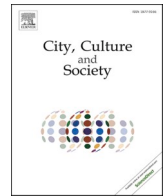




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# ‘This land is not for sale’: Post-1994 resistance art and interventionism in Cape Town’s precarious publics<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The control, regulation and commodification of space has been fundamental in reinforcing structural racism and social identities. In a city such as Cape Town, where colonial architecture and heritage as well as apartheid racial zoning forms part of the spectacularisation of the city, racial conflict seems to have deepened. Through discussing public protest, artistic public interventions and live art, we argue that young black artists in South Africa are heralding a new phase of post-1994 resistance art which exposes conflictual cultural politics of public space in Cape Town rather than a healing democracy and multi-culturalism. As protesters and activists, artists deface the myth of a reconciled non-racial post-Apartheid society by targeting officially sanctioned art. Drawing from Faranak Miraftab’s notion of ‘invited’ and ‘invented’ spaces as well as Chris Dixon and Angela Davis’ concept of prefigurative politics, we argue that precarious South African publics are experienced as a ‘battleground’ rather than a space for liberal deliberation and democracy. New resistance art, therefore, tends to be protest-centred in engaging with the conflictual nature of the city.

## 1. Introduction

A young woman in a blue tight-fitting dress and high heels treads on a path of sand. Engrossed in a monologue, she falls and her sonorous weeping overwhelms the cacophony of bystanders. Somewhere in the crowd, there’s another woman whose piercing laughter counters the mourning [Fig. 1]. This performance, *Finding the Other* (2013), conceived by the artist, Ntando Cele was performed by Zinhle Zama and Nomusa Ngubane in front Cape Town’s central railway station – turning the city into a stage where thousands of working-class people traverse every day to sell their labour power. Weeping, screaming, mayhem invade the seemingly ‘orderly’ European-styled city centre. Ntando Cele explains that the black experience of repression, loss and alienation in Cape Town is like death (of human dignity). She asks: ‘Who is ‘the other’ today? Whose lives are worth less or more? If mourning for yourself before you die became a competition, what would it look like? ... the ‘other’ is a recreation of a deep sorrow that is made public’.<sup>1</sup> Cele’s live art illustrates a sense of hopelessness in dealing with dispossession and dashed expectations for a really ‘new’ South Africa. More significantly, it highlights the operationalisation of race through the control of space,

locating discriminatory devaluing of lives through spatially-defined intersectional narratives (Crenshaw, 1991).

This performance took place during the 2013 *Infecting the City* (ITC) – a public arts festival that probes spatial politics in the city of Cape Town through nomadic performances and creative interventions. Similar to many ITC performances, Cele’s work reveals the antagonisms of the South African post-1994 urban public space. The shift from apartheid to post-apartheid since 1994 assumed tangible changes of public space – generating debates about old and new public monuments, street nomenclature, memorials, city plans and urban design. It also anticipated radical transcendence of racial hostilities, symbolised by the iconic Nelson Mandela. These national politics, as Ernesto Verdeja (2014) observes, called for ‘the moral transformation of citizens’ by renewing ‘social and personal relations through repentance and forgiveness’. The moral-theological approach to political transition, with its imputation to atonement and remorse, seemed to cloak the unchanged spatial race segregation. Apartheid, as a racial ideology, materialised mainly through the control and commodification of space. It contributed to the precarity of South Africa’s publics. It created differentiated formulations of citizenship – at least as an affective spatial

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<sup>1</sup> *Infecting the City* pamphlet, artists’ statement.

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Fig. 1. Zinhle Zama and Nomusa Magubane in Ntando Cele's *Finding the Other* (2013), photographed by Nomusa Makhubu.

experience – through racial zoning and land dispossession. This continues to plague common citizenship and hampers the psychosocial ambitions of transformation. As a result, hostilities have intensified such that South African publics are charged with heavy sentiment, as portrayed in Ntando Cele's *Finding the Other*.

Through discussing public protest, artistic public interventions and live art (for example *ITC* and artist collectives), we argue that young black artists in South Africa are heralding a new phase of post-1994 resistance art public interventions which expose conflictual cultural politics of public space in Cape Town.<sup>2</sup> Some artists see South Africa as a 'predatory capitalist state'.<sup>3</sup> Faced with the co-option of public art as part of the spectacularisation and branding of the city for sale to investors and tourists, art interventions target officially sanctioned art. In effect, artists are ready, as protesters and activists, to deface the myth of a reconciled non-racial post-Apartheid society.

Resistance art in South Africa largely refers to artworks made by artists during the apartheid era that directly or obliquely engage with the injustices of the apartheid regime. Under this banner are artists who challenged apartheid through transgressive work, unclinking the horrors of apartheid. The term, however, is contested because it reflects the

<sup>2</sup> In this article we use the term 'black' inclusively. In South Africa, the racial categories created by the apartheid regime distinguish 'Africans' from 'Coloured' and 'Indians'. This racial categorization was also enforced through the Group Areas Act, where different townships were built for each 'race'. Countering these divisive tactics were political thinkers such as Steve Bantu Biko, who advocated for a dignified notion of Black as a political identity that is inclusive of those who were oppressed and inferiorised in relation to the racial category 'White'. Black therefore includes (and defies) the categories of African, Coloured and Indian. At times, the terms 'African' and 'black' are used interchangeably in this article but with cautious acknowledgement of their differing political meaning. Both terms are used as racial categories but could define political communities that go beyond scientifically determinist notions of race.

<sup>3</sup> This phrase is used by Tokolos Stencil Collective but captures the sentiments of protest-based art interventionism.

uneven forms of struggle and levels of persecution among artists of different races (see also Sue Williamson's 1989 anthology of resistance art). As Omar Badsha (2019) puts it: 'the term reflected the great divide between well meaning White academics and the Black and progressive artistic community'. This period was followed by post-1994 commercial-gallery-driven art. This new resistance art phase, however, does not seem concerned with the futile decorum of the art world nor with public art endorsed by the city in what can be seen as the 'art-in-public-places' paradigm (Kwon, 2002) where art is used to brand the city and attract business and tourism. Its angry interventions are akin to protest.

Angry art interventions, such as occupying spaces or toppling statues, in South Africa arise from mostly working- and middle-class black youth who are disenchanted with rainbowism<sup>4</sup>. The Fallist protests in 2015 and 2016, for example, demonstrated the importance of solidarity between working- and middle-class black students and staff. For the black working class, the spatial logic of apartheid black townships inferiorises and limits meaningful participation in the city as a whole. For the black middle-class, social mobility and limited access to former "white" space does not erase structural racism. Middle-class black rage is defined as the 'depth of daily pain experienced by black [middle-class], who though they have played by white society's rules and believed their promises', find themselves denied 'the same type of success experienced by whites' (Frazier, Margai, & Tettey-fio, 2003, 73–74). Likewise, the anger in post-1994 resistance art is accumulative frustration at the ceaseless conceit and micro-aggressions from white society. In this way, navigating post-1994 South African publics is to navigate profound but raw sentiment, making public spaces volatile and precarious. Young artists see the sense of 'public' in public spaces in the Central Business District (CBD) as being usurped for private interests, stirring resentment and weakening the faith in democratic citizenship and for rights to the city (Harvey, 2003; Lefebvre, 1968). Moreover, boldly exhibiting public anger about rampant inequality, alienation and dispossession threatens the 'normality' of bourgeois territorialisations such as the colonially-shaped categories of private and public spheres.

We chose Cape Town specifically because it embodies some of the worst of South Africa's unresolved contradictions, as we will outline in the first section. The 'general' public or majority of Capetonians live in the Cape Flats – the 'dumping ground of apartheid' (Yusef, 2013, 88). They are confined in black and 'coloured' townships with Khayelitsha and Mitchells Plan being primary exemplars. Public protests have been frequently spilling out of these townships onto highways, into the CBD, parliament and have been transported deliberately into bourgeois territories (the airport and government offices) to disrupt their 'normality' and go beyond invited official forms of participation even when met with excessively violent policing. The article contributes to the discussion about the centrality of artistic intervention in current public protests. Within these cultural politics, disengagement and partial destruction (such as defacing offensive colonial monuments) are regarded as a better basis for a democratic city than performing a false sense of 'community'.

Drawing insights from critical race theory, Faranak Miraftab's (2004) 'invited' and 'invented' spaces as well as Chris Dixon and Angela Davis' concept of 'prefigurative politics', we argue that precarious South African publics are experienced as a 'battleground' rather than a space for liberal deliberation. As Dixon and Davis (2014, 83) illustrate, 'prefigurative politics names activist effort to manifest and build, to the greatest extent possible, the world we would like to see through our means of fighting in this one'. Transformation, in this way, implies simultaneous building and dismantling. It requires a questioning of prescribed rational discourse which maintains 'white comfort zones and

<sup>4</sup> Rainbowism refers to the post-1994 multicultural nation-building ideology. South Africa came to be known as 'the rainbow nation' making it seem as though racial hostilities deepened through apartheid were now reconciled. The phrase was coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

becomes a symbolic form of violence experienced by people of colour' (Leonardo & Porter, 2010, 139) and where toyi-toying and protest are trumped by laws protecting property.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in this article, we discuss how the branding of the city through specific forms of sanctioned public art is seen as an active process of alienating the city's poor. Through invited spaces (sanctioned public art and festivals) and invented spaces (independent protest-centred art interventions), young artists seek to destabilise bourgeois property relations that constitute the city (see Mirafab, 2004).

## 2. An integrated city? Race and the city

Moving through the city of Cape Town, one becomes acutely aware of the racial divide. Although Cape Town is envisioned as a cosmopolitan city, it is impossible to ignore the deeply impoverished black and 'coloured' townships contrasting the excessively wealthy predominantly white suburbs. Like other cities with high income inequalities, growth occurs in the high-income securitised suburbs and away from where the city's poor live such as the Cape Flats (Sinclair-Smith & Turok, 2012). Moreover, the worsening uneven racist geography of inequality is sustained by the booming property and job market, making Cape Town 'a white paradise' as Oliver Wainwright (2014) points out, for those fleeing cities with a dominant black middle class such as Johannesburg. Continued gentrification, which artist collectives such as Tokolos Stencils have intervened against, sustains and expands apartheid-style racial zones. Although the city administration embarked on an Integrated Development Plan (2017–2022), it still retains colonial architecture, heritage and monuments as well as apartheid spatial engineering that not only haunts contemporary public spaces but is in fact positioned as the currency of the city as commodity.

This is further exacerbated by the city's socio-economic disparities. Of the 4 million residents in Cape Town, 16% are white compared to the national proportion of 8.9%, and this relatively large white population is distinctively richer and older with 15,3% above 64-years compared to the African population with 2.1% (Community Survey, 2016).<sup>6</sup> This wealthy minority has also had access to expensive education – almost every second white adult (45%) boasts a higher education degree compared to one in ten blacks (Africans and coloureds). White higher education levels in Cape Town in fact increased from 35% in 2001 to 45% in 2011. Due to this, it is mostly the black population that is unemployed and proportionately has lower incomes. In 2011, a mere 14 173 whites in the city were unemployed compared to 383 000 blacks.<sup>7</sup> Whereas 35% of White households earned above R12800 per month only 2% of African households earned a similar amount (City of Cape Town census, 2012).

These racial divisions are also mirrored in voting trends. According to DA estimates, in the 2009 elections the DA won only 0.8% of the black African vote and 99% of the white vote (Ensor, 2014). Two thirds of 'coloureds' voted DA (66.7%) in 2009, with the ANC getting about 11% of their vote. In 2014 about 80% of voters in coloured areas voted DA whereas predominantly African areas still voted ANC in overwhelming proportions (Community Survey, 2016). Cape Town's multiple polarisations extend to Xhosa speaking Africans from the Eastern Cape who

like foreign Africans from neighbouring countries are routinely labelled as 'refugees' by major Western Cape politicians stoking already prevalent attitudes of Afro-phobia and provincialism (Palmary, 2002).

The city has crafted its success around a coalition that includes ratepayer's associations in former elite white areas and CIDs. According to Faranak Mirafab (2007, 618)

it is not local government alone that stabilizes conditions for capital accumulation in post-apartheid Cape Town. Rather, a matrix of governance does so, not only through governmental agencies but also through the private sector [...] and civil society organizations: the NGOs involved in the mayor's Campaign and CTP's social development program. This network of actors governs spatiality through a complex set of values, fantasies and practices that blur the distinctions among the interests of the public sector, the private sector and civil society.

The 'ruling elite in Cape Town' includes powerful corporate entities with long-term sunk investments, governmental agencies, banks, powerful voter groups (ratepayer's associations in former white areas) and insider NGO's that might benefit from tourism and gentrification (see also Mirafab, 2004; 2007).

Cape Town's city managers, politicians, property owners and bankers have mobilised since the mid-1990s to save it from going the way of Johannesburg or 'descending into a morass of crime and grime', social decay and capital flight (Cape Town Partnership, 2009). They formed the Cape Town Partnership (CTP) in 1999 and Central City Improvement District (CCID) in 2000, a private-public partnership to provide 'safety and cleanliness'. The Cape Town elite views the city as literally 'for sale'. Michael Farr, the first Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the CCID, who defined street children and vagrants as the CCID's biggest problem that costs the city millions in investments, supported the idea that Cape Town should be a commodity (Samara 2008, 190). Competition between cities dovetails with global neoliberal thinking, which sees the city and its spectacularisation as a commodity. That spectacularisation however is based on the marginalisation and rejection of the urban poor.

According to David Harvey (1989) places could compete: by crafting themselves as centres of production, centres of administration and services and as centres of consumption, art and leisure. In the competitive tourist city, governments aim to build 'flagship art developments' to attract investment rather than embark on mass cultural planning schemes (see also Carmichael, 2002). This evokes what D. Asher Ghertner (2015, 6) calls 'aesthetic governmentality' where 'social order is inscribed in public modes of viewership as much as it is secured through reasoned injunctions, systems of belief or statutory command'. Competition between places follows the logic of corporate governance reproduced through scopic regimes.

While art and cultural developments geared toward branding the city are promoted, racial hostilities continue to plague the city. In March 2015, Patricia De Lille announced Cape Town's *Inclusive City* campaign in response to increased so-called 'racist incidents' rather than structural racism. These 'incidents' included: black patrons being denied service at white restaurants, a young white teenager peeing on a black taxi driver and announcing that there isn't 'anything wrong with peeing on a black person', a black domestic worker being attacked by a white man who assumed that she was a sex-worker, a white man who spat in a domestic worker's face declaring that he 'hates all kaffirs', and white Stellenbosch students who dressed up in blackface mocking black domestic workers (see Dixon, 2015; Segar, 2014; Moshenberg, 2014, Valley, 2014). Although, the CEO of the CTP, Bulelwa Makalima-Ngewana (2014), claims that Cape Town is a city where difference is celebrated, there has been increasing mobilisation as masses of citizens and workers demand dignity and the right to the city; which is not just about *being* in the city or having a say over ones' part of the ghetto but about taking back the agenda of change. The 'creative city' governance strategies that have

<sup>5</sup> *Toyi-toyi* refers to dance movements in South African protests and marches.

<sup>6</sup> This number is according to the Community Survey, 2016. We have also used the Census 2011 on Statistics South Africa for most recent solid set of census statistics rather than the survey. The next census is in 2021.

<sup>7</sup> The Democratic Alliance (DA) which manages the City and the Western Cape provincial government, states that job creation is among its top priorities. The Minister of Economic Development, Ebrahim Patel (2014), however, pointed out that 'just over half the jobs created in the Western Cape from December 2009 to December 2013 went to whites, while Africans got around a tenth. The share of working-age Africans and Coloureds with employment actually fell from 2009 to 2013, while the share of whites with jobs climbed...'

been adopted, however, as in other cities globally, often tend to be based on economic principles and linked to creative industries (Landry, 2000; Pratt, 2004).

It is within this milieu that generally [black] people feel angry and resentful of white property, which represents their continued oppression and cataclysmic dispossession. There are frustrations about the increasing gap between themselves and the abject rich; structural racism; the lack of change in infrastructure, skewed economic development and racial/spatial inequalities in public services.

### 3. The spectacular city, traumascape and the 'art-in-public-places' paradigm

The spectacularisation of Cape Town as a utopian holiday destination, with Table Mountain, Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned, District Six, the Cape Coons Festival, winelands, book festivals, malls, a waterfront, music and numerous art galleries, makes it a leading tourist destination. Cape Town as a 'world city' (McDonald 2008; Houssay-Holzschuch & Teppo, 2009) projects itself as the events capital of Africa, promoting 'iconic events segments: such as the Cape Argus cycle race, business events, exhibitions, conventions, township tours and the Cape Town Jazz Festival'.

Colin Bird (2009, 108) a founding member of the CTP and property developer, stated: 'I love seeing tourists walking around with cameras around their necks; and the hotels going up [...] Cape Town has become an international brand; when you see letters in magazines with "Cape Town", they don't need to add "South Africa"'. This spectacularisation of the city is often presented as a celebration of 'Cape Town's history and diversity for purposes of inclusivity, social cohesion and positioning' and, as stated in the draft arts, culture and creative industries policy (2014), 'maximizing opportunities to contribute to economic growth and sustainability through its creative industries/events, arts entities and cultural infrastructure' as well as 'support urban and community regeneration through public art, monuments and cultural centre development'. Bulelwa Makalima-Ngewana (2014) of the CTP notes that

the celebration of the collectiveness of all of us as Capetonians requires a place where locals meet, but not only locals – a full spectrum of the diversity of people in our Mother City, including visitors. It is especially true during events like the Switching on of the Lights, the Cape Town Carnival, the Summer Market and *Infecting the City*, but the plethora of historical sites and cultural experiences that *showcases* the rich heritage of our city (own emphasis).

The goal of the city's arts, culture and creative industries policy is aligned with the general investment focus and with *showcasing*. These policies have a clear elite-bias and are often internally contradictory. As Harvey (2006, 17) notes 'once the city is imaged by capital solely as spectacle, it can be consumed passively, rather than actively created by the populace at large through political participation'. Harvey (2006, 17) points out that the city is 'spectacular in the most oppressive sense of the word'. Therefore, the given forms of participation operate as an illusion of inclusiveness, obscuring the simultaneous renunciation of the black proletariat.

Thus, the collective cultural wealth of Cape Town, its history and unique natural offerings have been privately appropriated by a minority. Alongside this, art developments are part of the city's competitive approach towards tourism (the city competed against other cities for the World Design Capital award given by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design.) Furthermore, Irma Booysens (2012, 54) shows how the 'creative craze' in spectacular public art programs is associated with 'sharp increases in property prices'.

Cape Town is the re-construction of a little Europe servicing the tourist imagination (Bickford-Smith, 2009). The churches, squares, public monuments and botanical gardens forge a 'pristine' white public. These monuments celebrate brutal forced removals, land dispossession

and exclusion. Nigel Worden (cited in Mirafab, 2007, 620) notes 'the city's historic core' was not only 'built on land stolen from the Khoi-San but also its very buildings were paid for by the blood money of slaves in the form of the compensation money that slaveholders received in 1838 from the British Queen'. Downtown real estate after the 1840s, Worden shows, was largely financed through 'the abolition of slavery'.

Cape Town's anti-apartheid history, now itself a tourist commodity, is sold as 'heritage' and as unique 'colourful' offerings to the global tourist industry (See Minty, 2006). Mandela as icon has been appropriated, adopted and incorporated into DA tourist strategies for marketing the city. Robben Island and the freshly painted Bo-Kaap neighbourhood (a former ghetto group area now being gentrified with fancy pavement coffee shops and bars) are among the 'must dos' in Cape Town's tourist circuit.

However, the tourist circuit can be characterised as 'traumascape', which is defined by Maria Tumarkin (2005, 12) as places 'marked by traumatic legacies of violence, suffering and loss' that are 'full of visual and sensory triggers, capable of eliciting a whole palette of emotions' and 'catalyse and shape [...] reliving of traumatic events.' The traumascape of Cape Town involves the aesthetic consumption of images of slavery, apartheid violence, prisons, massacres such as the Trojan Horse memorial in Athlone, and township poverty tours (See Wits 2011). The 'dark tourism' of Cape Town or its affective divided publics is, however, ensnared in its spectacularisation as a brand.

Public art has therefore been foremost in creating city as commodity for consumption by urban elites and tourism. We also argue that Cape Town operates within a conservative paradigm of Art-in-Public places. Writing about the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) programmes in the United States, Miwon Kwon (2002, 60) outlines three paradigms in public art (1) art-in-public-places which were large-scale sculptures 'placed outdoors to "decorate" or "enrich" urban spaces, especially plaza areas near corporate office towers'; (2) art-as-public-spaces, or the 'more site-conscious art that sought greater integration between art, architecture, and the landscape through artists' collaboration with members of the urban managerial class'; and, lastly, (3) art-in-the-public-interest, which is 'often temporary city-based programs focusing on social issues rather than the built environment' and 'involve collaborations with marginalized social groups (rather than design professionals)'.

Public art in Cape Town generally operates through the first two paradigms defined by Kwon. If it does venture into the third paradigm, it often, as Kwon (2002, 60) warns, presents an 'uncritical embrace of "progressive" art as an equivalent of "progressive" politics'. Public art then is part of urban boosterism under cover of the community interest and job creation. It becomes a form of bourgeois revanchism that often underpins contemporary urban gentrification (Smith, 1996). Neil Smith (1996) invoked the term 'revanchist city' to reflect on the era of neoliberal revanchism that sought to hand power to the bankers, drive out the poor, attack feminists, environmental activists, LGBT+ communities, and political correctness, ending the liberal era of redistributive policy, affirmative action and antipoverty legislation.

However, the neoliberal CTP sees itself as transforming towards a people-centred phase. The first phase, *Cities are for Business* (1998–2008) was the key reason for forming the partnership: 'to make the city attractive for business'. The second phase, *Cities are for People* (2008–2012), focused on 'the role that events, the knowledge and creative economy, and popular history and memory could play in the area's development'. During this time, various events for the 2010 world cup were initiated and events such as *ITC*, co-opted. *People Make Places* (2012–2018) is the third and current phase that regards cities as 'places of 'concentrated humanity', networks of human connections, places created and sustained by people' Cape Town partnership Annual Report, 2014. This is because, as they argue, the CTP has been criticised to be 'agents of gentrification' who see 'development as a tool for displacement'. They recognize that 'in trying to pave a road to our future, at times we lost sight of our past: parts of Cape Town might've transformed in the last few years... but others are still living out apartheid-era

realities of a life divided and disconnected' [Cape Town partnership Annual Report, 2014](#).

While the last phase recognised the continued mass alienation and prejudice in Cape Town, it has barely led to radical changes and has not stopped young artists (who refuse to be part of the well-endowed public art programmes of the city or the partnership, even those seemingly progressive) from asserting that sponsored art in these programmes continues to be focussed on tourist entertainment rather than the promises of social cohesion and community regeneration in policy documents and public rhetoric. Public art is part of urban revitalisation rather than transformation. As [Miraftab \(2007\)](#) shows that the steady advance of 'urban revitalisation' sustains these contradictions, raising the question of whether collective, reconciled and co-existent life is possible within the current socio-economic arrangements.

This point is also raised by [Rosalyn Deutsche \(1998, 281\)](#) who argues that although liberal democrats

mobilize a democratic rhetoric of 'openness' and promote public space, these moves are structured by exclusions and, moreover, by attempts to erase the traces of these exclusions. Exclusions are justified, naturalized and hidden by representing social space as a substantial unity that must be protected from conflict, heterogeneity and particularity. Conflict, far from the ruin of democratic public space, is the condition of its existence.

Artistic intervention, both in endorsed programmes and those that are not tolerated by the city are centred in the conflictual nature of public space the city.

#### 4. 'This land is not for sale' – the infected city and the politics of shit

Embraced by the CTP, *Infecting the City* (ITC) represents both invited and invented space. Although it is often cited as an example of the 'celebration of collectiveness' and tourist attraction (invited), its curators and artists push the boundaries, taking people across invisible race and class borders in the city (invented). [Miraftab's \(2004, 1\)](#) concept of 'invented spaces' defines spaces 'occupied by the grassroots and claimed by their collective action' while 'directly confronting the authorities and the status quo'. Conversely, 'invited spaces' are 'occupied by those grassroots and their allied non-governmental organizations' but 'are legitimized by donors and government interventions' ([Miraftab, 2004, 1](#)). Unlike community development outreach projects and organizations, or 'invited spaces', resistance art reflects indignation resulting from often patronising NGOism that has shown no intention of radical change in the segregationism and economic exclusion of the apartheid era (see also [Xaba, 2014](#)). While the ITC festival has been co-opted into the investment focus of the city, it has opened up the possibility for young artists to create 'invented spaces', reflecting the precariousness of segregated publics and representing the enraged sentiments about the living conditions of Cape Town.

The Spier Performing Arts Summer Festival began in 1996. At the time, it was based at the private Spier Wine Estate in Stellenbosch until 2007 when it was decided that the festival should be moved to the Cape Town CBD in order to 'expose as many people as possible to the arts' ([Spier 2013](#)). The arts, which had come to rely largely on the private sector, have been regarded as elitist. The Spier Wine farm had German owners, some of whom were in the employ of the Dutch East India Company (Arnoud Jansz, for example), and it is an affluent major patron for the arts. It is the main funder of Cape Town-based international creative platform, Africa Centre, which was established in 2005 and runs various projects including the Spier Contemporary, a major art biennale and ITC (previously the Spier Performing Arts Summer Festival). [Africa Centre \(2014\)](#) is aimed at 'exploring contemporary Pan-African creative practice as a catalyst for social change'.

Initially curated by Brett Bailey from 2008 to 2011 and Jay Pather

from 2012 until 2015, ITC has thus far tackled controversial issues such as class, racism/racial segregation, xenophobia, provincialism, dispossession, land ownership, citizenship and separate economic development. Performances and exhibitions of the ITC festival that took place on the 11th – 16th in March 2013, were based at different points in the city including Cape Town station, where mostly black commuters travel between the CBD and townships for work.

Sebastian Klemm created the work entitled *ATTITUDE*, in which Masello Motana, an actress, poet and writer, delivered a bold and angry monologue [[Fig. 2](#)]. Motana wore a brown jumpsuit with the words 'This land is not for sale'. During her performance, she announces that,

we came in busses and trucks from Bonteheuwel [a township] and we will not go home, this is our home, you want me to turn the other cheek, I have no space to turn the other cheek in my RDP, I will just pee in the street, sommer net shit in the street, for I have no toilet, the world is my toilet...

She then locks her arms together and asks the audience to help her pull them apart. If they succeed, she falls on her knees to thank them hysterically, shouting: 'Thank you! Thank you, madam! Ooh, you have given me my freedom!' Often, she deliberately asks a white person or a male to 'give her freedom' [[Fig. 3](#)]. Throughout the performance, Motana refers to violent silence and silent violence, illuminating the social and spatial fragmentation and anger that is muted in otherwise sanitised spaces CBD and suburbs.

In her performance, she does not only refer to violence as physical violence but also as the persistent dehumanisation, alienation and protest by people living in black townships. In this performance, Motana unambiguously refers to the CBD as 'stolen land' but also land which black populations must re-claim as 'home', rather than the far-off townships on the periphery. She refers to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the ANC policy aimed at decreasing poverty through providing housing, land reform, healthcare and electrification for the black population, as a failed project. Here, the city is seen as a 'stolen' and privatised.

Although Motana's artistic performance precedes the 'Poo Protests', the public art performance and public protest are similar in the way they express anger and aim to 'contaminate' the CBD. By stating that she 'will just pee in the street, sommer net [just] shit in the street, for I have no toilet', she enacts what Arjun [Appadurai \(2001, 37\)](#) refers to as 'politics



**Fig. 2.** Masello Motana in Sebastian Klemm's *ATTITUDE* (2013), photographed by Nomusa Makhubu.

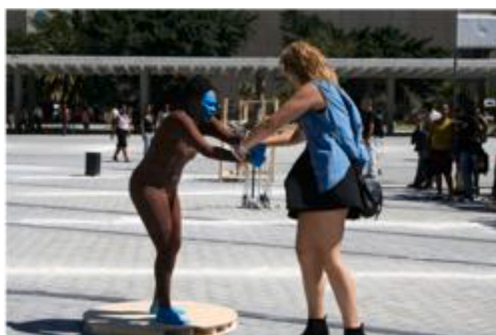


Fig. 3. Masello Motana in Sebastian Klemm's *ATTITUDE* (2013), photographed by Nomusa Makhubu.

of shit'. 'Shit', according to Appadurai, symbolises the dehumanisation of the poor. Appadurai (2001, 37-8) points out that 'distance from one's own faeces can be seen as the virtual marker of class distinction; the poor, for too long living literally in their own faeces, are finding ways to place some distance between their waste and themselves'. Appadurai (2001, 38) argues that the 'transgressive display of this faecal politics' in public spaces is the transformation of 'humiliation and victimisation' into 'initiative and self-dignification' and a 'critical material feature of deep democracy'. Along these lines, some *ITC* interventions literally 'contaminate' the CBD with performances that question the segregated public spaces and class-divisions in Cape Town.

An earlier iteration of *ITC*, curated by playwright Brett Bailey in 2009, engaged with violence in public spaces but focused on xenophobia particularly. Bailey chose 'Home Affairs' as the theme in response to the xenophobic violence that swept South Africa in 2008. Photographic images that depict the public burning of 35-year-old Mozambican migrant Ernesto Nhamauve became symbolic of the tragedy. The image of Nhamauve's burning body was stylised as the logo of the 2009 *ITC* festival, aestheticising the tragedy of these deaths. The program was printed in the form of a South African Department of Home Affairs (DHA) passport document bearing 'official stamps' and barcodes [Fig. 4].

It also includes the image of a cockroach that refers to the derogatory local reference to African migrants as cockroaches. Performances in the program entitled *Exile* and *Amakwerekwere* are direct references to the 2008 xenophobic violence. In fact, *Exile* includes the public burning of sculptural representation of a man as well as the depiction of river crossing by 'illegal' migrants from Zimbabwe to South Africa. Like Zimbabwean migrants crossing the Limpopo River near Musina, one of the performers carries heavy luggage as he wades through the Adderley Street Fountains. Through this performance, the fragmentation of the city, the terror of living in almost refugee-like townships (Pieterse, 2005) where this sense of anger and dehumanisation is often directed towards African migrants or through destruction of state property (such



Fig. 4. Infecting the City programme, 2009, [http://www.infectingthecity.com/downloads/ITC09\\_Programme\\_WEB03.pdf](http://www.infectingthecity.com/downloads/ITC09_Programme_WEB03.pdf).

as blockading highways, burning busses and libraries) reflects the conditions in which black South Africans and African migrants experience the precarious public sphere as 'strangers at home'.

The festival itself, especially its recent iterations, 'contaminates' the city within controlled conditions. In a panel discussion at the *ITC*, artist and urban researcher, Ismail Farouk, pointed out that 'the private sector shapes how public spaces are used; for example, the CCID continually "sanitises" the city through the removal of homeless people'. The policing of the poor as 'dirt', 'threat' or 'contamination' in the public space of the city is poignant. Although the CCID claimed that it employs the homeless to patrol and 'cleanse' the city, it is also one of the ways in which racial segregation is maintained and the grim results of an unbalanced economy are removed from sight. Arguably, the *ITC*'s contamination is still 'tolerable' within city's schema.

In the next section, we discuss examples of what we see as the new phase of Resistance art interventions that are outside of 'invited spaces', operate through prefigurative publics by dismantling and re-creating public space, and are often not tolerated by the city. By targeting its monuments, public artworks and spatial configuration through 'disruptive' and transgressive interventions, new resistance art confronts racial conflict in post-1994 cities.

### 5. De-facing the city: resistance art on 'official' art in a broken city

Several artists and art activists embark on not only *reflecting* the conditions of the precarious public, but also transgressing on the palatable aesthetic of officially sanctioned public art. Resistance art interventions are continually criminalised, seen as vandalism and as 'invasion' of bourgeois space. Rather than being embraced as artworks in the process of creative public dialogue, most interventions we discuss in this section are often quickly removed by city or labelled as a contravention. In the examples below, artist collectives operate anonymously or instigators are activist using artistic forms of protest or what Makhubu (2017, 688) refers to as 'militant creative protest', which is defined as art that 'confronts and frustrates the seemingly unshakeable, unchangeable urban capitalist machine through interventions that use artistic means to reach political ends, rather than using political issues to achieve artistic ends'. These are artworks which use guerrilla tactics such as spray-painting monuments.

For example, the activist Suleiman Stellenboom hung placards on statues of Jan van Riebeeck (the Dutch 'founder' of Cape Town) and his wife, and statues of Louis Botha and Jan Smuts that announce: 'I stole your land, so what?' 'I gave you a government, so what?' and 'He raped your woman, so what?' Today, the Jan Van Riebeeck statue is prominently located on the Heerengracht central island. It was a personal gift to Cape Town from the arch imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes who was then Premier in 1899. For activists like Stellenboom, the wealthy minority is not only regarded as inhumane but also as arrogant about ill-begotten wealth (gained from exploitative brutal colonialism and apartheid). This intervention suggests that people feel there is no indication of a desire by elites and the City to include, integrate or assimilate the black poor through creating common living spaces with commonly dignifying visual symbols in public spaces.

Under British colonial rule and later apartheid, public art in Cape Town served to broadcast local white settler power and celebrate its conquest of Africa. In Europe in the mid-to-late 1880s, the frenzy of statue building that glorified wars, state formation and nation building. As Yvonne Whelan (2002, 509) notes, 'statues [in Europe] served to strengthen support for established regimes, instilled a sense of political unity and cultivated national identity'. In postcolonial contexts, existing statues are sites of contestation, provoking anger and reinforcing racial hostility.

One of the most commonly cited examples is the RhodesMustFall (RMF) movement, which is a response to hardening elite attitudes that militate against a common public sphere, saturated with symbols of the

continued whiteness of privilege in the city and its major institutions (Mangcu, 2017). The RMF movement at the University of Cape Town (UCT) for example, has been the most radical student-led protest against white power and privilege.<sup>8</sup> It catalysed on the protest to remove the Cecil John Rhodes statue. The smearing of excrement by Chumani Maxwele on the Rhodes statue on campus, like the Ses'Khona 'poo protests' and the Tokolos strategy to place 'poo'-filled pota pota's in the CBD, was generally defined as 'defacement' of officially sanctioned 'art'. In a panel discussion at the Archie Mafeje Symposium (2018) at UCT, Maxwele states that he aligned this act with the *ITC* festival, as an art intervention, that was taking place at the time.

When the statue was removed in 2015, Kealeboga Ramaru of RMF announced that 'we must at no point forget that management are our colonial administrators, and their removal of the statue is merely an attempt to placate us and be perceived as sympathetic (RhodesMustFall statement, 2015, 12).' She also stated that

The removal of the statue by management is not something we should be grateful for. Management has undermined and antagonised us throughout this process. They described Chumani's protest action as reprehensible, they insist on defending Rhodes' legacy, and they have made it clear that they think that black pain is debatable (RhodesMustFall statement 2015, 12).

That is, the visual schema of public spaces reflects the continued derision of black life. Other performances that took place on that day include Sethembile Msezane's *Chapungu*. Msezane stood on a plinth, in high heels and a leotard with the Rhodes statue being lifted by crane behind her. Another was staged by RMF students who sat below the statue with a bucket of a red blood-like liquid, which they used to smear on their bodies [Fig. 5]. For these students, Rhodes represents the blood of Africans upon which the Rhodes legacy and the city of Cape Town was built. The bucket of red liquid was thrown at the statue as it was being loaded onto the truck. At this time, students were literally fighting the statue, kicking and punching it. Visual interventions became part of protest engaging with an endorsed public statue.

It is not only official monuments and statues that provoked these contentions but also the City's endorsed privately sponsored public art. Michael Elion's *Perceiving Freedom* was one amongst other public art

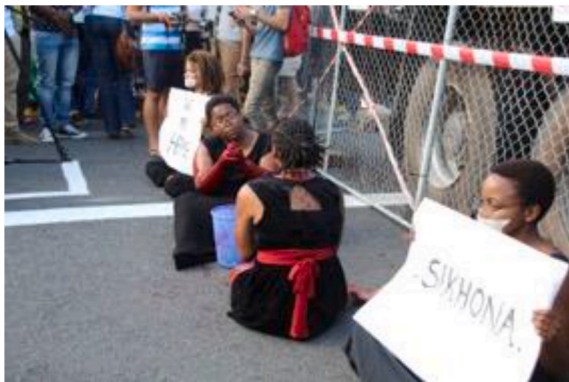


Fig. 5. Live art on the day the Cecil John Rhodes statue was taken down, 9 April 2015, photographed by Nomusa Makhubu.

<sup>8</sup> The institution has been pressured to create real dialogue, remove the statue and re-think 'transformation'. The students occupied Bremner building, which was re-named Azania house. Using Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality, the RMF movement sought to challenge systematic oppression, injustice and inequality through understanding how race, class, gender, sexuality and disability are interrelated.

installations that were co-financed by corporate sponsorship and public funds for the Cape Town World Design City 2014 project. Since Elion's project was financed by Ray-Ban, he made giant Ray-Ban sunglasses that were supposedly a memorial to Nelson Mandela because they were facing Robben Island. Another installation was the *SunStar*, a lit tetrahedron on Signal Hill by Christopher Swift, which was sponsored by Sun International hotel and casino group. These and other high-cost Word Design Capital projects caused controversy based on the fact that selected artists were white males and that so much was spent on tourist entertainment in the face of poverty.

In 2014, Tokolos Stencil Collective, an anonymous collective, spray-painted the phrase 'Remember Marikana' and the image of Mgcineni 'Mambush' Noki, an iconic symbol of the 2012 Marikana mineworkers strike, on the work of a little-known artist, Michael Elion, entitled *Perceiving Freedom* (Sosibo, 2014). Debates ensued in the public media. Eventually the interventions of Tokolos on the Elion installation were removed. The superficial linking of the frivolous sculpture exemplifies the investment focus of the city (operating in the art-in-public places paradigm). As Duane Jethro argues (2014) this installation represents the 'commodification of liberation history'

Not merely a puerile gesture at public art, *Perceiving Freedom* is a pathetic appropriation of commemoration as cover for a commercial promotion. Really, it's a stunning emetic trigger that suggests that Nelson Mandela is beckoning us from the afterlife to buy Ray-Ban sunglasses, to do our duty for reconciliation and nation-building by consuming this luxury product. What an incredible opportunistic whitewashing of an iconic legacy. [...] In other words, 'mis-perceptions' about race, class and gender can be overcome with a pair of Ray Ban sunglasses, rather than the hard work of interrogating one's privilege. In South Africa, there's a growing idea that deep psycho-social problems that relate to the difficult past can be resolved through acts of consumption. [...] The Robben Island Jewellery project shows that 'reconciliation' narrative can transmute the debris of even the most traumatic black histories into gold.

The anger sparked by Elion's installation, were seen as the City's crass disregard of major social issues that plague Cape Town.

Prior to this, Tokolos also stencilled 'Remember Marikana' on the Cecil John Rhodes statue at the UCT in 2014 and have been targeting public statues in the city. They emphasise that the city does not treat all its people and publics equally. This anonymous collective of artists has also placed poo-filled pota-pota's in the city's public spaces on First Thursdays, a monthly event when galleries stay open until late (for a detailed discussion of Tokolos and XCollectiv see Makhubu, 2017).

They also sprayed stencils such as '*larney jou poes, larney jou piel*' (transl. master you(r) cunt, master your dick) on building facades. This phrase is colloquial – used in township lingo. It was popularised by the Cape Town Hip Hop band *Dookom* whose song '*larney jou poes, larney jou piel*' is against the dubious amassing of land by white farmers and predatory exploitation of mostly 'coloured' labour made possible through colonial invasion and racist apartheid policies. It is no surprise that this song was used during the 2012 farmworkers strike. The song attracted, from the right-wing organisation AfriForum, complaints that the song incites violence. In response, *Dookom* (2014) stated '[w]e're not inciting violence [...] it's about claiming the land and being angry, because we have a right to be angry.'

New resistance art and 'prefigurative' aesthetics point to the violence of colonialism, slavery and the massive loss suffered by the majority black people of South Africa which seems to be mocked in the very make-up of the city, its architecture and statuary. For Tokolos, public art 'could speak back to the poor, acknowledge their existence and their struggles, but instead it only reminds citizens that they are invisible' and 'under these conditions, so-called vandalism is the only option' (Young, 2014).

Collectives such as Tokolos Stencil collective remain defiant,

recognising 'art' in Cape Town as a bourgeois prerogative and asserting that the only way to 'participate' democratically is to do so without official sanction and to do so in the spirit of protest.

## 6. Conclusion

Are spaces for democratic engagement and mutual disagreement in post-1994 South Africa possible? Artists' and activists' interventions indicate that they are shrinking. In the fashioning of the city as spectacle and as commodity, the CTP's neo-liberal approach to public art aligned with the art-in-public places paradigm seems increasingly alienating and racially divisive. In response, the new phase of post-1994 resistance art is poised against sanctioned, 'official' art. Young artists and activists are using existing statues, not only as a canvas, but as the conflictual site for the stalled debate. New resistance art also challenges the boundaries of tolerance in endorsed public art programmes such as the ITC. Although some of the ITC interventions still operate within invited spaces, specific artists have been able to push the boundaries of bourgeois proprieties, such as Masello Motana boldly proclaiming 'This Land is Not for Sale!' Artist collectives reject the city's co-option of art through protest-centred artistic interventions.

The evidence for the CTP's argument that the Cape Town builds unity, respect for diversity especially for visible poverty in the CBD, and tolerance for difference is weak. In fact, Cape Town remains fragmented into different hostile publics (each having own separate development, economy, spaces and political loyalties) even though there might be groups trying to secure a common public sphere. Cape Town's elite alliance re-cements apartheid by physically, financially and socially walling in and walling off the rich residents, on the one hand, deepening the misery and confinement of townships on the other. A neoliberal political economy with its marketised ways of constructing citizenship and subjectivities (under the guise of sustainable delivery and respecting diversity) combines the 'morally' responsible citizen with a strong antipathy for organised artist and workers who are depicted a violent and destructive. For example, the appropriation of Mandela in the branding of Cape Town entrenched in the rhetoric of the DA sets the stage for more intensive violent conflicts and an aversion to Mandela-centred reconciliatory and moral-theological approach to political transition.

Artist opt for prefigurative praxis where collaborative struggle of 'dignified subjects who are capable of critically analysing the world, crafting sophisticated strategies for fighting against injustice, taking courageous risks in struggle, and envisioning a better society' (Dixon & Davis, 2014, 167). In this way the conflictual nature of the city necessitates prefigurative politics. It also alludes to Chantal Mouffe's (2007, 2, 5) observation that 'public space is the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation'. Conflict or 'agonistic struggle' is the core of 'vibrant democracy', therefore 'to grasp the political character of artistic activism', she argues, 'we need to see them as counter-hegemonic interventions whose objective is to occupy the public space in order to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character' (Mouffe's 2007, 2, 5).

The new phase of post-1994 resistance art uncovers the conflictual and precarious nature of the African city, and in the case of South Africa, the deliberate market-friendly design of cities that sustain hostile, racial and class divisions.

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