have a deeper, more emotional meaning.



Fig. 4.6 Zanele Muholi, *Somnyama Ngonyama II* (2015), Silver gelatin print, 50 x 43.6cm. Source: http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/somnyama/somnyama_ngonyama2_oslo_2015.html

Marginalisation creates feelings related both to being invisible and to belonging. When a person is part of a marginalised group of people, they may experience feelings of not ‘belonging’ in a particular community or country. *Somnyama Ngonyama II* (Fig. 4.6) can thus be interpreted as a representation more or less related to the idea of being a ‘black sheep’. A ‘black sheep’ is an idiom used to refer to something queer¹⁵¹ and implies defiance – that is, in this regard, a defiance of the normative. For example, black wool was regarded as being less desirable than white wool because white wool can be dyed any colour, and a black sheep

¹⁵¹ ‘Queer’ is used here to refer to what is regarded as being odd, strange, peculiar, curious, weird, unorthodox, different, untypical, unconventional, eccentric or unfamiliar.

would usually stand out in a flock of predominantly white sheep. In this regard, the use of the sheepskin could stand for a metaphor for a deviation from normative social identity.

By this, I specifically refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and how sexual orientation and gender expression that is neither heterosexual or cisgender is regarded as being a deviation from what is considered to be 'African' within black communities and cultures in (South) Africa. That is, homosexuality and transgenderism cannot be reconciled with an 'authentic African' identity, since it is perceived as being a Western import and, as such, stands in contrast to perceived notions related to the 'origins' and 'traditions' associated with an African identity. Therefore, homosexuality and transgenderism are regarded by some as aberrations that should be expelled from the continent. The notion of something which needs to be expelled is directly related to the abject and the fear that it produces. (Kristeva 1982). The abject speaks of the horror one experiences when confronted with a breakdown between 'self' and 'other'. According to Julia Kristeva (1982:6),

The phobic has no other object than the abject. But that word, "fear" – a fluid haze, an elusive clamminess – no sooner has it cropped up than it shades off like a mirage and permeates all words of the language of non-existence, with a hallucinatory, ghostly glimmer. Thus, fear having been bracketed, discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confront that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject.

The abject, then, refers to human reaction, such as horror, and examines marginalisation. With regard to the above-mentioned quote, the abject is associated with fear, and in this regard is related to the binary of self/other. Fear stands in direct opposition to the 'other'. We fear what we do not know or understand; moreover, we fear what could potentially disrupt our notions and beliefs related to tradition, culture and social norms. Kristeva (1982:10) suggests that "I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and instead of what will be 'me'", and that "not at all an Other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be". That is, one becomes that which one is not. In other words, identity and being are often shaped by the other, especially in terms of binary oppositions.

In this regard, Muholi's work not only references homosexuality, but also gender and race. So, for example, women are regarded as abject, since abjection "persists as exclusion or taboo" (Kristeva 1982:17). Yet, Muholi's visual activism is abject in itself. Kristeva (1982:15) explains that "the abject is the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always been lost", and that "the abject shatters the wall of representation and its judgments". The

object, by extension, relates to what is perceived as being 'pure' and what is regarded as 'impure'¹⁵²; whiteness has (incorrectly) been associated with that which is 'pure', and blackness is, then, mistakenly associated with what is 'impure' and results in a feeling of incompleteness. Fanon (1952:169) notes that:

The only means of breaking this vicious circle that throws me back on myself is to restore to the other, through mediation and recognition, his human reality, which is different from natural reality. The other has to perform the same operation ... [I]n its immediacy, consciousness of self is simple being-for-itself. In order to win the certainty of oneself, the incorporation of the concept of recognition is essential. Similarly, the other is waiting for recognition by us, in order to burgeon into the universal consciousness of self. Each consciousness of self is in quest of absoluteness. It wants to be recognized as a primal value without reference to life, as a transformation of subjective certainty (Gewissheit) into objective truth (Wahrheit). When it encounters resistance from the other, self-consciousness undergoes the experience of *desire* – the first milestone on the road that leads to the dignity of the spirit. Self-consciousness accepts the risk of its life, and consequently it threatens the other in his physical being.

Somnyama Ngonyama II, and the exhibition as a whole, is, then, an introspective exploration of the artist. It 'speaks' of a longing for representation, since, according to Hille (2016), Muholi realised that there was a lack of representation of people who are black and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender living in South Africa. Therefore, Muholi decided that, if no such representation exists, then she would be the one to represent such individuals. The effect, through the use of photography, establishes an archive of the lived reality of such individuals, as well as creating a platform for discussion and a space for being. Through my own experiences, the feeling of incompleteness has always been present, and in terms of Muholi's photographic archive, such feelings related to incompleteness are evident. The act of introspection serves to fill the 'gaps' and to make sense of one's own being. This leads to a form of self-consciousness raising, and "each consciousness of self is in quest of absoluteness". Therefore, the photographic archives of Muholi form a resistance, and such resistance 'threatens' the other in his physical being. A work of art is often regarded as being controversial because of its resistance toward socio-cultural norms.

When I had a conversation with Ubuntu Mzila (2016), one of the viewers at the exhibition, he stated that the exhibition was bold and provocative. Mzila said that he found the images beautiful, but that provocation blurs the lines of beauty. When I asked Mzila what he found provocative about the exhibition, he responded by saying that he could not tell whether the

¹⁵² Abjection refers to a state of being 'cast off', for example, menstrual blood or sweat. In this instance, the object refers to a state of being that can be perceived as being a transgression of purity. Thus, the object, then, is caused by a disruption, that is, a disruption of order or of systems.

subject of the work is male or female. After asking him to show me the works to which he referred, he pointed to the *Brave Beauties* section and to the work titled, *Inkanyiso I* (Fig. 4.7)¹⁵³.

Inkanyiso I (2014) (Fig. 4.7) is a black and white self-portrait in which Muholi stands underneath a white lamp. Muholi lightly holds onto the lamp and poses in a way which suggests that the image was taken during a moment of spontaneity. Nevertheless, some viewers, including Mzila, were confused as to whether or not Muholi is transgender. For Mzila, the unshaved armpit indicated that Muholi is male, but her small stature and breasts suggested to him that Muholi might be transgender. When I told Mzila that Muholi is a woman, he indicated that women should shave their armpits, and that it is not feminine to leave them unshaven; therefore, the work is regarded as being controversial. Controversy, with regard to *Inkanyiso I*, relates to the policing of the female body and what is regarded as ‘appropriate’ representation of the ‘feminine’. As Judith Halberstam (2013:472) notes, “the female butch has been pressured to forgo her masculinity and attest to positive female embodiment”. In this context, lesbianism and female masculinity are dependent on the perceptions of “distinct differences between gender and sexual identities” (Halberstam 2013:472). That is, representations of the female body within the art historical canon have always represented the female body without body hair, denoting ideal conventions of femininity. In other words, the representation of body hair, regarded as being barbaric, places female representation outside the canon of the nude. Similarly, representations of the black female body, historically seen outside of the art canon, were not regarded as conventionally ideal. Muholi interrogates loaded/problematic representations of the black female body and its regulations, including the construction of representations of gender, which include the polarisation of masculine and feminine, and representations regarding the naked and nude in relation to the art canon.

According to Lynda Nead (1992:81), “the female body is constantly subjected to the judgmental gaze” and “the female body is caught in a perpetual cycle of judgment and categorisation”. However, Nead (1992:81) notes that “the power of the images lies not in the fact that we are made to witness a display but are, rather, involved in the processes through which identity is formed”. Nead (1992:26) further notes that “the beautiful is seen to lie in limitation” whereas “the sublime challenges this act of judgement by suggesting the

¹⁵³ The title of the work, *Inkanyiso*, is a reference to the online forum for queer and visual media, which Muholi founded in 2009.

possibility of form beyond limit". Since the sublime is traditionally associated with masculinity and body hair is associated with 'masculinity', the presence of hair under Muholi's arm goes 'beyond limit'¹⁵⁴. However, 'femininity' has set limits through the use of multiple framing devices¹⁵⁵; going beyond such limits goes against the art historical canon pertaining to beauty. If the subject of the work remained within the bounds of the framing devices, it could be regarded as beautiful, but since Muholi constructs her identity by her own agency and transgresses these boundaries, this then can be perceived as controversial by some individuals, for example Mzila.



Fig. 4.7 Zanele Muholi, *Inkanyiso I* (2014), Silver gelatin print, 50 x 33.3cm.

Source:

http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/somnyama/inkanyiso1_paris_2014.html

¹⁵⁴ According to Nead (1992:46), "... the notion of tradition works to contain dissent and to create a particular kind of public for images of the female body through the assertion of an ideal aesthetic transcendence and timeless appeal. Social difference and political contestation are held in abeyance through these structures as we are incited to celebrate an historical continuum of male mastery over the female body".

¹⁵⁵ See Clark (1956) and Berger (1972).

Another challenge is evident within the *Somnyama Ngonyama* exhibition; that is, Muholi challenges heteronormative assumptions. The work titled *Thulani II* (Fig. 4.8) is an image in which Muholi stands facing directly toward the viewer. She wears nothing but a helmet with goggles. The helmet is reminiscent of those used during the Second World War. The setting is indoors in a darkened area; perhaps Muholi is standing in a warehouse. Her skin pigmentation is darkened and, coupled with the darkened setting, there is no visible light contrast in the image. In the work, Muholi represents a mine worker and references the Marikana Massacre. The effect of the darkened skin pigmentation is suggestive of the coal found within the mines. The fact that Muholi is naked, apart from donning a helmet, alludes to the vulnerability miners face on a daily basis when they go underground – they have no control over what could happen, whether it be an explosion or the tunnels collapsing.

The helmet, which is similar to an old military helmet, as opposed to a typical mining helmet, refers to the violence the Marikana miners faced on 16 August 2012, and references war. The miners were protesting at a mine owned by the Lonmin Company, situated in Marikana, an area close to Rustenburg, for a wage increase due to the appalling conditions of working in the mines. On this day, 34 miners were killed, 78 miners were wounded and 250 miners were arrested by members of the South African Police Service. The massacre is regarded as being one of the most lethal uses of force against civilians, apart from the Sharpeville Massacre¹⁵⁶ in the 1960s. The use of assault rifles by security services and the South African Police Service in effect turned the mine into a battleground, hence Muholi's employment of a military helmet as opposed to a hard hat. The effects of this tragic day were devastating to the family members of the miners, and South Africans were horrified at the police brutality, which was broadcast on every news channel and printed in most South African newspapers. The first couple of days after the massacre consisted of finger pointing, blame laying and denial regarding who was responsible for the tragedy, and many South Africans sympathised with the families of the deceased. Since it was reported that the deceased miners were the breadwinners of their families, it was assumed that the miners were leaving their wives and/or children behind with no primary income.

¹⁵⁶ In 1960, the Sharpeville Massacre took place at a police station in Sharpeville in Gauteng, South Africa. Protesters gathered at the police station during a peaceful protest to hand themselves in because they were not carrying passbooks. Passbooks and pass laws were used during the Apartheid regime as a means of racial segregation. After an attempt was made to arrest a protester, things turned ugly. Reinforcements were called, and police opened fire and used stun grenades, which resulted in 69 deaths and 180 injuries.

However, according to Deslynne Hille, the heteronormativity associated with the miners influenced Muholi to construct a ‘queering’ of the massacre. That is, Muholi questioned if any of the miners were in a same-sex relationship, and if a man came forward to claim the body of his partner – what would happen in terms of public reactions? Given that South Africa is a democratic country where myths surrounding notions of homosexuality being ‘unAfrican’ are still prevalent, I wonder whether the reaction and sympathy from the public would be the same as the reactions and sympathy for heterosexual relationships¹⁵⁷. I think that it is highly doubtful. Some religious conservatives might deem it an appropriate time to preach that a homosexual miner had died as punishment for his homosexuality, as happened after the Pulse nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida in June 2016. The anti-gay pastor Steven Anderson celebrated the shooting by stating that “there’s 50 less paedophiles in this world, because, you know, these homosexuals are a bunch of disgusting perverts and paedophiles”¹⁵⁸. The irony is that Anderson has stated that he is being persecuted for his comments about the Pulse shooting.

¹⁵⁷ *Freeheld* is a movie starring Julianne Moore and Ellen Paige. The movie is based on a true story in which a New Jersey detective, Laurel Hester, is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Hester wishes to leave her pension benefits to her domestic partner, Stacie Andree. However, Hester’s request is denied and she seeks help from her colleague Dane Wells and the activist Steven Goldstein. The film focuses on the couple’s fight for equality. In certain countries, domestic partners are still denied pension benefits after their partner has passed away. In this sense, Muholi’s exploration of the Marikana Massacre can include questions surrounding benefits and legal implications when a domestic partner passes away.

¹⁵⁸ The quote is available at the following link: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-3639262/Orlando-shooting-victims-targeted-pastor-s-hate-filled-rant.html



Fig. 4.8 Zanele Muholi, *Thulani II* (2015), Silver gelatin print, 50 x 36,2cm.

Source: http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/somnyama/thulani2_parktown_2015.html

Hate speech, both as an individual expression of prejudice and as an incitement to cause harm, is still prevalent in South Africa; for example, a Facebook post went viral in January 2016, when an estate agent, Penny Sparrow, from KwaZulu-Natal, likened black people to

monkeys¹⁵⁹. Sparrow later deleted the post, apologised and stated that she did not mean it personally. Clearly, the post was a personal attack on black South African citizens, just as many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender South Africans face hate speech on a daily basis. Black people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender face discrimination, prejudice, violence and hate speech pertaining to their race, their gender and their sexuality. In January 2016, it was reported on Mambaonline¹⁶⁰ that the long-awaited hate crimes bill would be made public in two months. Although a hate crimes bill would not be perfect in terms of guaranteed protections, if the constitution is anything to go by, it will still afford a structural response against injustices suffered by many South Africans, and such a structure can be developed and continuously be worked on by activists. However, by August 2016, the hate crimes bill has yet to be made public and drafted into legislature. It was reported on eNCA that the hate crimes bill would come into effect soon, yet this remains to be seen, since numerous reports regarding the hate crimes bill have been circulating in the media for over two years.

It is for this reason that the work of activists, and, in terms of Zanele Muholi, visual activists, is a necessity. Muholi creates a visual space in which black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are represented for who they are and not for who they are perceived to be, thus allowing for such individuals to have an affirming space. For example, in contrast to Mzila's observations of the *Somnyama Ngonyama* exhibition, another viewer, Thandolwethu Nyengule, walked into the exhibition space about 15 minutes before closing. At the time, I was the only gallery assistant on duty, and had the privilege of seeing Nyengule stand in the middle of the space in front of the *Somnyama Ngonyama* wallpaper, arms stretched wide and exclaiming, "what a time to be black and queer". Nyengule explained that Muholi is one of her favourite artist, and that she was worried that she would not have an opportunity to experience the exhibition because she had taken a job as a waitress for the duration of the National Arts Festival, which kept her busy. The excitement of Nyengule was contagious, and she is proudly queer. Her excitement further ignited when she inquired whether or not photography was allowed in the exhibition space. Since the two representatives from Stevenson (Deslynn Hille and Gemma Garman) had told us that photography is allowed, I responded in the affirmative. What followed was five minutes of my taking photos of

¹⁵⁹ An article written in the *Mail & Guardian* is available at the following link: <http://mg.co.za/article/2016-01-04-twitter-erupts-after-kzn-estate-agent-calls-black-people-monkeys>

¹⁶⁰ DeBarros, L.2016. *SA hate crimes bill to be revealed soon*, [Online], <http://www.mambaonline.com/2016/01/14/sa-hate-crimes-bill-revealed-soon/>. Accessed on 26 January 2016.

Nyengule using her phone. Her confident poses in front of the works of Muholi follow in the footsteps of all the participants who Muholi has photographed and documented over the years.

Nyengule was, however, disappointed that she was unable to attend any of the walkabouts, and since I conducted the third and final walkabout, I suggested that, if she were to find time, she should return and I would take her through the exhibition. She returned three days later filled with excitement. I took her through the space as I had done during the walkabout for various other viewers. During one of our conversations, Nyengule¹⁶¹ asked the question, “do I wear the label or does the label wear me?”. Perhaps this was the most interesting question a viewer had asked for the duration of the exhibition. This was the first time that I had been confronted with a question by a viewer that required a great deal of thought.

As much as I dislike the use of labelling¹⁶², and as much of a hindrance that it may be, it remains helpful in terms of affording descriptive terminology when referencing specific groups of people. In terms of Nyengule’s question, labelling can function as a double-edged blade. First, a label should function as a means of being a description of both individuality and of personal identity, thus a person should ‘wear the label’. Secondly, labelling becomes problematic when society attempts to box a person into a specific label and expects a person to forego individual identity for a collective identity. Thirdly, when the label ‘wears the person’, the individual becomes pressurised into conforming to the label and, by extension, the expectations such a label holds, thereby losing both agency and autonomy. Lastly, labels may not always pertain to self-identification, as Liesl Theron (2013:323), notes:

Sexual orientation and identity are complex and people sometimes refer to themselves outside the categorisations of lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual offered by mainstream discourses on sexual orientation. It becomes apparent that the definitions or labels accepted and used by academia and the organised LGBTI sector are not necessarily the descriptions people use when self-identifying, even where that language is available to them.

For example, the *Faces and Phases* photographic archive attests to Theron’s assertion that labels may not always pertain to self-identification – there is no singular way to be gay, lesbian or transgender. The LGBT community is filled with many individuals with their unique personalities and identities, from butch to lipstick lesbians; from bears to jocks to twinks among gay men; and from the androgynous to transvestites to transgender individuals

¹⁶¹ I obtained permission from both Mzila and Nyengule to use their names and to reference them in my thesis.

¹⁶² See “Does the label fit?” by Liesl Theron in the *Queer African Reader*, pp. 316–328.

in terms of gender fluidity and expression. It becomes evident, then, that what is seen and perceived as ‘truth of being’ by society is ‘only half the picture’.

4.4) More than a Picture

In an article entitled *Deconstructing violence towards black lesbians in South Africa*, Zethu Matebeni states that “the claim to a black lesbian identity in South Africa, and in the African continent as a whole, is an important but contested claim” (2013:343). Matebeni (2013:343) goes on to explain that “the lesbian category, as an identity and a social and political group, highlights sexuality and gender as well as race, nation and class”. As Matebeni (2013:343) explains, this interplay to which she refers both resurfaces and recedes in the various ways in which “the lesbian category is made to ‘disappear’ through various forms of injustice, the use of language and through violence in contemporary South Africa”. This is due to the fact that lesbians are seen as disrupting and transgressing the gender binary and sex norms. As Matebeni (2013:344) notes,

Masculine or butch lesbians¹⁶³ are targeted because their visible masculine traits disrupt the gender hierarchy by symbolically claiming male privilege¹⁶⁴. Femme lesbians, who remain ‘invisible’ in society as they are deemed ‘heterosexual’, are violated because they invert their feminine attraction and eroticism to other women, and not men. Regardless of where one fits within the lesbian paradigm, the mere existence of black African lesbians, in particular, remains contested. In various, often violent ways black lesbians in South Africa, even within the progressive pro-gay rights laws, live under harsh conditions that attempt to ‘do away’ with their sexual subjectivities. The form of corrective or curative rape ... is one such example ... [T]his language of rape and sexual violence has contributed to the branding and framing of black lesbians as ‘special’ victims of widespread rape and sexual torture towards women in South Africa. This is a complex and difficult position to take because on the one hand ... lesbians are attacked because of their perceived and real disruption of the gender and sex order. On the other hand, by framing black lesbians as special victims of a form of rape, the language of corrective rape locates black lesbians in the townships of South Africa outside the wider gender, class, sexuality and racial struggles of social justice in South Africa.

Similarly, according to Mkhize et al. (2010:14), the word ‘black’ functions as an electric and complex thread within the energies of South Africa, and wrestles with class, ethnicity, Apartheid, experience, and ancestry. This is a result of the fact that ‘black’ can designate a

¹⁶³ See Gqola (2011).

¹⁶⁴ Often men feel threatened and believe that these women are trying to replace them, and that they are stealing ‘their women’. Also, masculine traits are perceived to be a signifier of homosexuality, yet since masculinity and femininity are social constructs, this is a misconception, since many women who appear to be more masculine are not necessarily homosexual.

wide range of constituencies, such as politicians, the majority of people in urban and rural environments who are poverty-stricken, ‘born frees’ who have a middle-class access to resources but who remain “powerfully alienated from ‘white’ identity” and people who remain rooted “in the identities as political activists they crafted during the 1980s” (Mkhize et al. 2010:14). According to Mkhize et al. (2010:14), the aforementioned deploys the term ‘black’ within the recognition of two critical realities. First, this is a term of definition that is used by a variety of active and insightful people who work against homophobic violence within cities, townships, and rural areas, as well as several other locations in South Africa (Mkhize et al. 2010:14). With regard to organisations such as the “Forum for the Empowerment of Women” [FEW] and the “Durban Lesbian and Gay Community and Health Centre”, the people with whom they primarily work who have experienced “diverse forms of violations are ‘black’” (Mkhize et al. 2010:14). As Mkhize et al. (2010:14) rightfully note, “their ‘blackness’ encompasses a wealth of issues” and their “connection with ethnicities rooted in South African land long before colonialism”. Although there are many diversities in South Africa, as a collective, and despite the marginal improvement in middle-class locations since 1994, ‘black people’ still inhabit the minority of the well-resourced neighbourhoods and exert the least amount of political power, as individuals or families, and it is manifestly evident that they remain the most vulnerable to severe levels of social assault, such as gang warfare, street violence, domestic insecurity and burglary.

Lastly, the term ‘black’ is also extremely useful in terms of describing the realities of lesbian lives in South Africa (Mkhize et al. 2010:15). Mkhize et al. (2010:15) further suggest that it would be absurd and counterfactual to suggest that lesbians in South Africa who are racialised as white, for example, do not experience instances of homophobia, gender-based violence or even hate speech, yet at the same time it is true that the dominant cultures with regards to a ‘safe space’ for lesbian women, more often than not, tend to exclude all but women who are well-resourced, and the majority of whom tend to be white. Therefore, as Mkhize et al. (2010:15) note, the bars and clubs in Cape Town’s ‘Pink District’ are frequented by mostly white people, and academic conferences in which lesbian politics, ideas and imaginations are explored are attended by “many more white people than by those racialized in other ways”. Mkhize et al. (2010:15) state the reason for this as being that “white lesbians – as a group (not individuals) – tend to feel ‘safer’ in their sexual orientation than lesbians of any other racial categorisation in South Africa”. In this instance, the term ‘black’ is accustomed to this generalisation and, although not blind to the “overarching

consequences of homophobia and gender-based violence for all South African lesbians, can be very powerful in emphasising the ongoing life of apartheid cultures, despite the formal dismantling of apartheid legislation” (Mkhize et al. 2010:15).

As a result of generalisations, several serious challenges emerge; yet it is also essential to take the lived realities of lesbians’ experiences with regard to various violations to the core of questions about and relating to citizenship and human rights (Mkhize et al. 2010:15). However,

... given that black people, women and lesbians remains second-class citizens in terms of actual access to security and status, creating knowledge of black lesbians’ experiences and theorisations of violence against them risks moving ‘black lesbians’ from a discursive terrain of invisibility and marginalisation to one in which ‘they’ are recognised only as ‘special victims’” (Mkhize et al. 2010:15).

This occurs in exactly the same way that ‘black South Africans’ became internationally identified within the international press of the 1970s as the “arch-victims of apartheid, helpless and struggling in the face of the racist machine” (Mkhize et al. 2010:15), as a result, damaging notions of black South Africans as capable, artists, writers, philosophers, poets, intellectuals and so forth, as “serious infractions against their human rights as South African citizens could imperil knowledge of their versatilities, diversities, creativities and unique identities as individuals” (Mkhize et al. 2010:15).

According to Mkhize et al. (2010:15), the aforementioned issues are in need of being kept under close activist surveillance, and, while black lesbians are subjected to a similar climate of hostility and violence, this should not and cannot be seen as a climate that defines their identities as well as attempts to predict their experiences of life and of living (Mkhize et al. 2010:15). As Matebeni (2013:344) similarly notes, black lesbians who live in townships in South Africa and who are, therefore, presumed to be ‘poor’¹⁶⁵, are increasingly viewed as either victims or survivors of corrective or curative rape¹⁶⁶. According to Matebeni (2013:344), the victim narrative with regard to black lesbians living in township areas is not only problematic, but it is also a limited view of how these women experience the fullness of

¹⁶⁵ According to Pumla Gqola (2015:65), South Africa has a “contradictory situation where women are legislatively empowered, and yet we do not feel safe in our streets or homes” and “a genuinely gender-progressive country is without the gender-based violence statistics that South Africa has, making South African women collectively a majority (at 52 percent) under siege”. Gqola (2015:65), states that “there simply are no two-ways about it” and that “it certainly does not watch and participate in ‘curative’/ ‘corrective’ rape against its most marginal: Black lesbians and/or poor women”. See, Gqola (2015).

¹⁶⁶ See Chapter 2 regarding rape and ‘corrective/curative’ rape. See, Gqola (2015).

their lives. The emphasis on black lesbians as survivors/victims of curative or corrective rape thus arise out of both feminist and lesbian circles within South Africa (Matebeni 2013: 344).

A number of organisations that work with black lesbians living in South Africa “continuously report numerous cases of black lesbians experiencing curative/corrective rape because of their sexual orientation and their identity” (Matebeni 2013:345). According to Matebeni (2013:345), curative rape is defined as:

The rape of women perceived of as lesbian by men as an ostensible ‘cure’ for their (aberrant) sexualities. The term has become synonymous with the notion that this term limits this kind of experience only to a certain class of black lesbians, there are a number of reason why ... it presents a problematic reading of violence towards lesbians. According to police records and accounts of crimes in South Africa, corrective rape does not exist. All rape is recorded and categorised the same way.

However, the use of the term ‘curative rape’ has been strategically helpful within various activist circles, since the term effectively manages to highlight the extent of violence and injustices that are perpetrated on black lesbians because of their identities and sexualities (Matebeni 2013:345). Yet, as Matebeni (2013:345) notes, “beyond such circles, it remains unclear how useful the deployment of this term has been”. This is due to the fact that, as Matebeni (2013:346) argues, the deployment of such a term can potentially do more harm than good, since marking certain groups of individuals as victims of a special kind of crime can, in effect, make them more vulnerable to “unintended further victimisation”. As Matebeni (2013:346) further explains, “knowing that a victim has experienced curative rape immediately identifies her as a lesbian, a category many (including certain institutions) still treat with disdain”, and, “in this sense, this language and terminology can unintentionally work against what it set out to do”.

Zanele Muholi’s exhibition¹⁶⁷ *Only Half the Picture* (2006) portrays female same-sex practices in South Africa. According to the Stevenson Gallery website (2006), “as a gender and sexual rights activist, and as a photographer, she [Muholi] confronts the notion that lesbian practices are alien to African cultures, and offers a radical break from stereotypical narratives about black female sexualities”. Muholi explains the importance of creating a new narrative¹⁶⁸ pertaining to the lives of black lesbians living in South Africa. In “Thinking through Lesbian Rape”, she writes,

¹⁶⁷ The exhibition took place at the Michael Stevenson Gallery, Johannesburg, 29 March to 29 April 2006.

¹⁶⁸ This new narrative which Muholi creates affords black lesbians both agency and a space in which to be who they are, and thus creates a sense of autonomy. According to Pumla Gqola (2011:623), “paying attention to

... I need to push beyond simple exposition, and begin to unpack why our Black sexual agency and autonomy is so threatening to how this new nation imagines itself. As Black lesbians, we need to initiate the process of theorising hate crimes against us so that we may become agents articulating our sexualities and genders through our own diverse voices.

That is, Muholi's representations of black lesbians and the black female body enable the artist, participants in her work and members of the black lesbian community to resist classification by sexist, misogynist, racist and patriarchal structures. As the title of the exhibition suggests, the viewer only sees 'half the picture'. In terms of 'curative/corrective' rape, as discussed above by Mkhize et al. and Matebeni, the full picture regarding the effects of the rape are not always visible. Brenna Munro (2012:220) notes that Muholi's works that endeavours to circulate, globally, the concept of "black lesbian", which pertains to a local and a fashioned identity that can have "political legibility", and it further reflects the "vulnerabilities that visibility – and particularly the visibility of the black (queer) female body – can bring". That is, images in *Only Half the Picture* makes 'lesbianism' as a preconceived category invisible, but also directly refer to and address the violence and homophobia faced by black lesbians.

Muholi's work *Ordeal* (Fig. 4.9) directly addresses victimisation, representing a woman who has been victimised. 'Ordeal', by definition, is "a prolonged painful or unpleasant experience" (Soanes and Hawker 2006). The viewer cannot know which ordeal is referred to; the subject may have been a victim either of 'curative/corrective' rape or of a hate crime. However, it is evident from the image that the subject is attempting to clean up after the incident, and perhaps 'wash away' both visible and invisible trauma. The image is a black and white photograph in which the participant is on her haunches in front of a metal tub. The focus is on the tension evident in her arms and legs, and she is intently focused on the task at hand. She is in the process of washing; however, although the participant is naked, her face and her genitals remain either out of view of the photographic lens or hidden in shadow. Arguably, considering the violation the participant has endured, the anonymity is used as a means of avoiding further violation from the photographic lens. Muholi is respectful of her participants at all times and, forming a bond with her participants before photographing them, as a means of protecting them from further violation, Muholi's works are always constructed

Muholi's images requires grappling with the competing and nuanced meanings highlighted in the represented subjects. They underline the importance of seeing the agency – life choices, decisions, failures, confusions, discoveries, rejections – of the Black lesbian in the picture. They make it hard to safely see only the victim of heteropatriarchal violence, but invite us to engage with the many layers in the world that is Black lesbian South Africa".

in such a way as to protect her participants from further violations and scrutiny. According to Muholi (2013:170), she “did not want the camera to be a further violation”. This is the basis of her visual activism – it is a process through which Muholi establishes relationships with her participants to avoid further violation, yet at the same time she documents the resistance and existence of black lesbians’ lives.

According to Munro (2012:224), “it is ... a moving scene of self-care and dignity: this woman has been hurt and has very little material wealth, but she maintains and arranges her body and her belongings in this small and fragile space of safety with grace”. Indeed, despite the ordeal the participant has suffered, she remains composed within the image, suggesting a ‘silent’ strength. The viewer does not know the back story and can merely speculate what the participant has been through – a representation is only a representation and cannot reveal the whole ‘truth’. For example, some photographs in *Only Half the Picture* address rape as a social issue, but they are contrasted with other images in the series representing black lesbian women during intimate moments with their partners, including unapologetic images pertaining to menstruation¹⁶⁹. Munro (2012:224) notes that “Muholi’s work as a whole illuminates the ways in which sexuality, trauma, gender identity, race, poverty, and body taboos are all bound together, rather than being separate issues”.

¹⁶⁹ I use ‘unapologetic’ because menstruation is often regarded as not only abject but a taboo subject for discussion. All too often, negative connotations are placed on issues regarding menstruation, which in some cases, also have feelings regarding shame and or embarrassment attached to them. According to Muholi (2009:4), “the source of shame we feel as lesbians for being raped comes from the same patriarchal source as the shame we feel for our menses. We not only feel the shame for being raped by men on the streets and/or in our homes, but then there is the secondary shame we endure when some doctors re-victimize us by commenting that lesbians can’t be raped, or that it is a sin to be a lesbian, and therefore the rape of our bodies is justifiable – our punishment. It is our living, bleeding female/lesbian/butch/femme bodies that are raped.”



Fig. 4.9 Zanele Muholi, *Ordeal* (2003), Silver gelatin print, 600 x 535mm.

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/ordeal.htm>

In contrast to images such as *Ordeal* and *Aftermath* in the series, images such as *Beloved* and *Kiss* stand in contrast to the violations represented and alluded in the above-mentioned images. *Beloved I* (Fig. 4.10) is a black and white photograph of two participants. These participants are evidently a couple, since their body language is illustrative of familiarity with the other person, as well as suggesting a sense of ease and comfort. The image depicts the couple in an intimate embrace. One participant stands in front of the other, eyes closed, head tilted slightly to the side and is naked. Her partner stands behind her and kisses her neck. The women are at ease and appear content. However, we do not know their history, nor do we know the hardships they have faced. We are presented with ‘only half a picture’, and the representation is illustrative of a time in their lives that is devoid of any violation and scrutiny. Arguably, the viewer can ascertain that, in a country where homosexuality is regarded as being ‘un-African’, it is logical to conclude that they have faced stereotyping, violation, discrimination and violence at some point in their lives.

Similarly, in *Beloved II* (Fig. 4.11), the same women are shown lying on top of their bed. One participant’s gaze is downward, whilst the other participant’s gaze is directed upward toward

the ceiling. The image is potentially captured after love making, yet the participant's gaze directed toward the ceiling seems remote, isolated and faraway. I cannot help but get the sense that she may be reflecting back to a less happy time. It may be a captured moment of introspection and, although her head is nestled next to her partner's head, it appears that there is distance. However, such introspection has nothing to do with her partner; instead it reflects on their social reality. As Raél Salley (2013:116) notes,

Subjectivity itself may be constituted through visual discourse ... This is part of an effort to resist overdetermined narratives of black or lesbian identity in favour of noting how these pictures resist imposed labels by linking the visual subject to us as agents of sight and objects of discourse that impact the production of visibility. When I say visibility I mean the social field of the visual, the everyday processes of looking at others and being looked at. It is this complex field of visual reciprocity that is actively constitutive of social reality.

For example, one aspect of social reality is being looked at and scrutinised in society. Introspection can, then, remind one that one is present in a moment without judgement and without public gaze following one's every move. It has been my experience that, when you are in public with your partner and you hold their hand or give them a kiss, in times like this you may experience feelings of vulnerability and become exceedingly self-conscious. It should be noted that this does not always occur, and is entirely dependent on the environment that you find yourself in; however, I can imagine that, in township areas, these are feelings that feature prominently. The vulnerability originates from a paranoid feeling that you are constantly being watched and scrutinised – perhaps you are – but it also relates to fear: the fear of being approached in public by a homophobe who may decide to confront you, or the fear of becoming the victim of a hate crime. The self-consciousness comes from a feeling pertaining to 'difference', and knowing that such 'difference' may result in severe public judgement, whether it is expressed verbally or not; the knowledge that judgement may occur is ever-present. However, the two participants in the *Beloved* images (of which there are five) are photographed in a 'safe' place. Their home is a place in which they can feel comfortable and safe to be who they are without fear of persecution. However, a 'safe' space is not always possible within the township areas. Although these women are protected by their 'private' space, they know that this sacred space, separate from the world, can be intruded upon, and they could become violated within their own home by a person who decides to follow them home and 'punish' them for their sexual orientation. According to Gabeba Baderoon (2011:401),

Muholi makes a thoughtful contribution ... but declines to become entrapped in a reductive focus on authenticity. Instead she has chosen in her photographs to convey a political meaningful vision of LGBTI intimacy and pleasure in private spaces. This is in clear contrast to the theme of trauma that has been used to give an easy legibility to black and queer bodies in much writing on African sexuality ... For her, the route to this more complex, self-generated view has been to convey 'the visual pleasures and erotica of my community so that our being comes into focus, into community and national consciousness'. Such images of domestic intimacy and rarely seen lesbian eroticism follow the call to African women ... to pursue the power of bodily pleasure and self-affirmation and resilience that can issue from this.

Therefore, such images representing being and lesbian intimacy can attest to the resilience of the black lesbian community. Despite the adversity they face, such images re-affirm lesbian existence and the right to existence, despite notions pertaining to normative behaviours, the policing of the black female body and the myth that homosexuality is 'un-African'.



Fig. 4.10 Zanele Muholi, *Beloved I* (2005), Silver gelatin print, 274 x 390mm.

Source: <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/beloved1.htm>



Fig. 4.11 Zanele Muholi, *Beloved II* (2005), Silver gelatin print, 274 x 390mm.

Source: <http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/beloved2.htm>

Through Muholi's visual activism, it becomes evident that such notions have harmful effects; that is, without the existence of such myths and notions, violence would not be perpetrated against those perceived as being 'other'. Another work that is illustrative of 'domestic intimacy' is the work titled *Kiss* (Fig. 4.12), which is a black and white photograph depicting two women kissing. The image consists of a close-up of the participant's faces. The work is powerful in its simplicity; there are no props, and the setting is unknown to the viewer. The women may either be in a public or private space; however, the viewer bears witness to a tender moment between the two women. The image is neither obscene, nor is it pornographic; however, by virtue of what the work depicts, it is regarded as being obscene. Regarding Muholi's work as either obscene or pornographic has nothing to do with the visual representation, but has everything to do with the viewer's own racism, sexism and/or homophobia.



Fig. 4.12 Zanele Muholi, *Kiss* (2003), Silver gelatin print, 500 x 360mm.

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/kiss.htm>

4.5) The Art of Being

Zanele Muholi's work has often been misunderstood and met with both disgust and controversy. The controversy arises from issues related to obscenity and in some instances the pornographic. As mentioned in the previous subsection, such views originate from the viewer's own prejudices. Muholi's series *Only Half the Picture* and *Being* has been regarded by many visitors to her exhibition, and public figures, as obscene due to their subject matters. Since these exhibitions were the first to document intimacy between black lesbians in South Africa, the images were regarded as going 'against nation building'. In 2009, the Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana, walked out of the exhibition titled *Innovative Women* during a Women's Day celebration in 2009. Xingwana was shocked and disturbed by Muholi's images of lesbian intimacy, and the minister described the work as being 'pornographic', 'offensive', and 'against nation building'. However, Xingwana's behaviour and intolerant attitudes are reflective of the prevailing attitudes South Africans have toward homosexuality and transgenderism. According to Munro (2012:219),

The fact that the exhibition was being held at Constitution Hill makes it an even more symbolically charged skirmish over how gay rights to citizenship and freedom of expression are interpreted in the shifting political climate. While many commentators have shared Xingwana's feelings that these photographs are pornography rather than art and have objected to the 300,000 rand in government funding for the exhibition, many others have objected strongly to her critique and her attempts to censor the exhibition.

Herein lies the important of activism and Muholi's visual activism. As Xingwana's reaction illustrates, there is a pervasive refusal within South African society to acknowledge female sexuality and homosexuality. This, in turn, delegitimises sexual agency and individual autonomy. Invisibility regarding the aforementioned issues is preferred and encouraged. However, Muholi's refusal to remain on the margins of representation and what is deemed as being 'appropriate' is evident in her photographic archive, which covers a broad spectrum related to sexuality, gender, race, class and the black female body. Therefore, her images transgress the boundaries of the normative and pose a challenge with regard to normative sexuality and behaviour as defined by (South) African communities, often originating from perceived notions of what it means to be 'African'. The photographs in *Being* are unapologetic; the series is suggestive of a challenge – a challenge to change socio-cultural thinking – but which also 'says' that 'this is who we are in our 'being'. The series includes a triptych titled *Being* (Fig. 4.13), that consists of two black and white photographs, and one monograph print. These images show two participants, who are in all probability a couple,

lying on top of their bed. The couple are cuddling and holding each other, therefore, as the title suggests, the participants are ‘being’ together and they are ‘being’ who they are and with the person they love. Therefore, a reimagining occurs, that is, a reimagining of what an ‘authentic’ ‘African’ looks like. It implies the importance of cultivating new ways of being and accommodating new notions of difference within the framework of equality in South Africa. For such social change to occur, it entails a re-working of history. By this I mean changing notions and concepts that were constructed in the colonial past, and re-working such issues and concepts to be relevant in a post-colonial South Africa. However, neither is the task simple, nor will it a prompt process. Such re-imagining will take time, but, through visual representations such as those of Zanele Muholi and through continued activism, the need for social change will be re-iterated and concepts reconfigured until individuals’ perceptions begin to change.



Fig. 4.13 Zanele Muholi, *Being* (2007), Silver gelatin prints and lambda print, 30 x 22.5cm (each).

Source: <http://archives.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/being20.htm>

4.6) Conclusion

Zanele Muholi’s photography interrogates the impact of social and cultural conventions, and their impact on identity. In this socio-cultural context, ontologies of sexuality and gender regulate the formation of identities and of being. In other words, the regulation of identities

pertains to the socio-political and cultural normative conventions and appropriations that dictate which identities are regarded as being 'acceptable'. Additionally, notions regarding being, pertain to a division between individual and authoritarian constructs that mark 'difference'. 'Difference', then, is constructed around notions of 'belonging' and 'non-belonging'. Individuals 'belong' as long as they conform to social conventions of sexuality and gender, and cultural appropriation (from a colonial manner). Non-conformity is resultant in 'non-belonging', and displaces individuals to the margins of society and representability. These factors result in misconceptions, misrecognition and stereotypical representations.

In the exhibition titled *Somnyama Nkonyama*, which consists of self-portraits, Muholi adopts various personas and represents different archetypes that are profoundly related to the politics of race in South Africa, the construction of stereotypes pertaining to African-ness, and Muholi's re-working of history in her photography and visual activism. This is achieved through the use of props that are associated with African-ness, for example beads and shells, and the use of blackface, which is done by darkening her skin tone through the development of the gelatin print. In this context, Muholi references the racist stereotypes that are imposed on black people and that influence their sense of self, identity and sense of worth. Psychologically, such stereotypes are deeply damaging to individual psyches. Muholi refuses to conform to socio-cultural conventions and subverts racial stereotypes of African-ness. She challenges stereotypes in her re-appropriation and use of stereotypical props, and her gaze confronts the viewer, thereby challenging their own stereotypical conceptions, while simultaneously asserting power, authority, and dominance; demanding a place in the South African historical archive by refusing to be placed at the margins of society; and asserting her right to 'belong'.

Conclusion

The policing of boundaries in art is frequently related to a question pertaining to the projections of views held by the state, religious leaders, and conservative critics and their institutions, as well as the invocations of norms of both sexual and moral values. Censorship is used as a vehicle in order to maintain cultural and social regulation, since censorship is both privative (depriving the public of certain images or news) and formative. Arguably, the use of censorship does not pertain to using such censorship as a moral compass; instead it becomes a basis for discrimination and prejudice against the 'other'. Therefore, censorship can be regarded as a suppression, that is, can be in a narrow sense, as punitive. This policing and regulation of boundaries means that certain artists, such as those artists who identify as either lesbian or gay, for example Mlangeni and Muholi, are targeted, and their work faces adversity and scrutiny from individuals and communities who believe homosexuality to be 'un-African'.

The objective of this study has been to provide a critical analysis of images pertaining to homosexuality and transgenderism, including the complex discourse they appear to proliferate. Notions pertaining to obscenity (often images of same-sex couples are regarded as being obscene) allude to the social and cultural volatility pertaining to the political, in which such images of eroticism, homosexuality, transgenderism and drag incite persistent issues regarding both cultural chauvinism and gender inequality.

Censorship, then, is suppressive. It is imperative to note that censorship does not solely pertain to stopping exhibitions or withdrawing certain works of art from exhibitions, but also includes commentary that is made by officials, spectators and critics based on their own bias and discrimination towards such works and the individuals represented in such works. For example, in the case of Zanele Muholi's works, which predominantly focus on and deal with the so-called township lesbians, women who are marginalised due to their race, class, gender and sexual orientation, censorship would appear to be necessary in order to protect the women depicted; however, at the same time, such censorship would also be a form of silencing the artist due to its suppressive nature and regulation of cultural norms. Therefore, provocative homoerotic images, as well as images depicting the transgender community, are images that can be regarded as being a form of visual activism.

Visual activism, specifically within the photographic medium, is able to expose the fallacy regarding the notion of homosexuality and transgenderism being ‘un-African’, by depicting such individuals ‘as they are’ in their daily lives and ‘showing’ that they are just as ‘normal’ and as ‘African’ as their heterosexual counterparts. It includes a new way of visual thinking that purports to change the world through its deconstructive capacity. We have been socially conditioned to believe social and cultural norms to be ‘truths’ without ever questioning this until a later stage in life. Sometimes individuals do not ever question these ‘truths’, because they are what they have been taught to believe and they have no reason to question them; however, visual activism provides a visual platform in order to question such ‘truths’.

Since photography is regarded as a medium that captures a moment in time, including its privileged status as a ‘truthful’ document, it provides a potent means to document communities and to widen the scope of activism. Society, through gender roles, ‘tells’ us how men and women are meant to behave and conduct themselves. Similarly, heteronormativity is the assumption that all individuals are heterosexual; for example, most individuals would tell their daughters that they would someday marry a man, and similarly, their sons are raised with the expectation that they will marry women. In this sense, children are brought up to believe that they will marry a person of the opposite sex. However, as they grow older and develop their sense of self, they often realise that they are ‘different’ from the socio-cultural binary model of man/woman that they were taught as children. These binary systems leave no room for compromise and can have devastating effects, from self-loathing to hate crimes from members of the community when they realise that an individual is ‘other’. Hate, then, begets hate, and it is a vicious circle.

The only means of breaking such a cycle is to promote activism and to expose that binary systems are inaccurate. This is done by transgressing established norms and boundaries in order to ‘show’ individuals and communities alike that there is no one way of living. Apart from binary systems being archaic and fixed in a singular way of thinking, they do not take into account individual personalities and identities, and therefore they attempt to create one homogenised culture, society or nation. The work of artists such as Mlangeni and Muholi often exposes the stereotypical notions related to homosexuality, drag, transgenderism and what it means to be ‘African’. Their work is inclusive and becomes a potent agent for change. In effect, these artists become the change they want to see in the world through their visual activism, by representing the lived reality of LGBT South Africans, including the adversity they face due to socio-cultural norms and hegemonic power structures.

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