Rhodes University

The "Other" Africans: Re-examining Representations of Sexuality in the Work of Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi.

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Abstract

Nicholas Hlobo, a sculptor and performance artist, and Zanele Muholi, a photographer and activist, explore different ways of representing sexuality, particularly homosexuality. It is extremely difficult to discuss African sexuality in light of the stain of colonial attitudes that have exoticised and ascribed hypersexuality to African bodies. Moreover, sexuality is often not discussed in the construction of so-called African traditions and this has contributed to rendering African-ness as an exclusive identity. Tensions within and between categories of African-ness are compounded by constituted regulations. For example, Hlobo investigates the obligation of circumcision which seems to contrast the lifestyle and contexts in which he works and resides, and Muholi represents the existence of homosexual and transgender relations, even within conservative categories.

The visual imagery of these two artists investigates the boundaries set by different social constructs. These set boundaries have also affected crimes against bisexual, transgender and homosexual individuals, which are reaching an alarming rate. Hlobo questions the validity of structures that marginalise homosexual individuals through drawing attention to the ambivalence of certain statutes. Muholi seeks to publicise the injustices imposed upon homosexual individuals in order to demonstrate the weight of that crisis. Although the South African legal system condones liberated expressions of sexual identity, due to social prejudices homosexual individuals are still treated as if they are not entitled to basic human rights. As a result, hate-crimes are not reported, and when they are they are not taken seriously. Hlobo and Muholi not only bring these issues to light, but also point out the dilemma inscribed in the social and political history of (South) Africa with regards to collective and individual identities. This thesis seeks to provide an analysis of the visual language used by Hlobo and Muholi to subvert the notion that homosexuality is “un-African” and to complicate concepts of gender, sexuality and identity.

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Introduction

There have been negative sentiments towards homosexuality in South Africa that have garnered deductions that homosexuality is not African. I have chosen the artists Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi in order to discuss ideas that revolve around identity and sexuality. Nicholas Hlobo, a sculptor, began working on the theme of homosexuality in 2001 and gained his B. Tech. degree from the Technikon Witwatersrand in 2002 (Perryer 2006: 48). He exhibited in several shows that focused on transformation and identity in South Africa and abroad. The activist and photographer Zanele Muholi has been involved in a number of organisations fighting for gay and lesbian rights. She co-founded and works for the Forum and Empowerment of Women (FEW) and is actively involved in a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersex (LGBTI) organisation (Neidhart 2006: 95). Muholi's photojournalistic and artistic portfolio forms part of a larger research project she is involved in. Her photographs have been used for several publications including *Womyn, Exit, Agenda, An ABC of LGBTI: A Resource Guide* (2005), Joanne Bloch and Karen Martin's *Balancing Act: South African Gay and Lesbian Youth Speak Out* (2005), and Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa's *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives* (2005). Muholi's work has also featured in a number of significant art exhibitions. Both artists are signed up with the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, where they both premiered in 2005. Amongst other contemporary African artists who explore the issue of homosexuality and ethnicity in South Africa, Hlobo and Muholi open up discussions about the inter- and intra-communal intricacies through representing sexuality. Further, they draw attention to the assumption that African-ness is an exclusive set of characteristics.

The political histories of the African continent have generated a need for unity which has also been underscored by many leaders, such as the late Ghanaian president and philosopher Kwame Nkrumah and W.E. B. Du Bois who promoted African unity. Pan-Africanism became popular amongst Africans on the continent and in the diaspora because it necessitates a unified identity or a distinct "African personality"[1] that is a point of reference for all Africans. However, it has been

[1] This term has been used by many African writers to contribute to sentiments that compounded the fear that an "uncritical absorption of western ideas would in time destroy the distinctive personality of Africans"; a sentiment that has also been expressed by Dr Edward Blyden (Gordon 2000: 178). It has also been argued to have gained currency in the 1960s after Kwame Nkrumah pronounced that "for too long in our history, Africa has spoken through the voice of others… now, what I have called the African Personality in international affairs will have a

burdened by pockets of divisive events. Generally, conflicts in the continent have been ignited by identity politics. Ethnic, racial and religious divisions have led to a quagmire that complicates the singular idea of an "African personality". Ali Mazrui (1967: 14) argues that "group identity at the beginning of African nationalism was the identity of *blackness* racially" [original emphasis]. In the same sense, the idea that homosexuality is "un-African" insinuates that it is not *black.* The homophobic statement that homosexuality is "un-African" is opposed by both artists through making those identities visible and questioning beliefs that constitute communal belonging. This assertion has been expressed by some African leaders and has been used to justify the iniquitous treatment of homosexual individuals. Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork also highlights the racial disparities that create margins within homosexual communities and the different societies they reside in. Hlobo makes references to Xhosa traditions in his work and Muholi focuses on gays and lesbians particularly in townships.

This thesis is divided into three themes that are used to analyse Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi's artwork in relation to socio-political factors. The first chapter addresses the concept of authenticity and the generalised tenets of group identity as problematised by these two artists; the second chapter is a discussion of the aesthetics of performance in expressions of sexuality, and the final chapter attends to violence and vulnerability manifest in the visual imagery utilised by Hlobo and Muholi. In chapter one, *The Real Makoya,* I focus on Nicholas Hlobo's *Umthubi* (the kraal) and Zanele Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya* (the traditional healers) in relation to the politics of authenticity with regards to geographical location and the social meanings of gender and religion. I discuss the idea that although rural areas represent an economically non-ideal life, they can still be seen as culturally ideal in that they represent the remnants of "authentic African-ness". The kraal and traditional healers are assumed to be a significant part of, or are associated with a rural lifestyle, rather than an urban one. Here, I discuss how Hlobo and Muholi complicate these associations and further draw attention to the complexities of traditionalism and modernity. The terms "traditional" and "modern" have various meanings that, when interpreted, must take into consideration the influences and effects of pre-colonial and

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chance of making its proper impact" <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,868409-1,00.html> accessed 2008/ 07/12. The term has also been used by Es'kia Mphahlele in establishing *The Eskia Institute* which seeks to affirm Africa and African-ness.

post-colonial migration and diasporic movements. Also, the implications of political thought such as nationalism, Pan-Africanism and trans-nationalism, which highlight the complications with definitive identification and the continuous re-construction of borders, must be regarded in discussing originality and identity.

The polarisation of the terms "traditional" and "modern" has occurred in separate instances where the term traditional is equated to "African", "stagnant", "primordial" and the term modern is seen to mean "Western"[2], "dynamic", and "innovative". This is a misconstruction that Hlobo and Muholi tackle through highlighting the realities of the transformations of (South) African identities and the limitations of formulated concepts of bordered identity. Moreover, these two terms carry with them the cultural meanings attributed to them in Western culture. The era of modernity and the production of Modern Art occurred from the late 1800s to the early 1970s and contested traditional modes of artmaking. This chronology seems to situate "traditional" and "modern" as oppositions. Most of the principles within the frameworks of Modern Art cannot be ignored because art education in South African institutions still occupies itself with Western art and cultural history, which have had their influences on the development of the conventional aesthetics. I focus on the implications of these theories in the South African context and particularly with regards to the presumed criteria of African-ness generated by 19th century Western cultural processes.

Further, I discuss the loss of the "authentic African", as well as the sentiment of "return" or "recovery" in the visual codes used by Hlobo and Muholi. Hlobo's reference to initiation and Muholi's documentation of township *sangomas* (traditional healers) exhibit the compromised spaces in which bisexuals and homosexuals who live and practice certain African customs are placed. They also critique some principles of "tradition" with regards to prescriptive frameworks that affirm indiscernible authorial voices. Nevertheless, the significance of the task of "recovery" cannot be overlooked. The project of "recovery" seems sensible when considering the socio-political histories of colonisation and migration in different African countries as well as the extension of capitalism and its effects on other economic systems. However, the mission to recover African-ness assumes that there exists a singular, exclusive, definite and genuine African

[2] I use the upper case "Western" to refer to Europe and North America.

character who is a repository of resources to guide the present and future African and from whom criteria can be drawn. This idea tends to overlook many factors that are important in the discussion of African cultural affairs. Its flaws would stall discussion around race and would forever centre colonialism as a primary trait of the continent.

In chapter one, I also discuss the issue of global production and marketability in art. Both Hlobo and Muholi have exhibited abroad as African artists. In the past, there has been an international trend of buying "authentic" African art which has contributed to the expectations of the standards set for art produced on the African continent. For Sidney Littlefield Kasfir (1992: 42), "what we could call canonical African art – that which is collected and displayed and hence authenticated and valorized as 'African art' – was and is only produced under conditions that ought to preclude the very act of collecting". That is not to say that African artists conform to assumed demands, but that the discourse generated by these works seems to oscillate around African-ness as a condition which complicates seeing Africa as merely a geographical location. Art made by Africans is compounded with sensitised words that remain indices of codes generated by colonialism. Among other themes, the most dominant are identity and displacement. These themes form part of the processes of illustrating the transformations from the illusion of authenticity that the market may or may not demand.

Religion also plays a part in the construction of grand historical narratives of nativity and beliefs in authenticity. I investigate the doctrines of religion and traditional beliefs, especially as represented in Muholi's *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo Outside the Hope Unity Metropolitan Community Church, A Gay Church, During Good Friday, Mayfair, Johannesburg* (2007) (see fig. 1.4). Despite the understanding that, generally, Christianity and African traditionalism are assumed to oppose homosexuality, Muholi's photographs reveal otherwise. Christianity and traditional healing have been seen as the "cure" for homosexuality in places where it is seen as a disease. Interestingly though, gay churches are increasing in South Africa. The history of Christianity and the operation of missionaries particularly in Southern Africa further complicate definitive categorization and the identities that Muholi represents. The notion of authenticity also problematises gender and sexuality. Hlobo and Muholi complicate prescriptive gender roles within both "traditional" and "modern" structures. Moreover, there is the issue of being a "real"

gay, as Graeme Reid (2006: 137-145) observes in his research of so-called workshopped gays (who are taught the language and mannerisms of gayness). In some cases, there are those who have been in same sex-relationships but did not label themselves with terms such as "butch" and have adopted these labels as part of their assimilation and identification into the gay community.

In chapter two, I discuss performance and its aesthetics. The particular performances that I focus on are Hlobo's *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005) and Muholi's *Miss D'Vine* (2007). (I also mention Muholi's documentary entitled *Enraged by a Picture* in the *Out of Africa* Film project in which she takes her gallery exhibited photographs to a taxi-rank and lays them on the ground). Although Muholi is not a performance artist, her photographs offer insight into the understanding of performance and sexual identities. In the artworks under discussion there are certain tenets of ritual[3] performance used by the artists to unpack constructions of communal identity. I review concepts of spectacle where there is a distinction between intentional or staged spectacle and unintentional spectacle. Intentional or staged spectacle has mechanisms of anticipation and audience whereas unintentional spectacle is arguably caused by difference from the normative with mechanisms of stigma operating. (For example, a mentally ill individual, a homosexual couple in a homophobic society, a cross-cultural relationship in a race-sensitive context, or physical disfiguration.)

The task of raising awareness about the injustices carried out in relation to bisexual and homosexual individuals involves not only making those identities visible but also drawing attention to the harm that is inflicted on them. Hlobo's performances explore the monopoly of seeing; of the things guarded by secrecy and the revelation of their existence as secrets or that which remains imperceptible. Muholi's project is a complex one. Where certain visual codes assumed by homosexual individuals are a means of remaining socially invisible, they can also be seen as a means of becoming visible. Visibility can also become problematic in homophobic

[3] It can be argued that, as a term that is associated with Anthropology and subsequent racial politics, the word "ritual" has been demonised. Carol Duncan (1995: 8) suggests that "like the term 'artifact', the term 'ritual' has… been treated as a lower term in a hierarchy" and has become associated with "religious practices – with the realm of belief, magic, real or symbolic sacrifices, miraculous transformations, or overpowering changes of consciousness". The term has been mostly attributed to African, Asian and Oceanic people. It was used in a more general sense by anthropologists such as Victor Turner "to indicate a mode of consciousness outside of or 'betwixt and between' the normal day-to-day cultural and social states" and it was linked to "modern western notions of aesthetic experience" (Duncan 1998: 11). I use this term to refer to particular communal events and individual routinised actions.

communities just as invisibility is. In this section, I discuss Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2007). This series of photographs consists of thirty-five portraits which are, arguably, thematically similar. For this reason, I only chose eight for analysis. Also, some of the individuals that are included in this series appear in other photographic projects by Muholi. Notably, in some photographs Muholi portrays some individuals which she calls "my people". The choice of photographs that I made on this series is based on the composite notion of performed masculinities in comparison to performed femininity or femininity as masquerade.

I then tackle mimesis as it operates in ritual and as it operates in the artistic aesthetic with regards to Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork. The term "mimesis" is burdened with colonial concepts that further complicate the politics of identification. Race and gender categories also formulate means of being which are performed as affirmation of belonging. Moreover, historically, certain means of identification have experienced political degradation. Racially, blackness is riddled with notions of subservience and of its mimicry of whiteness, at least in Fanonian terms (Fanon 1967). Femininity has also been regarded as a condition that follows certain codes of performance. Hlobo analyses the codes of being a Xhosa male and codes of being gay, which, when performed, complicate the mimetic principle. Although, the theories constructed around mimesis must be taken into consideration, they are dealt with differently or present alternative means of interpretation in the representations offered by Hlobo and Muholi.

The history of performance art also cannot be ignored. In general, performance art is traced back to the nineteenth century and was influenced by Futurism and Dadaism (Gordon 1974: 114). It is therefore necessary to keep in mind that the term "performance" is understood, in Coco Fusco's (2000: 160) words, to have "a flagrantly Eurocentric genealogy" following the artistic trends such as Dadaist and Surrealist events. The developments of performance art in America, particularly African-American performance, called for a re-evaluation of "western aesthetic" and an "emergence of a black aesthetic" (Bean 1999: 1). In her discussion of the already transgressive nature of African-American performance, live art and related practices, bell hooks (2000: 210) attests to "an amalgamation of ancient traditions". However, specificities must be drawn to understand the extension to which performance art in South Africa takes form. When looking at Nicholas Hlobo's performances, or even other performance artists such as Dineo

Bopape, Tracey Rose or Athi Patra Ruga, for instance, some trends bear similarities to forms of African-American performance, but they also tell distinct narratives that bear testimony to different South African experiences.

When American Marlon Riggs produced what was understood as "the first coming-out film for black gay men" under the title *Tongues Untied* (1989), it was marginalised (Mercer 1999: 122). Zanele Muholi's *Enraged by a Picture* (2005) still remains within the boundaries of the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. In a section of this chapter, I explore the invisible boundaries of performative expression and South Africa's visual culture. Some of the means of representing lesbians and gays used by Muholi are also apparent in popular culture; however, they take various commoditised forms. South African popular culture tries to grapple with the country's liberal policies which must be reflected in the representations of diversities on radio and television and magazines. There are differences that keep Muholi's type of representation of homosexuality in the margins from those that are present in popular culture.

Chapter three addresses the crises defined by the increasing rate of hate-crime as documented by Muholi. The title of the chapter, *States of Vulnerability and Processes of Violence*, makes particular reference to the images in Muholi's *Only Half the Picture* (2006) in which she portrays victims of rape and hate-crime. The element of vulnerability is also evident in Hlobo's work and sheds light on the gendered embodiment of violence and vulnerability. Moreover, in both Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork, the notion of feminine vulnerability and masculine violence is destabilised. Research conducted by OUT (an LGBTI health and mental health organisation) shows that gay men are as vulnerable to rape, domestic violence and other hate-crime related incidences as lesbian women are (Wells and Polders 2006: 22-23). A section in this chapter addresses some of the ideologies that can be argued to have caused the ways that Correctional Services attends to the few hate-crime cases that *are* reported, as testified by Muholi.

As a reaction to a history of gender inequity, violence has been a key topic for feminist study (D'Cruze and Rao 2005: 1). Feminism and queer theory have overlapped due to common political interests – "a concern for women's and gay and lesbian rights" (Weed 1997: x-xii). These two domains also have differences and paradoxes with regards to understanding sexuality.

For instance, Judith Butler (1997: 3) maintains that in queer studies there is a methodological distinction that distinguishes "theories of sexuality from theories of gender and, further, allocate the theoretical investigation of sexuality to queer studies and the analysis of gender and feminism". Conversely, studies of masculinity have only recently been scrutinised. Interestingly, black masculinity has been more examined than white masculinity, while black feminism has distinguished itself from the notion of a "universal" feminism that has been developed as a reaction to, and through Western frameworks. In her definition of the colonial discourse of protection, Gayatri Spivak offered the phrase "white men saving brown women from brown men" from culturally sanctioned violence "from which brown women are to be saved by their liberal Western counterparts, [hence] violence bears an inverse relationship to ideas of full humanity and sexed personhood" (D'Cruze and Rao 2005: 1). Hlobo's sculptures and performances and Zanele Muholi's photographs offer insight into the various political positions pertaining to context-specificity with regards to theorising sexuality, gender and race.

Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork positions the body as the key instrument to address issues pertaining to race, gender and sexuality. In this last section I take into cognisance theories that have been constructed about the body and bodily fluids and the alternative meanings offered in Hlobo's and Muholi's work. Both artists investigate the processes of skin as boundary which can limit the understanding of the body. Nicholas Hlobo explores the outside/inside binary and Muholi examines the female body as a signifier of power through its internal bodily fluids. I then consider stigma as a tool that separates what some societies do not regard as "normal". Hlobo evokes this in his performance and sculptures by altering his body or representing the body as an alterity. Muholi on the other hand, represents the stigmatised body to the public in order to retard the injustices that are inflicted on lesbian and gay men and she tries to unveil the secrecy that maintains stigma.

The processes of "othering" transpire from various beliefs that can be argued to be created through the compilation of principles that delineate group identity. The identity of a faction also seems to depend on a common historical narrative that bears the substantiation of originality or authenticity and a re-performance of the principles borne in those narratives. Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork explores the human commonalities of compassion and pain, and the

differences marked by gender, race and sexuality. In this thesis, I examine the broad themes that Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi explore in their artwork in increasing awareness of homosexual identities in South Africa.

Chapter 1

The Real *Makoya*[4]: Concerns of Authenticity

Although the notion of origin or original has been a key reference for the validation of identification, it has become a chimera of false certainties. The concept of authenticity has been defined by Hattingh (2005: 198) to have "a special meaning in existentialism [which] is the primary good or value of the existential viewpoint". Hattingh (2005: 199) stresses that to live life authentically, is to accept of "the authorship of our lives". This statement is problematic in that it overlooks the fact that individuals are born in contexts of already constructed and already authored narratives that guide ways of being. The theme of authorship is important to this discussion in that it underlines the politics of representing African sexuality in the artworks of Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi. These artists probe the social processes of assumed identities, drawn boundaries that differentiate gender, race or ethnicity, and individual choice. In this chapter, I discuss the slippery meanings associated with so-called genuine African-ness and "genuine" homosexuality.

The designation of "authentic" African-ness is compounded by a history of displacement, ventures of unity (such as Pan-Africanism), and constantly changing political and economical systems. Moreover, the capitalist system has manufactured versions of national identities and accredits object creation through the illusion of authenticity. There are many factors that create a smoke-screen from the certainty assumed by "authenticity". The issue of place as a base from which identities are formed has become interlaced with politics of migration. South African land has been claimed and re-claimed by different factions of people (following trade, pre-colonial, and post-colonial migration) who declare it as the land of origin. Moreover, certain traditions have been formulated in environments of diversity and cross-referentiality. It becomes problematic, therefore, to assume that there exist particular tenets of "authentic African tradition"

[4] This term is a township slang derivative of the idiom "the real McCoy" and means "the genuine" or "real thing". It has also been used in advertising to sell products that are targeted to appeal particularly to the township market because it seems to come across as an "authentically" township word. The origins of the idiom are obscure but are assumed to have originated from a Canadian, Elijah McCoy, who invented the "lubricating cup" that would improve the efficiency of oiling axles and bearings of trains. His product was copied by so many, that traders would have to assess if the product they are purchasing was genuinely made by McCoy (James 1989: 73).

pertaining to black, socio-linguistic groups only. Furthermore, religion has also played a significant role in contributing to the illusionary list of criteria for the "authentic" African. The focus of this section is to examine the ways in which Hlobo's installations and Muholi's photographs challenge the concept of "authentic" identity with regards to ethnocentricity, nationalism and transnationalism as well as analyse religious and African "traditional" doctrine, and the complication of gender as represented. I will also explore the processes of sexual identification in differing contexts. The artworks that I will focus on are Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1], *Unojubalala* (2006) [fig. 1.2], and Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3] and *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo outside the Hope Unity Metropolitan Community Church, a gay church, during Good Friday, Mayfair, Johannesburg*[5] (2007) [fig. 1.4].

I: "Real African": Context and Politics of Authenticity

The issue of context may not be as primarily apparent as sexuality in Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi's work. However, it may be imperative to examine the implications of spatial politics on the notion of authenticity that compunds the work. Hlobo's sculptures and Muholi's photographs represent identities that are dispelled from areas of belonging in specific (South) African spaces. Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1]and Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3] illustrate, in different ways, some of the forms in which concepts of "authentic African character" take in post-Apartheid, rural, semi-rural or metropolitan spheres, as well as the spaces these forms "fit in" particularly under the umbrella of contemporary art.

Although Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1] references traditional Xhosa culture, the artwork comments on a rural lifestyle in juxtaposition to an urban one and distinguishes the rural as "traditional" and the urban as "modern". Hlobo's installation is a depiction of a quasi-Xhosa[6] kraal with pink, woven ribbon in the centre. The round-shaped kraal is opened but the entrance is

[5] Throughout the thesis, I will refer to this photograph as *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo* (2007).

[6] The kraal that Hlobo uses is not generally seen as a Xhosa kraal because of its round shape. Mostly, Xhosa people build square kraals while the round kraal is seen as a Zulu kraal. Moreover, although the Xhosa still practice circumcision as a cultural event, amongst the Zulu circumcision rituals were replaced by military training under Dingiswayo and Zwide from 1719 to 1818 (Chanaiwa 1980: 12). Male circumcision was re-introduced by Josiah Shembe in the late 1930s but only within his religious community (I will discuss Shembe in relation to tradition and religion at a later stage) (Jolles and Jolles 2000:3).

blocked by the pink ribbon where a ball-like object (covered with inner rubber tube) is attached. In the installation, Hlobo's distinction of "traditional"/"modern" allows the artist to be removed from both worlds so as to critique them while identifying with them. The term *Umthubi* denotes cow's milk that boys cook to feed a newborn calf (Perryer 2006: 7). This chore is associated with a rural traditional Xhosa lifestyle. Hlobo draws attention to the fact that traditionalism is not only practiced in rural areas and, in his work, considers the different lifestyles in urban areas that maintain traditional principles.

A kraal is a structure that would normally be found in rural and peri-urban[7] areas, and its purposes encompass customs and traditions that form a way of life for certain groups of people, hence the perceptions that "people who live in rural areas are solidly 'culturally rooted'" (Rudwick 2006: 61). Culturally, rural areas seem to represent the remnants of "authentic African-ness". Hlobo's kraal is a product that cannot easily be attributed to a rural or urban space. In his approach, he questions the overlapping of lived experience and location. His use of materials from different places and different manufacturers illustrates this point. Hlobo explains that he constructed the kraal from the ornamental tree known as Pride of India and blue gum wood which originates from Australia and was brought to South Africa because its properties would prove to be useful in the gold-mining industry (Perryer 2006: 4). Hlobo also introduces industrial materials such as steel, wire, rubber inner tube and ribbon which would, in "traditionalist" impressions, not be considered to be "authentically" traditional or African. In his explanation, Hlobo calls these materials "exotic and indigenous" in order to "talk about [himself], [his] entire South African heritage" (Perryer 2006: 4).

Hlobo's work also acts as an index to the persistence of ethnocentrism and traditionalism in urban areas. There are contemporary forms of "African-ness" which have been transformed to suit urban lifestyles. For example, "Afro-chic[8]" is a form of African-ness that is seen as "modern" but retains the nostalgia of "a golden past" and, arguably, evaluates the authoritative

[7] This term was introduced due to the limitations in the dichotomy between urban and rural or "to describe contradictory processes and environments" (from *Defining Periurban: Understanding Rural-Urban Linkages and Their Connection to Institutional Contexts*, a research paper presented by David L. Iaquinta and Axel W. Drescher at the Tenth World Congress of the International Rural Sociology Association, Rio de Janeiro, August 1, 2000).
[8] This term connotes the modernization of "African traditionalism" especially in fashion design where beads, printed cloth, shells, etc. are used in Haute Couture. The urban appropriation of "traditional" seems to assure a consciousness of one's African-ness and pride in one's "roots" while it keeps up with new commercial trends.

stance assumed in strict customs. The assumption is that urban ethnocentrism is always in-between, whereas rural ethnocentrism has a strict outlook on lifestyle. Urban ethnocentrism can be argued to be constructed from multiple concepts of various ethnic principles. These principles are also compounded by an assortment of social constructions formulated in spaces such as townships. Zanele Muholi's focus on lesbians in township areas bears significance in discussing context and sexual identity. Muholi's photograph, *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3], represents two women who are wearing clothing that is associated with *sangomas*. The material they are wearing can also be seen as, generally, traditional cloth that can be worn by anyone (it is understood to be African and is at times referred to as African traditional cloth[9]). From the photograph, it can be deduced that these women live in a township in Sasolburg. A township is seen as a space that has been previously defined as "in-between" in that "township residents are located in an 'imagined space' between those who live in central city areas, suburbia and rural areas" (Rudwick 2006: 61). They are therefore culturally hybrid where neither "western" standards nor "traditionally African" measures are "points of identification, but rather a third space" (Rudwick 2006: 61). Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3] complicates even the idea of a "third space". The implication of a culturally hybrid space is that it is inclusive and does not subscribe to concepts of "essential" and/or "authentic" identities. Homosexuality seems to have no place of belonging in townships, even though they are seen as "in-between" spaces of diverse groups of people. Arguably, the traditionalism that is associated with rural areas is referred to as a means to expel homosexuality.The dominant heteropatriarchal structures assumed to be traditionally African inform "accepted" lifestyles in townships, which makes Muholi's project significant.

Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3] destabilises the association of *sangomas* with "authentic African traditionalism" because their lifestyles adapt to the context they are in. Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, in printed material, bra's and beads, are posed back-to-back and one of the women sits on a car rim that is covered with dried animal skin. The other woman tucks her hands in the other's bra, fondling her breasts. In the background

[9] "Traditional" (printed) cloth can be argued to have become a signifier of African adornment. In his analysis of Yinka Shonibare's work, Okwui Enwezor (1999: 214), surmises that the brightly coloured "Dutch wax print" and "African textile" is "neither Dutch nor African", therefore, the "itinerary of ideas it circulates are never quite stable in their authority or meaning".

there are shacks and a toilet built out of bricks with the number 8793. The presence of shacks indicates the type of area in Sasolburg where the women that are portrayed reside. Due to the increasing rate of movement by people from rural areas to urban, peri-urban areas and areas surrounding industrial sites, the government has had to provide housing to decrease informal settlement. The post-Apartheid governmental housing project was part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and was aimed at improving infrastructure and providing basic housing for people who lived in corrugated iron shacks. In 1996 it was estimated that about 19 percent of the South African population live in informal settlements (Saff 1996: 235). Individuals would, over time, extend their small government houses using corrugated iron. This seems to be illustrated in Muholi's photograph where a smaller house that is built out of brick is extended through the use of corrugated iron. The area that Muholi chose complicates the idea of an undisturbed "African traditional" life.

Sangomas are still a strong reference to rural "African traditional" life because their purpose is understood to be more of a rural phenomenon than an urban one (Nkabinde 2006: 10). Muholi's photograph presents the paradoxes borne in the presumed concepts of authentic "African-ness" and contexts. *Sangomas* (in rural and peri-urban areas) are respected for their ability to access knowledge that is understood to be embedded in African knowledge systems; hence they seem to signify some of the tenets of "authentic" African-ness. However, the *sangomas* portrayed by Muholi are homosexual, which contradicts the dominant heteropatriarchal constructs of African-ness. Further, the characteristics of "authentic African-ness" seem inconsistent in that the assumption of particular areas as places of origin does not extend to *sangomas* practicing in townships or peri-urban and urban spaces.

Zanele Muholi was born in Umlazi, a township in KwaZulu Natal (Perryer 2006: 48). Rudwick (2006: 61) suggests that KwaZulu-Natal, in particular, "is believed to be one of the strongholds of African traditions and patriarchy". This idea complicates notions of authenticity in that it seems the formation of patriarchy employs gatekeepers who should dictate what "African culture" entails. Muholi's photographs transgress patriarchy and highlight flaws within the illusive concepts of African tradition. It is problematic that *all* African cultures are assumed to be heteropatriarchal. Also, the assumption that gender roles in "traditional" Africa are fixed,

overlooks the differing demands of place, time and changing political and economical atmospheres. Muholi's portrayal of same-sex *sangomas* can be compared to the anthropological and sociological surveys which refer to the existence of *sangomas* in same-sex relationships to prove and support the argument that homosexuality *is* African (Epprecht 2004; Murray and Roscoe 1998; Nkabinde 2006: 9-19). However, it remains arguable that Muholi's photograph(s) avoid(s) the tendency to essentialise African-ness or "African sexuality".

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 identity. The notion that homosexuality is un-African (a comment that has been directed towards Muholi's photographs in particular) assumes that spatial contexts characterize particular behaviours. Hlobo's use of the kraal and Muholi's portrayal of township *sangomas* defies this supposition. The idea of tradition or traditional behaviour already collides with certain misconceptions[10] and is argued by Terence Ranger (1983: 212) to have been manipulated through the administration of European traditions as a way to "modernise" the behaviour of Africans. The urban space is seen as the sphere of the "modernised" African. The concept of a "modernised" African who is seen as the opposite of an "authentic" African is provoked through colliding symbols in Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1] (such as pink ribbon and a kraal) and in Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3] (such as the cowhide and car rim).

More prone to the concept of a "modernised" African is the issue of race. Urban spaces seem to encompass different ethnicities that are obscured by racial categories. Hlobo retorts, in an interview with Sean O'Toole, that "most people I know say my work is so not black" (O'Toole 2008: 34). "Not black" can be argued to mean that it does not conform to the vague principles that are generally understood to be "African". The diversity of African-ness that is seen in urban spaces is presumed to fall short of the ideal of "authenticity". The materials of the artworks (installation and photography) are seen as products of "modernized" spaces. Arguably, the

[10] To support this statement, I will use the example of an auction in 2007 where Chief Fadana of the Xhosa was sent by the Royal House to purchase five Xhosa portrait paintings depicting Xhosa chiefs who fought against the British in the 19th Century colonial wars that were painted by ethnographer Frederic Timpson I'Ons for R540 000 (Kretzmann 2007: 1, 3). What is surprising is that they valued Frederick Timpson I'Ons' paintings as significant objects to acquire in the process of revamping "traditional African culture". The chief's reasoning was that he "could not watch his ancestors being sold 'like animals'" (Kretzman, 2007: 3). However, it is questionable just what kind of value is attributed to ethnographic paintings and what benefit the purchase has for the Xhosa communities.

marginalization of Hlobo's work as "not black" and Muholi's work as "un-African" is tied to the racialised polarisarion of African and Western. Through the example of Johannesburg, Achille Mbembe (2004: 376) states that the city could be seen as having "started" on a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) on which "the new could be inscribed upon it without reference to a past" which he instigates could be found in the "myth that Johannesburg was a European city in a European country in Africa". Mbembe (2007: 25) explains, in his definition of Afropolitanism, that "[for] many, to be 'African' is to be 'black' and therefore 'not white', with the degree of authenticity being measured on the scale of raw racial difference". For Mbembe (2004: 375) Johannesburg has been seen as a "racial city" and he illustrates this idea through making an example of a billboard advertisement. The text on the billboard reads:

> I hate being black. If it means some people think that they know my criminal record. My rhythm. My level of education. Or the role affirmative action has played in my career. *I'm not someone else's black. I'm my own*. And I love being black." and "I hate being white. If it means people think that I'm *not a real South African*. That I'm racist. Privileged. Paranoid. Or Baas. *I'm not someone else's white. I'm my own*. And I love being white (emphasis added) (Mbembe 2007:283).

This highlights colonialist tenets of "black" and "white" being used to allow for new definitions of these terms. Moreover, the term "black" ceases to specify ethnicity. The new definitions continually make reference to past definitions which become misconceived truths and realities that must be challenged to create new ones. Authenticity is and has been a contested term since it yields to social construction. There are ambiguities, within South Africa about national identity and specific ethnic groups. The socio-linguistic categories that have become primary signifiers of group identity have also presented unclear demarcations, vague and ambiguous principles. Most urban spaces are, arguably, seen as spaces where people of different origins reside and where none originate.

The construction of racialised identities complicates the manner in which sexuality is seen in South Africa. Bisexual and homosexual identities are displaced through constructions that locate sexuality at the margins. Generally, sexuality is seen as a taboo and made foreign through constructions of identity, belonging and through the process of sifting what goes inside and what stays outside "moral" or communal boundaries. Even though, as demonstrated by Ranger and Hobsbawm (1992), some traditions are shown to be foreign imports, some claims of locality do not bear certainty. The notion of importation is emphasized by both Hlobo's use of materials

from different places and Muholi's documentation of different sexual identities in a particular place. Timothy John Cresswell (1992: 8) defines "place" as a meaningful location and draws a distinction to "space" (an abstract concept) and "landscape" (a visual idea). Cresswell (1992: 8) sees the concept of place as a means to assert identity and addresses the "use of notions of appropriate place to construct normative 'moral geographies' that map particular kinds of people and practice to particular places". In Cresswell's discussion, place becomes primary in the formation of difference and phobias. Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) and Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) represent the spaces that further complicate the idea that locality should restrict individual choice. The notion that certain things or lifestyles are "un-African" assumes that a collective African identity obliges to this designation some characteristics and not others. Ali Mazrui (1967: 43) acknowledges Herskovits' assertion that "Africa is a geographical fiction … it is thought of as a separate entity and regarded as a unit to the degree that the map is invested with an authority imposed on it by the map makers". The idea that Africa is a spatial fantasy provokes the premise of its "creators" and questions the "displacement" of those who reside in it. With these spatial politics in mind, the concept of authenticity becomes even more complicated.

Usually, Hlobo's and Muholi's artworks operate in the particular context of a gallery. Hlobo's kraal garners new meaning and a different purpose as compared to when it is built in rural and semi-rural spaces. In the gallery, the kraal is housed as an object rather than it functions as a social space. The entrance to the kraal is disallowed because of the woven ribbon. Also, the ribbon, as an element to the kraal, obscures the link of place and originality. Hlobo's appropriation of different meanings for the kraal complicates the concept of a particular unchanging African culture. Muholi's portrayal of same-sex *sangomas* using the platform of a gallery to create awareness about homosexuality, also unveils the assumed "African personality" to be a spectre of various constructions. There are further implications in using the gallery platform to critique objects and personages that are associated with ancestors, power and mystery. The gallery space dissolves the inscrutability of *sangomas* and ancestral communication that is maintained with regards to the purpose of a kraal. It can be argued that the gallery space begins to "*museumify*" the subjects and objects in Hlobo's and Muholi's work in that they reveal

aspects that would otherwise be concealed, yet it can also be argued that they contravene the museum-packaged ideals of African-ness.

Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) examines Xhosa masculinity and the different spaces in which practices that contribute to this construction manifest. Although Hlobo uses, in his work, objects and practices of the Xhosa, his artwork does not have the degree of self-importance and particularism associated with "tribalism". For example, in an interview with Sean O'Toole (2008:34), Hlobo says "I am somehow celebrating all my heritages…the language I speak, *my* Xhosa". Even though, Hlobo affiliates with the Xhosa, he allows space to claim "*all* [his] heritages" from different contexts. Amongst other factors of identity politics that contribute to the illusion of authenticity is language and socio-linguistic grouping. Hlobo's use of Xhosa titles within the framework of art practice (which is often thought to be Eurocentric) can be seen as a contravention in the field as well as advancement of the Xhosa language.

Language plays a significant role in the validation of "African-ness" and spaces of identity since English has dominated indigenous languages officially. Sean O'Toole (2008: 34) considers Ngungi wa Thiongo's 1981 statement that "[t]he choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe". O'Toole (2008: 34) points out that Hlobo's work is "pitched at a white art world" in which Xhosa is not comprehended. It can be argued that O'Toole's suggestion implies that Hlobo's use of Xhosa titles in "a white art world" is a form of transgression. It may be that Nicholas Hlobo underscores the disparity of language where attempts to understand Xhosa are not made within "the white art worlds", yet Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho speakers make efforts to comprehend English. Nevertheless, English has been seen as the common language of communication between the different socio-linguistic groups, and a means to avoid tribalism based on which indigenous language is favoured.

Socio-linguistic groups have, in the past, been used as domains for constructing "authentic" African-ness and can be seen as a base for ethnocentricism. In *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, Leroy Vail (1989: 1) suggests that ethnicity and ethnocentricism were unpopular amongst political leaders as "destructive to their ideals of national unity" and that

tribalism also served the purpose of affirming "authentic" African-ness. According to Vail (1989: 2), the lauded "modernization" was seen as the antidote to ethnic loyalties but when the nationalist paradigm did not deliver on "development", ethnicity regained popularity because it provided alternatives against dominant political parties. Vail (1989: 2) argued that "[e]thnicity became the home of the opposition in states where class consciousness was largely underdeveloped", and he continues to warn that even in South Africa "where industrialisation has proceeded further than anywhere else on the continent" ethnicity would linger as "a focal point for whatever opposition to the dominant political classes that might exist". In South African urban spaces ethnicity has gained popularity as the means to recover pre-colonial history, as the confirmation of one's *being* African and for the development of these categories.

Vail (1989: 6) defines ethnicity as "a kind of romantic rejection of the present". Ethnicity is at times used as a notion that is parallel to "tribalism". The term "tribalism" comes from the word "tribe" which is defined by Kwame Anthony Appiah (1999: 703) as that which implies a group of people who have common ancestors and a single culture and "who live in a well-defined geographical region". The notion of "tribe" assumes the homogeneity imagined in the 19th century colonial usage of the word which alleged that all Africans lived in tribes via the assumption that Africans are primitive (Appiah 1999: 703). Hlobo and Muholi are somewhat removed from ethnicist ideologies, but evaluate their African-ness through mapping their individual experiences on the geographical location of South Africa (as a nation) rather than merely on the components of cultures that are separated and constructed as "authentic". Hlobo refers to the Xhosa[11] people as an homogenous group whereas they are structured into clans such as the Gcaleka, Rhrarhabe, Mfengu, Thembu, Bomvana, Mpondomise and so on, all of which have different derivations and chiefdoms and practice different customs (Peires 1981: 18). For instance, not all these groupings practice circumcision. Instead, the signifier "Xhosa" would be better understood in the South African landscape but it also leads to the assumption all Xhosa factions have similar principles. Jeff Peires (1981: 18) argues that the word "Xhosa" comes from the Khoi word '//kosa' which means angry men and that it was "invented" by outsiders.

[11] Peires (1981: 18) suggests that it is incongruent that the Xhosa people believe that they are common descendants of a hero called Xhosa, saying that some beliefs "assert that Xhosa was the son of Mnguni and the brother of Zulu and Swazi" which is suspect.

"Authenticity" and location have been linked through history, yet spatial politics continually construct and problematise the notion of authenticity. Shannon Fitzgerald (2003: 3) argues that "the concept of authenticity [is still a] dominant criterion and expectation in art history [which is] necessarily predicated on fiction". Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) and Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) give examples that provoke questions about belonging, "authenticity" and the South African landscape. For instance, the pink ribbon that is used to block the inner space in Hlobo's kraal destabilises the meanings that are generally associated with it. However, it also raises questions about the idea of a "true" Xhosa male and allows for an interrogation of different forms of this identity within an urban space. Muholi's photograph of *sangomas* in a township also acts as an index to the perplexity of place and identity, more particularly, homosexuality and African-ness.

II: "Going Back to My Roots: Born in Africa": Returning to "Africa" and its Limitations

When Nigerian born musician Dr. Alban released his first record *Hello Africa*[12], he sang:

> Hello Nigeria! – That's my Motherland. Coming to Sweden now – causin' hysteria. Takes a long time to travel the globe, so why be shy? Why be humble? I just came straight out the jungle. You can't compete with me cause you know I got the rhythm… Mi no live in a house - mi live in a tree… I'm calling on the big guys from the pyramid top, to join bits and pieces of our Fatherland - Afrika. Cause without boundaries we can move the mountains. Drop your personal individual ambitions. Chase the devil off and purify our Fatherland. Afrikan people, crawl from your vultures, stand affirm. 'Cause you are the aura of mankind. You are the dreams, you are the hope, you are the future, you are the past, you are the grandfather of civilization… Afrika for me and Afrika for you…

Considering, Dr Alban's lyrics, the affiliation to "Africa" has different forms locally and in the diaspora. The romanticisation of "Africa" has implications for social constructions of "authenticity". Hlobo exhibits and has had residencies in South Africa, Spain, Italy, Netherlands (Amsterdam), Switzerland, England and the U.S. (Massachusetts, Texas and New York). Muholi has also exhibited in South Africa, Germany, Austria and the U.S. (New York). There are general sentiments that South African artists who exhibit abroad consequentially live abroad or move between countries, such as Cape Town artist Kendell Geers who lives and works in Brussels and states that

> [a]s an artist living in the Post-Apartheid, Post-Communist, Post-Theory glut of Post-Modernism I prefer to live nowhere and to be nationalistic only to that which

[12] Dr. Alban< www.lyricstime.com/dr-alban-hello-africa-lyrics.html> accessed 2009/01/04

> cannot be controlled by my tongue, the moment when the digital dissolves into the analogue, the colloquial crush of imperfection. ...[13]

These ideas cannot be generalised for all African artist, however they reveal a move away from stringent categories of context and identity, where the obligation of *recovery*, *return* (or going back to one's roots) is less significant than the choice of moving between categories and meanings. Palmer (2000: 57) states that the term "African diaspora" must be "used with great caution, underscoring the point that until recent times, those people who resided on the African continent defined themselves solely in accordance with their ethnic group". Palmer (2000: 57) points out that the homogenisation of these terms is external; for instance, appearing in academic discourse as an homogenous category. The movement of people have contributed to views that do not adhere to strict notations of group identity. Transnationalism suggests a mobility and network across the globe whereas "territorialism" seems intolerant (Koven 2004: 270). This outlook defeats statements such as "homosexuality is unAfrican". Muholi's photographs disqualify this perception which excludes homosexuality. Hlobo's position allows him to have a similar kind of mobility, exemplified by the diversity of the origins of the materials that were used to construct *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1]. Nevertheless, there is the perception that African cultures are "fading" because of globalisation and transnationalism.

Although it may seem to be a kind of affirmation of belonging to use elements of ethnic traditions in contemporary art in order to inspect one's identity or to comment on the structures that inform identity, it also highlights tools of such constructions. Some of the elements that are apparent in Hlobo's and Muholi's work are boundaries of secrecy and respect which, in their artworks, function to sustain the patriarchies that they criticise. Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1] explores "Xhosa traditions or African traditions, and gender issues, with an emphasis on masculinity and rituals... to challenge the purpose of the kraal" (Perryer 2006: 4). The kraal encompasses many significant rituals including Xhosa circumcision. It is a space where gender roles and family lineage are defined. Circumcision marks the interior meaning of traditional life in Xhosa culture because it is a ritual that is conceptually meant to define right from wrong, inside from outside, male from female, and defines roles within the society in order to maintain a continuous understanding of life while balancing social dichotomies. Circumcision has been one

[13] <http://www.artthrob.co.za/02jun/artbio.html> accessed 2008/06/24

of the aspects of "traditional" life that have been explored by a number of young, black South African artists and has provoked questions pertaining to the ethics of representing cultural traditions in artworks. Also, it has drawn attention to the expectancy of art produced by black artists to question their ethnic and African identities.

The circumcision ritual is one of the customs that, when faced with "modernity", have been seen in a bad light because of mortality rates and hospital admissions for infections have risen since 1995 (Vincent 2007:3). The custom is important to communities that practice it to such an extent that full respect cannot be granted to an uncircumcised male by that community. It is what Peter Mtuze (2004: 48) calls "the greatest day in every boy's life" and what authors Mayatula and Mavundla describe as "the most widely accepted cultural practice among the Xhosa speaking people whether educated or illiterate, Christian or non-Christian" (Vincent 2007: 4). Signe Arnfred (2004: 13) discusses social scientists', Ranger and Hobsbawm's, argument regarding 'tradition' as a notion that is invented by 'modernity', stating that

> [t]his conceptual pair is still going strong, breeding new categories, such as HTP: *harmful traditional practices* (original emphasis). HTP is a most unfortunate expression, a) because it tends to classify everything "traditional" as harmful, and b) by labelling them "harmful" it also implicitly enforces a specific morality, an unspoken norm, compared to which this or that is considered "harmful"... the implicit morality here is the morality of "modernity", i.e. of the West.

Rituals such as circumcision still carry with them "the mystery" inscribed by colonial ethnography and appear as a "problem". Recently, young, black male artists in South Africa have dealt with the circumcision ritual in their work and it can be argued that in some cases it has been represented in such a way that the positive aspects of traditions are overlooked. The view that certain traditional cultural products are being "exploited" cannot be ignored as it compounds analyses of the kraal and references to circumcision in Hlobo's work and even the traditional healers in Muholi's photograph.

It is not only Hlobo who represents this ritual in a questionable light for comprehensible reasons. Between 2004 and 2005 various contemporary South African Xhosa male artists explored this subject. Artist Thembinkosi Goniwe exhibited artwork representing Xhosa initiates bleeding heavily and dying from circumcision (see. fig. 1.5). Goniwe highlighted the reality of mortality during the circumcision ritual, but the blood-soaked bodies in his images could have been argued

to obscure the importance of the ritual to Xhosa communities. Another artwork by Goniwe that could be argued to have a similar affect is a photographic series of initiates on the front cover of magazines (reminiscent of Ike Ude's photographs) that were targeted specifically at the black community (see fig. 1.6). The magazines that Goniwe chose have a reputation of always representing magic, *muti*, cannibalism, incest, etc. within the black community. Goniwe's manipulated magazine covers include all sorts of words alluding to the "supernatural" and draws attention to the constant association of African-ness with malevolence and dangerous ritual activity. Another South African artist, Churchill Madikida, depicts the circumcision ritual in an installation of an initiate in a hospital setting with bandages, amputated limbs and skulls, and a projection of bloodied hands (see fig. 1.7). These exhibitions may have attracted negative criticism[14] from Xhosas and traditionalists but generated significant discourse within the field of South African art with regards to representations of black masculinity.

Arguably, circumcision divides as it connects and does not fit neatly in the equity policies of South Africa. In the South African context, it either privileges women because they do not have to endure the hardship or it provides a difference that allows initiated men and formed "traditional" authorities more power over women. Ranger (1996: 254) argues that

> elders tended to appeal to "tradition" in order to defend their dominance of the rural means of production against challenge by the young. Men tended to appeal to "tradition" in order to ensure the increasing role which women played in production in the rural areas did not result in any diminution of male control over women as economic assets. Paramount chiefs and ruling aristocracies in polities which included numbers of ethnic and social groupings appealed to "tradition" in order to maintain or extend their control over their subjects. Indigenous populations appealed to "tradition" in order to ensure that the migrants who settled amongst them did not achieve political or economic rights.

The appeal to "tradition" by so-called traditionalists is challenged in Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1] by the masculine and feminine traits of the kraal (pink ribbon and wood) and its non-sexist prohibition of entrance. Nicholas Hlobo illustrates the limits of particular categories through hindering entrance to the kraal. However, he also embraces a notion of mobility and freedom to have more than one identity in saying that: "I'm not just Xhosa – in my genealogy there is diversity" (Perryer 2006: 4). Although the kraal resembles a Zulu kraal, it is neither a

[14] I assessed this issue in my honours thesis in 2006 through various interviews with a number of Xhosa men in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape.

Zulu kraal, nor a Xhosa kraal and the materials that were used to make the kraal such as ribbon, rubber inner tube, "exotic and indigenous wood" show the integration and assimilation of cultures and products from different places or social spaces (Perryer 2006: 4). The traditional Zulu or Xhosa kraal functions to separate and acts as a border. In Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1], however, it does not allow anyone in but is constructed out of diverse or seemingly inclusive symbols. Hlobo uses the metaphor of the border as an index to the limitations assumed in the concept of African-ness.

However, it can also be argued that Hlobo and Muholi "appeal to tradition" in order to represent their sexuality and identity and, subsequently, to challenge beliefs about tradition. Vincent (2007: 14) observes that "it is not always the older generation nor those in rural communities that are the guardians of 'tradition' because "today's middle-aged black South African males are both better educated than their fathers and more highly politicised"; and therefore are in search of stable identities and defend rituals when elders are in opposition. In defence of tradition, secrecy has been seen as the main predicament in visual representations of "traditional" objects and practices. Secrecy does not only protect those in power (patriarchies in most cases), but it also reveals processes of selective information available about "African cultures", in terms of what is denied, adapted or changed. Evidently, these processes are protected by a required respect. For example, the respect of a kraal as a male space is communally understood. When Hlobo makes a kraal that "looks like a plaything, a trampoline" he challenges "the notion of what is respectable, and what is respected as a man's space" (Perryer 2006: 4). The issue of respect in Hlobo's work is twofold: there is that of a kraal in the context of a community and that of an artwork in a gallery. The gallery restricts food, smoke, drink and animals from the exhibition space out of respect for the artwork and the artist, whereas all this is done inside a kraal in its usual context. Cattle slaughtering, smoking, the drinking of sorghum, eating and other social engagements happen in the kraal out of respect for the elders and ancestors. In Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006), the boundary that is the kraal reveals limitations in Xhosa traditions and in the broader society. The kraal highlights the gap between "traditional" and "modern", and problematises the idea of returning to one's cultural "traditions" and ultimately complicates relational links to "authenticity" and power.

Secrecy or censorship has always been used as a tool to manipulate politics and assure power for those with access to certain information that, if made public, threatens those power positions. One of the rules given to initiates is that they never discuss what happens in seclusion with anyone else, especially women. Representing the circumcision ritual in visual art can be seen as disrespect because undisclosed details are divulged, in turn threatening the ritual and those who maintain it. The "threat" can be attributed to the boundaries that secrets create. According to Mary Nooter (1993: 29), "multisensory signals are used to erect boundaries between the initiated and noninitiated and also between novices of different levels". The kraal in Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1] gives access guarded secrets and can be argued to parody the "guardians" of tradition. Hlobo's and Muholi's work seems to meddle with these boundaries: boundaries of male and female roles, of classes, of laws and constitutions (traditional and national), etc.

"Traditional" aspects are not the main theme in Muholi's artwork but she does make references to the Zulu traditions of Umhlanga reed dance in her *Virgins* (2005) [Fig. 1.8] series, traditional healers in *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3] and one of the photographs from *Miss D'Vine* (2007) [fig. 2.6] where Miss D'Vine wears a beaded skirt. Muholi does not respond to traditions as compulsory means of certifying "authentic" identity, but rather as an option for a number of identity affiliations. Present day challenges present a scenario where "young *sangomas* in their 20s started coming *out* as lesbians in the last ten years in Soweto, they received a hard time from their trainers, and other older heterosexual *sangomas*" (Nkabinde 2006: 10). Nkabinde (2006: 9) further states that "[t]he heterosexual male *sangomas* who control our oral history and the information that gets passed down from generation to generation, have insisted that we keep same-sex relationships *secret*" (own emphasis). The secret that Muholi portrays in *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) of lesbian *sangomas* provokes more questions. *Sangoma* same-sex relations are understood as spiritual relationships rather than lesbianism (which imply the taboo of sexual activity). In Muholi's work, secrecy is also a challenge because her awareness campaign is based on publicising the reality of black lesbians in townships. It is debatable, whether representing same-sex relationships or lesbian relations of *sangomas* is a contravention to "traditional" structures.

The concept of "authentic African tradition" is also breached by the individuals in Muholi's photograph through the combination of what is understood as "Western" and "African" attire. The "suit-and-tie" appearance of females (in *Faces and Phases* (2007), see fig. 2.10), the "bright-dress-and-high-heels" of males (in *Miss D'Vine* (2008)) and the brassieres in *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3] may be the rationales that lead to the assumption that homosexuality is "un-African". Although some clothing styles may be seen as foreign, they have become basic clothing items that do not have a particular and permanent origin. Karen Hansen Tranberg (1999: 358) argues that "the model behind [clothing performance] is a rather unspecified sense of the West" and intimates that "when it comes to clothing, Africa and the West cannot escape one another". Clothing has also become the property of no particular culture. The notion that characters photographed by Muholi wear Western-influenced styles of clothing is not to say that the individuals captured by Muholi have un-African or "inauthentic" identities because then one would have to address the broader (South) African contexts, the ideologies and standards that persist and construct new identities that are from different local and foreign social spaces. In the documentation of Muholi's township lesbians, ethnic differences are silenced to give way to another struggle (the rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-, Trans-, Inter-sexual community). On the other hand, as demonstrated by Epprecht (2004), Murray and Roscoe (1998), it is the re-recording of "authentic" or "original" ethnic practices that advocates their cause (in proving homosexuality's African-ness).

Hlobo's and Muholi's work does not only show the predicaments that are embroidered in the concept of African-ness but also how individual identities appear, at times, as "inauthentic" threads. The exhibition entitled *Flow* (2008), in which Hlobo participated, generated discourse about the perimeters constructed around identity. In his review of this show, Alan Gilbert of *The Village Voice* stated that "[a]lthough feelings of displacement and incongruence permeate much of *Flow*, its art responds with an element of creative affirmation whatever their present location". Nevertheless, the idea of flexibility cannot be said to be a phenomenon that is occurring only amongst contemporary (South) African artists. Ranger (1996: 248) argues that most 19th century studies of pre-colonial Africa

> have emphasised that far from there being a single 'tribal' identity, most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as subject to this chief, at another moment as a member of that cult, at another moment

> as part of this clan, and yet another moment as an initiate in that professional guild... [t]hus the boundaries of the 'tribal' polity and the hierarchies of authority within them did *not* define conceptual horizons of Africans [original emphasis].

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. As demonstrated in Hlobo's work, the obligatory "bush" circumcision over-emphasises homogenous hypermasculity, unopposed patriarchy (as in the fact that the kraal is a strictly masculine space) and heterosexuality. Conversely, masculinity is appropriated as a part of identity by the women in Muholi's photographs through dress, language and bodily manipulation. The transformation that is demonstrated in these artists' works bears testimony to changing economic and political spheres.

The liberation struggle asserted an African Nationalist or Pan-Africanist identity in opposition to "European economical, social, cultural, racial and political domination" (Mandaza 2001: 133). Conflict between ethnic groups had to be lessened by not emphasising the differences. However, an escape from the differences seemed to lie in a European identity and language. For instance, English becomes a form of communication if two black South Africans cannot communicate in each other's languages. The assumption of African-ness as an homogenous destination becomes more problematic. Christopher Steiner (2002: 381) draws attention to "the popularity of 'Africa'" in his analysis of the increasing interest by blacks in other countries in the material culture of Africa rather than African immigrants. The sentiment about Africa is constructed from the circulation of an imagined "Africa" that has no physical, political and cultural borders. Myra Goldschimdt's (2003: 209) survey on South African identities shows that a sense of identity has been dependant on ethnic and cultural heritage, yet the number of people who labelled themselves "African" increased from 24% in 1990 to 26% in 2000[15]. Goldschmidt argues (2003: 209) that there is prestige in the African label. These modes of identification are further questioned in visual culture.

[15] This study was based on University students.

It can be argued that the return to "Africa" or "finding" African-ness is not only prone to African artists. Clifford (1998: 210) states that "the concrete, inventive existence of 'tribal' cultures and artists is suppressed in the process of either constituting authentic, 'traditional' worlds or appreciating their products in the timeless category of 'art'". Clifford (1998: 210) discusses, in particular, the Modern artists in nineteenth century Europe and their relationship or "affinity" to "tribal art", which he argues is suspect in appropriating non-Western objects. Modern artists claimed to be "founders" or "pioneers" of "informing principles". The same hypothesis cannot be applied to Contemporary African artists who work with cultural objects of their "African heritage". However, the "outsider" stance is open to discussion. Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) can be argued to be an example of the French expression: *avoir le cul entre deux chaises* which means "to be caught between two stools". Hlobo affiliates with Xhosa, labels his work in Xhosa; yet (if the kraal is used to signify Xhosa) he speaks of the difficulty of access and speaks from outside of the enclosure that symbolises Xhosa (Nguni). Muholi demonstrates that neither African-ness nor homosexualities are sealed identities through her representation of different personalities within the community of black lesbians. Arguably, the metaphorical enclosure around certain cultures is to pre-empt their erasures. In his *Deterritorialisation of Culture* (2000: 105), Nikos Papastergiadis argues that the notion of autonomous cultures obscures "the porous boundaries between groups, the diffuse notions of identity, the deterritorialised links between members of groups, the globalising patterns of communication and the hybrid process of cultural transformantion". The transformation of cultural traditions therefore offers no point of return but rather points of reference. This view allows for a better understanding of Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi's work, not as "un-African" but as documentation of transformation. Also, through this perspective African-ness is not prone to erasure or loss.

III: The Death and Re-birth of the "Authentic African"

In his article for *Agenda* entitled *The End of The Black Man* (1998: 61), Kopano Ratele identifies "a perceived loss" in reference to black masculinity and Steve Biko's (1978: 28) statement that "[t]he type of black man we have today has lost his manhood". Without the conflation of gendered absence and presence, there is a general sense of loss of "traditions" and the selfhood of the so-called "real African" character. This "loss" can be read in different ways. There are genuine sentiments from cultural agents in the arts (visual arts, music, and theatre) that express a

need to retain what is loosely termed as "our culture". In urban spaces and on public platforms (the media, youth-organised poetry sessions and so on) the appearance is that of a multifarious, non-ethnic-specific, quasi-Rastafarian[16], anti-nativist[17] and pro-Biko spirit. These groups are generally educated at university level and express a motivation to continually re-define *being African* (at times specific and other times holistically). However, the American influence of hip-hop culture and slam poetry cannot be ignored, because it forms the basis of these platforms. The variety of these influences uses the structure of the hip-hop sub-culture and performs it in the acknowledged sense of African-ness, which is first and foremost expressed through language. Therefore, hip-hop is performed in Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa, etc.

Jeffery Louis Decker (1993: 54) refers to this assimilation of sub-cultures as an "imagined" global community and as "hip-hop nationalism". In most cases, some of these individuals have been educated in the so-called model-c (multi-racial)[18] schools and speak proficient English, which would inevitably separate them from the category of being "African" through name-calling (such as "coconut", or "Oreo" – in other words "not authentic"[19]). Identification with some of these sub-cultures has also been expressed as being "real" or "keeping it real"[20], therefore a "real *sistah*" or "real *brotha*" can be anyone who is accepted in the youth groups or subcultures as someone who can still speak and understand his/her language even though that individual does not experience the seemingly obligatory "traditional" practices that are assumed by traditionalist as some of the criteria of being "authentically" African. Cultural production has then re-integrated South African languages in song, theatre, film and visual arts. However,

[16] Rastafarianism has contributed to anti-colonialist assertions of African-ness. Conversely, Rastafarianism has also been rejected as "improper" such as the case of the Zimbabwean Supreme Court ruling that disallowed Rastafarian Chikwekwe to register as a legal practitioner (Unknown Author 1995: 231).
[17] The term "nativist" is used to describe a form of American "antipathy for internal foreign groups of various kinds" (national, cultural, religious) (Friedman 1967: 408).
[18] Formerly, model-c schools were reserved for whites only. When Apartheid was abolished, these schools were open to all races but are now attended by children of middle/working class South Africans.
[19] The terms "coconut" and "Oreo" have been used to distinguish black people who assume Western modes of being from those who regard themselves to be "truly" black. The connotation is linked to the dark outer layer of a coconut or an Oreo biscuit (an American brand) and white internal substance. This connotation can also be linked to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin/ White Masks* (1967). Taking into consideration that for Fanon, "whiteness" is seen as a facade and has also been defined as a condition of inferiority, the term "coconut" or "Oreo" implies "whiteness" that cannot be "taken off", and it implies that those who are labelled this way have "white" souls or that "whiteness" extends to their psyche.
[20] This American phrase is colloquially used to define a person who is "not fake" and it connotes "to be oneself". This phrase has been used by celebrities who want to associate themselves with life in ghetto and slum areas. <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=keep+it+real> accessed 2008-08-16.

cultural discourse still uses English as the dominant language of communication. There are few young, black visual artists, such as Lunga Kama and Nandipha Mntambo, who are using their own languages to title their work. In this particular case, all of Hlobo's work is entitled in Xhosa.

Another way to read the sentiment of "loss" is in the idea of a "primitive" African. The expression of "loss" with regards to African-ness is composite. I will mention the two most recognisable views, the Western (the Occidental[21]) view of "primitive" Africa and the "African" view of "primitive" Africa. The two have similarities in that both have a romanticised ideal of the "natural" African native. However, they differ in that the Western view sees "African" in the form of the object or in its materiality and in the acquisition of "authentic" African objects (monetary value becomes a direct variable that increases as the object seems more "authentic"). An exemplar can be drawn from Claude Levi-Strauss' acknowledged yet bigoted concept of the ineffectual *Bricoleur* whose mind is savage in opposition to the Engineer whose mind is scientific in his book, *The Savage Mind* (1966)[22]. For Levi-Strauss, the savage mind is unchanging and does not have the innovative trait of the Engineer. Arguably, this view has influenced the way that African cultural production is perceived. The "African" view of the ideal of the authentic "African" is one of recovery and *re-turn*, to "the simple life of our fathers"; that is, to re-call those principles before the advent of colonisation.

Moreover this idea was promoted through South African television. The arrival of television in South Africa 1976 the Apartheid state "feared the influence that television would have in opening up South African minds to a world beyond national ideological borders" (Gule 2004: 254). Mark Beittel (1990: 751-752) observes that South African film was initially shot for a western market and when it was made for the domestic market, themes circulated around "our boys on the border" for the "white" population and for the "black" population it was the theme of returning to the homelands where an urban lifestyle presents a criminal "black" persona cured by the return to the "pureness" of rural areas as in the visual interpretation of Alan Paton's *Cry, The*

[21] I am using Occident in the sense that Edward Said put it. Said (1978: 108-109) dichotomised Occident and Orient in saying "that the world is made up of two unequal halves, Occident and Orient" but specifies between American, Anglo-French and German Orientalism(s).

[22] Although, it is notable that Levi-Strauss defines "savage" as that which is prior (which has been used to define structuralism and is credited in its implication of combination of different objects which have different purposes as objects), the racist links that connected the word Africa to "savage" and "primitive" cannot be ignored, keeping in mind that Levi-Strauss was an 19th Century anthropologist.

Beloved Country (1951). Beitel (1998: 752-753) further mentions Ray Phillips, who was a prominent liberal missionary in South Africa, who devised a so-called Social Gospel that would solve "the whole great problem of moralizing the leisure time of natives". Phillips controlled and censored what was represented, further lending meanings to concepts of "African-ness".

The romanticised ideal is fostered among older generation traditionalists who express that the younger generation has adopted cultures that are "not their own" and "they are forgetting where they come from, they are forgetting the ways of their ancestors". An example of this trepidation is illustrated in Muholi's *Virgins* (2005) [fig.1.8] series which depicts young bare-breasted Zulu women partaking in the traditional *Umhlanga* Reed Dance and virginity testing in KwaZulu Natal. Virginity testing has been opposed by gender activists, youth organisations and popular media. In an article, Bongani Mthembu (2008: 5) reports on King Zwelithini who demanded apologies from the Young Communist League which issued a statement against the *Umhlanga* Reed Dance in asserting that it is "outdated and sexist". King Zwelithini referred to this statement as "hostility towards Zulu tradition" (Mthembu 2008: 5). Commenting on behalf of the King and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Pat Lebenya Ntanzi stated that "[t]he apartheid regime taught black people to look down on their cultural practices" (Mthembu 2008: 5). Mthembu's article highlights the divergent views that further complicate ideas of African-ness. Zanele Muholi's position as voyeur into this event also locates her as an outsider and opens access of the discussion of the viability of *some* traditions. At the point of divergence of these views, the idea of the "African" is an unchanging one, an idea that seems to be contained, re-captured and re-contained. At the border of this containment is contamination.

Hlobo's appropriation of a kraal and the Xhosa circumcision ritual and Muholi's documentation of Zulu maidens who took part in the *Umhlanga* reed dance is not merely a retrospective re-iteration or "recovery" of "traditions", but rather unpacks the construction of "African" to draw attention to and disengage the process that create stereotypes. They represent a rebellion against the ideals of the "African". Hlobo's critique (which is also an appreciation), disrupts the nostalgia of the "African" who, according to King Zwelithini's statements, should not question the obligations of set structures, while Muholi represents the overlooked, misunderstood variations of this ideal. The themes that Hlobo and Muholi tackle are those that would otherwise

demand a certain degree of censorship. For instance, circumcision as assessed by Hlobo is maintained by traditionalists through secrecy and, using the example of Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006), traditional healing and aspects of sexuality demand censorship by the older generations of *sangomas*.

Upon revisiting Thabo Mbeki's notion of African Renaissance which assumes a re-construction of African-ness that differs from the dormant, unchanging and homogenous concept of African-ness, there is dissolution of boundaries assumed by ethnic obligations of being. By obligation, I am alluding to the patriarchal traditions of circumcision and virginity testing as represented by Hlobo and Muholi, consecutively. In his statement, Mbeki announced that "the children of Africa … continue to be consumed by death dealt out by those who have proclaimed a sentence of death on dialogue and reason and on the children of Africa whose limbs are too weak to run away from the rage of adults"[23]. For Mbeki, "African" had come to embody dialectical meanings and Africa had become residence to opposing forces; "harbingers of death" and "victims", "the poverty" and "prosperity", "the corrupter" and "the harlot", "death" and "birth" in which the new Africans must be midwives[24]. The re-birth of Africa, according to Mbeki, demanded "that we purge ourselves of the parasites". This concept of African-ness is very different from that of the romanticised view since, in its "vigilance against the danger of the entrenchment in African society" must continually renew itself.

When considering Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1], it is constructed of opposites or materials of opposite associations, such as "exotic" and "indigenous", "masculine" and "feminine", "tough" (wood and inner rubber tyre) and "soft" (ribbon). Furthermore, the kraal can be read in conjunction with a performance (it is discussed in detail at a later stage) that is called *Umkhwetha* (2006) [fig. 2.1][25]. *Umkhwetha* or "the initiate" walks around the kraal looking over it then stops next to the "entrance" of the kraal to squat next to it. By some means, the kraal begins to look as if it has "purged" a round object that is still attached to the interior or what seals the interior (the pink weaving). Traditionally, initiates begin their crossing into manhood

[23]From Thabo Mbeki's *African Renaissance* statement delivered at the Gallagher Estate, 13 August 1998 <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/1998/tm0813.htm> accessed 2008/08/16
[24]< http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/1998/tm0813.htm> accessed 2008/08/16
[25] I mention this performance when discussing each of the works that were in this exhibition because it can be argued that Hlobo weaves this performance in with the other artworks that were exhibited.

within the kraal. However, Hlobo as initiate is already rejected and kept-out. If we are to consider the kraal as a signifier of tradition, then it seems to be one that is inaccessible in Hlobo's interpretation. Moreover, it is only a "traditional African" kraal on the facade, but it is woven with what is seen as "Western" interior. Arguably, it follows the analogy of "coconut". Conversely, *Umkhwetha* (2006) is black inside and covered in white, debatably a literal illustration of Fanonian concepts.

For Muholi, dialectical concepts are embodied. With reference to a number of photographs apart from *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006), femininity *is* masculinity perhaps in the sense that the one is always a cover for the other. Although, it can be argued that Muholi plays with what seems "African" as "un-African" and what seems "Un-African" as "African", it comes to surface that Muholi evades such absolute categories and the imagination of their oppositionality. The fact that a female *sangoma* can be spiritually male destabilises the point of opposition. Even the difference supposed in "traditional" and "modern" can be argued to have assimilated into something else.

Seemingly, traditionalism deals with the past rather than the present, which is anticipated by African Renaissance theories to pass for a process of re-construction and regeneration through re-birth. Another complication is the impression of Black liberal movements which, in seeking to amalgamate "traditional African" socio-linguistic groups under a racial category, constructed a different type of African-ness which left a legacy of the "responsibility to identify with, and devote to blackness" (Ratele 1998: 60). In reference to the past and blackness, Toni Morrison (1993: 11) remarks that "the past is absent, or it's romanticized". In addition, Kimberly Chabot-Davis (1998: 247) points out Morrison's "disdain for the Black Power movement's creation of new myths and their retreat to ancient African myths of the 'far and misty past'" that exemplifies the loss of a knowledgeable past and a need to move away from it. Furthermore, Frederick Jameson and Linda Hutcheon proposed the "fictionality" of history, "the blurring of past and present and the questioning of grand historical metanarratives" (Chabot-Davis 1998: 243). Questioning grand historical metanarratives is thought to position a threat to those narratives, whereas it could be considered to open forum that is necessary for understanding different forms of African-ness within various political, economical and social environments. Economical

exchange is often blamed for the devastation of non-Western forms by dominant Western global forms. Papastergiadis (2000: 107) observes that "much of the debate on the relationship between globalisation and cultural production revolves around the question of whether … non-western practices will be destroyed by …western global forms". The positioning of practices as "Western destroyer" and "destroyed Africa" is problematic but has persisted as a concern in the global economic sphere.

IV: Production, Marketability and Authenticity

Within some of the different stereotypes of Africa and African-ness, some cultural products have become manifest as commodity. Christopher Steiner (2002: 381) discusses an example of the consumption of "products of African cultures" and the nonchalant treatment of African people in New York. Paul Stoller (2003: 209) discusses writers such as Christopher Steiner, George Marcus, Fred Myers, Sally Price, Susan Vogel and Shelly Errington who concur that "the socio-economic contours of global interdependence" have contributed to the "traffic of 'tribal' art" and the "construction and reconstruction of the aesthetic value of 'primitive' art". Given that there are different categories of African art which writers (such as the abovementioned) who focus on art production, marketing and consumption take into cognisance, there are also different receptions to and expectations of what "tribal" art[26] and contemporary African encompasses. Considering that Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi have exhibited in various countries and have participated in international group exhibitions, the politics of cultural exchange may influence interpretation of the work and the social weighing of "African-ness".

Taking into consideration Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1], the kraal is an object of significance that is not only associated with "authentic" African objects but also with "primitive" objects. The 20th century European interest in "primitive" art made it difficult to discuss objects of African cultural production and African art because it constructed a hierarchy that elevated European art over African art. Shelly Errington (1998: 1) points out the misconstructions implied in perceptions that Modern artists "discovered" "primitive" art which is said to have "progressed" to the acceptance of mainstream art (Errington 1998: 1). Errington (1998: 2)

[26] "Tribal" art is considered to encompass African, Asian and Oceanic (Austronesian) cultural objects which are considered to be "primitive" (Miller 2004)

describes the "darkened spaces and jungle noises" that framed Primitive Art in the exhibitions that became popular, the most significant being the 1984 Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) exhibition entitled *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. The popularity of "African Art" influenced major modern artist (Cubists, Surrealists, etc.) (Errington1998: 2). Errington (1998: 3) argues that "by 1984 authentic primitive art had begun to 'die' for another and quite different reason: new sources to supply the artefacts that could be counted as 'authentic' and 'primitive' were disappearing at an alarming rate". Again, the allegory of death comes into play; in this instance, with regards to material constructions of African. Errington argues that the "glorification of primitive coincides with its death" (Zolberg 2000: 391). According to Errington, death is linked to "authenticity" as "authenticity" is linked to value. In her text, Errington locates constructions of value within the European colonial project, the implementation of "imagined communities"[27] (Zolberg 2000: 392). The connotations that are constructed through imagination of non-European objects and spaces are positioned as markers of "authenticity"; such as "ritual", "ancestors", "supernatural" in their destiny as "esoteric fetishes, erotic figurines [and] inventive sculpture" (Zolberg 2000: 392).

There is a predicament in understanding the appropriation of objects produced in culture in contemporary African art with the use of the constructions of colonial imagination that makes it tricky to deal with objects of experienced rituals (as in Hlobo's sculptures and performances) and avoiding the stain of "hypersexualised" black bodies (as in Muholi's photographs). Some of these polemics condense into intangible illusions of ownership. Claims complicate matters. Moreover, the delusion of ownership operates on too many levels. Recounting from some phrases that have been quoted earlier such as "*our* culture", "assimilating cultures that are 'not their *own*'", Hlobo's remark: "*my* Xhosa", Muholi's definition of those she portrays as "*my* people", "Modern artists '*discovered*' primitive art" and the "colonial project that *implemented* 'imagined communities'"; the idea of authenticity becomes fictional and effects value. It would be limiting, nevertheless, to suppose that cultural agents (artists, writers, etc.) cannot re-assess cultural objects and (re-) claim them to open up the spaces between culture as constructed by

[27] Shelly Errington (1998: 188) borrows the phrase "imagined communities" from Benedict Anderson's 1983 book with the same title. In *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress*, Errington (1998: 188) affirms Anderson's suggestion that the phrase should not necessarily mean that "political communities are imaginary or that their self-imaginings are to be distinguished as 'genuine' or 'false,'" but should rather be distinguished "by their different styles of imagining themselves".

"African traditions" and culture as assembled by popular or global trends, institutional frameworks and socio-economic change.

Taking into consideration Kwame Anthony Appiah's (1992: 5) proclamation that "the truth is the property of no culture... and whether or not [the] new truths we take from the West will be believed depends in large measure on how we are able to manage relations between our conceptual heritage and the ideas that rush at us from worlds elsewhere", it can be assumed that meaning is owned by no one. When thinking of Muholi's photograph of *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3], debates can persist that *sangomas* are the markers of "authentic" African-ness or that township *sangomas* are not "authentically" African in their adaption to urban restrictions and demands, or even that Muholi places hypersexuality and supernaturalism back into the construct of African-ness or that she deconstructs those concepts to point out some realities. Nevertheless, Muholi's images show that meaning and value is valid in the present, further highlighting that the constructs of the "primitive" and those of the "natural African" are disengaged from time and return as commodified stereotypes. Commodification means changing an item that was initially not meant for monetary exchange into a purchasable item (Marx 1848: 4). Does Muholi's representation of lesbian *sangomas* or Hlobo's kraal pose complications regarding cultural production and "monetary exchange"?

Hlobo's work sells well internationally to private collectors and museums and is in major South African collections[28]. Zanele Muholi's photographs have sold to private collectors and she received a commission for *Le Monde* (French newspaper) in November, 2008[29]. From one view, there is nothing unusual about artists selling their artwork. From a different view, the politicisation of cultural objects (such as the kraal) in museums and black female bodies presents another dimension of debate. African artist face the challenge of functioning within "the art world" as agents who are able to sell their work and as cultural critics. Marcus and Myers (1995: 7) argue that

[28] From an interview with Joost Bosland who works with Nicholas Hlobo at the Michael Stevenson Gallery, conducted on 10 November 2008. Hlobo's sculptures are more popular with museums whereas his works on paper are generally bought by private collectors and there is an overlap.
[29] From an interview with Federica Angelucci who works with Zanele Muholi at the Michael Stevenson Gallery, conducted on 10 November 2008.

> [d]espite debates and challenges to the […] ideal of art's autonomy in the West, for many people engaged with the arts the category of 'art' remains a resolutely commonsense one, associated with essential value in relation to a generalized human capacity for spirituality and creativity.

This has implications for art created in Africa because while it contests various negative constructions about Africa and identity it must also operate within frameworks that are "associated with essential value", the same frameworks which judged and undermined cultural production basically through geopolitical location.

Peter Jackson (1999: 95) comments that "previous studies (of 'exotic' food and 'ethnic' cultures, for example) have tended to treat commodification as a dirty word, implying that once such cultures have been commodified, they have been devalued and degraded". Muholi's photographs tackle sensitised arenas. Muholi took part in *.ZA: Giovane Arte dal Sud Africa* (2008)[30] held at the Centre for Contemporary Art at Palazzo delle Papesse Sienna, Italy and she exhibited images from *Faces and Phases* (2007) [fig. 2.10] and *Being* (2007) [fig. 3.7][31], some of which show the politically charged naked black female body. The black female body and black female sexuality have suffered a history of degradation. Felly Nkweto Simmonds suggests that "[b]lack women were … subjected to ruthless exploitation of their sexuality" through various political disparities and thus "[t]he perception of a black woman's sexuality was damaged for all time, and out of this exploitation grew the image of a black woman as 'not only emotionally callous but physically invulnerable'" (Wallace 1979: 138). It is not surprising that Muholi's photographs draw such negative reception. The fact that black female sexuality has been represented (even in popular culture such as music videos, film, television programmes) to be synonymous with prostitution, animalistic sexual instinct and various sorts of taboos, has sent the black female body into exile from "acceptable" visual culture. Muholi's raw portrayal of black naked women expressing their sexuality revealed the silence that has clouded discussions of the black female body to the oscillation of recalling the Mammy, Jezebel, Josephine Baker, Sarah Baartman and the Zulu Lulu[32] circulation of commoditised stereotypes. What is perhaps sometimes overlooked is that,

[30] Read: dot Z.A.
[31] *Being* is a series of photographs by Muholi which includes *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg, Johannesburg* (2006) and *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo*, (2007) and a triptych that is also called *Being* (2007) depicting two naked women cuddling in bed (as can be seen in fig. 3.7).
[32] The Mammy and Jezebel are American stereotypes. The Mammy is a well-known caricature of a large, subservient domestic black woman which was used on "ashtrays, souvenirs, postcards, fishing lures, detergent,

in Muholi's work, the women portrayed are subjectively beginning to talk about their own bodies and sexuality in spite of the several misconstrued and degrading stereotypes. Muholi uses the raw images to make a different socio-political assertion to detach the negative associations with blackness, femaleness and sexuality within politically charged spaces.

With regards to Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006), the kraal has been included in exhibitions where it is defined in terms of political histories. The kraal was also included in the group exhibition entitled .*ZA: Giovane Arte dal Sud Africa* (2008).The exhibition was curated by Lorenzo Fusi and curated by Berni Searle and Kendell Geers (prominent South African artists, and the latter resides in Germany) (Halliday 2008: 18). In her comment on Hlobo's installation for the show, *Umthubi* (2006), Halliday reveals the tendency to compare contemporary African art with the Primitivist idea of "African Art". Halliday (2008: 18) states that:

> [the] juxtaposition of long established cultural and architectural traditions – an Italian Baroque ceiling with a Zulu traditional enclosure – brought to mind the way in which African Art, to use a troubling catch-all, is so often either excluded from, or uncomfortably assimilated into, an over-arching Western narrative.

The two architectural structures are compared to each other in the sense of the belittled, "primitive", ritual kraal in the interior of the large Baroque building. The kraal was illuminated, giving it a central glow which was absent when the kraal premiered at the Michael Stevenson gallery in 2006 (see Fig. 1.1, image on the right). The light cannot be ignored because it adds another dimension to the kraal and adjusts the way it is interpreted. "Primitive" objects were often lit in particular ways in what Errington (1998: 2) defined as the "darkened spaces" to dramatise and emphasise the idea "supernatural", "primitive" object.

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artistic prints, toys, candles and kitchenware" <http://www.ferris.edu/JIMCROW/mammies/ > accessed 2008/09/15. The Jezebel stereotype was created to be the opposite of the definition of white women as innocents, "self-respecting" and "modest" where black femininity was defined as "innately promiscuous" and "lascivious by nature". The Jezebel image is different from the Mammy image in that it depicts a "thin-lipped, slim, light-skinned and long straight hair" – what sociologist K. Sue Jewell called a "tragic mulatto" <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/jezebel/> accessed 2008/09/15. American-born Josephine Baker, jazz singer, gained French citizenship for her political involvement and is also known for her "exotic sensual act" in her performances and was referred to as the "Bronze Venus". <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/bakerjosephine/p/josephine_baker.htm> accessed 2008/09/15. South African Sarah Baartman was sent to Europe as an object of curiosity for the shape of her buttocks and genitalia and was referred to as the "Hottentot Venus" <http://www.southafrica.info/about/history/saartjie.htm> accessed 2008/09/15. The 1950s "Zulu Lulu" swizzle sticks were considered a Jezebel archetype that mocked African women. The sticks showed silhouettes of a naked black woman ageing and her breast and buttocks mocked for being "droopy at 40" <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/jezebel/> accessed 2008/09/15

Galleries and exhibitions of this nature become both political spaces and spaces of consumption. Hlobo also participated in the exhibition (also discussed by Halliday) entitled *Flow*. This exhibition took place at the Studio Museum in Harlem[33], New York and was a collection of works by twenty young artists from Africa and its diaspora. Halliday (2008: 19) further observes that

> [most] write-ups, however, alongside engaging with the works themselves, were underpinned by a vague unease: the difficulty of visualising - and verbalising – the complexities of contemporary Africa and its art without falling foul of reductive taxonomies or primitivist myths. ... [t]he current buzzword is Afropolitanism, a term encouraged by *Flow*'s curator Christine Y Kim.

Achille Mbembe's (2007: 28, 2004: 376) Afropolitanism, which he confers is "not the same as Pan-Africanism or Negritude", was arguably constructed on ideas of "a commercial civilisation" of the "gold reef", Johannesburg. In his *Aesthetics of Superfluity* (2004), Mbembe draws from Marxist theory that "capitalism is not simply a mode of production and accumulation, it also involves flow and motion" and continues to say that "[t]he material life of cities is made up of people and things, of images and signs" which remain in constant circulation. This further complicates the notion of authenticity or, indeed, of authentic African objects or personhoods. Terms that keep coming up in the discourse of African cultural production, as noted by Halliday (2008: 19) are "transnational identity", "fragmentation (of form)", "commotion of the self in shambles", [personality in an] orchestral mess... or harmony". Other terms that are the warp of the discussion of contemporary African art are "displacement" or "dis-location", "authenticity", "re-invention", "appropriation". In representation, *the* "African" is never "true"; s/he is not the common denominator of his *being.* Codes of being are part of this circulation that is the engine of capitalism.

In a review about the *Flow* exhibition Holland Cotter stated:

> …not only did artists once excluded by color and class gain entry, they were granted certain options as to how they might appear there… they could wrap themselves in

[33] The Studio Museum in Harlem is known to be home to artists who identify as "Post-Black". This term was coined by curator Thelma Golden in describing an exhibition that was entitled *Freestyle* (2001). The label "Post-Black" is reminiscent of Alain LeRoy Locke's *New Negro* written in 1925 during the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance was a period in the 1920s when African American intellectuals (writers, poets, musicians, artists, and so on) explored new ways of thinking about being Negro, attributing positive aspects to the term. The Harlem Renaissance also influenced Sadar Senghor's *Negritude* (Bremer 1990: 47-56)

> the evidence of their origins, or wear that evidence lightly, or not at all, the first option being preferred by the market[34].

This contracted statement evidences the complicated spaces, of narrow cataloguing and price tagging, that artists who were born anywhere on the African continent and those in the diaspora have to negotiate. It also indicates the dilemma that these artists are caught in: the demands of the "market" and the ability to choose to work with any theme without being limited to boundaries based on a particular historically severed geographical location. With reference to Nicholas Hlobo and Moshekwa Langa, Cotter (2008) continues to say that "[t]he evidence of material richness continues where crafts, traditions and modernist abstraction meet: …in Nicholas Hlobo's suturelike stitched pieces based on Zulu needlework…" It is problematic that African artists continue to be subjected to analyses that compare them to the "genius" of Modernism and the "craft" in Zulu needlework and that Hlobo's work is *like* suture, but is "Zulu". There is no such thing as "Zulu needlework". African artists face the problem of being placed on a scale that measures them against European traditions and cultural production, and they are therefore packaged in such a manner that is "preferred by the market".

There are different forces at work when discussing the economical value of artwork in which a myriad of socio-political aspects come in to play. In the previous discussions of Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi's work and traditionalism, points are by and large driven by the uneven foundation laid by colonialism in the understanding of African art. This foundation has led to assumptions that Western collectors of African art are looking for the misconstrued "authenticity" discussed earlier. In an older exhibition, the currency of this "authenticity" of "African Art" can be traced. James Clifford's discussion of the 1984 MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) exhibition entitled *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1988), entails the complexity of value in African Art, not as art itself but as objects for "the progressed" to find route in *returning* to the "ideally pure and primitive being" (which is only seen as cultural products of African and Asian countries) (Clifford1988:189-213). Can this idea be extended to contemporary African artists in their "affinity" with objects used in traditional ethnic rituals as (post) modern contemporary art forms? Can it thus be argued that as professionals trained in western institutions, African artists view "African-ness" as outsiders?

[34]< http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/04/arts/design/04flow.html?_r=1&oref=slogin> accessed 2008/09/11

Contemporary African art has taken great leaps in the global art market but it has distinguished itself from the objects that James Clifford discusses. Contemporary African art and the African objects that Modernists called "authentic" and "tribal" are almost two separate domains.

This aspect of artwork complicates how one interprets African art. Thinking of Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006), for instance, as a *product*, it complicates discussing his critique of "traditional African" structures without feeling the guilt of always casting African traditions as perpetrator of restriction and wounding practices. Furthermore, Zanele Muholi's work also complicates interpretation where one is caught between the problematized naked female body as a body of alterity and recognition of the braveness shown by the women in Muholi's photographs to reclaim power through nudity in defence of the illicit and violent acts directed against (African) homosexuality. These artworks are exhibited in spaces of consumption as products. Simon Njami intimates that an artwork's social being gains social value, stating that "the meaning we allude to is neither philosophical nor aesthetic: it is commercial". The social being that Njami speaks of involves the meanings given to by critics and spectators in social space where "all markets are regulated by the law of supply and demand"[35]. Bestowing market value to artwork can be argued to manipulate its philosophical meanings. Hlobo's and Muholi's provocative visual assertions on "African-ness", gender and sexuality are intensified by cultural exchange politics.

V: African-ness and Gender

In Western discourse, consumption in commodity culture has been gendered. Women have been portrayed as commodity (prostitute) and woman as consumer through the 19th century (Roberts 1998: 817-818). Mary Louise Roberts (1998: 840) argues that in the 1960s advertisers "singled out the African woman as 'the most important by far' target group for marketing" based on the idea that women were "seen as the 'primary civilizers' a century before: they 'believed fervently that women were the key to changing the material composition of the African home, […] as consumers as well as housekeepers". Further, Roberts (1998: 840) highlights Burke's suggestion that "the advertisers who exerted control [were] rivaled only by African patriarchs who also viewed women as a central cultural force, in this case, for the preservation of African traditions". Roberts (1998: 840) argues that "woman-as-consumer acted as a power broker for modernity, the

[35]< http://www.joburgartfair.co.za/press/JAF_Simon_Njami.pdf > accessed 2008/09/21

woman-as- commodity did the same for 'traditional' Africa" – a concept which rendered a "cultural manipulation of the African woman" as "a contest for the soul of Africa". Zanele Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3] depicts gender and African-ness differently. The women play out masculine and feminine roles in their daily lives and their sexual relationships. For example, a female *sangoma*, whose guiding ancestor is male (that is part of her gender in the spiritual realm) may choose to have a sexual relationship with her ancestral wife or choose to have her own sexual male or female partner and, an ancestral wife chosen by the dominating ancestor and with whom the relationship is not sexual (Nkabinde and Morgan 2006: 9-19). Her relationship with a spiritual wife is not understood as *lesbianism* socially, and may or may not necessarily be a sexual relationship or resemble a heterosexual relationship (Nkabinde and Morgan 2006: 9-19).

Considering Oyèrónké Oyewùmi's (1997:12) argument that "biological determinism and social constructionism" need not be mutually exclusive, the dominating male ancestor and the female *sangoma* need not be allocated a third gender if the concerned culture does not view this category as gendered. Oyewùmi (1997:12) observes that "the western cultural system precludes the possibility of more than two genders". The women in *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006), are able to identity with material (femininity and masculinity) and spiritual genders. It is suspect that the idea of "authentic" African traditions declares strict gender roles and differences as is demonstrated by Hlobo in *Umthubi* (2006).

A kraal is fundamentally a male space, according to Hlobo, "which [a] woman [is] not freely allowed to go [to]" unless if she is a daughter of the family, whereas a woman who is married into the family enters only when invited and when she is introduced to the ancestors through a ceremony called *ukutyiswa amasi* ("being fed sour milk") (Perryer 2006: 4). The kraal is the first space where circumcised initiates are re-introduced back into society and it is where they are told how to be men (*ukuyala*). The term *ukuyala* directly translated means "to instruct". Initiates are instructed to conduct themselves as *men* (Perryer 2006: 4). The kraal in Hlobo's work is denied this purpose because the pink ribbon that covers it closes the entrance. The pink ribbon is interpretable as a feminine object and the wooden stakes as both masculine and feminine in that they are phallic in shape and they have knots that Hlobo's says "resemble wounds or genitalia ...

[they] could be an anus, or a vagina" (Perryer 2006:4). In Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1], the dichotomies (masculine/feminine, "African"/"un-African", seriousness/play) are fused into one entity. By doing this, gatekeepers are removed from a position of power (in the authority to instruct) and a serious space becomes a playful one. Matters of filtered information become public knowledge in the realms of contemporary art which is interpreted as disrespect; on the one hand to "authoritative traditionalists or imperialist gatekeepers" and, on the other, practiced and significant rituals in certain cultures.

In his discussion of black masculinity, Kopano Ratele (1998: 61) takes note of Steve Biko's assertion that "the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood". Ratele (1998: 61) points out that the loss Biko speaks of "begs an essential black manhood". Ratele deconstructs this notion by making an example of one of the many different categories of masculinity – the *Cosmoman* (a magazine) definition. The definition stipulates in its sub-headings that black masculinity is embodied by a man who is "remarkable", "articulate", "intelligent", and a "consummate professional" who "enjoys a personal sponsorship from Mossimo clothing" (Ratele 1998: 62). Indeed, the masculinity defined in *Cosmoman* is of a particular man in a particular context. Ratele (1998: 63) instigates that previous establishments "appropriated the body for differing kinds of truths, each purchasing discourses that imagined the white and the black, the male and the female as an important contested point in the political struggle for South Africa". The different constructions of black masculinity exclude homosexuality, arguably, because it does not fulfil the gendered associations of power.

To borrow Signithia Fordham's (1993: 327) expression of gender "passing" which implies "impersonation, acting as if one is someone or something one is not", the binary of gender seems incongruous. Fordham discusses women who act "masculine" or "genderless" in spheres that are male-dominated in order to "be taken seriously". The women in Muholi's photographs, for instance in *Faces and Phases* (2007), exude this masculine seriousness. Gender appearances can then be read as a strategy; because for these individuals, it is used to renounce feminine roles, announce lesbianism and at the same time hide biological female-ness and to hide lesbianism. To elucidate the suggestion that masculinity is also used to hide lesbianism, I consider the examples in Muholi's photographic essay entitled *Being* (2007). The same-sex couples that are portrayed

look heterosexual where one individual appears masculine and the other appears feminine. The incongruity of the gender binary is that where masculinity can be read as a "protective layer", femininity is read as incompetent or lacking.

There are different ways in which gender is generally understood in South Africa as it is illustrated in Hlobo's and Muholi's work. However, dominant heteropatriarchal structures still obscure femininity as a weakness. In most instances, masculinity is what femininity is not and femininity is perceived to be devoid of masculine traits. Hlobo and Muholi address the gender constructions that are enforced through "traditionalism" as strong principles of an "African" man or woman. Not only do Hlobo and Muholi use a combination of materials and visual codes associated with stereotypes of gender, but they also present the possibility being ungendered.

VI: "Real Gay": A Predicament of Sexuality

> The aim of the workshop is to teach homosexual men and lesbians in Ermelo and surrounding towns, such as Bethal, Piet Retief and Standerton, about gay life because, according to Tsepo, it "seems as if they are very confused", and in Bhuti's view "the gays of Ermelo don't know how to be real gays". (Reid 2007: 138)

Such a statement is intriguing in that it seems to assume that even though it has been argued that an individual can be born homosexual, s/he must still fit a social definition. Muholi documents same-sex couples that *look* heterosexual. This further complicates how one would reach the understanding that there is such a destination as "real" or "authentic" gayness. The debate whether homosexuality is in-born or socially formed dates back to early 19th century western taxonomy and medical studies that needed to label homosexuality as a psychological problem (Falk 1998: 15). There were attempts, by writers like Falk, to distinguish between "true" and "pseudo" homosexuality. An argument was that "pseudo" or "situational" homosexuality is "the behaviour of those who lacked heterosexual outlets, or to obtain money, or out of libertinism, or to debauch minors" and "true" homosexuals were those who couldn't help their desires for which the cures were punishment and "[taking] a look at native people [to] soon change [the homosexual's] mind" (Falk 1998: 15). However, it can be argued these conclusions are based on Western concepts of morality, gender and religious beliefs. Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork offers insight into notions of sex and gender, and how the ambiguities presented in their work transgress and simultaneously conform to processes of stereotyping and labelling. Labelling can

be problematic in that it masks authentic response to understanding individual identity because it is embellished with presumptions about each category it creates.

Comparing Hlobo's works *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1], *Unojubalala* (2006) [fig. 1.2] and *Chitha* (2006) [fig. 1.9], signifiers of masculinity and femininity are emphasised to such an extent that the original meanings are deferred. To borrow a Foucaudian use of difference, the inner rubber tube and wooden stakes as compared to pink ribbon creates a difference, but used together the meanings are suspended between the original meaning and the present altered meaning. As I have discussed earlier, the kraal in *Umthubi* (2006) is no longer a strictly male structure but oscillates back and forth from its "original" meaning as a kraal to being an art object. *Unojubalala* (2006) [fig. 1.2], which translates to "tadpole", is a depiction of a sperm that is made of inner rubber tube and pink ribbon. A sperm is biologically determined as male. Yet, in this work it is completed and complimented by fine stitches of pink ribbon, where the act of stitching and the material used are socially constructed as feminine, but are not biologically determined female aspects. To connote Hlobo's construction (since it is neither purely male nor purely female), it is a depiction of a feminine male (not a man-woman or woman-man as I will discuss in reference to Muholi's work). The socially constructed difference in hierarchy or physique between femininity and masculinity is removed to form one object.

In contrast, Hlobo states in reference to *Chita* (2006) [Fig. 9] that "the shoulders belong to both of them (the masculine and feminine figures in the single structure) – they're bound together like Siamese twins or someone with multiple personality disorder" (Perryer 2006: 22). He further states that the woman is flinging the man and "taking over the man's role" (Perryer 2006: 22). The two genders are not in this case merging, but begin to polarise. This is different when studying the masculine females in Muholi's photographs. However, a similarity is that they are also socially understood to have a "personality disorder". Their biological female sex and social masculinity are placed in in-between categories such as *isitabane* (male-female or hermaphrodite) or *unongayindoda* (he who looks like a woman – also one of Hlobo's work titles) in society. *Isitabane* is understood as someone who has both male and female organs. In either category, these individuals are seen as neither "authentically male" nor "authentically female" since they trouble the binary logic in gender discourse.

Considering Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3], *Stanley I* (2007) [fig. 1.10], *Dada* (2003) [fig. 1.11], *I.D. Crisis* (2003) [fig. 1.12] and *Tommy Boys* (2004) [fig. 1.13], there are different levels where gender is negotiated. Tommy boys are usually condemned by society to have a "personality disorder", and are sent by parents to *sangomas* so as "to rid their bodies of evil spirits" or to church. The transgression of boundaries between male and female render them "other" – seemingly untrue to biologico-social roles. Whereas, in Hlobo's *Unojubalala*, the *sangomas* in Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) are neither this nor that, and they are not necessarily thrown into a gender category by the societies concerned. Interestingly, they open forum for different understandings of gender and homosexuality. *Sangoma* same-sex relationships are not socially understood as "gayness" or "lesbianism" and are not labelled as hermaphroditic. However, modern-day *sangomas* in areas such as townships proclaim their sexuality by categorising as lesbians. A proclamation of sexuality by *sangomas* or suggesting having a sexual relationship is taboo in an ancestral marriage (Nkabinde 2006: 14). A diviner may not be necessarily gendered; therefore s/he may not necessarily represent gender ambiguity or fall into in-between or third gender social categories.

In Muholi's *Stanley I* (2006) [fig. 1.10], the represented character, whose gender is only suggested by the name, is physically ambiguous. Stanley's chest has breasts that protrude slightly but not enough to fully say they are female. His face looks feminine yet his chin looks recently shaven. Similarly, in *Bra* (2004) [fig. 1.14] the woman's large breasts are contrasted by chest hair. The ambiguity, though, is created by social constructs of physical masculine traits. In this case, socially, *she* is understood to have "hormonal" problems but she does not represent that ambiguity unless if she dresses in a masculine way. It could be said of both individuals that their gender ambiguity lies in biologically determined traits. However, in another example, masculine traits are appropriated and manipulated in Muholi's representations. In *Dada*[36] (2003) [fig. 1.11],

[36] *Dada* (2003) is reminiscent of the 1974 Linda Benglis advert in *Artforum*, in which she posed with an enormous pink dildo and symbolised, for her, male power (Buszek 2006: 289). This image signalled the kind of transgressive stance that was asserted by feminists in the 1970s.

the white male penis attached on the black female body signifies a flexible movement between the categories. Significantly, the white penis appears as a fetishisation of white masculinity.

The subjects in Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork present ambiguities. However, in reference to Muholi's photographs, the individuals that resemble heterosexual couples could be said to be conforming to certain social codes. While Hattingh (2005: 199) suggests that patriarchy too falls victim to inauthenticity since it neurotically positions itself as singularly "good" or "superior". The defence mechanism is "hiding". Labelling is a means to expel difference from the fraternity into "otherness" [sissies, pansies, moffies] (Hattingh 2005: 200). Otherness is created through labelling. Satre's basic existentialist tenet that "existence precedes essence" suggests that *being* authentically depends on the individual's making (his/her choices and subjectivity) (Hattingh 2005: 200). In the face of patriarchy creating distortive meanings in its approach to the "other", the captive homosexual may give up hope of creating a meaningful self-definition and passively sink into apathy. In as far as such a (non-) response is inauthentic, it involves an alienation from self. The concept of being "true" to oneself is complicated Hlobo's and Muholi's work. They destabilise the concept of being a "real" man or woman and, even more so, a "real" gay. Hattingh (2005: 197) defines the predicament of authentic, particularly with regards to homosexuality.

> Existentialism distinguishes between existential anxiety, a "normal" feature of the human condition, and neurotic anxiety, also known as dread. Awareness of the ontological givens evokes existential anxiety, which has to be faced and accepted with courage (also known as authentic being). However, if existential anxiety is overwhelming, we attempt to defend against it through mechanisms that distort reality. Because the givens are immutable, such inauthentic responses (or non-being) are doomed to failure and the anxiety returns in the form of dread.

Hattingh's statement alludes to individuals who are "hiding in the closet" in attempt to conform to social givens. He also concludes that those who maintain heteropatriarchal standards are faced with the anxiety of being inauthentic by having to conform. Nonetheless, "coming out of the closet" also entails conforming to standards of appearance. Being gay also requires an acknowledgement of gay social groups, events, languages and modes of dress. Therefore, authenticity seems temporary and alludes to an assumption of illusory truth.

VII: Religion and Authenticity

Religion tends to present itself as the truth and maintains immutable traditions and customs that require undisputed reverence. Religion plays a significant role in the shaping of African (sexual) identities. The influences of beliefs in the ancestral power of diviners or *sangomas*, rituals, as well as Christianity are instrumental in Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork. Both artists show in different ways the manner in which religions relate to sexuality. In Hlobo's work religions are compared and evaluated, however there is the freedom of the artist to move from one to the other without devoted affiliation to none. In Muholi's work, however, different religions are documented as part of black lesbian identity; even though some of those religions reject the notion of homosexuality. Interestingly, in some instances beliefs that were seen as opposite ideals (such as beliefs from African customs and rituals versus those from Christianity) become one African religion.

In terms of Hlobo's work this is apparent in that the artist constantly refers to ancestors and associated customs while at other times, he also refers to Native American mythical objects such as dream catchers. In the work *Dream Catcher* (2006) [fig. 1.15], Hlobo states that "if you're a gay boy or even a woman, this is something that catches your dreams" (Perryer 2006: 7). This extension of Native American beliefs into sexuality is significant because while this belief is said by Hlobo to offer "safety" (also in its resemblance to a rubber safety ring found on a boat and to a condom) and sexual fantasy dreams (in its resemblance to a dildo); the Xhosa beliefs seem to make life "unsafe". With regards to *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1], Hlobo states that "[t]he wood was scarred by this process [of chopping and throwing each piece down hill], which could be related to how hard the route is that men have to take when they go through the process of initiation" (Perryer 2006: 7). It seems like a comparison of African belief systems with others where the African ones are perceived to be injurious or limiting.

Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) should also be read in the context of the opening of the exhibition *Izele* (2006) at the Michael Stevenson gallery in Cape Town. I will discuss the performance that is entitled *Umkhwetha* (2006) [fig. 2.1] at a later stage, it must be noted that this performance provides a different context of understanding *Umthubi* (2006). While Hlobo walks around all the sculptures that premiered at this opening, he squats particularly next to *Umthubi* (2006) for a

longer time and delivers what seems to be a prayer in Xhosa, effectively constructing the gallery space as a sacred space. By doing this, he renders an ambiguous element of respect to the tradition of Xhosa ritual circumcision. Arguably, Hlobo acts as sanctifier *and* as worshipper, yet as the initiate the kraal rebuffs him or denies him access. Hlobo occupies the ambiguous space of worshiper and worshipped in one of his performances that is entitled *Thoba, Utsale Umnxeba* (2008) [fig. 1.16] which translates to "be calm, be humble and contemplate". Hlobo wears a head-dress that has colourful pleated strings which attach cup-like objects to the wall. He also wears black attire with a white frilled shirt that makes him look priestly and folds his legs in front of him as if in deep spiritual contemplation. The cups almost act as conduits of knowledge transferring from the artist to the gallery wall and vice versa, questioning the power and god-like status that oscillates from the work, to the artist, to curator/s, to gallery owner/s, critics and the general public. While the title suggests the artist as the humble meditator and diplomat, it also presents him as a deity who transfers knowledge to the wall in the form of art. This ambiguity questions the notion of power as a stable attribute that is guaranteed to one person or a specific group of people. When Hlobo analyses circumcision, he highlights the movement of power. The initiates are considered powerless, but the circumciser is purposeless, therefore powerless, if there are no initiates.

Nevertheless, circumcision is seen as a vital aspect to a Xhosa male's life. Peter Mtuze, known for his literature on Xhosa male circumcision, uses "a religious analogy to demonstrate the importance of initiation for the amaXhosa in saying that '[it] is the gateway to manhood in the same way that baptism is the gateway to Christianity'" (Vincent 2007: 4). Incidentally, in the Bible God says to Abraham

> [t]his is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised, and ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you... and the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant (Genesis 17: 9-14)

Although, the laws of the Old Testament phase to those in the New Testament, the similarities of being "cut-off" from society among the Xhosa and among the children of Abraham are striking. While, it can be argued that the Xhosa endured long contact with colonial missionaries, I will not further analyse whether circumcision is authentically Xhosa or deeply influenced by

missionaries. I want to question whether the ribbon trampoline in Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) is an allusion to an ascension and descent of moral similarity and difference between Western and African custom, a combination of religious beliefs or a comment on the similarities whereas colonial Christianity opposed African "traditionalism" as what has been referred to as savagery and ancestor-worship?

About two thirds of the South African population is Christian[37]. In some denominations the religious beliefs are a mixture of African beliefs and Christianity. In this form, beliefs in the power of ancestors and Christianity are not in opposition as some have perceived them to be. For example, some *sangomas* practice traditional healing and preach in local churches simultaneously (Weinberg 2006: 22-1). The KwaZulu Natal (KZN) based African Independent church is another example, where Isaiah Shembe[38] descendants are perceived as godly figures "who practice a hybrid of Christian teaching in an African idiom" (Weinberg 2006: 26). Shembe's Church of the Nazarites draws from the Bible, Shembe's insights and "revelations to create a new religion that [meets] the needs of traditional people in the modern world" (Hexham, Rost and Morehead 2004: 109). The notion of spirituality in Hlobo's and Muholi's work is represented as part of a hybrid identity where principles of belief are drawn from different sources. Hlobo's and Muholi's exploration of different spiritual beliefs draw attention to the discordant principles of the assumed essential "traditional" African belief.

Arnfred (2004: 14) argues that "gender identities that were promulgated by the missionaries in the first half of the 20th century are presented in postcolonial discourse as 'traditional'". Arnfred's argument coincides with a notion I mentioned earlier that KwaZulu Natal is perceived as a stronghold of "traditionalism". Muholi's photograph of the *sangomas* is as informative about religion and sexuality as *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo* (2007) [fig. 1.4]. The latter work depicts two women in a same-sex relationship who resemble a heterosexual relationship in a photograph that was taken after a church service. What is interesting in this photograph is that by being in a same-sex relationship, they have "transgressed" social and Christian assumptions but they return

[37] <http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/population.htm> accessed 2008/06/22

[38] Isaiah Shembe was hailed as the "black prophet who would save his nation" that Meseni (the Qwabe chieftain) had prophesied. Meseni was the prophet that King Cetshwayo's son, Diniswayo, relied upon (Etherington 1979: 125). Shembe's *AmaNazaretha* (church of the Nazarites) was founded in 1912 with approximately 750 000 followers who were mostly Zulu (Hexham, Rost and Morehead 2004: 109).

to the very standards they transgress by *looking like* a heterosexual family with child. Religion in this case plays a part in shaping concepts of gender, marriage and family. Symbolically, the couple in the photograph seems heterosexual, but is actually homosexual. This is also interpretable as compliance to structures that define masculinity and femininity; even in terms of the gestures employed by the individuals in Muholi's photograph. Although there is not much told about the lives of each character, it can be argued that their identity as Christians is one that diverts from the idea of "African traditionalism".

Arnfred (2004: 15) argues that "virtually all African 'traditions' and 'customs' have been conceptualised by men and women (mostly men) with Western/Christian educational backgrounds, [and] have made some aspects less visible than others". Furthermore, he names three Christian assumptions regarding sexuality, i.e. assumption of heterosexuality that made same-sexuality invisible, assumption of male control of women and perceiving "female chastity as emblem of civilisation", seeing sexuality as an issue of morality, and linking sexuality and procreation (Arnfred 2004: 15). Arguably, these tenets have become associated with "traditional African" principles. Again, there is a similarity (churches often excommunicate gay Christians, just as stern "African traditionalists" generally detest gayness as un-African). In Muholi's *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo* (2007) [fig. 1.4], the formation of gay churches highlights a predicament where at one time "Christian" principles are transgressed and at another they are complied with.

It may be challenging to separate Christianity and some South African beliefs because in some instances they are very similar. As an example of a convergence of concepts

> [a] Christian employee of one potential donor replied to Muholi's application for funding saying: 'I will not be associated with anything done against my *Christian, natural and African beliefs* and non-heterosexual[39] promiscuous promotion of any sort is against God, Africa and nature. So count me out!" She counted herself out by resigning when Muholi used the Constitution's equality clause to challenge her stance" [own emphasis] (Smith 2004: 33).

African-ness becomes synonymous with "Christian", "God" and "natural", whereas these beliefs can be argued to have represented significantly different identities. Etherington (1979: 109)

[39] The use of the term "non-heterosexual" is problematic in that it is negative. In discourses of racial discrimination, the term "non-white" has been criticised as a negative descriptor that "equates white as the norm or standard" and defines anything else in terms of what it is not (Kivel 2002: 84).

motions that "missionaries and their sponsors worried that black secession and their established denominations established heresy at best and a return to paganism at worst". In Muholi's case, it seems that Christianity and African traditionalism are being used to condemn homosexuality and the representation of undressed (black) female bodies.

Muholi stated in an interview with Gabi Ngcobo in reference to her exhibition entitled *What Don't You See When You Look At Me*, 2004 at the University of Western Cape that "people quoted some scriptures from the Bible to me" (Ngcobo 2006: 49). This statement not only highlights the enforcement and normalisation of heterosexuality but also the manner in which Christianity marks sexuality as sinful or morally debased. Furthermore, the issue that seems to be ingrained in that statement is that when black female bodies are in the nude or naked they are impure and are victims who suffer a sinful male gaze. This is particular to black females because Muholi further states that people reprimanded her and said that "[she] mustn't portray black women like that and why [doesn't she] capture white people" (Ngcobo 2006: 49). In discussing the white female body, a distinction is made between nude and naked; the latter implies a state of undress and victimisation rather than an appreciation of form. Considering the South African Immorality Act[40] during *Apartheid*, the black body was perceived as morally debased. This perception made it seem judicious to restrict sexual encounters between races. The judgement of immorality was to such a point that committed acts resulted in suicide (this is in reference to the miscegenation cases that occurred in Excelsior, Free State) (Keegan 2001: 466).

It is questionable that it seems "African" that female bodies should remain covered. It can also be linked to the over-sexualisation of black bodies by ethnographers, and the work of missionaries. Some of the tenets do not apply in a similar manner to white bodies. The nude body in Western Classical history has become a sign of purity and perfect proportion. The bare-breasted maidens that attend the Umhlanga Reed Dance (which involves the debated virginity testing – a custom which has also been seen as harmful as circumcision) annually in KZN and Swaziland pride themselves in the purity that this custom assures them. Yet, when televised they

[40] The Immorality Act [Act 23 of 1957], declared a law against prostitution, owning or renting brothels, child defilement and under-age sexual offences, abduction, sexual offences with "female idiots or imbeciles"; and the most notorious Section (16)1, "sexual offenses between white persons and coloured persons [any person who is not white]". Referenced from Digital Imaging South Africa (DISA) on <http://ts-den.aluka.org/> accessed 2009/10/11

are portrayed as something "primitive" as compared to the "modern" women and are seen as victims of a heteropatriarchal structure. With regards to Muholi's *Virgins* (2005) [fig.1.8], Ngcobo observes that "by foregrounding this 'cultural practice' in her work, Muholi demonstrates how the black female body continues to be pressed and made to yield to easy cataloguing in a capitalist hetero-patriarchal society". Compared to the *Virgins* (2005) project, Muholi's *Only Half the Picture* (2006) and *Being* (2007) consists of representations where the nude black female body is given power to confront but it shows victimhood. Virginity testing demonstrates gender inequality as circumcision does and it has the purpose of defining "traditional" gender roles. Zulu virgins (*Iintombi nto*) are held in high regard in "traditional" Zulu communities and are seen as a sign of wholesomeness in the societies that practice that tradition. Having earlier discussed that male initiation gives the candidates pride and social status; the Umhlanga Reed Dance virgins also convey social pride.

Christianity makes other belief systems seem to be "savage practices" such as circumcision and virginity testing as explored by Hlobo and Muholi respectively. However, as it is pointed out by Vincent (2007: 12), "it is precisely the flexibility of African belief systems that accounts for their survival in the face of history of invasion and political domination", some African customs have embraced western values. Conversely, Makang (1997: 325) further, states that "the modern Bantu, who has been corrupted by his exposure to European materialism, is not an authentic Bantu any longer, but has become a Europeanised Bantu, who has lost the sense of the old, ageless wisdom of the ancestors, and of everything that was stable in Bantu tradition". The models described by Makang could be equated to Muholi's *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo* (2007) [fig. 1.4] who are dressed in suit-and-tie attire. Hlobo's performance *Umkhwetha* (2006) is a representation of a Xhosa ritual in a context that has been constructed as a Western context because it has for a long time endorsed Western art. However, as an artist he may not be considered as "Europeanised Bantu" but a cultural critic.

Christianity and the traditional healing practice have been used to "provide the cure" for homosexuality. However, *sangomas* who preach in churches and the growth of gay churches defeat the "disease – cure" concept. The place of (homo) sexuality in African religions is argued by Dlamini (2006: 128) to have spiritual power "associated with each biological sex". He states

this to discuss *sangomas* and spirit diviner same-sex relationships. Yet Murray (1998: 270-1) argues that in some societies, same-sex relationships are normal and even banal except where Christianity and Islam have been adopted. Homosexuality seems to fit uncomfortably within religious ideologies.

Religion entails regulations that are maintained through differing modes of punishment. John Mbiti's (1991: 34) observation is that

> without going into details we should here mention what constitutes sexual offences in African societies... when adultery is discovered it is severely dealt with: in some societies a guilty person (particularly a man) would be whipped, stoned to death, made to pay compensation or have his head or other part of his body mutilated. This severe manner of punishing adultery and other sexual offences has been modified or relaxed in modern times, but not altogether abandoned. Fornication, incest, rape, seduction, *homosexual relations*, sleeping with a forbidden "relative" or domestic animals, intimacy between relatives,... all constitute sexual offences in a given community. Society deals variously with these offences and African peoples are very sensitive to any departure from the accepted norm concerning all aspects of sex

Hlobo's and Muholi's work challenges these restrictions and by doing so, it reveals the transformations of popular regard to religious regulation and propensity to question these institutions. Homosexuality is still allotted punishment through social exclusion, beating, rape and murder. There have been recent cases of lesbian murders in townships such as the case of two openly lesbian activists, Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masooa, who were found dead in a field in Meadowlands Soweto in 2007[41]. In some cases the "cure" is an outlandish one. Murray (1998: 246) records a statement made by a gay man who states: "Robert told him that if his parents found out about his homosexuality, they will think I am bewitched and will take me to a witch doctor". Witch doctors are not similar to *sangomas*[42], but are also seen to be able to provide a "cure" for homosexuality. These social ideas make Muholi's *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) intriguing because homophobic statements based on the subjects "un-African-ness" can be discredited.

Vasu Reddy (1998: 66) suggests that the "homophobia displayed by People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) and the Christian right" illustrates that homosexuality faces attack from

[41] <http://www.sabcnews.com/south_africa/crime1justice/0,2172,152451,00.html> accessed 2008/10/11
[42] In comparison to witches, *sangomas* are traditional healers who consult ancestors and not evil spirits (Nattrass 2006: 1)

many factions. These examples show the suspect manner in which homosexuality is claimed by none and is located nowhere in the histories of social spaces. Theology suggests authority: in power and authorship. Hlobo re-inscribes the Xhosa kraal in *Umthubi* (2006) and by doing so claims authorship. Also, by questioning conventions and regulations, Hlobo challenges the power associated with theology. Hlobo and Muholi represent the complex transformation of belief systems in South Africa. Moreover, their artwork reveals social change.

Conclusion

African-ness appears as a condition remedied through continuous re-defining analyses (which are written and interpreted in western languages). It is not a hidden fact that identity is the sum of different experiences, yet essentialist notions of identity persist. Nicholas Hlobo's *Umthubi* (2006) and Zanele Muholi *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) reveal some of the contradictions and assumptions that are entailed in the concept of African-ness and its "opposition" to the West. Although these works can be seen to contribute to negative labelling of African iconologies, they also offer critical comments about social inequities and political changes. The authenticity of one's identity (be it ethnic, cultural, religious, national or transnational) is based on individual perceptions. It remains that past histories influence how one may interpret South African artworks, particularly Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork, without the nagging comparison of the aesthetics of Africa and the West.

To borrow from James Ferguson's (2006: 16) discussion on the analogy of "shadow states" and Carolyn Nordstrom's "ethnography of the shadows", the concept of a "shadow" is not merely darkness but implies "a kind of doubling". Ferguson (2006: 16) observes that "the first version is the 'official', and implicitly Western, model, while its uncanny dark double is the 'African' version thereof". Complications arise when discussing authenticity, since associations of Africa adhere to the concept that cast it as the ugly twin, the base from which it is always read in comparison to. Ferguson (2006: 17) referred to Africa's position in this relationship as "the attached twin". The connotation of this idea is that Africa cannot be productive since it is assumed to mimic the West. In their artwork, Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi present a different hypothesis that material cultures are objects of circulation that belong to none of these constructions. Moreover, they highlight the confusion of the *different* singular constructions of

"Africa's" *and* the singular notions of West. It must be kept in mind that for different African countries, the coloniser was not one singular country and that not *all* African countries were formally colonised and not *all* European countries were colonisers. America is grouped with the "West" and is hardly thought of in terms of its indigenous people. The idea of Africa and the West as opposites obscures certain realities. The implications and assumptions of Africa's paralysis can be argued to haunt cultural production through the puppet shadows manoeuvred about history.

The discussion of Africa and of sexuality is in most instances weighed down by the luggage of its past. Hlobo's references to his experiences are infected with all sorts of negative discourse about Africa, traditions and sexuality. Muholi's photographs are read beneath the mirage of stereotypes created through political inequality. Mbembe (2001: 241-242) stated that, discussing Africa as a category involves the "oscillation between the real and the imaginary, the imaginary realised and the real imagined" which takes place "in writing [and] in real life". Africa experiences many metaphorical births and deaths that project its pasts as ghosts that are tagged with "authenticity".

Images

Fig. 1.1: Nicholas Hlobo, *Umthubi*, (2006), Exotic and indigenous wood, steel, wire, ribbon, rubber inner tube, 200 x 400 x 730cm (variable); (right) *Umthubi* (2006) at *.ZA: Giovane Arte dal Sud Africa* exhibition

Fig. 1.2: Nicholas Hlobo, *Unojubala***,** Rubber inner tube, ribbon on Fabriano paper, 80 x 100cm

Fig. 1.3: Zanele Muholi (from *Being*), *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006), Lambda Print, 76.5 x 76.5cm

Fig. 1.4: Zanele Muholi (from *Being*), *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo, Outside the Hope Unity Metropolitan Community Church, A Gay Church, During Good Friday, Mayfair, Johannesburg* (2007), Lambda Print,76.5 x 76.5cm

Fig. 1.5:
Thembinkosi Goniwe
Communication XYZ (1999)
Video Stills on Digital Inkjet print
78.7 x119.4 cm

Fig. 1.6
Thembinkosi Goniwe
Face Value: Bona and Drum (1999)
Computer manipulated inkjet poster print
150 x 120 cm

Fig. 1.7
Churchill Madikida (2002)
Liminal States, Struggles of the Heart and Blood on my Hands
mixed media installation, dimensions variable and DVD projections, dimensions variable

Fig. 1.8
Zanele Muholi
Virgins (2005)
Silver gelatin print
275 x 275mm

Fig. 1.9: Nicholas Hlobo, *Chitha* (2006), Wooden dumb valet, jacket, rubber inner tube, silicon, fabric, ribbon, 116 x 140 x 114cm (variable)

Fig. 1.10: Zanele Muholi, *Stanley I and II* (2006), LightJet print on Fuji Crystal Archive paper 76.5 x 76.5cm

Fig. 1.11
Zanele Muholi
Dada (2003)
Silver gelatin print
485 x 300mm

Fig. 1.12
Zanele Muholi
I.D. Crisis (2003)
Silver gelatin print
325 x 485mm

Fig. 1.13
Zanele Muholi
Tommy Boys (2004)
Lambda Print
700 x 575mm

Fig. 1.14
Zanele Muholi
Bra (2003)
Silver gelatin print
275 x 275mm

Fig. 1.15: Nicholas Hlobo, *Dream Catcher* (2006), Rubber inner tube, ribbon, 155 x 55 x 25cm (variable)

Fig. 1.16: Nicholas Hlobo, *Thoba Utsale Umnxeba* (2008), Performance

Chapter 2

Rites and "Dragging Queens"[43] : Spectacular (Non-) Performance

Homosexual identities in South Africa are scarcely appropriately represented and when they are, they are often fraught with misconceptions, particularly in the public sphere and popular media. Having said this, the platforms that gay and lesbian communities form in order to assert public presence cannot be overlooked since they affirm how South African gay identities represent *themselves*. In the previous chapter, I discussed the subject of being "a real gay" that involves certain forms of representation. Drag culture is mostly associated with gay life and is considered a spectacle. In this chapter, I discuss different types of spectacle in Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi's work in light of seeing the performing self as the expression of a "real" non-performing self and I discuss the ambiguity that can be attributed to this designation. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Zanele Muholi is not a performance artist, but her work alludes to certain aspects of performance that give valuable contribution to this study. Muholi's *Out in Africa* documentary entitled *Enraged by A Picture*, shows the social spaces that respond to homosexuality negatively. I discuss the types of performance apparent in Hlobo's performance art and Muholi's photographs and documentary DVD. The particular artworks I will focus on are Hlobo's *Umkhwetha* (2006) [fig. 2.1], *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005) [fig. 2.3], *Dubula* (2007) [fig. 2.5] and Muholi's *Miss D'Vine* (2007) [fig. 2.6] and *La Rochelle* (2008) [fig. 2.7].

The word "spectacle" is argued to have transformed as "a form of cultural performance" to gaining "a fresh kind of political potency" (Kershaw 2003: 592). Kershaw (2003: 592) underscores the ambiguities and uncertainty in the meaning of the word "spectacle" and discusses Patrice Pavis's warning that "[a] general theory of spectacle would seem to be premature at present... because the borders between reality and spectacle are not easy to define". While this term has been used in theatrical performance, it is also used in the dramatization of ethnography. Guy Debord (2006: 1) defines societies "dominated by modern conditions of production" as a situation "of an immense accumulation of *spectacle*" through commoditization. For Debord (2006: 8) "it is the very heart of society's real unreality", and arguably the platform

[43] Use of "dragging queens" instead of "drag queens" is adapted by Graeme Reid (2006: 143) from workshops conducted in Ermelo that were intended to define "how to become a real gay".

upon which everything performs "the social idea of itself". Another understanding of spectacle can be traced through analysing the phenomena of "freak shows" which were a profitable entertainment scheme. Mark West (1990: 605) explains that freak shows "enjoyed widespread popularity" in America before the 1940s, for example the *Phineas T. Barnum Freak Show*[44]. The occurrence of such a show may contribute to understanding some of the politics of looking and seeing. Homosexuality has been treated as a natural oddity. John Thorp (1992: 55) accounts by saying that "the planophysical theories are those which cast homosexuality as an error of nature, a freak – produced, no doubt, by nature, but not in accordance with her grand plan". Thorp (1992: 56) argues that homosexuality is a social construction based on Foucaudian ideas. Foucalt (1980: 43) suggests that "homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy into a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul". The notion that sexuality is a social construction presents complexities in understanding the identities that are socially projected in South Africa as homosexual identities. Moreover, it complicates understanding the identities of the *sangomas* in Muholi's reportage or the "drag queen" models she portrays. Sexual identity, if understood in the Foucaudian sense, is socially performed just as gender is understood to be a construct of the social domain. However, when looking at some of the visual representations in Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork, the nature-culture polarisation fails to comprehend sexuality and gender fully. Furthermore, it highlights differing dimensions of spectacle.

I: The Ambiguous Spectacle

i. A Rite to Publicity

The acknowledged phrase "coming out of the closet" insinuates a sexual identity that had been concealed or invisible. The usage of this phrase also linguistically connotes homosexuality or bisexuality and suggests that a proclamation of one's sexuality comes in the form of a social revelation that sometimes involves a *change* in outward *appearance*. It is also assumed that a person who has "come out of the closet" has been performing heterosexual social norms in order to avoid being marginalized, therefore "coming out" would be an expression of the *real* self. Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that the event of "coming out" is embedded in the social

[44] Barnum started his career in 1835 through showing black people, albinism (which he called "white negroes") and "creatures found in the wilds of Africa" (Unknown Author, *The Journal of Black in Higher Education*, 1999: 44)

realm and as such instigates general social performativity which contradicts or problematises the notion of an *authentic* self. Hlobo and Muholi represent intricacies with regard to the public staging of "African" (homo) sexuality in their references to differing configurations of ritual.

The affirmation of social existence involves public appearance and interaction. In South Africa the gay and lesbian community has, since the introduction of the new constitution, liberally asserted different kinds of public identities, some of which are explored by Hlobo and Muholi. While Hlobo's performance art draws on and destabilizes meanings associated with "African-ness" (via Xhosa-ness), "masculinity", "femininity" and "sexuality"; Muholi exposes the complication of "authenticity" and the performed self. In the earlier mentioned performance *Umkhwetha* (2006), which when translated means "initiate", Hlobo theatricalizes parts of the Xhosa circumcision ritual in the seclusion phase that can be argued to be non-theatrical. I use the term "non-theatrical" in order to make a distinction between the meanings associated with the actual circumcision and the "staged-ness" of floating signifiers of a performance in a gallery. Allan Kaprow (2003: 173) defines the term "nontheatrical" as counterpart to theatrical, and the two forms of performance correspond to the two meanings of performance. One meaning has to do with artistry and the other refers to service or to "carrying out a job" (Kaprow 2003: 173). Kaprow (2003: 173) asserts that "nontheatrical performance does not begin with an envelope containing an act (the fantasy) and an audience (those affected by the audience)". Hlobo's performance can be said to have been configured towards the inclusion of an audience, so that it almost depends on the audience whereas the circumcision ritual consist of phases when an audience is prohibited.

In Hlobo's performance, which was initially performed at the Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, the artist walks into the gallery as if he is playing the role of a spiritual diviner. He is wearing a white net made out of silicon that covers his entire upper body over a white long skirt and white socks. The silicon net that covers his head has a phallic, orange protrusion on top. He walks around the installations in the gallery prying over his exhibited sculptures and interacts with each one as if he is spi*ritually* inducting or initiating them. He mumbles an inaudible song, creating an aura of transcendence as he slowly sways from side to side. During this performance

Hlobo walks into an installation entitled *Unongayindoda* (2006)[45] [fig. 2.9] (that includes a sculpture of a large dress, *Imtyibilizi Xa Yomile*[46] (2006)) and moves back and forth through the bottom of the dress. Its transparent orange organza begins to be interpretable as theatre curtains through which the artist performs. This organza also accentuates the fact that the performance has private and public aspects since the fabric partly obscures him. Hlobo also compares this material to sexual intercourse in stating that it "is like sex without a lubricant amongst men, 'dry sex'" (Hlobo 2006: 40). The installation also consists of sculptures called *In a While* (2006) and boots from the 2005 performance entitled *Igqirha Lendlela*[47]. Hlobo walks among the viewers and squats next to the installation entitled *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1]. While he squats he sings what seems to be a prayer and then exits the gallery. Hlobo's performance as an initiate (*Umkhwetha*) [fig. 2.1] and the process of Xhosa initiation are interesting in this discussion because, although they use similar codes of ritual performance (as it has been theorized in anthropological texts), they are not parallel.

With regards to Arnold van Gennep's (1960: 44) theories of ritual performance, there are generally three phases or stages in a ritual, namely separation ("by means of taking the individual into seclusion, or intoxication"), transition ("these include bodily mutilations such as circumcision, body painting, dietary changes, and linguistic change") and re-integration ("the novices return to their previous environment and re-join society, in a 'resurrected' state"). These phases are also known as pre-liminal, liminal and post-liminal stages (van Gennep 1960: 44). Hlobo's performance can be argued to highlight the intricacies of ritual and personal experience. Although van Gennep takes into consideration that ritual performance varies and that there are overlaps in the phases, it can be argued that Hlobo represents a different kind of ritual performance. The phase where van Gennep's theory of ritual surmises seclusion as the in-between space of change, Hlobo's performance as the "initiate" inverts seclusion as social incorporation. The preparation stage is prior to walking into the gallery space that is filled with *spectators* and Hlobo's exit reads conversely to van Gennep's theories. In the first phase, Hlobo is re-introduced into society as initiate and *then* exits into seclusion to later re-appear again as himself or as the artist.

[45] This term means "hermaphrodite" or "the one who *looks like* a man" [own emphasis] (Perryer 2006: 40).
[46] This title translates to "slippery when dry" and was in reference to the organza material (Perryer 2006: 40).
[47] This phrase translates to "the doctor of the road" and will be discussed at a later stage

Moreover, Hlobo highlights different understandings of society. The so-called art society cannot be entirely representative of the general society, and even this is too broad and diverse. van Gennep (1960) was writing about small-scale societies (which he inaccurately referred to as 'semi-civilised') as opposed to complex societies and vocational or organisational societies. It is also arguable that Hlobo's performance draws attention to the overlooked subject in these theories. In Hlobo's performance, the subject decides, creates and designs ritual performance, rather than following specific and prescriptive codes that are shared and acknowledged by a larger identity group towards a common purpose. Nevertheless, to connote the Xhosa ritual circumcision, Hlobo also uses the colour white in his attire, which can be read as reference to the white clay that initiates cover themselves with to symbolize purity and the social status of being re-born. Within the Xhosa circumcision ritual and in subsequent analytic texts, there is also the overall assumption that *all* initiates are thought to be heterosexual. Desire is not thought of as something that can exist between initiates, even though they may spend up to three months in seclusion. The initiate, as performed by Hlobo, also walks around other sculptures. One of them is entitled *Ndiyafuna* (2006) [fig. 2.2] which can be translated as "I want" and represents a male who bends over into a bag, with his leather underclothes exposed. Hlobo stands behind this sculpture, swaying from side to side and looking at the buttocks then moves to another. It can be argued that Hlobo merges the part of the circumcision ritual that is not meant to be seen or not meant to be a spectacle with what is a spectacle by appearing as an initiate in seclusion in the gallery and making references to sexuality. By doing this he confronts some of the hidden or unexplored realities or secrets of boys in seclusion. He also contravenes the traditional rules of the Xhosa circumcision ritual, firstly by being in the position of a director (initiates are guided and directed), and secondly by suggesting sexual desire between the initiates. "Coming out" can mean coming out of seclusion or informing the society of one's sexuality. This phrase presupposes exposing something that is otherwise kept secret.

Mary Nooter (1993) explores the aspect of secrecy in Yoruba rituals which can be related to this discussion. In some masquerade or ritual performances concealment becomes significant for the elucidation of the masked presence. For instance, the Yoruba Great Mother mask Iyanla performs in darkness, where spectators must extinguish all sources of light (Nooter 1993: 236).

The performance is based on what is unseen rather than what is seen (Nooter 1993: 236). There is irony in the inclusion of spectatorship in events that are markedly "secret" and it is precisely this publicity that sustains the power of the secret. Hlobo's inversion of seclusion depends on the presence of spectators to communicate his estimation about a ritual which removes spectatorship in the seclusion stage but necessitates spectatorship at the end of seclusion to acknowledge change in the initiated. The unseen is what gives an event its prestige which must cite the element of surprise, disclosure or revelation.

One could also argue that Muholi's documentary photographs employ an element of disclosure. For this discussion, Muholi's *Enraged by a Picture* (2005) is a case in point. This is a documentary that debuted at the *Out in Africa: The South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival*. In it Muholi is shown laying her photographs on a pavement near a taxi rank. These photographs are from the exhibition that was shown at the Michael Stevenson Gallery under the title *Only Half the Picture* (2006) that entailed images of nude, black lesbians. Passers-by would stop to look and then react with hand-to-mouth astonished gasps and others with impish giggles. The taxi rank and taxi drivers have been notorious for abuse of younger women in mini-skirts asserting that public nudity/nakedness is against African culture and that, female bodies must remain covered or hidden[48]. In Muholi's performance, the private lives of black lesbian women drew attention to their public existence.

Another example in Muholi's work is her image of traditional healers, *Nando Maphisa and Mpho Sibiya, Sasolburg* (2006) [fig. 1.3] which I discussed in the previous chapter. The power conferred to traditional healers is invested with concealment and mystery. Initiation for traditional healing also has elements of the seen and unseen. *Sangoma* initiation in Nguni languages is called *(uku)thwasa*, a word that is said to have derived from the San *baThwa*, and means "to become visible (appear of the moon and stars) and to commence (of the season)" (Hammond-Tooke 1998: 10). During initiation, the initiate must communicate with the ancestor who gives her healing abilities and knowledge and if that ancestor is male, he determines the

[48] In February 2008, a young woman, Nwabisa Ngcukana (25), was violently stripped of her skirt and sexually assaulted at Noord street taxi rank in Johannesburg by taxi drivers who wanted to "teach [young women in mini-skirts] a lesson". This caused outrage amongst young women who gathered in a protest march lead by radio personality Redi Direko. <http://www.news24.com/News24/South_Africa/News/0,,2-7-1442_2282157,00.html> accessed 2008/09/28

ancestral wife of the *sangoma* (Morgan and Reid 2003: 383). The ancestor is unseen. Issues of sexuality are kept secret and happen in the isolated private spaces and are not performed publicly. In Muholi's photograph access is given into the sexuality of traditional healers as part of the larger complex gay and lesbian community. Muholi's re-staging of traditional healers re-directs curiosity into their sexual lives of which they are at times guided by their trainer to conceal.

The survival of rituals depends on their being re-performed in order to validate traditional ways of life (Denzin 2003: 7). For Denzin (2003: 7) "performance embodies the ritual" and it is through performance that the knowledges embedded in a particular ritual are communicated. Generally, there is the perception that rituals teach something and bring about change but cannot be changed. Performing a ritual involves aspects that are unchanging and those that change from time to time. Hlobo's performance does not emulate the Xhosa circumcision ritual he refers to and by doing so he tenders alternative means of accessing or challenging those knowledges. When Hlobo performs as initiate in a gallery, he does not seek a similar end-result as an actual initiate would, he does not seek manhood. Muholi draws attention to the unexplored, the unseen and the variation of contexts or arenas of 'seeing' and being seen' and the differing reactions (at the gallery and at the taxi rank) to the exhibition and ultimately to the invisibility of black lesbians. It can be said that Muholi's documentary reveals the concealed rituals such as breast binding to the general public. The public space is complex because meaning sometimes conforms to the spaces in which it is interpreted (for example, the gallery and taxi rank). Hlobo's performance and Muholi's documentary negotiate the process of publicizing the visual codes that are associated with ritual performance.

ii. Visibility

Identity is an organizing principle that operates in the social and cultural domain and therefore depends largely on its visibility. Zanele Muholi's photographic project is aimed at making township lesbians and gays visible and through this, to normalize black homosexual identities or to attest to the various sexual identities in South Africa. In her comment on the series that is entitled *Faces and Phases* (2007) [fig. 2.10], she states that she "decided to capture images of [her] community in order to contribute towards a more democratic and representative South

African homosexual history"[49]. Pumla Dineo Gqola (2006: 83) correctly points out that it is "inaccurate to claim that Black women's bodies, and specifically Black lesbian's bodies, are invisible in South African society". The existence of discriminatory names and direct attacks on lesbians in townships imply that Black lesbians "are in fact highly visible manifestations of the undesirable"; Gqola explains (Gqola 2006: 83). Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2007) [fig. 2.10] was shown at the Michael Stevenson Gallery and consists of portraits of black lesbians. What is peculiar about this series is the ambivalence of visibility and invisibility. A point I raised in the previous chapter, was that while homosexual identities are represented to transgress the heterosexual norm, they still seem to comply with it. This compliance should not be understood as naïve because it is also a strategy that utilizes visual politics. The women in Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2007) re-perform masculinity which can be read as a means to hide (femininity) and as a means show (masculinity).

It is debatable that certain aesthetics have been appropriated in the townships for visibility and invisibility. It can be *assumed* that the masculine codes used in Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2007) [fig. 2.10] can be linked to camp styles, particularly in the case of Drag Kings[50] which was based on playful performance and appeared to satirize masculinity. The women in Muholi's photographs, on the other hand, do not appear to be playfully satirizing masculinity. Susan Sontag (1964: 275) once defined camp as "something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques", but she does suggest that it is "disengaged, depoliticized or, at least apolitical" and that "to perceive camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role [which is] the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater". Sontag (1964: 287) further states that "homosexuals have pinned their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense". *Thembi Nyoka* (2007) (see fig. 2.10) *seems* to show influences of camp styles but there is a difference between the appropriation of masculinity in this photograph and that associated with camp. The similarities are obviously the sartorial codes and similar means of creating gender illusion (such as breast binding by using bandages, pantyhose or duct tape). An example of breast binding is demonstrated in Muholi's *I.D. Crisis* (2003) [fig. 1.12]. The difference is, arguably, that in Muholi's photographs masculinity seems to be staged in a

[49] <www.michael.stevenson.com> accessed 2008/09/28

[50] A Drag King is defined as a woman who performs masculinity for entertainment, "pinpoints or exploits the (often obscured) masculinity and may be extremely self-conscious about her performance" (Halberstam 1997: 104).

different way so that it operates more on hiding than it does on showing, at least not in the same degree as camp (Drag Kings). In Muholi's imagery, the appropriated masculinity has to be integrated into a township context which is a complicated space. Homosexual public styles highlight ambiguities, not only with gender appearances but also with the notion of authentic self and public self-presentation. In South Africa, gay communities have had different means of presenting themselves. Mostly, these identities are expressed through sartorial codes.

In Muholi's photographs there is both theatricality and non-theatricality in that the sartorial codes used can be interpreted as a means of hiding where the subject appears as one gender, or as a means of *showing* through the masculine props appropriated. Particularly as can be observed in *Faces and Phases* (2007) [fig. 2.10] where it can be assumed that the women portrayed dress in this manner on a daily basis, even at times when an audience is being avoided. Considering what Muholi calls "the birth of visual activism", she seeks to give "a face to each and every issue". The photographic project becomes a point when an audience is required. With reference to Muholi's portraits, these sartorial codes conceal femininity and present masculinity. In *Pearl Hlongwane* (2007) (see fig. 2.10), the subject is dressed in a large leather jacket, male trousers and has short hair. She stands with her hands in her pockets and looks defensively at the viewer. *Dikeledi Sibanda* (2007) (see fig. 2.10) wears a shirt, tie, waistcoat and hat. *Thembi Nyoka* (2007) (see fig. 2.10) whose head is bald has her muscular arms folded across her chest and wears a muscle vest, male trousers, and a large belt. Without the female names as indices to femininity, the subjects would otherwise appear as males.

Muholi's "visual activism" is only part of a larger movement to represent homosexual identities in the social domain. There are different types of social representation and misrepresentation. There are roles performed within the gay community which are used so that gay men and lesbians can identify each other, and there are roles performed to express this identity to the broader society. Jennifer Craik (2005: 222) noted this in her *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* in stating that

> [t]he adoption of a series of secret codes allowed gay men and lesbians to spot each other, while remaining invisible to the outside world. The gendered nature of clothing led some gay men to adopt overtly feminine dress and some lesbians to adopt overtly masculine garb as markers of sexual identity.

In Craik's observation, sartorial codes are for both visibility within the gay community and invisibility outside of these social circles. In Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2007) the explicit masculine clothing both marks and masks the wearer. It is through the feminine names that the invisibility that Craik discusses becomes visible because the feminine names contrast the visual masculinity.

This ambiguity between performance and non-performance or visibility and invisibility (not to equate performance with visibility) is aptly defined by Norman Denzin (2003: 9) who sees performance as "an organizing concept for examining phenomena that may or may not be a performance in the conventional sense of the word". For Denzin (2003: 8), cultural performances are "encapsulated contingent events that are embedded in the flow of everyday life". In this discussion, an example would be Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2007) [fig. 2.10] which is an exhibition of identities that utilize the conventional masculine codes for "normality" as invisibility and difference as visibility. For instance, Craik's (2005: 222) suggestion that gay men and lesbians adopt sartorial codes to "remain invisible to the outside world" can be related to Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2007). Denzin (2003: 9) distinguishes between performance and performativity[51] and defines the latter as "the power of discourse to reproduce the phenomenon that it regulates and constrains" through relaying the performance narrative of how certain social roles are played out. However, it can also be argued that in *Faces and Phases* (2007) the women are not performing the female roles that are socially expected and are generally conceived to be expressing a "true" self. Muholi's subjects convey a difference in their identity from the normative, but are also re-playing a script that is already created in culture, not only through representing themselves as the opposite gender but also through quoting visual codes and already-created ways of being identified as gay. This cultural quoting is not exclusive to the gay community but can also be said in reference to the larger matrix of societies. Denzin (2003: 9) observes that performances

[51] Norman Denzin's definition alludes to the theme of stereotyping where categories such as gender and race are formulated through generalised actions. The term "performativity" has been seen in Drama studies as a "partner of performance" (Worthen 1998: 1095). J. L. Austin based his interpretation of performativity in language which has been argued to have led to "a heightened willingness to credit a performative dimension in all ritual, ceremonial, scripted behaviors" (Worthen 1998: 1095). Worthen (1998: 1095) continues to point out some interpretations of performativity to have a "constitutive predication on the 'etiolated'- meaning linked with the perverted, the artificial, the unnatural, the abnormal, the decadent, the effete, the diseased" but "it excludes theatrical performance".

> [m]ark and bend identities, remake time and adorn and reshape the body, tell stories and allow people to play with behaviour that is restored, or twice-behaved…. [t]he way a performance is enacted describes performative behaviour, how people play gender, heightening their constructed identity, performing slightly or radically different selves in different situations… [making it] increasingly difficult to sustain any distinction between appearances and facts, surfaces and depths, illusions and substances.

In Muholi's photographs, one can also assume that their appearance is the "fact" and the surface is the depth for the reason that the subjects are liberated in the event of "coming out" through acting out their "true" identities rather than performing the normative in fear of stigma. There are also stereotypes that have been formed through popular culture that become part of the re-performed role. It is interesting to see that Muholi's representation of lesbian women in specific contexts (the townships) draws influences from global stereotypes of gayness. Muholi's photographs urge for differentiation *and* normativity.

With reference to visibility and gayness in the South African context, Vasu Reddy (1998: 66) understands "coming out" differently and suggests that

> [g]ay masculinity is then negotiated on two levels; [firstly], a private understanding based on the self- concept, as in 'coming-out', coming to terms with a sexual identity [which is described as] a personalised, often less ; 'visible' phenomenon; [and secondly], a politicised and public gay masculinity, a phenomenon that operates largely in the way the gay and lesbian 'movement', in the form of the NCGLE (National Coalition of Gay and Lesbian Equality), inculcates an equality perspective in the gay community in its lobbying and advocacy initiatives.

Often black lesbians are overlooked. The concept of "coming out" operates differently when considering the women in Muholi photographs. In some cases, as in the image entitled *I.D. Crisis* (2003) [fig. 1.12] which shows a woman bandaging her breasts, the individual's biological sex has always been hidden. It could be said that that individual has always acted, dressed and spoken like a male and therefore has sometimes been seen as male. In some cases, the negotiation of masculinity or femininity does not culminate in a single climax of public change in appearance and visibility. At times, rumours are the only public distribution of the private sexual identity of that individual. Put differently, some township lesbians do not wear feminine clothing for sometime which changes at a point of "coming to terms with one's sexuality".

Rosemary Hennesy (1995: 32) draws a link between the increasing visibility of homosexuality and capitalism and suggests that commodity culture creates a stereotype of gayness that is

marketable; styles that may appeal to heterosexuals. An example of this suggestion is the popularisation of the male who is "in touch with his feminine side" or the female "who is in touch with her masculine side"[52]. These are identities that are not homosexual but have appropriated the styles of the opposite gender which also effectively challenge dominant male hegemonic order that is seen as the normative. Parag Khanna (2004: 66) uses Michael Flocker's 2003 bestselling book entitled *The Metrosexual Guide to Style: A Handbook for the Modern Man* to define metrosexuals as "muscular but suave, confident yet image-conscious, assertive yet clearly in touch with their feminine sides". Pink, yellow and peach ties, shirts, trousers and blazers, for instance, challenge the association of dark colours with suits and with masculinity. Shopping "like" women for men is being encouraged through the appropriation of gender styles, and *stereotypes* of lesbianism and gayness gain more visibility.

Other means of visibility as noted by Vasu Reddy (1998: 66-67) are the Gay pride marches ("South Africa had its first pride parade in 1990"); the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival; television and radio where "airtime has substantially increased with programming that is devoted to gay issues [such as] TV talk shows *The Felicia Mabuza-Suttle Show*, *Point Blank* and *Two Way*, TV magazine shows such as *Options*, *Impilo Life*, *Screenplay*, radio shows such as *Pillow Talk* "; print and electronic media coverage of instances of homophobia; and international events such as the Gay Games. These platforms had begun being used when the policies of the country changed. Even though these platforms are available, there are not too many homosexual identities being made visible, and if they are, they are represented as a small group of social deviants[53]. It becomes important therefore, to question *how* they are being represented or made visible. Reddy (1998: 68) also mentions that when black homosexual identities (which are often "visibly absent") are represented they "are not sensual but almost animalistic". This brings forth the question of the means of representing black homosexual identities by Hlobo and Muholi. It can be argued that Hlobo's performances render him other, effectively highlighting the existence and invisibility of black gay identities particularly in

[52] An article in the *Evening Times* reads "Mel Finds His Feminine Side" to discuss someone who was not homosexual but appropriated female clothes and products in order to market them better (Nugent 2000) <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-19177949.html> accessed 2008/09/23

[53] For instance, headlines such as "Attention Social Deviants! The Episcopal Church Wants You" show the marginalisation of homosexuality <http://news.aol.com/newsbloggers/2007/06/17/attention-social-deviants-the-episcopal-church-wants-you/> accessed 2008/09/23

traditionalist contexts. Muholi represents black lesbians as they are in society where some can be aligned with the stereotype of homosexuality and some challenge the conception of those stereotypes. Popular media plays the role of creating ideals. Reddy (1998: 68-69) states that in the four leading publications; namely, "*Exit* (a tabloid newsprint publication, in print since July 1985), *Outright* (a glossy lifestyle magazine in print since 1994), *Gay Pages* (another glossy publication) and *Gay SA* (tabloid, in print since 1996)" there are particular versions of homosexuality represented.

Muholi's *Miss D'Vine I-V* (2007) [fig. 2.6] uses the language of fashion photography. This series entails five photographs of a male character, Miss D'Vine, in feminine poses and different kinds of feminine dress. In one of the photographs, Miss D'Vine is on his knees, wearing black lingerie with his hand on his crotch. In another image, he is in a black, shiny, tight, short dress and bright, red high heels. He wears a black short dress where he holds up the sides so that it exposes his thighs in one of the photographs. In the fourth image he wears only a Zulu beaded skirt and red high heels. Finally, in the last image he wears a bright orange shawl and a colourful short skirt (representative of the Gay Pride/Rainbow flag). In three of the photographs he is on the rooftop of a block of flats and in another two he sits in a dry-grass field. Through his poses the photographs read like magazine spreads and as such, draw on a commercial language of marketing and publicity. Generally, commercial photographs are marketing new fashion trends and the focus is on the branded clothing, but in this series, this does not seem to be the case. Although Miss D'vine wears different clothes for each photograph, the clothes do not seem to be the point of focus, but rather they can be seen as a means to draw attention to the character that upon close inspection differs from a typical model. His flat chest, muscular arms and thighs, and masculine facial structure make his commercial visibility out of the ordinary and thus pointing out that these representations of sexual identities have indeed been invisible particularly in South African popular media and social arena.

As already mentioned, Muholi produced a documentary that was screened in the *Out in Africa* Gay and Lesbian Film Festival entitled *Enraged by a Picture,* in which she takes the work from her *Only Half the Picture* (2006) series and displays it at a taxi rank. The taxi rank can be seen as a conservative space where homosexual identities should remain invisible for security reasons.

Muholi braves the conservative nature of a taxi rank and displays images of naked women, women in sexual poses with other women and the private processes of transforming the female body into the masculine body (bandaging breasts). This documentary highlighted the differences in the representation of homosexuality, particularly the notion that the context within which homosexuality is made visible should be considered. Muholi's representation of black lesbians showed their illusive visibility in the representations of homosexuality in popular media. Stereotypes also contribute to misconstructions which Muholi seeks to correct.

There are also differences within the gay community that contribute to visibility. Reddy (1998: 67) investigates this in reference to male homosexuality through scrutinizing the phrase "gay masculinity" as "a way of articulating some of the tensions within the gay community". Reddy (1998: 67) suggests that "the public image of gay masculinity, as is the case elsewhere in the world, presents a false impression of inclusiveness and a false notion of solidarity" which "lacks adequate representation by blacks". This concept calls for inquiry into the ways in which black homosexual identities are represented and in which contexts. The gay pride parade only began taking place in Soweto[54] in 2004, organized by Nkateko (a black lesbian organization) in comparison to cities (Morgan and Reid 2003: 375). It is generally an urban event that takes place in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Durban cities. Having said this, Soweto townships cannot be equated with other townships. Soweto townships have through the years gained prominence through historical political events that have happened there and thus have had international beckoning that allows for certain areas to become tourist destinations. Some Sowetan townships are areas where social boundaries are continually transgressed and change is embraced. This is not to say that homophobia in Soweto does not pose a danger to homosexuals who publicly express their sexuality, but that they are not to be regarded as similar in comparison to other townships. Means of becoming (in)visible have slight differences even though there are similarities in ways of *being* homosexual. Muholi investigates these differences and similarities of *being* gay/lesbian within and outside of the gay community.

[54] Soweto or South Western Townships are situated in the Gauteng Province (South of Johannesburg) and consist of 87 townships such as Meadowlands, Zola, Tladi and Pimville. The Johannesburg Gay Pride Festival is older (1989) and larger than the Soweto Pride Festival which only began in 2004.
<http://www.gala.co.za/RememberanceWall.htm> accessed 2009/01/08.
In some townships homosexuality is still unaccepted.

iii. Difference and Spectacle

> And we, spectators always, everywhere. Looking at, never out of, everything! It fills us. We arrange it. It decays. We re-arrange it, and decay ourselves (Rilke 1998:69)

The word "spectacle" in cultural discourse is said to have gained its currency in the 1960s through Henri Lefebvre's *Critique de la vie Quotidiene* (Crary 1989: 96). Throughout its changing meanings as a system of relations, power remains a significant characteristic. Although the role of "showing" is assumed to be a position of power in the relation between seeing and being seen, the role of the viewer as interpreter cannot be overlooked. Moreover, the term itself has to be understood differently in various social situations. For example, the theory of spectacle formed around popular culture (television, film, magazines and so on) cannot be directly transferred to that formed around "ritual". The term "spectacle" also assumes the *intention* of *showing* through using various tools to draw sustained attention. Seemingly, a spectacle is dependant on attention to be conceived as such. For this discussion, difference can be seen as a significant tool in creating spectacle. Notably, there is difference that is intentionally created for particular public events but there is also difference created through social, cultural and political concepts and the boundaries created by those concepts. The visibility of black homosexuality is one of many kinds of "otherness" that are emphasised by cultural (mis-)beliefs. However, other forms of expressing this identity, such as gay parades and drag culture, become a trangressive intentional spectacle.

The *difference* to the normative can also be understood as a mechanism of stigma. In this instance, a spectacle should be understood on two levels: the intentional and perceivably transgressive performance (such as drag queens and the theatrical) and the unintentional and socially marginalized spectacle usually because of visual difference (such as albinism, mental illness, disfiguration and other stigmatized social categories or illnesses). In the latter example, the subject occupies a position of being a spectacle even when doing things that are considered normal (walking in town, shopping, etc.). This example can also be traced from incidents of "freak shows" in America. Other examples include interracial and gay couples in racially divisive contexts who may attract unwanted attention.

Nicholas Hlobo's *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005) [fig. 2.3] explores the processes of difference in seeing and being seen. In this performance, Hlobo wears a jacket on which he attached a hunchback, a skirt made out of ties, boots and a lace headgear that looks like a bonnet. The brim of the "bonnet" is lacy and almost covers his face. Initially, the jacket is hung on a coat-hanger as a sculptural artwork. Throughout the performance, Hlobo tries to mingle with the gallery crowd and, at a later stage; he exits the gallery and talks to people on the street. The "hunchback" disfigures Hlobo, renders him other and attracts attention. The "hunchback" also reads as a backpack or a form of luggage. In fact, Hlobo's worn hunchback is similar to the Fon *Bocio* [fig. 2.4] figure of the Republic of Benin in form and some meanings. The figure is made out of wood and organic materials and "alludes to personal secrets that are too dangerous to express verbally", where the "accumulation of organic matter, animal skulls, and twine on *Bocio*[55] figures provide a form of psychological catharsis" (Nooter 1993: 61). The figure is sculpted with the hunchback attached by a rope to the chest and neck, that it seems heavy weight would strangle the figure. The similarity of Hlobo's performance and the *Bocio* figure is that both symbolize personal hardship. According to Hlobo's definition of the work, the wearer of this jacket "is required to mingle with people in social situations… such as visit exhibitions, go to restaurants, window shop, go to libraries, [and] meet people, etc… like any normal person would"[56]. The character as described by Hlobo is not belittled by this disfiguration but is wise and carries himself with pride and confidence (ibid.). The hunchback causes social otherness. It is defined by Hlobo as an allusion "to the heavy baggage we carry as South Africans" (ibid.). South Africa is a nation of difference; cultural and social difference with a history in which these differences were emphasized.

The difference makes the spectacle. It is in the same way that an exuberantly dressed person would be considered a spectacle amongst "the normative". In *Iqgrirha Lendlela* (2006) Hlobo's "disfiguration" recalls the very currency of "freak shows". Robert Bogdan (1988: 10) described "freak" as "a way of thinking, of presenting, a set of practices – not a characteristic of an individual" and the "freak show is the formally organized exhibition of people with alleged and real physical, mental or behavioral anomalies for amusement and profit". Bogdan's definition

[55] Interestingly, the word *bocio* is Spanish for goitre (an enlarged thyroid gland), the metaphors of a "hump" agree with each other <www.emedicine.com/med/topic916.htm> accessed 2008/09/06
[56] <www.michaelstevenson.com> accessed 2008/09/06

underscores that it is the institutions of societies that creates difference and isolates people who look different. He traces this "way of thinking" to modes of presentation that played on the Victorian's concerns of well-being. Robert Rydell (1989: 1494) summarizes these modes of presentation as the "exotic mode" that stressed "alleged racial and cultural differences, pandered to the public's interest in the hierarchies of human beings," and as the "aggrandized mode of presentation" that affixed "grandiose military and aristocratic titles to persons on display". Hlobo's performance examines the power relations in looking and investigates institutions that categorize gayness as a mental or physical illness, isolating it from the "normative". The reception of Hlobo's performance is elevated by the designation of "artist performance" where otherwise it would be seen as deviant or insane behaviour. It is almost in this sense that the men and women photographed by Muholi are seen to be expressing "deviant" behavior in their societies but are the gems of research on black homosexual identities in a gallery or museum. Difference operates when prescriptive codes are discounted in particular social environments.

Earlier I mentioned insanity as a misconceived symptom of homosexuality. It is assumed that individuals that have been diagnosed with insanity are not in a performance since they behave without taking heed to prescriptive social codes, but they do become subject to being a spectacle. One of the behaviours understood as insanity is walking in public naked without a particular cause. We would not label Hlobo's performance entitled *Dubula* (2007) [fig. 2.5] as an act of insanity because we understand it as part of the profession of being an artist which gives license to transgress social boundaries and also protects artists from the designation of insanity. In the performance Hlobo is naked save for secret socks and inner rubber tube that covers his genitals and attaches a round "ball" made out of the same material by a long cord. In this performance he sits on the floor, the ball fixed on the wall, and he fiddles with the cord and eventually pulls down the ball and fondles it for some time. He then gets up, as if awoken, pats his buttocks and stretches his body and begins walking slowly backwards into the crowd of gallery visitors. The ball begins to signify genitalia that he is dragging on the floor. He walks around as if he is a gallery visitor as well, reaching an uncomfortable proximity with other visitors who keep shifting away from him. He stands for a while amongst them looking at and beyond them, and then he turns around and slowly walks out of the gallery, his arms folded across his chest. Out of the protective boundaries of the gallery, in the public eye in Rome he wanders outside dragging a

heavy ball or heavy “genitalia”. In the public eye, it can be seen as madness and an offense defined as public indecency, whereas it is a profound performance within the structure of fine arts.

In the above examples, the body is the primary visual signifier that allows for social differentiation. Tseëlon (1978: 105) argues that “using the body to ground narratives of identity similarly suppress the body”. The body, according to Tseëlon (1978: 105) “is neither purely [a] natural nor a textual metaphor”. The body is also a medium for performance and performativity and as such it is the foremost social visual signifier of identity. Tseëlon’s suggestion of the oppressed body can be paralleled to the social narratives and constructions that impose a limit on the body. The construction of identity and narratives created around it are of the social sphere and the body is limited to already-created means of being, and of social visibility and identification. Social ideas are constructed so that margins are created and what lies beyond these margins is stigmatized. Difference becomes a threat to social structure and to power. Hlobo uses the body to highlight the complicated spaces that bodies of alterity inhabit, for Hlobo it is race, gender and sexuality. Hlobo represents these forms of identification as surplus, and as excessive attachments to the body that dramatize it.

In her discussion of the politics of identification in relation to Fanonian thought, Diana Fuss (1994: 21) contends that “[d]eploying the conventional psychoanalytic grammar of “the other” and “the Other” to distinguish between imaginary and symbolic difference, or between primary and secondary identification, Fanon implies that the black man under colonial rule finds himself relegated to a position other than the Other”. Hlobo’s “otherness” is based on his race and his sexuality and he mobilizes this into subjectivity. He accentuates this otherness through the props that he uses: the bright colours and unusual bodily appendages. Hlobo becomes an abnormality through his performance in order to highlight the mechanism of othering. On the other hand, Muholi represents otherness in order for it to be assimilated into society. Muholi’s documentary style photographs, in comparison, carry a subtlety (particularly in *Faces and Phases*) that allows for access, because the characters she represents are already in society and are identifiable as part of society; a part that society turns a blind eye to. Hlobo’s performances affix an extravagance

that is not visually, publicly identifiable as part of society. Fuss (1994: 21) examines the Lacanian terms of otherness in stating that

> the first other (small o) denotes a specular relation to an imaginary rival, while the Other (capital O) designates a linguistic relation to a Symbolic interlocutor; second, the other depends upon a narcissistic relation, while the Other marks the locus of intersubjectivity; and third, the other is produced as an effect of primary identification in which the subject recognizes itself in its own image, while the Other is constructed as an effect of secondary identification in which the subject shifts its point of address to another speaking subject.

Considering the concepts of primary and secondary identification one must distinguish the different operatives in Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork. Hlobo's performances occur as negotiations of his Xhosa male-ness and his gay-ness. For the reason that being Xhosa and being gay are selfhoods that are situated as oppositions in a relationship where Xhosa masculinity rejects gayness but gayness does not necessarily reject Xhosa masculinity, Hlobo's primary identification is not simply one that depends upon a "narcissistic relation", and arguably it is more complex than a private event of self-recognition. By being gay, Hlobo is othered from the Xhosa and ultimately from the so-called exclusive designation of a "traditional African". The specular reflective self-recognition is already a fragmented one. These different selfhoods seem to negate each other rather than locate the self as a part that works towards a reflection of the narcissistic "I". Hlobo performs both selfhoods. In the performance entitled *Dubula* (2007) [fig. 2.5] which translates as "shoot"[57], there is a mind map written by Hlobo in Xhosa and English which he studies through the performance whilst clad in the inner rubber tube that covers his genitalia but elongates it into a black ball. The mind-map or diary comes across as an internal dialogue of incomplete or incoherent sentences. His body then translates as both an internal and social otherness. Through performing these selfhoods, Hlobo embraces them but also draws attention to equal forces of rejecting the neat boundaries of categorization.

Fuss (1994: 22) further suggests that "[r]eliance upon the Other as a categorical imperative often works to flatten rather than to accentuate difference" for the reason that it overlooks subjects who "may be left out of the Self/Other binary altogether". It must be noted that this ideological construct of the self cannot be directly imposed on the ontological definitions of selfhood in *kwa*-Xhosa. Furthermore, the different contexts in which Hlobo lives and works present different

[57] The term *Dubula* is a verb in Xhosa and is therefore translated here as a verb rather than the noun "shoot" that denotes a young branch or the occasion of taking photographs.

instances and levels of subjectivity and otherness. There are also similar and different operatives in Muholi's photographs. Pumla Dineo Gqola (2006: 84) captures this complication of selfhood and self-recognition in a statement by Bev Ditsie to Nkululeko Masinga (2005: 59) who states that,

> [i]t has taken me a long time to grow into my body… At 19 I began to accept myself as a woman and love my body … Society's perception of my body does impact on my self-esteem … My sexuality as a gay woman is part of who I am as Bev and the way that I relate to the world and other people. I can be as butch or as feminine as I want, it all depends on my mood

This statement further highlights the different levels and instances of self-recognition and the acknowledgement of internal and social differences as constant negotiations between the performed and unperformed self (these designations are also not clearly defined). In an image entitled *Isibuko* (2005) [fig. 2.11] that translates as "mirror", or more directly as "the see (object)", a woman is reflected in a mirror. However, it is not her face or frontal façade that is reflected as is the implication in the Lacanian theory of Narcissus, the mirror stage and self-recognition, but it is an image of her body bent over with her backside towards the mirror and ultimately towards the viewer and her hand between her thighs blocking the orifices. Her face is not visible to us as it is situated outside the frame of the mirror and of the photograph. It can be assumed that here otherness is threefold or even more complex than that. Black lesbians have to come to terms with their race, come to terms with their gendered bodies and, thirdly, with their sexuality internally and externally. It can be said that they have been seen as "the other of the other" – the other that has been overlooked even in Fanonian studies of racial and gendered subjectivity and identification. Gabi Ngcobo (2005: 49) suggests that "Muholi's project highlights the problematic space black women inhabit apropos the two spaces inhabited by Frantz Fanon's colonized man" [58]. The dialectics or structures of opposition(s) do not seem to operate so neatly as separate forms of dualism (male/female, black/white or homosexual/heterosexual[59]).

[58] In what Frantz Fanon (1986: 111) calls the "corporeal malediction", his speaks of a personal awareness of being black and of "a slow composition [of self] as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world". For Fanon, blackness is burdened by the awareness of the self in the third person.

[59] A colloquial synonym of heterosexual is "straight" which is problematic since it aligns heterosexuality with the normative. In each of the opposing forces, one is unequal to the other. Whiteness has an assumed subjectivity and normality that in discourse it does not seem like a designation whose complexes are examined and discussed to the same extent as blackness. The problem with dualism lies in its hierarchical oppositions that render one category more powerful than the other. Elizabeth Grosz (1994: 3-24) warns against these essentialist constructions.

This complex schema of difference, othering and reciprocal relations of power is further highlighted by the kinds of media reactions that followed from Muholi's exhibitions. Nkululeko Godana and John Hogg's (2004: 9) headline in *This Day* reads: *Is Anybody Comfortable?* Sean O'Toole's (2006: 12) *Business Day* headline was: *Are You Feeling a Little Uncomfortable?* Gail Smith (2004: 33) boldly stated: *Outlaw Culture* in the *Mail and Guardian*'s *Comment and Analysis* which transcribes the kinds of difference that casts homosexual black female bodies in the margins. Further, there were articles that explored internal and external negotiations of identification such as Robert Greig's (2006: 23) *Delicate Constructions of Felt Experience* in the *Sunday Independent*; Gabi Ngcobo's (2006: 49) *What Do We See When We Look at Us?* in *Art South Africa* and Hazel Friedman's (2006: 3) *Intimacy* in *The Mail and Guardian*. The discomfort that Hogg and O'Toole imply (which was also the title of a group exhibition *Are You Comfortable* in 2006) is part of the mechanism of difference highlighting a subject's preceding isolation and imagined invisibility that when the veil is lifted the subject becomes spectacle. Attention is drawn to the isolated group of women to mark them as strangers. The women in Muholi's photographs become both a point of curiosity and of disgust. O'Toole (2006: 12) begins his dissertation with the statement that "Zanele Muholi's photographs chafe against conventional notions of good taste". The black nude body is almost aligned with obscenity and relegated to the notion of the body as the object of desire and disgust, where the "obscene is found at the heart of ideology and is closely bound with it in dialectical relations which conceal the obscene thus rendering power operable" (Tseëlon 2001: 105). For Tseëlon (2001: 105) "[w]hat is expelled as "Other" returns as the object of… fascination [and the] result is that which is socially peripheral is symbolically central". Muholi's photographs urge for re-interpretation of aesthetics that always already inscribe the black female body as other. Symbolic centrality is, according to Lacanian theories, in the realm of alterity whose discourse is unconscious and resides in death, lack and absence (Evans 1996: 202). Muholi's photographs, particularly those from the series entitled *Only Half the Picture* (2006), implore a reconfiguration of cultural associations.

For Baudrillard (1987: 21) "obscenity begins where there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theatre, no more illusion, when everything becomes immediately transparent [and] visible".

When Muholi (2006: 3) states that "[her] work is preservative free… no special lighting, make-up or Photoshop™ effects", she emphasizes that her photographs are not staged or manipulated. Unadorned black female bodies have for a long time been associated with what must be hidden and are what Toni Morrison (1994: 368) described as physical and metaphorical violation, as the "unspeakable thing unspoken" that has become aligned with obscenity. I contend that obscenity begins where social structures perceive it as such and operates on social difference and again becomes a different kind of spectacle: that of curiosity and disgust. The constructions of curiosity or disgust are based on social constitution.

O'Toole (2006: 12) acknowledges that "clichéd media depictions of lesbians as freakish revelers at Gay Pride marches haven't helped". The Gay Pride offers the platform of spectacle to gays and lesbians as means to increase visibility and decrease stigmatisation but it has also become isolated as "outlaw culture". Historically, segregation has been based primarily on visual appearance where strangeness challenges the normative. Kristeva instigates that the stranger's presence challenges tools of order making (Tseëlon 2001: 105). The stranger, "is singled out as a particular problem by the national state – to be excluded, not eliminated – because the stranger unlike the enemy, poses a greater threat to the social (or psychic) order: it is the enemy within" (Tseëlon 2001: 105). Muholi's photographs re-affirm the presence of black lesbians in townships. Hlobo, on the other hand, utilizes the mechanisms of stigma by making himself a stranger, and re-claiming a social position as a stranger. Hlobo's strangeness, though, also has a familiarity that allows him to access the social space again. The familiarity operates within a particular society, the art society. When Hlobo mingles with the visitors at the openings in costume, it is with people who have come with the understanding of abnormal behaviour as the artist's product and as a challenge to structures that create the normative. The visitors stare at Hlobo as they would a stigmatized individual but it is with keen interest in "meeting the artist" as genius rather than as a stranger or a disfigured "other".

Nicholas Hlobo's performance of "otherness" falls within the framework of the art practice. Sarat Maharaj (2003: 80) argues that

> across the art circuits and culture industry, we see difference treated less and less as flow and change… difference increasingly functions in terms of fixed cultural distinctions and ethnic demarcations filtered through a grid of contrasts and

> oppositions – a spook-lookalike of Apartheid logic – figuring out separate cultural identities and entities. It marks an emergent *multicultural managerialism* [o.e.]… we have quite another understanding of cultural difference as the fugitive flash of difference…the former is a calculus of difference…it identifies those who fall outside 'cultural visibility'.

Maharaj speaks of a matter of 'becoming imperceptible', becoming unreadable as this or that identity. The South African situation is such that difference has been previously accentuated that even though the margins of certain categories are transgressed they are still operating *from* particular designations of identification. For instance, "traditional", "African", "black", "masculine", "feminine" are all sets of demarcations that presume particular ways of being. Moreover, when the culturally invisible become visible, language allocates a variety of categories such as "black, township lesbians" where each category already casts meanings to a subject that may or may not quite fit into these enclosures. The issue of location discussed in the first chapter as one of the foremost debates about African artists and identity has often been sounded as the base from where identity is formed and transformed.

II: Metamorphosis, Metaphor and identity

The themes that are explored by Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi define identity as continuous transformation and as layers of meaning. At times metamorphosis implies a "once-off" event that involves a state in which the body is in-between. For Baudrillard (1987:46-47) "[t]he body of metamorphosis knows neither metaphor nor the operation of meaning and it is the body that knows no symbolic order" and generally metamorphosis is shrouded "with [the] ceremonial". The imagery in Hlobo's and Muholi's work represents different states of transformation that make identity complex.

i. Mimesis

The visibility of homosexual identities is largely the packaged ideals constructed by available popular media, some of which can be argued to contribute to the roles played out in South Africa. The male/female stereotypes also contribute to the representation of homosexual identities. In Muholi's photographs the lesbians play the role of the male, and dress like males, and the men dress like women and appropriate gestures that are associated with femininity. Jacques Ranciere (2000: 21) argues that "the mimetic principle is not at its core a normative principle stating that art must make copies resembling their models... it is first of all a pragmatic

principle that isolates, within the general domain of the arts (ways of doing and making), certain particular forms of art that produce specific entities called imitations". Ranciere was referring to works of art that aim to represent the "realistic" object in nature. It is also interesting that art bears another mimetic principle where artists quote preceding artists or movements. It must also be considered that within the structure of artmaking certain configurations become organized as standards or criteria that contribute to an object and the creation of it or a performance receiving a public reception as an artwork. For this discussion, I will discuss mimesis with reference to performance artwork.

Norman Denzin (2003: 4) argues that there is a way in which performance carries and transfers knowledge through ritual performance. Denzin (2003: 4) complicates this by discussing ethnography as a means of varying this knowledge through changing how rituals are performed. Denzin (2003: 4) states that the "way of doing ethnography imagines and explores the multiple ways in which we can understand performance, including imitation, or *mimesis*; as a construction, *poiesis*; and as motion or movement, or *kinesis*". When Hlobo re-performs ritual, the Xhosa circumcision ritual in particular, it is with some degree of mimesis that enables him to reconstruct the ritual within differing formations of aesthetic cognition. Hlobo only uses the mimetic principle for referentiality, rather than for the purposes of the ritual itself. In this sense, Hlobo questions the knowledges that are meant to be carried by ritual performance.

In his performances Hlobo occupies a space that is between the mimetic, in the codes quoted directly from the Xhosa circumcision ritual; and non-mimetic in that his performance involves spontaneous unscripted actions. Victor Turner (1986) suggested that performance can be understood as liminality and construction. Liminality or the attributes of liminal *personae* ("threshold people"), according to Turner (1986: 95), "are necessarily ambiguous since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locates states and positions in cultural space". With reference to *Umkwhetha* (2006) [fig. 2.1] and *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005) [fig. 2.3], Hlobo presents an ambiguity between initiator/initiated, seer/seen, normal/abnormal (such as the "hunchback who is normal in interaction but abnormal through perception). Ritual performance can be argued to have this element of non-mimesis even though it depends on the repetition of certain acts and the preservation of concepts carried by that

act. Hlobo allows his performance to rely on spontaneity and makes it dependant on the type of context in which it takes place. The format of the performance is also variable according to the visitors willing to "mingle" with the artist during the performance. In *Umkhwetha* (2006) [fig. 2.1], for instance, the performance seems to rely on Hlobo squatting by the installation *Umthubi* (2006) [fig. 1.1] for the "prayer" and the organza dress of *Imtyibilizi xa Yomile* (2006) [fig. 2.9] also seems to be completed by the performance. Although the dress can be exhibited as a complete separate work, the performance adds another dimension to it that cannot be overlooked when trying to decipher the work. The works have been exhibited separately and others have been sold which makes the repetition of the performance in its initial format impossible. Its existence is its documentary.

The historical backdrop of performance in the cultural sphere is said to have been introduced in America in the early 1970s "to describe art that was ephemeral, time-based and process oriented, that incorporated the body as an object and as subject of inquiry, and explored extreme forms of behaviour, cultural taboos, and social issues" and therefore has been seen as a political act (Coco Fusco 1995: 160). Fusco (1995: 160) notes that performative acts in black communities were "forced into secrecy as a strategy of survival" from the processes of the "civilizing" project and states that,

> [f]rom the late nineteenth century onward, these attempts at subaltern social control coincided with the commodification of black and native performance for white mass entertainment, and with the sardonic mimicry of racial stereotypes in the form of, for example, the black-faced minstrel [which resulted in] a split… between subaltern performance for insiders and outsiders, and between patterns of reception for each group.

Fusco (2000: 161) points out that it is this legacy against which the "authenticity" of black performance is measured. There is thus an expectation of mimicking certain versions of stereotypes and models in performance. It can be argued that performance by South African artist mimics the aesthetic of black American performance which is also said to follow that of the 1970s avant-garde performance artists, but the statement would be myopic. There is, arguably, similitude in the language employed in performance that has been influenced by earlier forms, but there are also differences. Performance amongst black communities in South Africa has been associated with communal events (music performed at rituals and in marches of political rebellion, for instance) and theatre.

The history of performance in South Africa is one of isolation and segregation (Waren 1968: 413).The racial designations also assume certain types of aesthetics in performance. Fuss (1994: 24) suggests that "in attempting to claim alterity entirely as its own, the Imperial Subject imposes upon all others, as a condition of their subjugation, an injunction to *mime* alterity [o.e.] … the colonized are constrained to imitate the colonizer's version of their essential difference". Coco Fusco also notes this point in his *Performance and the Power of the Popular* and it was argued differently in a section of my previous chapter as *The Loss of the Authentic African*. Homi K. Bhabha defines mimicry as "one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (Fuss 1994: 24). Conversely, mimesis can be utilized politically as a response to the expectation of performing alterity. Fusco (1995: 159) asserts that "we *do* wrestle with its power". The history of the appropriation of stereotypes of "primitive ritual" by white artists has "led to a certain protectiveness in subaltern communities…, [thus encouraging] many artists to focus specifically on the dynamics of objectification and exoticisation of people of colour by mainstream American society" (Fusco 1995: 161). These artists employ the strategy of "reworking cultural stereotypes, a very different objective from that of the imaginative retrieval of 'original cultural forms'" (Fusco 1995: 161). The re-worked forms cannot simply become mimesis but a political strategy through mimesis. Performance is viewed as "struggle, as intervention, as breaking and remaking, as kinesis, as a sociopolitical act", and as such they become "transgressive achievement, political accomplishments that break through sedimented meanings and normative traditions" (Denzin 2003: 4).

In Muholi's work mimesis can be interpreted differently. Although gay identities are understood to be playing the role of women or act like women and lesbians act like men, there is an interchange between playful role-play and a political strategy of sedition. The roles that are played by the identities that are portrayed in Muholi's photographs represent a boldly stated simulation of social gender. There is a presumption, however, that exaggeration can be attributed to the gay identities that mimic femininity and that the more political and transgressive stance can be attributed to lesbian identities that mimic masculinity. This presumption may be based on the gender construction that has lent seriousness and power to masculinity and has positioned femininity as a direct opposite. When looking at Muholi's *Faces and Phases* (2007) [fig. 2.10]

there is an element of seriousness that is associated with the masculinity worn by the women she portrays. This seriousness is not only in their choice of clothing but also in their faces and their poses. In comparison, *Miss D'Vine* (2007) [fig. 2.6] is not easily taken seriously through his feminine clothes and poses. The male gay in feminine clothing is generally associated with role-play or playfulness. It has to be noted though, that there is both playfulness and strategic political assertion utilized by the different identities. 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 representation.

Arguably, the characters in Muholi's photographs put on props to perform what is socially understood as masculine as much as "normal males" perform social masculinity. The performance involves clothing such as props, language and gestures. The language of a female who dresses like a man changes to fit the stereotype. Historically, *isiTsotsi*, a lingua-franca in townships, is linked to masculinity which is the reason why "there exists the common perception that *isiTsotsi* speaking women must be lesbians [and that] the majority of women who dress boyishly, have butch mannerisms and are labeled 'tomboys' also choose to speak *isiTsotsi*" (Rudwick 2006: 57). Rudwick (2006: 57) argues that this lingua franca is used by women for self-empowerment in saying that it is a "linguistic vehicle which African streetwise females use in order to empower themselves in a patriarchal society". Mimicry can then be seen, also, as a defense tool, but it can also be used as a navigation tool for identification. In his discussion of "workshopped" gays who were taught the language and etiquette of "real" gays, Graeme Reid (2006: 145) argues that language can be liberating yet constraining. Reid (2006: 141) points out that the workshops called *How to be a Real Gay* were seeking to "develop a fuller understanding of the self by piecing together disparate and sometimes contradictory and confusing ideas". The sources from which the "criteria" of gayness are drawn come from different sources.

Re-enactment assumes a staged-ness or an imagined likeness to an event and artificial spontaneity that is not in everyday performativity. The women in *Faces and Phases* (2007) [fig. 2.10] do not appear to be performing a re-enactment of masculinity but live the prescriptions of masculinity which makes this form of mimicry seem more as a defense tool. Conversely, *Miss D'Vine* conveys the theatrical and staged-ness which seems to expose a vulnerability that,

socially, *may* not be understood to be of any defensive utility. In her discussion of race, performance and identity, Diana Fuss (1994: 24) distinguishes between two notions of mimicry which interact and "make it increasingly difficult to discriminate between [them] or at least to know with any degree of certainty their possible political effects". Fuss (1994: 24) outlines "mimicry of subversion and mimicry of subjugation". Where mimicry can be used actively as a defense tool, it can also be used to cover or to hide; and as social invisibility it becomes disengaged from the political sphere.

The political nature of mimesis or its form as parody is dependant on a conscious purposeful assumption of the mimicked role and the perception by an audience that reads it as such. In the context of a township, for instance, some may read the mimicry of masculinity and femininity as subversive and deviant behaviour. Also there is no certain degree of knowing when it becomes political. There is therefore an oscillation in meanings. Diana Fuss (1994: 24) distinguishes mimicry as defined by feminist theory and by postcolonial theory.

> In feminist theory mimesis is understood to be opposite masquerade: "mimicry" (the deliberate and playful performance of a role) is offered as a counter and a corrective to "masquerade" (the unconscious assumption of a role). The critical difference between masquerade and mimicry – between a nonironic imitation of a role and a parodic hyperbolization of that role – depends on the degree and readability of its excess. In this reading, mimicry resists and subverts dominant systems of representation by intentionally ironizing them. Postcolonial discourse theory understands mimicry in contrary terms, not as a tactic of dissent but as a condition of domination.

The identities represented by Muholi can be read differently. Where the lesbian women appear to mimic particular forms of masculinity which read as "a condition of domination" *and* as a political transgressive statement; the gay men appear to parody femininity and limits of masculinity if these positions are viewed within a gender constructivist approach. It can be argued that the hierarchical construction of gender roles contributes to the apprehension that, particularly, township lesbian identities do not seem as comic and parodic as gay identities appear. The exception is the phenomenon of Drag Kings which may not yet be related to township lesbians. Muholi explores all these different types of appearances and she also makes visible the roles of gender that are usually, and arguably remain, visibly absent such as lesbian women dressed in Zulu traditional masculine gear and gay men in so-called African traditional feminine gear (see fig. 2.12). Muholi underscores that mimicry in homosexual identities is

focused on particular masculinities and femininities; which are seldom "traditionally" African. *Miss D'Vine* (2007) [fig. 2.6] becomes an exception. In one of the photographs in this series, he poses in a Zulu beaded skirt and red high heels. There are very few women who still don only a beaded skirt on a regular basis, and arguably, no gay men who mimic that feminine identity as a persona. This irregularity positions itself as a political statement. Muholi shows homosexual identities in a different way from the acknowledged stereotypes.

Homi K. Bhabha argues that there is an "ever-present slippage from mimicry into mockery, from performativity into parody [which] immediately discredits colonialism's authorized versions of otherness" (Fuss 1994: 24). In considering Fanon's analysis of cross-racial identification, Fuss questions the notion that mimicry is seen to have one direction that is colonially and hierarchically determined. For instance, Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) rarely examines the position of white skin and black masks as can be argued with regards to blackface minstrelsy (Fuss 1994: 25). In Fanon's theories the black subject mimics the white subject in pursuit of Subjectivity. A question posed by Kobena Mercer (1992: 21) seeks to interrogate "what is going on when whites assimilate and introject the degraded and devalorised signifiers of racial otherness into the cultural construction of their own identity". Using this analogy, the implications of men who want to occupy the historically degraded spaces that women occupy should be interrogated. In some contexts, when women mimic men there is an unspoken admiration in her strength that is superseded by the rejection of her being a threat to the heteropatriarchal; for example Rudwick (2006: 63) states that "many township and streetwise males respect female *isiTsotsi*-speakers in a very particular manner". However when a man mimics a woman, unless it is based on the understanding that it is conscious cultural parody[60] of the "absurdity" and "[the] amplified nature" of women, then the subject is met with disrespect and mockery. The mimicry of particular stereotypes is complex, even in the manner in which black minstrelsy is exclusively cultural and seen as conscious parody but the mimicry of whiteness by a black subject has been for a long time been seen as more of a condition. There is a difference between cross-dressers who mimic women because they want to be women and

[60] Actor, Pieter Dirk Uys as Evita, achieves the elevation of his mimicry into cultural satire. However, actor, choreographer and singer Somizi Mhlongo has been degraded in the media when he introduced his alter ego Madame Gigi on his talkshow *Intimate Connexions* because the public knows he is gay. http://www.sowetan.co.za/News/Article.aspx?id=760794 accessed 2008/10/01.

those who further the assumption that women are comical and exaggerated in nature and therefore cannot be taken seriously. Camp achieves the element of parody when women imitate men. Kristeva defines camp's "essential element, namely 'a seriousness that fails' [which can] mock, not transgress, the subject it lovingly imitates" (Kingwell 2004: 248). The different forms of mimicry require an understanding of particular context to ascertain the power relations that are established in different societies and the liberties of expression afforded.

Denzin's (2003:2) argument that performativity is reproduced, regulated and constrained also implies transformation. Through language a subject is regulated via the behaviours that are deemed "normal". In performance, "the speaking subject is already spoken for by and in language", but transforms prescribed social roles through individuality (Pollock 1998: 29). In saying that cross-dressers mimic meanings that are associated with certain gender constructions, it also has to be considered that femininity and masculinity can be argued to be codes that are performed even by the sexes associated with that gender. For Riviere (1986: 36) "[w]omanliness could be worn as a mask [by women], both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it…" This perception complicates the idea that men in drag imitate a type of woman when womanliness is in itself a mask. The stereotypes of women that are "imitated" in drag are those associated with promiscuity and/or prostitution. The stereotypes of men who are imitated by women are those who are virile and hypermasculine.

The women documented by Muholi, particularly in *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo* (2007) [fig. 1.4] are not just mimetic representations of heterosexuality but they draw attention to the notion that heterosexuality is also mimetic of the constructions that circulate in cultural production. It is generally understood that heterosexual identities remain within the constructs of gender. Masculine and feminine gestures and mannerisms are performed to preserve and regulate the construct of masculinity and femininity. Denzin (2003:10) states that,

> every performance is mimetic… if heterosexuality is an impossible imitation of itself, an imitation that performatively constitutes itself as the original, then the imitative parody of "heterosexuality" is always and only an imitation, a copy of a copy, for which there is no original… every performance is an original and an imitation.

The concept of there being an origin is abstract, if not a mirage. Mimicry always assumes the existence of an original or a predecessor. In this photograph Nomsa Mazibuko could be assumed

to copy a man, but one with flaws or the likeness that does not bear the all the qualities of the "original". In concluding my previous chapter, I discussed Ferguson's analogy of Africa as the "ugly" twin, the "shadow" that mimics the original thing but has representational flaws. Muholi draws attention to the fact that "representational flaws" are not always flaws but rather can be seen as perceptions constructed from accepted preceding norms. This couple interrogates the boundaries of representational normativity and aesthetic selectivity.

Craik (2005: 223) calls the character formed through stereotyped gay identities as "the clone persona" whom she suggests "enabled gay men to act out established fantasies and role models". This persona also comes across not as the silencing presence of being just one of the clones but rather as a liberated personality. Again there are complex ideas with mimicry, likeness and power relations. The subject that mimics can also be liberated from cultural regulations. The man in Zanele Muholi's *Miss D'Vine* [fig. 2.6] appears on the one hand to be liberated, but on the other hand he seems restricted. Metaphors of restriction can be seen in the fence that is in the background, locking him into a space allocated for the gaze, as well as in his hands clasping his crotch. The different types of dresses and lingerie that are "fashionable" and "sexually alluring" can be interpreted as a kind of emancipation.

Lacan discusses a multiple mimesis where "mimicry designates the moment when the human infant (mis)recognizes itself in the mirror and comes to experience its body through the specular image as a totality, more coordinated than bodily experience would suggest" (Tuhkanen 2001: 19). Considering this definition and Muholi's *Isibuko* (2006) [fig. 2.11], the fragmentation of the body that is reflected in the mirror complicates the understanding of mimicry. Moreover, seeing ties the individual with a social network that constructs identity through cultural regulations. Taking the image of *Miss D'Vine* (2007) [fig. 2.6] for an example, hypothetically the mirror reflection of biological maleness seems incongruent to the bodily experience and social co-ordination of social female-ness. Baudrillard (1987: 41) deduced that "resemblance is no longer concerned with others, but rather with the individual in his vague resemblance to himself; a resemblance born of the individual's reduction to his simple elements [which results] in difference [taking] on another meaning". In Muholi's portraits, resemblance is an element of the social domain and mimicry can be argued to be a strategic tool. Mimicry can be seen, in the

above examples, as a means of camouflage or masking but is not equated with masquerade. It can be argued that in mimicry, masquerade may be used but masquerade does not always transpire to mimicry.

ii. Masquerade

The term masquerade is associated with pretense and disguise. If cross-dressing is a means of performing or expressing the "true"/ "authentic" self as is assumed with the concept of "coming out", then is cross-dressing not a form of masquerade? Upon studying Muholi's different representations of cross-dressing in the context of South African townships and urban spaces, other forms of cross-dressing are readable as masquerade and other forms of cross-dressing complicate the meanings that are linked to that term. The excessively adorned males allude to the codes of femininity that are linked with "feminine masquerade". Kimberly Devlin (1991: 71) draws from Mary Anne Doane to define masquerade as "the hyperbolisation of female accoutrements" and distinguishes between "flaunting those signifiers and flouting those signifiers" where flaunting is linked to masquerade and flouting is linked to female mimicry. However, considering the fact that communal events amongst some African communities such as the Gelede, Yoruba Egugun and Burkina Faso (amongst others) have been called masquerades, the notion of masking and gender performance becomes a complex one (Hinckley 1986, Drewal 1974). The excessive clothing and make-up worn by gays are understood to be donned for particular occasions such as parades, beauty contest and for attending gay clubs rather than as everyday appearance. The women in Muholi's photographs; however, cross-dress on a daily basis, play masculine roles within family and society, and maintain that masculinity is the expression of a true self where dressing like a woman would be masquerading or pretending to be someone else. In *The Eternal Masquerade*, Dennis Bradley (1922) defined masquerade as "ornamental philosophy" (Tseëlon 2001: 103). In it, Bradley argues that "science has been co-opted to legitimate differences of social power relations along biological lines between men and women, normal and perverse sexuality, normality and mental illness" (Tseëlon 2001: 104). Power relations can be argued to be positions that are constantly destabilized. This further complicates understanding gender and masquerade with regards to the representations of sexuality in South Africa and as explored by Hlobo and Muholi.

Jennifer Craik (2005: 203) defines cross-dressing as "a sartorial desire where the uniform (women's clothes) enables the subject to perform authentically". Craik's definition becomes questionable, especially when examining Muholi's photographs. The notion of authenticity seems illusory in that codes of identity are always already quoted from a number of pervasive sources. Craik (2005: 109) continues to say that "[if] the concept of masking evokes an epistemology of authentic identity ('behind the mask'), locating it on the epistemological side of the notion of performance moves it away from 'authentic identity' and closer to 'an appearance of authentic identity'". It can be argued therefore that performance overlaps into general means of expressing identities. Masking in Muholi's work is ambiguous in that the women and men portrayed can be argued to be expressing "authentic" identities, but could be argued to apply masculinity as masquerade; and masking then becomes ambiguous as a tool for visibility and invisibility.

Masking or masquerade can be seen as a form of repression. Being secretly gay or lesbian is also considered to be repression. Considering Muholi's documentary photographs of lesbian women, masking becomes complex. In Western theory, femininity is related to masquerade and ultimately with hysteria. Diane Hunter (1983: 485) in her analysis of the relationship between the "hysteric" named Bertha Pappenheim who was "theorized" by Freud and Breuer, defines hysteria as "a self-repudiating form of feminine discourse in which the body signifies [that which] social conditions make …impossible to state linguistically". In this article Hunter argues that there exists "a function of the repressed femininity in men", which she calls male hysteria (Hunter 1983: 485). When considering Muholi's photographs, the women that dress like men and appropriate male mannerisms and the men who adopt femininity, gender-specific theories seem somewhat curtailed. Tseëlon (2001: 108) suggests that

> [t]he inverse masquerade (women dressing like men), however, marked her (just like the hysterical who articulates failed interpellation: the subject's inability to fulfil its symbolic designation) not as an author of a new meaning but as a deviant from the symbolic universe: a pervert.

Taking into consideration the particular contexts that Muholi focuses on, subjectivity becomes more elusive. Femininity is theoretically defined as masquerade where the hysterical presents features of masquerade in psychoanalytic theories of "inessential" femininity. Tseëlon (2001: 108) observes that the use of masquerade "to denote the position of the feminine is a

longstanding one in psychoanalysis" that is "based on the idea that femininity is a disguise assumed by the woman in order to disarm the male fear of her power". The women that Muholi portrays present an ambiguity between masking femininity and unmasking the personhood assumed by psychoanalytic theories to be hiding her power in order to "disarm" male fear. There are also more factors at play than male fear. Some of the women that Muholi portrays are survivors of curative rape. Curative rape has become one of the means to purge lesbian women out of the township social system. Tseëlon (2001:109) points out that "modes of clothing can only be problematised and pathologised against a symbolic system which allocates rigid space for appropriate behaviour". The formation and acceptance of a set of protocol for gender roles or "appropriate" gender behaviour is illusive.

Riviere (1986: 36) states that "[t]he elaborate masquerade of the feminine is a means of deflection, [a] means of covering up a crime: theft, illicit acquisition or assertion of power". One has to distinguish between the uses of the "mask" of femininity as performed by women and as performed by men. The question of power becomes intriguing when considering sex, gender and masking. For instance, is masquerade a form of deflection in drag culture or when it is utilized in performance art? When looking at Hlobo's performance art, it can be argued that he makes minor references to drag culture. The performances that demonstrate references to drag culture are *Ntywilela Ngaphansi* (2006) [fig. 2.8] and *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005) [fig. 2.3]. The only such references are the bright pink, yellow, light-blue, and orange ribbons that make the feminine pigtails in Hlobo's hair in *Ntywilela Ngaphansi* (2006) and the colourful tie skirt in *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005). In the first performance, Hlobo is dressed in pants made of inner rubber tube that is stitched together by various bright and feminine colours. There is a leather-belt that crosses his chest and attaches a large inner-rubber tube "bag" which he drags as he walks. The leather-belt with round, pink knobs is associated with drag culture. The "bag" is attached to his upper body and to his ankles by long colourful cords. The artist mingles, drinks wine, looking at the artwork shown in that group exhibition like other gallery visitors. He wears pigtails woven with bright ribbons.

Hlobo stands out because of this "bag" dragging behind him. The word "drag" is used as a noun (the sub-culture) and as a verb (to haul or lug). The "bag" then begins to read as a kind of heavy

burden that follows and inscribes the social body almost forcing the artist to walk in a certain way and prompts other gallery visitors to *avoid the burden*. Note that the avoidance is more out of respect for the artist and the artwork (bred by museum and gallery ethics) rather than the mechanisms of stigma[61]. However, Hlobo uses it to highlight these mechanisms within the larger community. The *difference*, again, creates the spectacle. In Hlobo's mingling with gallery visitors, it can be said that there is an element of visitors escaping the video camera that documents the performance and follows the artist. Any viewer/visitor that talks to the artist functions on two levels; he or she interrupts the staged-ness of the performance and becomes part of the performance (as a [non] fictional character and as a prop) while depreciating the mechanisms of stigma. The artist then is also both spectacle and spectator. The bag can also read in the metaphorical sense of the phrase "personal baggage". It is reminiscent of a song by American singer Erykah Badu (1998) with the lyrics "*bag lady, you gon' hurt yo back, draggin' all them bags like that… I guess nobody ever told you, all you must hold on to is you,… one day he gon' say, you crowdin' my space, so pack light"*[62]. The insinuation in the lyrics is that social gender stereotyping sees women to have more personal issues and excess than men. In a way it makes women seem more socially unfavorable because they have excess "issues". "He" in this sense is important because "he" must not come home to a crowded space. However, in this performance, Hlobo makes visible men's excess issues and hidden luggage with regards to masculinity. It can also be said here that although physically he is male, he can be interpreted as the bag lady and as someone who carries around "lady issues" and "pink" secrets in the bag.

Masquerade is then differentiated on gender construction. Judith Bettelheim (1998: 68) distinguishes between female and male masquerade and performance in saying that "female performers do not conceal their identity… there is no secrecy". Considering that Bettelheim makes this argument with regards to staged performance and carnival dancers of the Caribbean, the distinction between male and female performers and masquerade becomes indefinite when discussing gendered cross-dressing and masquerade. While it can be argued that the women portrayed by Muholi are revealing their identity, it can also be asserted that they are concealing their identity. Muholi's *I.D. Crisis* (2003) [fig. 1.12] is a case in point. The woman in the

[61] In the third chapter, I use Ervin Goffman's theory on stigma from which I will break down the components of this theory.
[62] < http://www.musicnotes.com/sheetmusic/mtd.asp?ppn=MN0038875> accessed 06/01/2009

photograph wraps her breasts with bandages. Nevertheless, concealment can be attributed to the men in Muholi's photographs and Hlobo's performances. The men, such as *Miss D'Vine* (2007) [fig. 2.6] and *La Rochelle* (2008) [fig. 2.7], cover themselves with make-up and Miss D'Vine covers his crotch while La Rochelle clinches his breasts. Nicholas Hlobo obscures or masks his face in lace in *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005) [fig. 2.3], with white silicon in *Umkhwetha* (2006) [fig. 2.1], covers his body in *Ungamqhawuli* (2008) [fig. 2.13] in pink and blue silk and, and with a white cotton hood in *Amaqanda'am* (2007) [fig. 2.14]. He exposes his body in *Dubula* (2007) [fig. 2.5]. Secrecy is operative in both male and female as performance. Hlobo's bags, in each of his performances, are filled with unseen material that can be interpreted as the secrets that are attached to his body or psychological luggage. The representation in Hlobo's and Muholi's work also destabilizes the reductive understanding of masculinity and the perception that femininity as excessive.

Masking can thus be understood literally and metaphorically. The women that Muholi portrays do not necessarily literally wear masks; however, they put up a facade that can be argued to operate symbolically as a mask. Artist, Rotimi Fani Kayode once stated that "[in] African traditional art, the mask does not represent a material reality: rather, the artist strives to approach a spiritual reality…" (Smalls 2006: 129). James Smalls (2006: 129) defined the white mask worn by the sitter Kayode's *The Golden Phallus* (1989) [fig. 2.15] as "part of a masquerade" and "as protection against the gaze that attempts to appropriate the black penis in the white colonialist imagination". Further, the phallus, the anus and the mask "served similarly as sites for exploring the relationship between the sexual and the spiritual, the interracial and the intercultural; and serves a gateway function which does not conceal a true self (as masquerade in Western tradition often assumes)" (Smalls 2006: 129). Nicholas Hlobo often utilizes the phallic objects and orifices that refer to the anus and the mask interchangeably that suffice to distort restrictive gender construction, to repel and attract the gaze which is not restricted to colonialist perspective but also to "African traditional" perspective.

Another distortion of the penis as mask is exemplified in Muholi's *Dada* (2003) [fig. 1.11] which portrays a woman wearing a white strap-on dildo. In this image, the woman's crotch is covered or masked by the dildo. Needless to say that the notion of a white mask is a recurring motif as

has been illustrated in Hlobo's *Umkhwetha* (2006) [fig. 2.1], Kayode's *The Golden Phallus* (1989) [fig. 2.15], Lyle Ashton Harris' triptych *Miss America* (1987) [fig. 2.16] amongst others. The penis as an attribute of a black female body becomes more entrancing in that it not only operates as the white mask but also as an index to the cultural and historical silencing of the black female body. While a mask is used by the abovementioned male artists to some extent as a form of facial erasure, the vagina is eclipsed from discourse in Muholi's *Dada* (2003). Frantz Fanon (1967: 170) asserts that "when one abandons oneself to the movement of … images, one is no longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed, he is turned into a penis, he is a penis". Muholi's *Dada* (2003) sanctions powerlessness to the penis because it renders it a mere object rather than the signifier of virility and birthright to authority. Its condom-covered lifelessness does not lend the same notion of power to the female body but does, however, surrender to her subjectivity.

In his discussion of the Algerian woman, Fanon insists on her nonmimetic character following the theories of masquerade that proclaim that "there is no model behind imitation, no genuine femininity beneath the performance, no original before the copy" (Fuss 1994: 27). Fuss (1994: 28) outlines Fanon's insistence "that the Algerian woman's European impersonation marked by the removal [of the veil] is an 'authentic birth in a pure state'" which she argues that it is not a presumption "that femininity is itself a cultural production of the masquerade but that masquerade is a natural function of femininity". Further, Fuss (1994: 28) argues that what is employed is mimesis that takes masquerade as its object because it involves "the deliberate taking up of a cultural role for political ends". The township women portrayed by Muholi inhabit a complicated space where the mimicry of masculinity and the appropriation of masculine objects reveal the element of masquerade as a visual strategy and as a function, also, of masculinity and not just as a natural function of femininity.

Role-playing and masking has been defined in reductive stipulations. Carlson (1996: 39-40) discusses Jean-Paul Sartre's perspective of performance as a danger to the psyche and states that "when we commit ourselves to become a 'representation' for others or for ourselves we exist 'only in representation' a condition that Sartre calls 'nothingness or bad faith'". This argument

seems to assume that an individual can exist outside of the social realm which is made up of representations. Satre (1969: 364) also asserts that

> by virtue of consciousness the Other is for me simultaneously the one who has stolen my being from me and the one who causes 'there to be' a being which is my being… thus I have a comprehension of this ontological structure: I am responsible for my being-for-others, but I am not the foundation of it.

The juxtaposition of self and other can be scrutinised more closely to reveal states of in-between-ness. Nevertheless, the binary of self and other is alleged by Sartre to have no original that is mimicked but rather a complex of sources that make up an identity. For Sartre an identity is constructed from the "theft" of social models where "theft" can be attributed to any person. Identity thus seems like material exchange between people. Hlobo and Muholi show identity as something that is already appropriated and available for appropriation.

iii. "In Her Shoes": A Queen's Dilemma

> Often one does not […] cease playing a role simply because one has begun to understand it (Baldwin 1962: 291)

Masculinity is sometimes framed as a goal, an achievement that is attained through proving the ability to act out the social criteria constructed in communities. Herzfeld's (1985: 16) discussion stipulates "performative excellence" that is defined by being good at being a man. Gutman (1987: 386) defines masculinity of the Sambia of New Guinea as "an intense phallic masculinity such that the issue is not one of males striving for masculinity versus femininity but rather for a particular kind of masculinity, that is, by its nature only available to men to achieve". It has to be considered that each community has differing versions of masculinity. Robert Morrel (1998: 607) discusses four categories of masculinity; namely, dominant, complicit, submissive and oppositional and argues that the dominant masculinity overshadows other types of masculinity. Femininity has been positioned so that it is the opposite of masculinity. Wray Herbert (1983: 170) points out that femininity has been treated as an illness in diagnoses that defined a healthy woman as "more submissive, less independent, less aggressive, more emotional and more emotionally expressive, more excitable and more concerned about appearance" and that "masculinity alone is not clinically suspect but femininity is". Femininity has also been packaged more as a commodity than masculinity has (Roberts 1998: 817). However, black masculinity has also been relegated "to the culturally abjected, pathologised space of femininity, degeneracy, and

castration (Fuss 1994: 30). The images presented by Hlobo and Muholi complicate these positions of power.

The stereotypes of gay identities that have been circulated in popular culture present a number of codes that have been appropriated as "gay identities". There are specific codes of femininity that can be seen in Muholi's photographs of male cross-dressers that at first glance can be associated with Western femininity but have become circulated as a global construction of gay-ness through cultural phenomena such as drag culture. This construction of femininity has been appropriated by the men in Muholi's photographs but there is ambiguity in knowing whether the appropriated femininity is empowering or has an opposite function. Male cross-dressers become the object of the male gaze, the sexual icon that has the sexual body emphasized. *Miss D'Vine* (2007) [fig. 2.6] and *La Rochelle* (2008) [fig. 2.7] look passive but there is also an indistinct level of liberty. Linda Ngcobo, a male founder of the group who later died of AIDS described township gay culture as being centered on cross-dressing and role-playing (Donham 1998: 6). Linda explained that "[no] one, including gay men, seemed to be quite sure what 'gay' meant – were gay men really women? Men? Or something in-between?" (Donham 1998: 7). Donham (1998: 7) points out that the phenomenon of black men in townships who publicly identify as gay is a fairly recent one, and he states that black townships categorized gayness as hermaphroditism. Nicholas Hlobo's sculptures are characterized by hermaphroditism or ambiguity between genders. Hlobo defines Xhosa masculinity as "weight" or "heaviness" and "difficulty" in comparison to femininity but does not necessarily see feminity as a better alternative.

Certain garments that are worn by women have been seen as restrictive or constricting as had been rejected by some feminist trends in the 1960s (Farrell-Beck 2002: 140). Further, cross-dressing by men has been treated as a disease. Marjorie Garber (1992: 95) outlines Robert Stoller's (psychoanalyst) assertion that,

> [the] transvestite states the question, "When I am like a female, dressed in her clothes and appearing to be like her, have I nonetheless escaped the danger? Am I still male, or did the women succeed in ruining me? And the perversion – with its exposed thighs, ladies' underwear and coyly covered crotch – answers, "No. You are still intact. You are male. No matter how many feminine clothes you put on, you did not lose that ultimate insignia of your maleness, your penis." And the transvestite gets excited. What can be more reassuringly penile than a full hearty erection?

Garber (1992: 96) argues against Stoller's allegations that transvestitism is phallessential and his definition of female behaviour as "ruin" and "perversion". Existing gendered politics are even more complicit when considering race and transvestitism. Black transvestitism has been met with skepticism such as Trent D'Arby's declaration that "any black act in the states who has been [a] massive quote-unquote crossover success has had to emasculate himself to some degree" (Garber 1992: 274). Garber (1992: 274) further states that the effect of the disruption of black male-to-female (and female-to-male) transvestites "is to unsettle expectations and bring them to crisis". When looking at Zanele Muholi's *Miss D'Vine* (2007) and *La Rochelle* (2008) there seems to be a predicament. The male body seems too large for the clothes worn, and the two characters do not seem to be using this to mock femininity. Their (black) masculinity is compacted, compressed or frustrating the appropriation of femininity. Mark Sealy (2002: 39) argues that in radicalized discourse the black male body "functions as a terminal signifier – racism's degree-zero: trapped in fantasies of tribal or urban violence, immured in an exorbitant and pathological sexuality, petrified in nature as flies in amber". The black male body appears to be violated by feminine accoutrements.

Recalling Ajamu Tyekimba's *Body-builder in Bra* (1990) [fig. 2.17], there is the notion that femininity overpowers masculinity where female clothing seems to affect brutality on the body. Moreover, there is a stark contrast between the hyper-masculinity of the body in comparison to the feminine accoutrements. La Rochelle, however, has a plump body whose chest is represented as lacking the breast he clutches. The black male body is represented as an entity that is compounded by lack or deficiency that is coated in the excess of the markings of its cultural history. The brassieres worn by La Rochelle and Miss D'Vine are an index to the absence of female breasts swathed in wigs, lipstick, high heels, brightly coloured shawls and boas. They also avert attention from the scars on Miss D'Vine's legs which do not satisfy the aesthetic that is associated with the "feminine body". Hlobo illustrates this lack in his work, where *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) [fig. 3.1] could refer to a castration; however, in his performances his body has something attached to it that is both a burden and endeared excess.

IV: Resistance and Aesthetics of Performance

Apart from the fact that historically performance art began as a means to transgress dominant social structures, performance has been a means of resistance in different contexts. Forte (2003: 270) states that performance art "provides a creative locale where artmaking and sociopolitical concerns merge because of the open-ended nature of the art form, its historical basis in radical intention". Performance art allows artists to use their bodies to re-position themselves as references to different identities or, more precisely, marginalized identities. Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi use performance art as a device to re-map marginalized identities.

As argued by bell hooks (2000: 210), there is a distinction between "performance that is used to manipulate in the interests of survival (the notion of wearing a mask), and performance as ritual play (as art)". This distinction, hooks (2000: 210) suggests, should be made and the similarities should be acknowledged because otherwise it would imply "that the performative arts in black expressive culture emerge as a response to circumstances of oppression and exploitation". When Zanele Muholi walks amongst the crowd at a taxi rank carrying large images of black, naked women to lay them down for display, she affects a form of activism (which she refers to as "visual activism"). Nakedness in the public domain has become sufficient as a maker of transgression. In South Africa, the most notable protest march by women in the nude occurred in 1991[63]. In Western artistic trends the female body has been represented as a contained and regulated entity; the goal was "to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside" (Nead 1991: 6). In opposition, the black female body has been "perceived as pathological… where it is characterized by the unbound, uncontrolled and limitless nature" (Nelson 1995: 100). Arguably, white female bodies could be defined as nude under the condition of containment, whereas black female bodies represented the obscene. It is interesting that the area where Muholi displayed these images is largely populated by black men and women and yet these images achieved reactions showing repugnance. Also, it is noteworthy that black females do not recognize or do not want to recognize the unclothed black female body when it is in the public arena and that it still causes repulsion and poses transgression to them.

[63] See Sheila Meintjes, *Naked Women's Protest, July 1990: 'We Won't Fuck for Houses'* (2007)

Jennifer Craik (2005: 224) argues that transgression has become encoded in the very discourse of sexual identity. Dominant heteropatriarchal structures have situated non-heterosexual identities as opposition. Performing sexuality publicly also poses a threat to the dominant structures. Nicholas Hlobo's *Dubula* (2007) [fig. 2.5] interrogates these boundaries. As he moves towards the crowd clad in a leather cord with a ball dragging on the floor the crowd moves away. He puts his arms across his chest, looks around and receives no eye contact or an uneasy stare. Through this performance, Hlobo's naked body maps the processes that have defined obscenity and exposes the limits that have marked the black body as transgressive. Hlobo also points out that the black nakedness cannot avoid the political associations that have, for a long time in the past, been marked on the black body. Norman Denzin (2003: 5) notes that W. E. B. Du Bois "addressed race from a performance standpoint" linking "the definitions and meanings of blackness to issues of theatre and performance" that would offer a platform for "pedagogical performances that articulate positive black 'social and cultural agency'".

Performance has been used as vehicle for political propositions in feminist movement, gay and lesbian movements and anti-racism resistance in the form of the theatrical, performance art and public demonstrations. Tseëlon (2001: 107) argues that "[t]he performative thesis has been taken up by queer theory to destabilize gender and sexuality categories… and it has used drag as a vehicle to problematise those very habitual categories" (e.g. Case 1990, Garber 1992). It could be argued that the recurrence of white face in art works by artists such Hlobo and Ashton Harris subverts blackface to make a political statement. Performance interrogates the binary positions delegated through history and politics to find a space that is in-between. To use Turner's term to define these spaces and states of being, the word liminoid (-oid is 'like') is set apart from 'liminal' in that it focuses on the more limited and individualistic action where convention is not paid tribute to but rather subverted consciously or by accident and introduces and explores "different structures that may develop into real alternatives to the status quo" (Carlson 1996: 19). Turner used this term to define ritual performance which effects a change in society.

Arguably, Hlobo's and Muholi's art work inhabits these complex spaces in order to affect a change in the way black sexuality is perceived. Carlson (1996: 15-17) stresses Turner's hypothesis that

> first a breach [is instituted] in an established and accepted norm, then mounting crisis as factions are formed followed by a process of redress and formal and informal mechanisms of crisis resolution are employed and re-integration, very likely involving an adjustment of the original cultural situation or alternatively, a recognition of the permanence of the schism.

Turner distinguished structure and anti-structure in (ritual) performance, stressing the "subversive potential of anti-structure [where] liminality as anti-structure can be both chaotic and innovative" (Carlson 1996: 15-17). Brian Sutton-Smith (1972: 17-19) affirms that "the disorderly quality of liminal activities sometimes merely involved 'letting off steam' from an 'overdose of order' but [it] can be undertaken because we have something to learn through being disorderly". Performance allows a detachment from definitive structure. For example, in his performances, Hlobo is between being detached from and being attached to Xhosa and his immediate social surrounding. Hlobo's and Muholi's work do not only transgress the social and moral boundaries of the communities in which they reside, but they also draw attention to the unawareness of processes that construct those boundaries.

Conclusion

Baudrillard (1994: 19) once defined the body as a stage. Using this proposition, it can be stated that the body is a stage upon which history dramatizes itself. Nicholas Hlobo's performances and Zanele Muholi's reportage make it uneasy to simply name, label and categorise because they exhibit culture as something that is constantly changing. Norman Denzin (2003: 12) links performance and cultural processes stating that "culture is a verb, [and is] static, [as it] turns performance into a site where memory, emotion, fantasy, and desire interact with one another". He makes another link to performance and the ethnographic praxis where he sees the observer and the observed as co-performers in an event, using Peggy Phelan's (1993) statement that "all seeing is hooded by loss….in looking at the other… the subject seeks to see" herself (Denzin 2003: 12). The third link between performance and hermeneutics "privileges performed experience as a way of looking, a method of critical enquiry, and as a mode of understanding" (Denzin 2003: 13). Further, Denzin (2003: 13) outlines that performance is a "critical site of power and politics".

The differing discourses present different definitions of what is spectacle and what is not, what is performance and what is not, which further complicate the notion of authentic being, or origin.

Seeing and being seen forms part of the social matrix and has been used as a means that not only privileges sight but also designates power. Power oscillates between seer and seen. Through the examples offered by Hlobo and Muholi power seems illusive and is demonstrated to be exchangeable. Foucalt argues that power always elicits resistance (Denzin 2003: 14). Arguably, it is resistance that makes power interchangeable because it allows for a constant re-framing of beliefs. Performance destabilizes rigid constructions and questions the isolation of certain things from mainstream society. In this chapter, the discussion of Hlobo's and Muholi's work reveal how seeing and being seen alternate as positions of power and vulnerability.

Images

Fig. 2.1: Nicholas Hlobo, *Umkhwetha* (2006), Silicon, rubber (costume), performance

Fig. 2.2: Nicholas Hlobo, *Ndiyafuna* (2006), glass fibre, rubber inner tube, ribbon, jeans, sneakers, lace, wood, 110 x 170 x 100cm (approximate)

Fig. 2.3: Nicholas Hlobo, *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005), Performance

Fig. 2.4:
Bocio Figure, Fon, Republic of Benin, wood and organic materials, h: 36.8cm, Collection: Don. H. Nelson

Fig. 2.5: Nicholas Hlobo, *Dubula* (2007), Performance

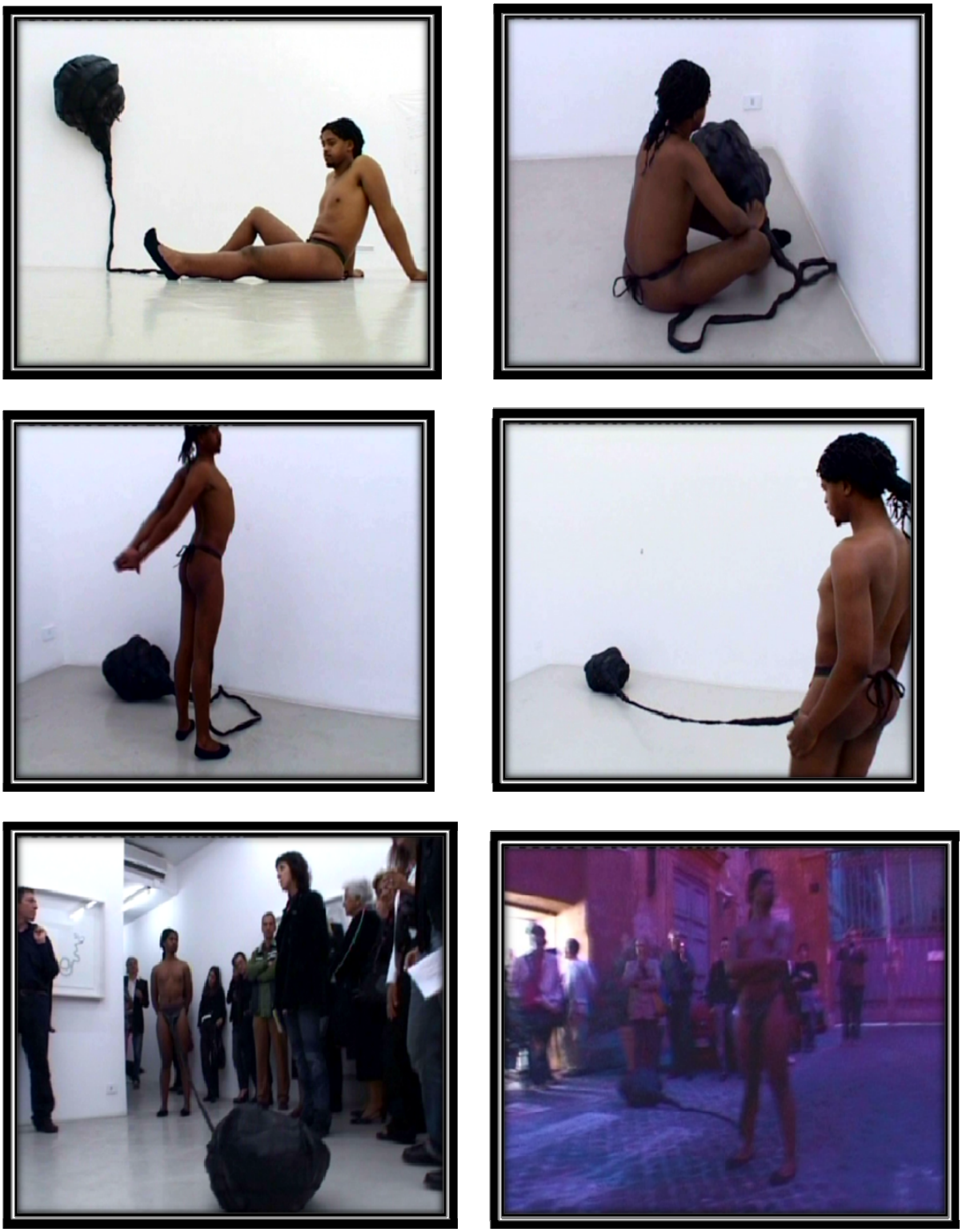


Fig. 2.6: Zanele Muholi, *Miss D'vine I-V* (2006), Lambda print, Image size: 76.5 x 76.5cm, Paper size: 86.5 x 86.5cm

Fig. 2.7:
Zanele Muholi
La Rochelle I-III (2008)
Lambda print
45 x 45cm

Fig. 2.8:
Nicholas Hlobo
Ntywilela Ngaphansi (2007)
Performance

Fig. 2.9: Nicholas Hlobo, *Unongayindoda* (2006) (installation including *Imtyibilizi Xa Yomile* bag**:** *In a While*), Organza, rubber, ribbon,260 x 600 x 330cm (variable)

Fig. 2.10: Zanele Muholi, *Faces and Phases* (2007), [left to right] *Dikeledi Sibanda, Tumi Mkhuma, Nonzwakazi P Ncapayi, Nosipho Solundwana, Thembi Nyoka, Sindi Shabalala, Siza Khumalo, Pearl Hlongwane*
Silver gelatin print, Image size: 76.5 x 50.5cm, Paper size: 86.5 x 60.5cm

Fig. 2.11: Zanele Muholi, *Isibuko I* (2005), Silver gelatin print, 385 x 255mm

Fig. 2.12: Zanele Muholi, From *Dress Code Series* (2006) (see chapter 3), Lambda print, 375 x 500mm

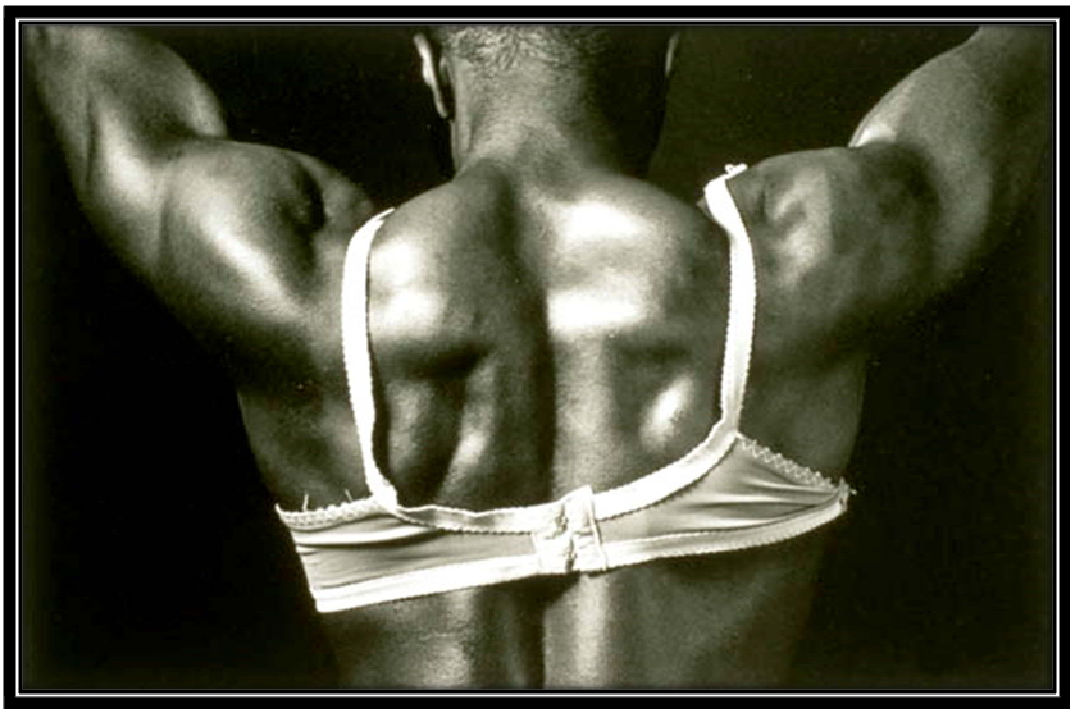
Fig. 2.13: Nicholas Hlobo, *Ungamqhawuli* (2008), Vinyl, ribbon, fabric, wood, synthetic rope, pulley, hooks, 155x125x64cm (excluding ropes), Performance

Fig. 2.14:
Nicholas Hlobo
Amaqanda'am (2007)
Performance

Fig. 2.15:
Rotimi Fani-Kayode
Golden Phallus (1990)
Photograph

Fig. 2.16:
Lyle Ashton Harris
Miss America (1988)
Photograph

Fig. 2.17: Ajamu Tyekimba, *Bodybuilder in Bra* (1990), Photograph, 24.8 x38.1cm



Chapter 3
States of Vulnerability in Processes of Violence

Muholi's first major exhibition that was entitled *Only Half The Picture* (2006) evoked vulnerability in the representation of female bodies that were being bandaged, flattened and covered. The exhibition further exposed how heteronormative privilege in South Africa is constructed through the bodies of black women, and also revealed how race and gender operate in the construction of contemporary post-apartheid homophobia (Ngcobo 2006: 49). In most contexts vulnerability is associated with femininity while violence is associated masculinity. Furthermore, township lesbians and gays are vulnerable to hate crimes (Shongwe 2006: 101). Some of the women that are represented in Muholi's photographs are survivors of hate crimes. They were shown with scars on their bodies. The gendered and racialised body has been scrutinised in cultural discourse, making it vulnerable to varieties of perceptions. Muholi confronts the constraints that have framed bodies of alterity as such. She also interrogates the body internally, which has been categorised as the obscene, as taboo or as dangerous. Bodily boundaries are rendered imprecise in Muholi's work as metaphor to social peripheries.

Some of Hlobo's sculptures and performances demonstrate masculine vulnerabilities. In his work, he demonstrates the fallibility of gender constructions. Hlobo examines codes that embody both violence and vulnerability where femininity, masculinity and alternative genders are capable of violence and susceptible to vulnerability. Also, through these transgressive artworks, certain socio-political structures seem more vulnerable in comparison to others. I examine Hlobo's *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) [fig. 3.1] and photographs from Muholi's *Only Half the Picture* (2006)

I: The Hero and The Victim: Race and Gender Politics of Vulnerability

The female body is presumed to embody vulnerability. Feminist theory and activism centred on violence as external force inflicted through cultural constitutions. In *Violence and the Vulnerabilities of Gender*, Shani D'Cruze and Anupama Rao (2005: 6) historically situate violence as masculine display of social status and assert that "violence is an enabling condition or the ground upon which sexed vulnerabilities are staged". The body is a primary site from

which violence can be articulated. Hlobo and Muholi show the body as a violated entity and whose vulnerability is unsexed through the use of visual codes of gender. Hlobo's *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) [fig. 3.1] is a depiction of male genitals that look as if they have been cut off from the body. Upon close inspection, the phallic object is made rigid by the white cotton and five plastic tubes that are inserted. Within each tube (except the tube that is in the centre), there is a red ribbon that suggests blood, and each tube is covered with pink ribbon. Hlobo defines this work using words that suggest violence. For instance, he states that it is an "amputated phallus-like shape" and that "these balls, the whole structure looks to [him] like something that is butchered" and he affirms that he "went rough on it, like an inexperienced surgeon" (Perryer 2006: 10). In his description of the parts that hang below this shape which he refers to as "balls", he states that "[we would] think it's a scrotum, but at the same time it looks skinned" (Perryer 2006: 10). Considering Hlobo's use of words, he speaks of violence from a position of victimhood and destabilises masculinity *as well as* maleness as the essential social expression of masculinity. Hlobo relates this violence to the Xhosa circumcision in stating that "[t]the reason [he] thought of something being butchered is because of the problems [they] have around male circumcision in Xhosa culture" (Perryer 2006: 10).

Hlobo's *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) [fig. 3.1] draws attention to the concept that endured pain results in strength which epitomises masculinity in most societies and popular culture. For instance; in visual culture, film in particular, many American "hero"-based movies begin the plot with a male character who endures tough training or the pain of having witnessed his family (the metaphor of his body) being violated. For example, *Rambo* was characterised as the "*uber*-eighties American hero" (Lichtenfeld 2004: 141). The male character "*makes a choice*" to avenge his family or his country through enduring the pain that is necessary for his metamorphosis into a hypermasculine being. The "choice" can only be geared towards proving his masculine character lest he is deemed feeble. The amplification of "masculinity", "strength", "revenge", "violence" and so on in American popular film cannot be directly paralleled to separate and particular realities but certain similarities (which may have influenced each other) may be drawn. Kerry Segrave (1997: 230) estimates that "Hollywood dominates the world's screens, getting about seventy percent total playing time". This popular culture has had its influences in constructions of masculinity and its link to invincibility and violence.

There are other forms of masculinity that not only link violence to masculinity but the endurance of pain as well. The Xhosa circumcision is said to be a choice. “You have to be circumcised not at a very young age, but when you are old enough to make that decision”, Hlobo asserts (Perryer 2006: 10). The consciousness of the hardship and pain of circumcision is the most significant not only in defining masculinity but also to sustain the traditional structures and gender constructions. The “choice” must always be in favour of circumcision otherwise there are unfavourable social consequences of not being seen as a man (as was discussed in previous chapters). A man is thus defined, in this context; by his capacity to endure pain, especially if it has been “chosen” by that man for a greater social outcome.

Hlobo’s artwork not only represents masculinity that expresses violence as its social condition and consents to pain being inflicted on it as proof of its strength, but also the point where that strength becomes vulnerability. The penis and scrotum are the foremost bodily signifiers of masculinity and virility but as such, they are dependant on their attachment to the (masculine) body and a (masculine) mentality to make the “right choices” in satisfying the criteria of masculinity. The amputation suggested by Hlobo in *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) [fig. 3.1] is a demonstration of the vulnerability of masculinity and of its prescriptive gender structures. The scrotum is very sensitive, yet Hlobo depicts it as an entity that is stretched out from the heaviness it carries, “skinned”, stitched and left hanging as if it is a pair of punching bags. Any pain inflicted on it would not be that of “choice” and resultant virility. Violence, in this case, cannot prove strength and endurance but seems to lead to destruction. The weight of the balls makes the sculptural structure seem as if it will snap and tear the sheath that joins the phallus to the balls.

Hlobo’s alchemy also highlights the predicament of male hegemony by using the double meaning of the word *dlozi*. This word, Hlobo explains, means “ancestors” in most Nguni languages but is also used in Xhosa to mean “sperm”, and “ejaculate” (when used as the vulgar verb: *ukudloza*) (Perryer 2006: 10). The title can read as the weight of the ancestors or the weight of the sperm. In some cultures, it is understood that traditional structures are performed in respect of ancestors who form a significant part of a community and a part of the theological understanding of being. There is a sense of respect, deference or reverence with regards to

ancestors as compared to sperm. Ali Mazrui (2001: 100) argues that "ancestry is taken seriously by the … ethnicist African partly because continuity [between the past and present] is an important principle" and it contributes to societal political experience. Hlobo contrasts the notion of respect by drawing similarities in meaning between ancestors and sperms. It is so taboo to speak of sperms that the only word for sperm that arises in formal translations is *imbewu* (seed)[64]. The paradoxical use of both meanings collapses the power that is associated with ancestors and also elevates the degradation associated with sperms so that their relationship is not polarised but forms two sides of one entity. For Hlobo, the "sperms and the ancestors are related, because sperm are part of the seeds that give life… for the spirit to be there, there had to be sperm first" (Perryer 2006: 10). In Hlobo's sculpture, the ancestors are in the same space as the sperm and that space (the scrotum) is in a vulnerable position which might consequentially fall to the ground. The visual language utilised by Hlobo may suggest that the traditional structures put in place and observed by and for ancestry are in danger of collapsing and are themselves weighed by other forces or external structures such as the scale that suspends the whole structure.

The hook on which the phallic shape hangs also suggests violence. There are other external forces that inflict violence on, and expose the vulnerability of, certain masculinities and this is visually absent in Hlobo's sculpture but is suggested. The artwork suggests a visually absent presence of the entity that places the genitalia on a scale, that which weighs masculinity, that which organises micro-scale structures. That presence is temporarily occupied by Hlobo (apart from the installation process – a point at which the work is usually not open to interpretation). Hlobo walks around *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) [fig. 3.1] covered in white silicon and wearing a long white skirt in a performance I mentioned earlier *Umkhwetha* (2006) [fig. 2.1]. This performance adds a different dynamic to each work so that each must be read as a single artwork *and* as part of this performance. The performance allows the weighed genitals to be seen outside of its totality as an object and to be looked at as part of larger social structures.

[64] Local (Eastern Cape) Xhosa people do not identify this term to mean "sperm", only ancestors. John Sawyer (2006: 186) writes that the meaning of "sperm" for the term *amadlozi* is Xhosa and "ancestors" in Zulu, yet local Xhosa people say the meaning of sperm is a Zulu derivative. The rejection of the meaning "sperm" illustrates that it is regarded as taboo.

The association of masculinity and violence is not only formed with the assumption that violence is inflicted amongst men as a sign of social proof of durability but is also inflicted on women. In some societies, when a woman is violated, she is not treated with the same level of respect for her endurance. Women have been associated with vulnerability, and this has become a centre of focus in feminist discourse (D'Cruze and Rao 2005: 1). Muholi's activism focused particularly on victimised lesbian women more than she focused on gay men. Her first catalogue that coincided with, and was named after, her first solo show that was entitled *Only Half The Picture* (2006) begins the photographic dissertation with a drop of blood that comes from her monthly period (Ngcobo 2006: 4). This series includes photographs of rape and hate crime survivors, and an image of a rape and assault case number. In *Hate Crime Survivor I* and *II* (2004) [fig. 3.2] the camera frame is focussed from the hip to just above the knee of the subject and her hands join above the crotch. In the second photograph, a figure lies on a hospital bed and foremost are hospital files with patient documents. Muholi photographs them as victims – their faces are not shown and the focus is on the bodies that have been violated. This is articulated in *Aftermath* (2004) [fig. 3.3] where a body of a woman is shown wearing *Jockey* underpants with her hands covering her crotch and indexing the large scar that runs from her hip to her knee.

The vulnerability of the women that are represented by Muholi in the abovementioned images contrasts the defensive masculine stances she portrays in *Faces and Phases* (2007) [fig. 2.10], particularly in the portraits of Dikeledi Sibanda, Tumi Mkhuma, Nonzwakazi P Ncapayi, Nosipho Solundwana, Thembi Nyoka, Matshidiso Mofokeng, Sindi Shabalala and Siza Khumalo. The suits worn by these women assert firmness and the masculine poses seem to solicit the seriousness that is usually granted to males in male-dominated spheres. To prove this masculinity, violence manifests itself as a trait. Nkunzi Nkabinde and Ruth Morgan (2006: 17) interviewed a same sex couple where one of the interviewees "would get into physical fights with her first lover" and said that "[she] was the first one who was beating her up when she saw her talking with someone". The social construction that codifies masculinity as violence and as a tool to assert power becomes more problematic in situations where homosexuals are targets of violence.

In the previous chapter I discussed visibility as part of Muholi's political strategy aimed at normalising homosexuality. Pumla Dineo Gqola (2006: 84) suggests that it is lesbian and gay hypervisibility that is used "as a way to violate them" and uses the example of "the virulent and misogynist speculations about Banyana Banyana players' sexuality on the pages of City Press" to point out that people do know of the existence of Black lesbians in townships and use that as "a safe target of … violence". In mid-year 2008, gruesome murders of Black lesbians were reported and one of the headlines read "Lesbian Couple Killed in Execution-Style Murder"[65]. Muholi challenges the manner in which Black lesbians are seen; whether they are seen as victims or as "foot-soldiers of heteropatriarchy" (Gqola 2006: 84). Shani D'Cruze and Anupama Rao (2005: 9) suggest that visibility and secrecy work hand-in-hand in the maintenance of gendered violence in stating that although the two concepts are "conceptually distinct, [they structure] gendered embodiment as a disabling condition". Violence can be meted out as a means of punishment and, as such, it may be publicised to regulate socio-political structures and affirm ideological boundaries; however, it can also be kept secret guarded by fear of transgressing such boundaries.

Valerie Jennes and Kendal Broad (1997: 21) state that hate-motivated violence has been in the past a reflection of state policies and "has been perpetrated by representatives of the state as well as private citizens". Homosexuals are also considered the most vulnerable to hate crimes in comparison to Jews, Hispanics, Blacks and Southeast Asians (Vaid 1995: 11). Although legally, homosexuality is protected under the liberal policies of South Africa, many still cannot practice their legal rights because of the fear that they will be violated for reporting their cases (Wells and Polders 2006: 25). Gay men are also vulnerable as targeted victims of homophobic crime. They are also portrayed as victims in Muholi's photographs. Although Muholi's work focuses on black lesbians, she has also portrayed black gay men, such as in *Miss D'Vine* (2007) [fig. 2.6] that was discussed in the previous chapter, *Black Beulah* (2007) [fig. 3.4], *Two Beulahs* (2007) [fig. 3.5], *Stanley I* and *II* (2007) [fig. 1.10], *Martin Machapa* (2007) [fig. 3.6a], *Between Friends* (2007) [fig. 3.6b] and *La Rochelle* (2008) [fig. 2.7]. In these images the gay men are not shown with evidently scarred bodies or as survivors of rape or hate crime. Violence is mostly associated with men and particularly with black men (Bruce 2004: 68). However, in a research study conducted

[65] <http://www.sundayherald.com/international/shinternational/display.var.1546316.0.0.php> accessed 2008/11/10

in 2006 by Helen Wells and Louise Polders, sexual abuse or rape was found to "be equally prevalent among gay men" and because of the areas they reside in and the lack of resources, black gay men are more vulnerable and are also susceptible to domestic violence (Wells and Polders 2006: 25). It can be said that gay men are socially less valued than heterosexual women and are also victims of homophobic crime. Crimes of this nature are often not reported. Muholi explains that lesbian women are often asked: "why are you laying a charge of rape when you act like a man?" (Smith 2006: 93). Gay men, also, often avoid the ridicule of officials by not reporting hate crimes. Wells and Polders (2006: 25) point out that the reason anti-gay hate crimes are under-reported is due to the fear of hostile responses from the police and the "fear of becoming a victim for a second time at the hands of the police should their sexual orientation become known". Gay men are not taken seriously, especially if they assume feminine behaviour.

The myth of extraordinarily strong black men obscures the factors that this group is vulnerable to, especially those that are part of the lesbian and gay community. The assumption that black men are violent arises from the crime rates in segregated areas. Shihadeh and Flynn (1996: 1325) argue that the high levels of violence in urban black communities are due to segregation and lack of resources and lead to higher number of black males facing imprisonment and vulnerability to "cutbacks in public funds and resources". Rotimi Fani Kayode (1999: 280) referred to his photography –"Black, African, homosexual photography" – as a tool which he must "use not just as an instrument, but as a weapon [with which] to resist attacks on [his] integrity and indeed [his] existence in [his] own terms." For Kayode (1999: 280), "the homosexual bourgeoisie has been more supportive – not because it is especially noted for its championing of Black artists, but because black ass sells almost as well as black dick". Kayode died from Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) which is said to have an impact in the gay community (Gorman 1991: 264). Homosexuality itself was only removed from the World Health Organisation's list of diseases in 1978 (Bealey and Johnson 1999: 143). Muholi also tries to advocate for safe sex amongst homosexuals and highlights that homosexuals are vulnerable to sexual diseases due to "curative" rape that is inflicted as a hate-crime. In *Dada* (2003) [fig. 1.11] the dildo is covered in a condom, in *Untitled* (2006) [fig. 3.9] there are feet enmeshed in the shadows of blown condoms, and in her *Dress Codes* (2006)[fig. 3.10] series there is an individual covered in water-filled condoms and another woman wearing Zulu male gear sucking on one of the condoms.

Images from the triptych that is entitled *Being* (2007) [fig. 3.7] include an image of two women lying on a bed with plastic wrapping around their joined hips and *Mpumi Mathabela, Parktown, Johannesburg* (2007) [fig. 3.8] holds her hands together with both index fingers pointing upwards and wears rubber gloves. Muholi asks in an interview with Nelly Jitsuya that "gay men can use condoms, but for us [lesbians]… do I have to ask for a blood test to sleep with a woman?"[66] In this interview, Muholi is concerned that lesbian protected sex is not even discussed and complains that "there are no booklets, there's nothing to inform people on how to take precautions…you don't even think of herpes…the only thing you talk about is HIV… but what about syphilis? What about hepatitis?"[67] She then mentions that in 2004 she assisted in producing a pamphlet entitled, *Woman Loving Woman and Sexually Transmitted Infections – STI*. Muholi also draws attention to the dangers that homophobic societies pose on the gay and lesbian communities and through those hazards, homosexuals become exposed to infections and eschew from proper treatment.

The township is a place that has marginalised gay and lesbian women so that they are vulnerable. Steve Biko (1987: 109) said that "township life alone makes it a miracle for anyone to live up to adulthood" when he was referring to the degree of violence in the townships. The vulnerability of homosexuals can be traced to the political anti-gay statements and policies. Ruth Morgan and Graeme Reid (2003: 376) outline that "the origins of a formal gay and lesbian movement in South Africa can be traced to the late 1960s, when informal networks were mobilized to lobby for legislative reform". Morgan and Reid (2003: 376) stipulate that politics or non-racialism emerged in gay and lesbian groups around the 1980s which was around the same time as the emergence of black-led organisations such as the Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), established by the late Simon Nkoli. These groups also made formal contact with the liberation struggle through affiliating with the United Democratic Front and through the exiled leadership of the African National Congress (Morgan and Reid 2003: 376). However, presidents and government representatives in some African countries often rejected homosexuality. Gevisser (1994: 63) offers the example of Robert Mugabe, the President of Zimbabwe, who "announced in 1995 that homosexuals would enjoy no rights in the country

[66] <http://www.movimientos.org/dss/show_text.php3?key=6345> accessed 2008/11/03
[67] Ibid.

because homosexuality: degrades human dignity… it is unnatural and there is no question, ever, of allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs". Homosexuality was seen as a threat to the family institution and a sign of moral decay (Aarmo 1999: 268). Through the statements and other discriminatory views homosexuality becomes marginalised and unprotected from the unjustified violence that is inflicted on them. Muholi's photographs solicit the cognisance of unjustified hate-crime and the realisation of the violence society sanctions on homosexuals.

II: Embodiment

Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi use the body's agency to chart politics of gender and sexuality. As it has been argued, violence is gendered and thus embodied differentially. According to Tim Cresswell (1999: 176), embodiment refers "to the process whereby the individual body is connected into larger networks of meaning at a variety of scales [and] to the production of social and cultural relations through and by the body at the same time as the body is being 'made up' by external forces". Elizabeth Grosz (1994: 101) defines embodiment as a condition of seeing, being seen but not being able to see oneself. Grosz (1994: 101) draws contentions from Merleau-Ponty and Irigary to argue against the suggestion that femininity is the "unspoken, disembodied underside of the flesh". Muholi and Hlobo examine stigmatised bodies or bodies that are pushed to margins of society. D'Cruze and Rao (2005: 9) suggest that

> stigmatised bodies, bodies burdened by their proximity to the material circumstances of daily life (dirt, disease, blood), queer bodies – embodiments of alterity, in brief – have been subject to targeted violations even as their exceptional status has provoked discussion, debate and more simply, fascinated attention.

Arguably, the "fascinated attention" that D'Cruze and Rao mention is related to the hypervisibility that Gqola suggests becomes a means of separating bodies of alterity as markers of difference and maybe as targets for violence. It must also be noted that without visibility, discussion and debate, violence continues without mediation and resolution. D'Cruze and Rao (2005: 10) further suggest that "violence establishes social relationships, that it marks and makes bodies, that it constitutes subjects even as it renders them incomplete and lacking".

Having discussed pain as a factor that socially constructs masculinity as virile and possessive of strength, the women in Muholi's images provide access into the different embodiments of violence and vulnerability. Scars on a male or masculine body do not carry the same meanings of

revulsion as they do on a female or feminine body. Arguably, the endurance of pain socially attributes deviance and unsightliness to a female body. In *Aftermath* (2004) [fig. 3.3] the large scar signifies atrocious violence inflicted on the subject but also renders her body as repulsive. The Jockey underpants are a male commodity and signify masculinity. The visual ambiguity highlights the absurdity of the separatism of gender, their social associations and gender-based violence. The woman that is portrayed in this image had been raped two days before the photograph was taken (Smith 2006: 93). Her ability to represent this publicly accounts for her bravery but also socially renders her body as impure, contaminated and spoiled. In other contexts, physical pain is seen to embody female virtue, for instance eighteenth century China linked female bodily damage to social accomplishment, respect and power (Theiss 2005: 19). In this context, a woman who has endured her husband's beating, or punishes herself when she is widowed is accorded respect for her "high calibre"[68].

The men that Zanele Muholi portrays express femininity through their bodies. Culturally, masculine movement and feminine movement differ. Iris Young (1990: 146) notes that there are certain ways that show that movement is gendered where women throw, walk, sit, and hold things "like a girl" and men also act out masculinity. For instance, Muholi's *Miss D'Vine* (2007) [fig. 2.6], *Black Beulah* (2007) [fig. 3.4] and *Martin Machapa* (2007) [fig. 3.6a] are all photographs of men who embody femininity through gestures and through dress. Black Beulah holds a long pink beaded necklace and has one hand on his hip in a feminine manner and Martin Machapa wears a shirt that is fastened at the chest, exposing his belly, and low-cut jeans. In concurrence with Young, Tim Cresswell (1999: 177) argues that "the female body is trapped, to some degree, in immanence" and explains that "feminine intentionality is in some way inhibited" and that "feminine movement is most often located in a specific body-part rather than the whole body". It becomes intriguing, then, when one considers the femininity that is embodied by the men in Muholi's photographs. Firstly, it must be pointed out that Merleau-Ponty, Young and Cresswell are referring to a particular femininity in a particular context which they demonstrate

[68] The cult of female chastity in the "late imperial period (including the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties)" marked violence as "integral to notions of femininity and female virtue for the first time in Chinese history" (Theiss 2005: 19). The cult included "an expanded state canonisation system and private mechanisms for honouring widows who lived out of their days in service to their in-laws, refusing to remarry; widows who killed themselves to follow their husbands in death or to resist coerced marriage; and women who died resisting sexual assault" (Theiss 2005: 19). This was also the era when foot binding was practiced.

through discussing the Parisian *flaneuse*, the imperial lady traveller who, in comparison to her male counterpart (the *flaneur*), had restricted freedoms (Cresswell 1999: 178). The femininity embodied by Miss D'Vine, Martin Machapa and Black Beulah is not one of timid inhibition but rather of audacious expression. Marjorie Garber (1992: 10) argues that one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is "the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity [and thus of gender and embodiment], putting into question the categories of 'female' and 'male', whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural". Cresswell (1999: 189), discusses Young's assertion that "the body is central to dominant cultural designations of certain groups as the 'other' [which] are frequently constructed through their bodies, according to standards that designate them as 'drab, ugly, loathsome, impure, sick or deviant'". Through the construction of social categories, debatably, embodiment limits the understanding of gender.

In her discussion on the refigurations of the heterosexual male body, Catherine Waldby (1995: 266) does not see lesbian relationships as "a safe haven from the destructiveness of men because such relationships offer the possibility of a reciprocity of destruction". Waldby (1995: 266) uses the term "destruction" to define both the "tender violence and terrors involved in sexual practice and relationships". Muholi confronts us with couples lying naked on a bed as if intercourse has occurred or occurred after the photograph was taken in the series entitled *Being* (2007). Sexual exchange between two bodies of likeness presents a challenge to the heteronormative analogy of destructive intercourse. Waldby (1995: 268) argues that culture privileges masculinity which means that "the hegemonic bodily imago of masculinity conforms with his status as sovereign ego, the destroyer ... of women with the correlative status of the one who is made to conform to this ego, the destroyed". In *Being* (2007) [fig. 3.7] there is no bodily difference that defines the bodies as essentially "doer" and "done to". Muholi does, however, present the complexities of understanding sexuality and gender through stringent biologically determined sexes. In *Dada* (2003) [fig. 1.11] the dildo blurs the categorisation of "doer" and "done to" as categories of gender.

Nevertheless, Muholi, as pointed out earlier, represents homosexual couples that appear to be heterosexual, where one represents the masculine and the other represents the feminine. In

Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo, (2007) [fig. 1.4] the couple personify a heterosexual couple with child. Henri Bergson (1990: 168-169) sees the body image as "the place of passage between the movements received and thrown back, a hyphen, a connecting link between things which act upon me and the things upon which I act". Considering Bergson's suggestion, the body does not constitute a static identity that is biologically determined and immutable. When Muholi speaks of marginalised bodies, it is arguable that she also uses the metaphor of the boundaries of the body to connote societal margins. *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo* (2007) could be argued to be between social categories and positioned on the margin where they are half in/ half out. The "heterosexual look" would define them as "insiders" or as "outsiders" to homophobic societies but their homosexual reality would mark them as "outsiders" from the general society. The index that marks this couple as different from the heteronormative is Nomsa's chest that bulges from underneath her masculine shirt to divulge her large breasts. The body as a visual signifier of identity, in this photograph, is presented as an ambiguity of maternal masculinity. Nomsa looks like the "male" in the relationship, in comparison to Fondo who wears a black dress, black stockings, black high heels and long hair. Yet, Nomsa holds the child dearly to her chest, while Fondo crosses her legs and leans towards Nomsa's breast. Nomsa's maternal body and masculine clothes present an ambiguous identity that disturbs the association of gender with embodied vulnerability and violence. Moreover, the ambiguity blurs the association of masculinity with power and knowledge.

Merleau-Ponty (1963: 3) states that "the perceiving mind is an incarnated body". Nicholas Hlobo's *Chitha* (2006) [fig. 1.9] is made from a wooden dumb valet, jacket, rubber inner tube, silicon, fabric and ribbon and depicts a single body that is both masculine and feminine. The dumb valet is attached to the wall and covered with a masculine jacket – a point at which a black shawl (silicon) forms a female body that "wears" a skirt made from inner rubber tube and lace with ribbon. The term *Chitha* means to "pour [something] out" or "ejaculate" (Perryer 2006: 22). Hlobo explains that the dress has phallic valves that make it look "as if you have to blow her up" and at the same time "she is lifting a man" (Perryer 2006: 22). Further, Hlobo defines the gender ambiguity of the figure as a mêlée between masculine and feminine where power is lent to the woman to lift the man but then this is also a burden that weighs down on her (Perryer 2006: 22). Hlobo separates them but merges them into one entity. He defines the figure(s) as "Siamese

twins" but states that the woman has the ability to absorb power from the man through her black shawl because, in Hlobo's analysis, while black signifies mourning, it also absorbs energy (Perryer 2006: 22). Hlobo then announces that "she is going to fling him over and take his position" and then wonders "perhaps, there are women hidden within some men's bodies" (Perryer 2006: 22). The "ejaculation" becomes the internal secretion of both beings in this figure or the woman "ejaculates" the man. In most of his work Hlobo challenges the idea of sex and gender as a binary and combines the two as a single entity. Hlobo sculptures can be seen as hermaphroditic in their combination of masculine and feminine embodiment.

The body image is interrupted by the crossing of the boundary by internal bodily fluids and the physical fusion of two bodies. Hlobo's title *Chitha* makes references to sperm and the work refers to two uncontained bodies pouring into each other. Elizabeth Grosz (1989: 72) defines abjection as that which "involves the paradoxically necessary but impossible desire to transcend corporeality" and as "a refusal of the defiling, impure, uncontrollable materiality of the subjects embodied existence". Abjection, to Grosz (1989: 72), is "a response to the various bodily cycles of *incorporation, absorption, depletion, expulsion,* the cycles of material rejuvenation and consumption necessary to sustain itself yet incapable of social recognition and representation" (own emphasis). For Hlobo the boundary is created and then dissolved. For instance, one cannot easily speak of the bodiliness of *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) [fig. 3.1] but can discuss the emasculated embodiment that is suggested. Moreover, Hlobo defines the perimeters of inside/ outside but makes them seem porous, thereby allowing dynamism. He speaks of the balls in *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) as something that was "skinned", explaining the urge to place "another cover that goes over them" (Perryer 2006: 10). Hlobo articulates the disembodied-ness of masculinity. He states that *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) is "also about the idea of men, or some men, having the tendency to put their confidence below their belt… the idea of them feeling, I am a man, I have balls, and my dick is what really carries me around… not using your head but using your penis" (Perryer 2006: 10). The penis is seen as an object that embodies masculinity and Hlobo represents it as a detached object that cannot offer the mobility that the body does. The detachment of the penis from the body then represents masculinity as disempowered through its lack of a body and its incompleteness. The "incomplete" and "uncontained" body has socially represented various perceptions about power and disempowerment.

III: "Touch my Blood": The Pervasive Body

Muholi's image of a drop of blood is accompanied by images of blood-stained sanitary pads and tampons. That series is entitled *Period* (2005) [fig. 3.11] and consists of five photographs and corresponding images. *Period I* represents a naked body, the point from which the camera looks down between the legs to focus on the fallen stained sanitary pad. *Period II* is an image of a trail of thick blood on wet gravel. In the third image, *Period III* is a close up of a stained sanitary pad that is still stuck on a pair of black underpants. The same black underpants appear in *Period IV* and are worn by a woman whose chest is visually ambiguous because of its flatness. The wings of the sanitary pad are seen on the sides of the underpants. *Period V* represents a heavy stream of blood in a bathtub that runs to the drain. There are photographs that correspond to this series, such as *Untitled* (2006) [fig. 3.12] which represents the shape of the ovaries painted in blood on the margins of a notepad. There are also two images that are *Untitled* (2006) in which the artist is portrayed with a blood-stained tampon in her mouth; in one of these images she holds it as if it were a cigarette. In these images, Muholi plays with the different associations accorded to blood in order to demonstrate how it can be gendered.

Blood carries with it many meanings. Gabi Ngcobo (2006: 4) relates it to the street lingo phrase: "touch my blood" to illustrate that Muholi's use of blood in these images is an invitation to acknowledge the bodily composition as the substance that strengthens social bonds. Pumla Dineo Gqola (2006: 85) suggests that (menstrual) blood has been seen, generally, as the "evidence of a woman's failure to conceive" which is "shameful and to be hidden". Gqola (2006: 85) argues that in patriarchal societies "a menstruating woman [may be seen as] a useless woman: under patriarchy she has failed to marshal her body parts to act in accordance with the rules that govern how such a society replicates", which renders a bleeding lesbian more disposable in such societies. Considering Gqola's elucidation, menstrual blood is considered as a failure and contrasts the notion of blood as sign of strength and endurance, further highlighting that such perceptions may be subject to change through images illustrated in artworks such as Muholi's photographs.

Zanele Muholi uses blood to subvert its abject meanings. Sabine Neidhart's discussion with Muholi commences with bell hooks's statement that "dead bodies do not bleed" to point out that blood is a signifier of life[69]. The series of photographs under discussion are titled *Is'khathi* [fig. 3.13], which translates as "time of the month" or "period in time" and is a representation of Muholi's and her partner's menstrual blood[70]. The titles of the images are *Amahluli* (clot), *Ibala* (bloodspot), *Iveza* (reveal), *Impukane* (fly), *Ububende* (thick blood), *Isibonelo* (evidence) and *Isililo* (Outcry)[71]. Muholi's titles refer to blood as an abject entity and a sign of mortality, as it is suggested in the work entitled *Impukane* (fly). Flies gather around rotting matter, and are associated with filth. These titles also refer to blood as a form of substantiation and disclosure. Muholi states that

> with this blood series, I wanted to highlight that one cannot talk about the body, about a body politic, without addressing the biological functioning of the body. One cannot theorize the aesthetic of the body across space, culture, and time without talking about the social and gendered aspects of the body, its internal components and functions, especially menstruation.

Muholi points out that menstruation is generally discounted as part and parcel of the female body, and should be considered when discussing the body. She draws out the implications of gender and biological sex, saying that the photographs are "about natural biological functions, of blood flowing with life through our butch/femme/trans cracks with ease, without hindrance". She continues to say that "women and [or] as transmen" allow hindrance and containment to "our flow" which is "hidden from view by various man-made technologies such as pads, tampons, cups, gauze, toilet paper, cloths, cotton, rayon, contraceptive pills, and so on"[72]. For Muholi, blood should be allowed to flow without this containment and calls for "an aesthetic of transgression"[73] to change the meaning associated with menstrual blood and women's relationship to it.

Further, Zanele Muholi draws from different cultures such as pre-modern Tamil Nadu (South India) and pre-modern pagan European cultures to indicate that menstruation has been revered as

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[69] <http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2008/05/02/iskhathi-images-from-a-photgraphic-project/> accessed 2008/10/11
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

a source of power[74]. She instigates that "Modernity and Westernization took the bleeding female body out of the public arena of collective celebration and ritual, and banished it not only to visual and intellectual obscurity, but also to collective cultural secrecy", and argues that it is the commodification of this secrecy that has led to the "banishment [and invisibility] of menstruating bodies"[75]. The photographs that are entitled *Amahluli* (2008) and *Isibonelo* (2008) [fig. 44] portray menstrual blood in the white bathtub in the same manner as *Period V* (2005) [fig. 3.11] which is interpreted by Muholi as a "phase [that] highlights the existence of a nature which knows how to heal and renew itself"[76]. To demonstrate the processes that deem menstrual blood as a filthy substance she uses the axiom "do not air your dirty laundry in public" to explain the images in the photographs that are called *Isililo* (2008) and *Impukane* (2008) which show a tampon lying on the ground and a fly "feasting on [the blood] its nourishment"[77] respectively. According to Muholi's interpretation, the ground, the cracked earth "recalls that passage of a crack (vagina)"[78]. The notion of life is re-iterated in Muholi's elucidation of her work, in the use of words such as "nourish", "seedlings [that] sprout", "life force", "renew", "cleanse the womb", "fertilisation". In *Ububende* (2008) [fig. 44] Muholi dilutes her blood with water and presents it on an off-white ceramic dinner plate next to a thick blood clot from her menstruation that looks like jelly or a foetus. She explains that she uses the ceramic dinner plate to allude to the irony of the kitchen as a woman's space and as a space where in some cultures (such as the Kambalathu Naicker of Tamil Nadu and in certain African contexts) menstruating women are prohibited[79]. There is a belief that, Muholi argues, comes from "[her] own Zulu culture" that allows only virgins and postmenopausal women in the kitchen when traditional beer, *Umqombothi*, is made "so that [it] will not spoil"[80]. Muholi defines the blood as a means of survival such as food and water and proclaims that her intention is "to emphasise that corporeal bodies depend on periods for procreation and survival".

In a conversation with Charlene Smith in an article that is entitled *Anti-gay Venom Becomes a Part of the Art* and was published in the *Sunday Independent* (27 March 2005), Muholi said that

[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

"she has always had terrible period pains, monthly aches that cut through her" and "sees this pain… as symbolic of the hidden psychic pain many women, and especially black lesbian women, experience as being part of, and yet kept apart from, the community of women" (Smith 2006: 92). In Muholi's images this pain and blood is appropriated from being a signifier of weakness to being that of power. Considering Cameroonian based Jean-Pierre Bekolo's science fiction film called *Les Saignantes* (*The Bleeders* and otherwise translated as *The Bloodettes* or *The Bloodiest*) (2005), blood (although invisible) is signified as mystical power possessed by women through the spirit of "*Mevoungou*". In this film, two women fight the corrupt masculine power of the government through their sexuality and through *Mevoungou*. The *Secretaire General du Comité Central* (SGCC) dies through being overwhelmed by the sexual prowess of the female prostitute Majolie (Dorylia Calmel) who later teams up with a friend, Chouchou (Adele Ado), to dispose of the body by taking it to the butcher to behead it. For Bekolo, the women represent a greater threat to the political governmental and traditional structures and are, at the same time, victims and victors of a corrupt system.

Regarding power and pain, Muholi's photographs entitled *Ibala* (2008) and *Veza* (2008) link sanitary pads to pain and define pain as man-made. In these photographs; there is a bloodied and torn pad, and "thighs and knees pressed together, positioned sideways, blood flowing out from underneath"[81]. Muholi elaborates that this is symbolic of "the tearing, searing pain many women experience with the onset of menstruation… and the loneliness women feel when left to their pain"[82]. Muholi points out that "Western patriarchal culture" represents pain "as illegitimate, as more of a state of emotion that actual real pain"[83]. This idea can be linked to the psychoanalytic theories inspired by Freud that diagnosed women with hysteria, rendering them "irrational" (Hunter 1983: 466-470). Muholi ridicules the fact that a menstruating woman "becomes at best a source of amusement and a joke — she acts irrationally and like a fool" and contrasts this to "the Khoisan who offer deep respect to a 'menstruant', allowing her to spend her bleeding days in a special hut"[84]. The scorn that Muholi refers to can also be argued to be a contrast to the idea that male-experienced pain is proof of heroism, courage and a validation of masculinity.

[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

Blood, as an internal bodily fluid, often signifies danger. Mary Douglas (1966: 182) discusses the Mae Enga and the male fear of menstrual blood, writing that contact with menstrual blood or a menstruating woman "will sicken a man and cause persistent vomiting, 'kill' his blood so that it turns black, corrupt his vital juices so that his skin darkens and hangs in folds as his flesh wastes, permanently dull his wits, and eventually lead to a slow decline and death". However, blood is also seen as the relational link between human beings. The notion of authenticity can be argued to rely on the myth of preserved "pure blood" and "origin" of lineage. Douglas (1966: 180) examines this concept in her discussion of the Nambudiri Brahmins who perform a ritual to be vigilant of the contamination of the protected "purity of the blood of the caste". Douglas (1966:150) argues that "all margins are dangerous" since "any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins" and hence "we should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points". For blood to be visible, a wound is inflicted. Arguably, menstrual blood makes the vagina interpretable as a wound.

Debatably, the female body is also represented by Muholi as already, naturally wounded. That is, its feminine attributes are shown as if they are already wounds such as the constantly bleeding vagina and protruding breasts that are bandaged. In *I.D. Crisis* (2003) [fig. 1.12] a woman ties a bandage around her chest to conceal her breasts and in *Status Unknown* (2005) [fig. 3.14] a nipple is flattened and hidden using a plaster. These methods of hiding femaleness appear to be very painful. It recalls Eastern foot-binding and Western corseting which can be defined as endorsed means of violation where pain is tolerable for reasons that construct gender in patriarchal societies. Representations of the female body are often exhibited as that which is not "naturally correct", some aspects of it are to be hidden, altered, appended, or removed. It can also be argued that the assumed pain in these images is endured in order to render the body socially masculine.

Resilience against pain is alluded to in Nicholas Hlobo's exhibiton called *UmaKadenethwa Engenadyasi* (2007) [fig. 3.15] which literally means "she who has always been rained on and has no jacket", connoting that person's resistance to difficulty. In this exhibition, the symbol of blood is unpacked to signify so many things. The gallery wall is equipped by the artist with short

phrases that look like a mind map or a brainstorm which also provide meanings to the black ball (from *Dubula*, 2006, fig. 2.5). A phrase from this mind map reads "black is heavier than blood, even red as blood is heavier than black. When blood is thick and black (*igazi elimnyama*) it's perceived heavy by Xhosa people". The word "red" has arrows that point to connotations which are "*imbola*", "unsophisticated", "danger", "anger"; and the word "heavy" is linked to the word "struggle" by an arrow. Again, Xhosa masculinity is represented as the heavy weight of the ancestors. "Blood", "black" and "red" are "heavy" and the two colours in a reciprocal relationship are both heavier than the other if they are the colour of blood. Hlobo refers to blood as a spiritual currency. The two colours are instrumental in the Xhosa circumcision ritual but have other meanings associated with them within and outside of the Xhosa community. For example, red generally signifies "danger" and "anger". It could be assumed that the artist is saying that the ritual or social Xhosa expectations of masculinity are "dangerous" and perhaps his performances and sculptures are an expression of anger towards "dangerous traditionalism".

It could be also argued that this is not only exclusive to Xhosa masculinity, since in the performance of social masculinity all men have to look strong, heavy and able to express anger while earning respect by looking dangerous. It may not be true for all societies; however, in many township societies men have to look ready to fight and ready to show power. It is this concept of masculinity that surfaces in the women documented by Muholi. The posture, walk and talk have to represent a ready-to-fight, powerful, streetwise and angry male. A male who seldom performs this socially constructed character is in the danger of being crowned with subversive labels such as "soft", "*isitabane*"[85], "*utshiriyene*"[86]. The colour "red" in Hlobo's work also means "unsophisticated". In this sense it refers to rural, uneducated people. The prejudice is within one group who live in different circumstances. In this context, if someone is "unsophisticated" it means that they are not able to perform the implicit "script" of a streetwise male or female, i.e. not understanding or using the terminology and not donning the "right" props

[85] The term "sitabane" is, according to Simon Nkoli, a Sesotho word to denote a person who has got two sexual organs – a vagina and a penis (Murray 1998: 245)

[86] An individual who is "*tshiriyene*" has lost his masculinity because he spends too much time in the company of women. His mind and not his genitals are targeted. He is said to be someone who is not able to think like a man. This concept comes from a gender-biased view that women cannot utilize their brains as well or better than men. Therefore the misconception suggests that a male who is always in the companion of women has an "underdeveloped" brain. The term can also be used to denote the awkward and sometimes illogical actions of someone who is infatuated.

in the form of clothing and accessories. That same colour (red) could also denote the newness of returning initiates. The word "*imbola*" denotes the red clay that returning initiates put on their faces. The clay protects their skins and marks the initiate as a new man, a returnee, for the society to know those who have been traditionally circumcised; otherwise they will always be disrespected as boys. When the returned initiate takes the mask (red clay) off, he will be a "new", "handsome" man who is ready to marry. It is another form of performance. Societal status has to be performed to be re-affirmed.

Hlobo also makes references to a seldom discussed stage before circumcision that is believed to enable boys to decrease the pain during circumcision. Hlobo's *Ungamqhawuli* (2008) [fig. 2.13] refers to, in its title, the preparation stage (that is done individually) of boys at around the ages of twelve to fourteen before circumcision. The title, when translated, means "do not cut (him)". *UkuQhawula*, a verb, refers to the cutting of a vein that runs in the sheath that covers the top of the penis. A string is tied around it to detach it. This makes the circumcision process less painful and it is not ceremonial. In this performance, Hlobo is cocooned in bright blue and pink silk. A knot is tied at each legging. He is tied to a white long structure that is hung to the ceiling by a rope. Hlobo then pulls himself up by pulling this rope. If the rope was to be cut, Hlobo would fall flat on the ground. If he tired of holding himself up and suddenly let go of the rope, he would not land comfortably. The shape of the object that he lies on and the title suggest that the sculpture represents Hlobo as a phallic object. However, the shiny fabric that covers Hlobo up to the underarms makes the artist seem as if he is wearing a dress when viewing him from the sides. The tied leggings make Hlobo's legs look amputated and also disallow him to walk. The structure renders Hlobo's body as a deformed entity. Hlobo's reference to deformity emphasises certain aspects of social "othering".

IV: On Stigma

I have briefly discussed stigma in previous chapters as it is interpreted by Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi. Hlobo alters his body through attaching appendages that begin to read as parts of the body. For instance, the hunchback in *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005) [fig. 2.3], the long thin penis that swells at the tip in *Dubula* (2006) [fig. 2.5] and the figure that bends over into a heavier upper body in *Ndiyafuna* (2006) [fig. 2.2] are means by which Hlobo examines societal reactions

to what is deemed a grotesque body. Zanele Muholi combats the means in which homosexuals are marginalised in townships. Ervin Goffman (1963: 14) identifies three types of stigma, namely

> abominations of the body…[such as] physical deformities, blemishes of individual character…[such as] weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behaviour. Finally, there are the tribal stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family

For Hlobo and Muholi homosexuality is not necessarily inferred from a "blemish of individual character". Homosexuality has also been defined as a disease (physical deformity). John Kitsuse (1980: 8) defines male homosexuality as "condemned and persecuted throughout history in law, religious doctrine and social convention" and states that "male homosexuals have borne the brunt of a degrading stereotype that depicts them as effeminate, frivolous, passive, physically weak, emotionally unstable, morally perverted, and a threat to men and boys alike". Through stereotype, certain individuals face exclusion from society. Goffman (1963: 4) draws a link between attribute and stereotype and the relationship between the two contributes to stigma.

I have used the term grotesque in reference to Nicholas Hlobo's work, with cognisance of its past use since the fifteenth century excavations in the caves (*grotta*) near Rome (Harpham 1976: 461). Harpham (1976: 462) defines the grotesque as "a structure of estrangement … [that] instils a fear of life rather that a fear of death" and explains that "the familiar and commonplace must be suddenly subverted or undermined by the uncanny or alien". When Hlobo performed *Dubula* (2007) [fig. 2.5] in Rome in a gallery called Extraspazio he included a couple of anthropomorphic sculptures, one of them is *Yinxibe xa Ikulingana* ("wear it if it fits") (2007) and the other is called *Ubomvu* (which means red – also a play on the idea of masked Xhosa initiates) (2007). Harpham (1976: 462) states that the characteristic themes of the grotesque are "The Plague, The Dance of Death, The Masked Ball and The Apocalypse" amongst others. Deformity, for Hlobo, is the element of the grotesque. His elongated "penis" that drags on the floor creates a space of discomfort for the visiting viewers and a veiled fascination. The two sculptures are made out of wood and are each covered in stitched inner rubber tube to resemble a dancing female body, body in motion or phallic object and looks protected by the inner rubber tube but is

vulnerable[87]. Hlobo also plays on the concept of masking, where his crotch wears a mask but the rest of his body is uncovered. The naked black male body has existed as a caricature of untamed imagination (Harpham 1976: 463). In his definition of what the grotesque is (as a word whose meanings change constantly), Harpham (1976: 463) mentions that homosexuality was classified with necrophilia. The fact of Hlobo's colour and that of his sexual identity provokes past associations that tainted the nude/naked black body into alterity.

The hunchback and lacy "bonnet" in *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005), which makes Hlobo's head look insect-like, has a similar effect. In this performance, Hlobo makes the viewer aware of the hunchback as something that is worn and can easily be taken off or that it is not his natural physical abnormality. Arguably, Hlobo points out or suggests that beauty and its opposite aesthetic are socially formed and projected to an individual who has traits that differ from what that society deems standard. Harpham (1976: 463) suggests that "the grotesque depends not only on physical conditions the deformity of which most people would recognize, but also on our conventions, our prejudices, our common-places, our banalities, our mediocrities". Hlobo uses his body to highlight the idea that prejudice, based on sight, is a construction and projection. In *Umkhwetha* (2006) [fig. 2.1] Hlobo's body is covered in white silicon and can be seen as a blank slate upon which society marks the traits of difference.

Ervin Goffman (1963: 4) defines stigma as something that can be "carried" and distinguishes between discredited and discreditable. The discredited stigmatised individual is one that can be seen and is obvious, such as deformity (Goffman 1963: 4). The discreditable is not easily perceptible or discernable, such as homosexuality which can be hidden. Hlobo oscillates between being discredited to being a discreditable stigmatised individual. His "hunchback" in *Igqirha Lendlela* (2005) [fig. 2.3], which is seen as a deformity, is a signifier of his racial colour and his homosexuality as the markers of stigma that cannot be changed or hidden and cannot be removed like the hunchback. During the performance, Hlobo ventures out from the gallery into town to talk to a stranger. Hlobo also shows a different objective from that implied in Goffman's supposition. Instead of aspiring to "hide" the traits that attach stigma to him, Hlobo applies them

[87] <http://www.re-title.com/public/newsletters/May_2007_-_Sculpture_&_Installation_0.htm> accessed 2008/11/12

and displays them with pride and attributes the hunchback to a sign of knowledge through the title.

The distinction between discredited and discreditable is also ambiguous in Zanele Muholi's *Being* (2006) and *Faces and Phases* (2007). Although the women that Muholi portrays can be classified as a discreditable stigmatised group, they also bear the stigma that has been attached to blackness. There is also an ambiguity in distinguishing whether homosexuality is being hidden or being asserted publicly and it could be both. To emphasise this suggestion, Muholi's *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo* (2007) [fig. 1.4] and the series of women dressed like men are a case in point. In *Nomsa Mazibuko and Fondo* (2007), the resemblance of the lesbian couple to a heterosexual couple can be seen as a strategic mimicry tool to assimilate into society, and that way it is a means of hiding. However, it can also be seen as a bold statement that takes into cognisance the stigma attached to homosexuality and subverts the heteronormative through presenting a "male" model that has ambiguous gender characteristics. The "male" model would otherwise be seen to bear a discredited marker of stigmatisation because of the breasts that are an anomaly or a physical deformity if they are on a male body. Another photograph that blurs this distinction is *Bra* (2003) [fig. 1.14] where the photograph is focused on the breast of the individual that is portrayed. The individual's lesbianism would be discreditable but her hairy breasts and chin are seen as a physical abnormality and the kind of characteristic that would have been paraded as part of a freak show. However, breasts are shown, in Muholi's *I.D. Crisis* (2003) [fig. 1.12], as a physical abnormality or deformity that must be hidden from society through a ritual of binding which offers an alternative masculinity to society.

This form of breast-binding can be argued to have been used by the women that Muholi portrays in *Faces and Phases* (2007) [fig. 2.10] as a means of hiding the supposed physical anomaly (breasts) and also to assert their stigmatised identities to society. It can be argued that the women that Muholi portrays are in a double bind. Whether they wrap up their breasts to hide their femaleness or to render their chosen gender visible, the "known-ness" of their sexuality is still a stigmatised characteristic. Moreover, an unclothed black female body has been clad with misconstrued assumptions of its monstrosity and untamed nature. In *Nomshado, Queensgate, Parktown* (2007) [fig. 3.16], Nomshado turns her back on the viewer who is met with her

bulging unclothed body. The silence that covers her body can be argued to evidence the repulsion that large, naked, black female bodies have been subjected to. Nomshado's whole body and being almost comes across as a "blemish" or a physical deformity, a site of curiosity and some measure of the grotesque. Muholi underscores the notorious racist and sexist events that have tainted the black female body as a monstrosity and allows a space for confrontation with the human-ness of bodies of alterity. Muholi offers a comparison to the Western tradition of the reclining nude in her *Reclining Figure* (2006) [fig. 3.17] to analyse the concept of the beautiful as a definition that has been constructed through Western aesthetics. The anonymous woman lies on the bed face down, subverting the convention of the reclining nude. Her large body also differentiates her from the Western reclining nude because her body does not appear to be contained and framed. The female body according to Linda Nead (1992: 2) "has been regarded as unformed, undifferentiated matter, [and] the procedures and conventions of High art are one way of controlling this unruly body and placing it within the securing boundaries of aesthetic discourse". Lisa Farrington (2004: 15) argues that "the chronicle of the black female nude is even more complex and carries with it cultural ramifications that are both sexual and racial". There is, to some degree, sensitivity about the black female body because of the history if its degradation that lends empathy but also fosters its erasure from visibility. Muholi highlights the vulnerability of the black female body that is part of its invisibility and voicelessness.

It must be considered that the level of stigma and the traits that society sees as stigma differs in different context. For instance, a dark skin is a characteristic of most people that reside in townships. That alone is not enough to compound stigma towards black lesbians in townships. Muholi portrays individuals who face stigma for more than one reason or condition and for characteristics that overlap. The *sangoma*, for instance, may be revered in other places but stigmatised in others as a "sorcerer" or a sign of African "witchcraft". Lesbian cross-dressers may be acknowledged for their bold masculine look in some areas but can also be targeted for hate-crimes in other places. Hlobo and Muholi query the simplicity of categories, the unawareness of the spaces that separate and the illusion of essential group identity.

Hlobo and Muholi investigate the differences that amount to prejudice between people. Gordon Allport (1954: 281) suggests that

> prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals… the effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports and provided it is of the sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of two groups.

Considering the types of stigma that Goffman outlines, prejudice seems irreconcilable for individuals who have physical deformities or whose sexual preference has been treated as a psychological illness or an imperfection of character. In Hlobo's work that margin between beautiful and repulsive, belonging and foreign is blurred in a way that further interrogates constructions of group identity. Muholi advocates for a group of women that has experienced prejudice in almost all levels of society through public interventions of creating awareness to the injustices against lesbian women in townships.

Conclusion

Nicholas Hlobo's *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) and Zanele Muholi's photographic essay *Only Half the Picture* (2006) reveal a part of the atrocity that homosexuals experience. The violence that is carried out to the men and women who are bisexual or homosexual based on their sexuality still denies them their basic human rights. Amongst others, these two artists underline the fact that the main problem does not lie within a protected sense of being African, but rather it resides in the perceptions that have, for a long time, excluded homosexuality from society in different parts of the world. Hlobo's *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006) illustrates the vulnerability that is overlooked when discussing masculinity and the different ways in which masculinity is filtered. Zanele Muholi's *Only Half the Picture* (2006) reveals the violence that is inflicted on lesbian women and the ways in which vulnerability is embodied. The artworks discussed also demonstrate that, often, vulnerability is shadowed by violence.

Although violence takes different forms and functions in different societies, it is generally used as a tool to express intolerance. The aspects of violence and vulnerability in Hlobo's and Muholi's artwork show the processes of social "othering". Moreover, they question the processes that define African-ness and the ways in which certain characteristics are purged as un-African. Prejudice has been a central issue in South Africa's past and present and although it has often been based on race and gender, prejudice against homosexuality tends to be overlooked. The

crimes that have occurred in South Africa against homosexual individuals may have been broadcast in order to raise awareness but have not urged as much concern as hate-crimes based on race would have. Therefore, not only are bisexual and homosexual individuals vulnerable to violent crime, but also to social systems that discriminate against them.

Images

Fig. 3.1: Nicholas Hlobo, *Isisindo SamaDlozi* (2006), rubber inner tube, scale, ribbon, plastic tube, fabric 225 x 90 x 60cm (variable)

Fig. 3.2: Zanele Muholi, *Hate Crime Survivor I and II* (2004), Silver gelatin print, 254 x 385mm

Fig. 3.3: Zanele Muholi, *Aftermath* (2004), Silver gelatin print, 600 x 395mm

Fig. 3.4
Zanele Muholi
Black Beulah (2007)
Lambda print
76 x 100cm

Fig. 3.5
Zanele Muholi
Two Beulahs (2007)
Lambda print
76.5 x 100cm

Fig. 3.6a (left): Zanele Muholi, *Martin Machapa* (2007), Lambda Print, 100 x 76.5cm
Fig. 3.6b (right): Zanele Muholi, *Between Friends: Nico Bhengu and Jabu Radebe* (2006), LightJet print on Fuji Crystal Archive paper,76.5 x 76.5cm

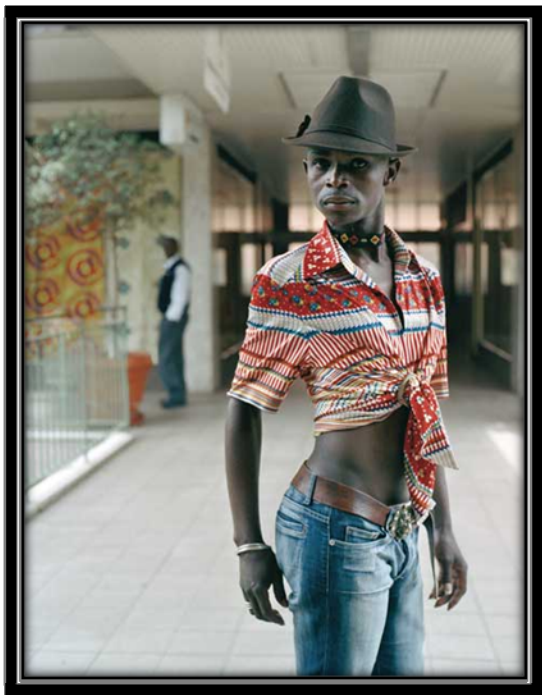

Fig. 3.7
Zanele Muholi
Being Triptych (2007)
each print: 20 x 22,5cm
silver gelatin prints and a Lambda print

Fig. 3.8
Zanele Muholi (2007)
Mpumi Mathabela, Parktown, Johannesburg
Silver gelatin print
76.5 x 76.5cm

Fig. 3.9
Zanele Muholi
Untitled (2006)
Lambda print
375 x 500mm

Fig. 3.10
Zanele Muholi
Dress Code Series (2006)
Lambda print
375 x 500mm

Fig. 3.11: Zanele Muholi, *Period I-V* (2005), Lambda print, 500 x 375mm

Fig. 3.12: Zanele Muholi, *Untitled I-III* (2005), Lambda Print, 500 x 375mm

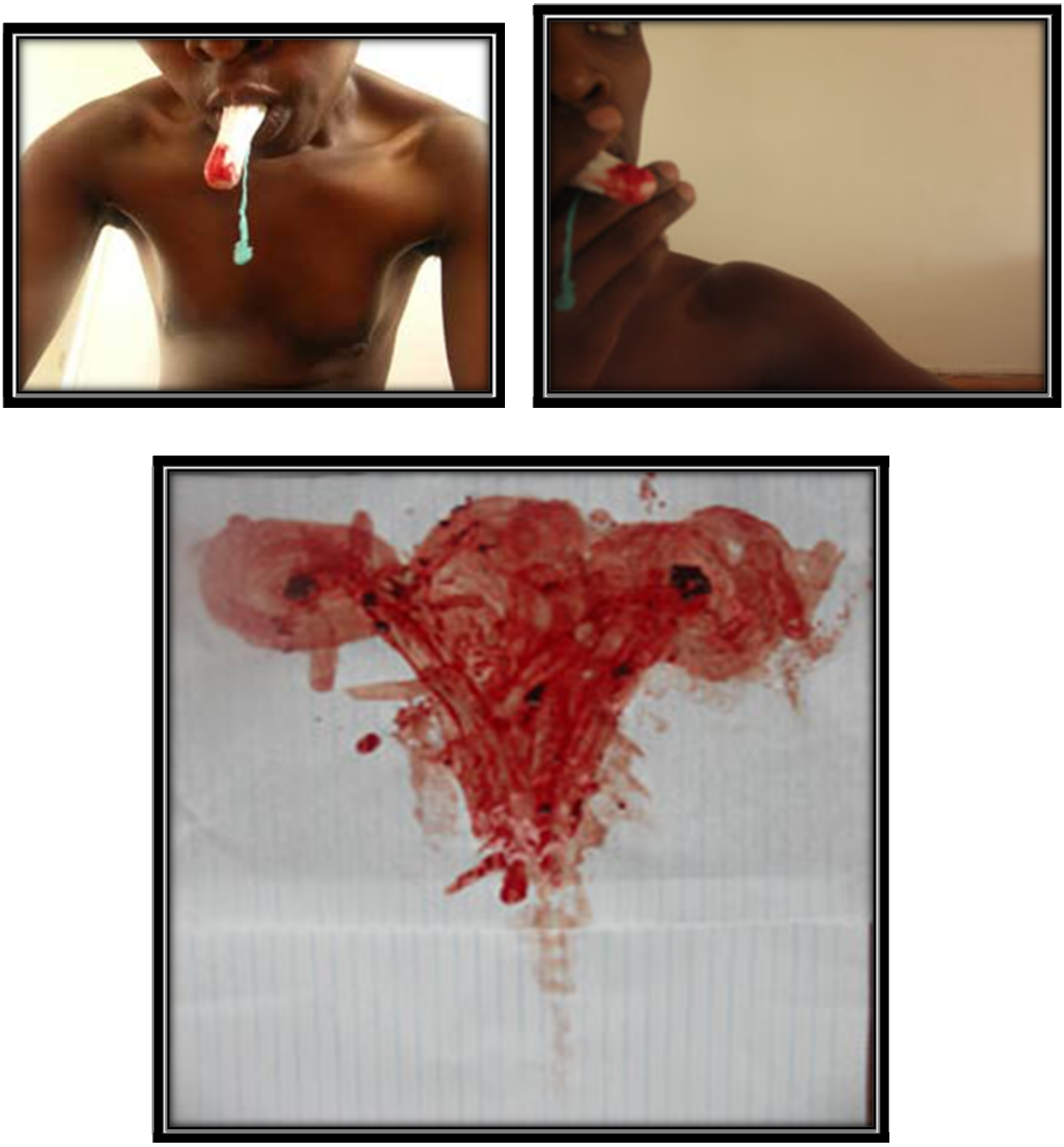

Fig. 3.13: Zanele Muholi (Darkmatter), *Amahluli, Ibala, Iveza, Impukane, Ububende, Isibonelo, Isililo* (2005-2008), Lambda prints

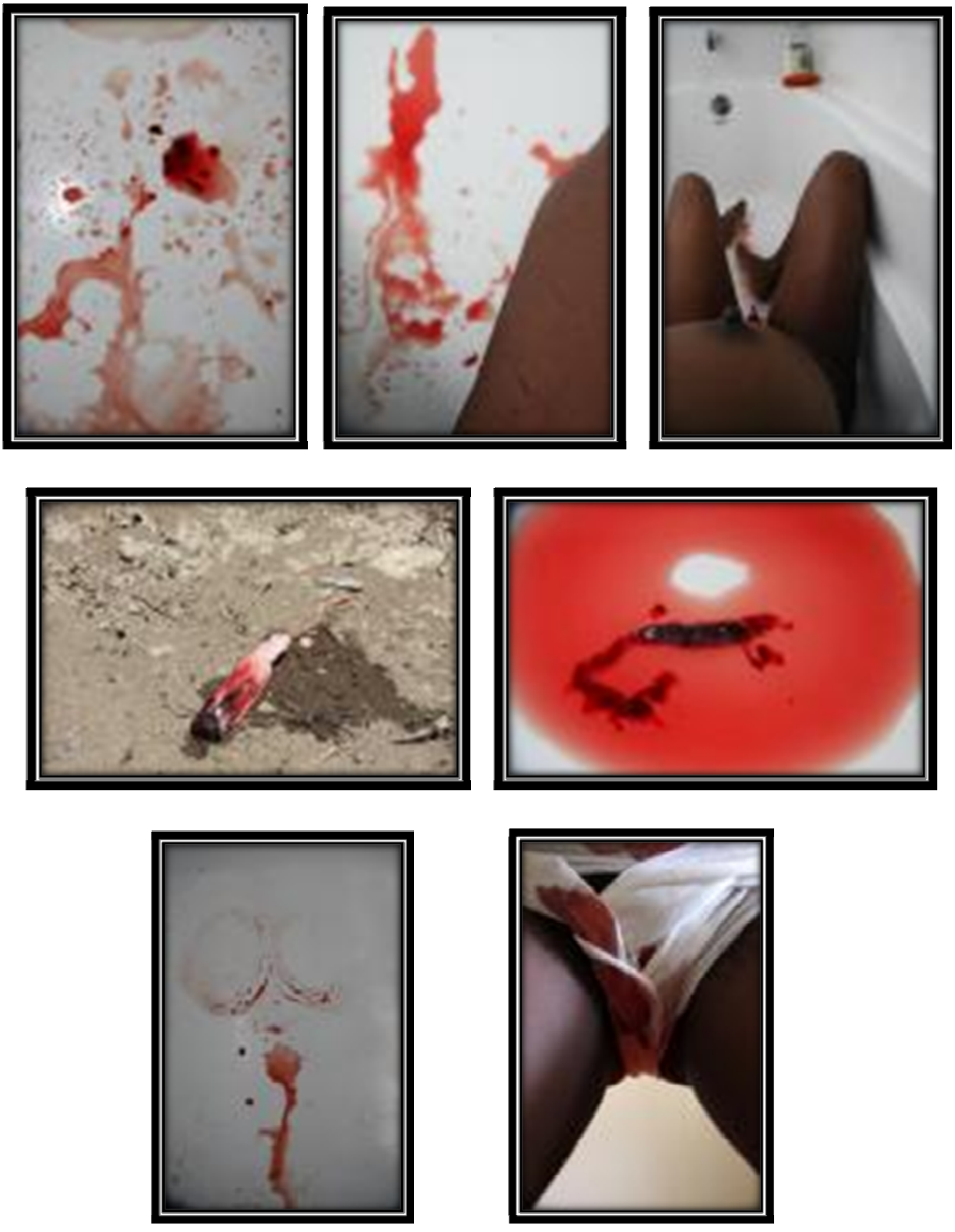

Fig. 3.14
Zanele Muholi
Status Unknown (2005)
Lambda print
225 x 300mm

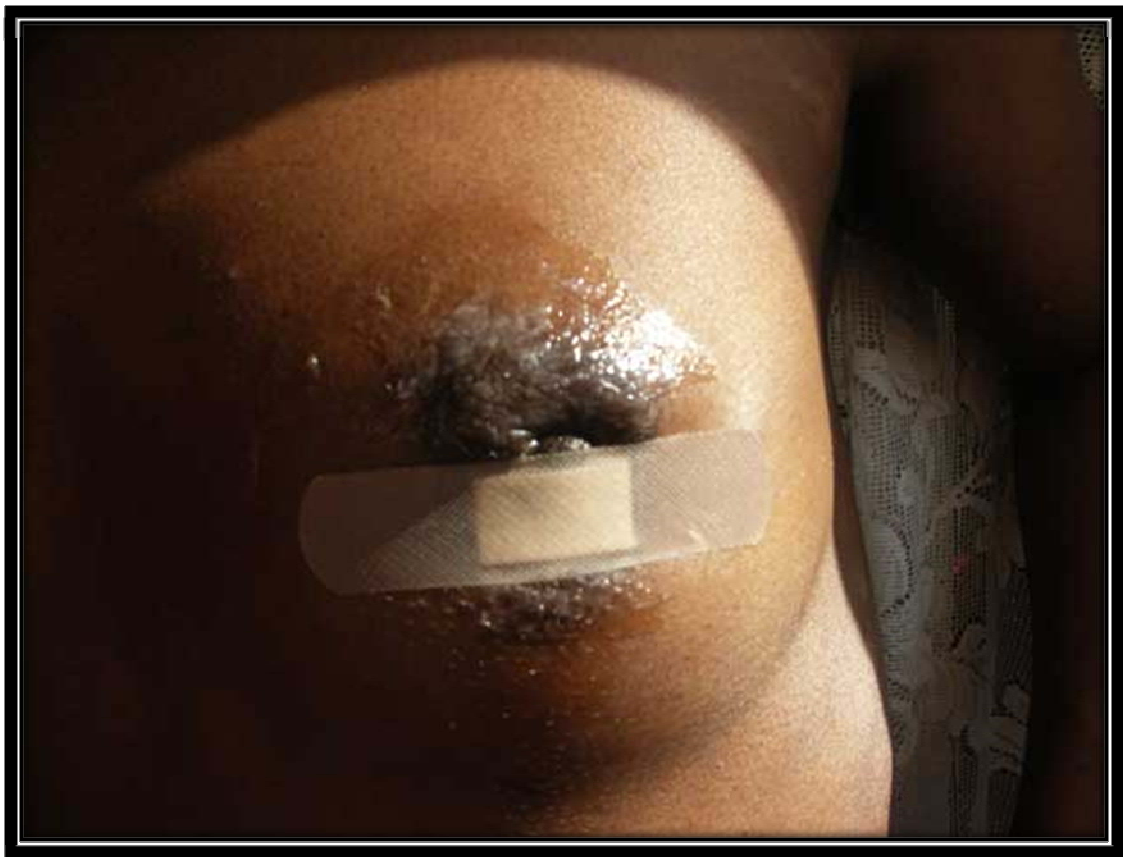

Fig. 3.15: Nicholas Hlobo, *Umakadenethwa Engenadyasi* with the artworks *Dubula* and *Bomvu* (2007)

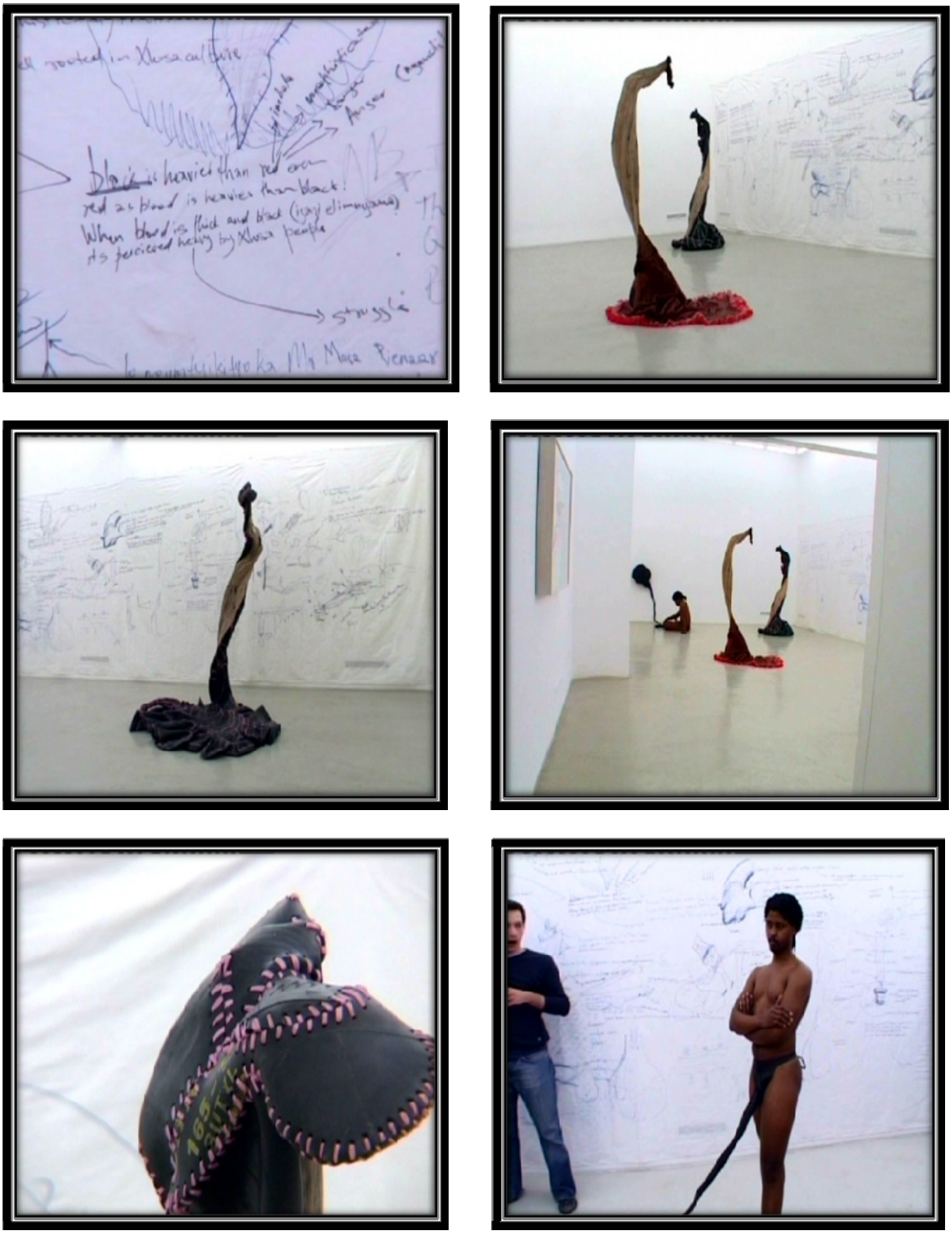

Fig. 3.16: Zanele Muholi, *Nomshado, Queengate Park Town* (2007), Lambda print, 76.5 x 76.5cm

Fig. 3.17: Zanele Muholi, *Reclining Figure* (2006), Lambda print, 550 x 800mm

Conclusion

The theme of belonging or not belonging is recurrent in Hlobo's and Muholi's work. Often, (African) artists consider the theme of place and identity to reconfigure issues such as "authenticity", observation of traditions and assertion of individual expression. Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi explore sexuality as a means of locating the concept of "African". These two artists challenge the dominant, heteronormative concepts of gender and sexuality and the delegation of such concepts as "essential" African-ness. The works discussed do not allow for conclusive assertions, but rather encourage on-going and constantly changing interpretations.

Zanele Muholi's documentary-style photography is, by and large, based on activism. Muholi has achieved a significant platform that allowed for discussion about black female bodies and furthermore, about black lesbianism in South Africa. It can be said that Muholi's work has contributed to research on gender studies in South Africa and to the Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA). Moreover, Muholi destabilises the prevailing stereotypes that foster hate-crimes against homosexuals. She explores the notion of African-ness in works such as *Miss D'Vine* (2007) where the subject wears a beaded skirt, the notion of authentic and unchanging identity in exploring the ambiguities between staged-ness, visibility and invisibility, the notorious history of the black female body and the ways in which it haunts the interpretation of contemporary representations of black bodies; and she interrogates means of publicising healthy homosexual lifestyles that are not prone to diseases.

Muholi is able to make work that can be classified into more than one domain to advocate and/or refuse strict classification and the compulsion of following certain specific aesthetic conventions. It seems strategic in that she critiques the concept of limits and boundaries of social classification and advocates for freedom of association and fair public representation of different types of individuals and not just the constructed stereotypes. Fredrik Barth (2000: 30) suggests that

> the affordance of a boundary set the scene for social activities, and in that sense, yes boundaries also connect. But the connections that emerge are the work of people who respond selectively and pragmatically to the affordances, spinning connections in forms that will be shaped by social and material processes, not by cognitive fiat as the drawing of the boundary was.

Barth's suggestion that boundaries have a social purpose that also connects groups, illustrates the element that compounds identities. While social history has necessitated belonging to particular groups, the faint lines of difference (ethnic, gender, in sexual preference, and other social affiliations) are necessary as markers of diversity but are also problematic as they accentuate differences and limit the flexibility of identity.

Nicholas Hlobo explores these alternatives of indistinct or ambiguous states of identity in his sculptures and performances. For Nicholas Hlobo, identity should not have to be a choice between inside/outside but an ability to have affiliation with different groups in different places and the ability to enter and exit those groups. In most of his work, Hlobo investigates sex, gender, sexuality and culture, and draws from different cultural traditions such as the Xhosa tradition, art practice traditions, and an amalgamation of gendered tools and practices that reveal the complexity of the influences of shifting knowledge systems and ideological structures. Through his work, Hlobo unseats power as a secure property of one individual or one group of people.

I chose to deal with the idea of authenticity first because of the alleged prevailing sentiment that homosexuality is "un-African". Homosexuality is one form of identity amongst many to have been excluded from African-ness. For instance, whiteness is at times excluded from "African-ness", the clothes we adorn on a daily basis are often not considered to be "African" enough, Africans in the diaspora (who have adapted cultures of the countries they are in) are, arguably, only considered "African" to a certain degree, the urbanite who lives in one of the continent's "concrete jungles" may be rumoured to have lost a bit of his/her "African-ness", indigenous languages are not enough to conclude the quality of "African-ness". The concept of African-ness seems to be a distant goal, rather than lived experience. Through exploring the subject of traditionalism, Hlobo and Muholi reveal the element of lived experience that allows them to re-claim whatever meanings are allotted to African-ness. In their work they question the exclusivity of African-ness through the reconfiguration of "African" sexuality. Their work also destabilises the notion that African-ness is something that can be lost.

The idea of lost identity is shown to be an element that lends validity to the polarisation of "modern" and "traditional" and overlooks the traditions that have been and are transforming. Hlobo investigates the illusion of authenticity and complicates the concept of an homogenous African through employing materials from many different places to construct the cultural objects that are seen as pointers of authentic African-ness. He also intercedes between worlds. Bringing the Xhosa aesthetic and language into the art domain highlights the inequalities within the field and unaccommodated languages in the practice. Hlobo and Muholi pose new-fangled questions to existing social structures and show that identity is lived rather than achieved or simply recited from social prescriptions.

African-ness is, arguably, perceived as a set of characteristics that can be performed and also advocated as a state of mind. Hlobo's performances and Muholi's rebellious photographs complicate the concept of a "true" African by drawing attention to the contradictions in the construction of different kinds of African-ness. Moreover, they underscore the difference between the manners in which African-ness or an individual subject is seen and how it sees itself. In their work, they highlight the social constructions that are projected within society to form general understanding of race, gender and sexuality.

For Hlobo and Muholi, the generalisations of masculinity, femininity, blackness, whiteness, heterosexuality and homosexuality distort other realities and marginalise those who are thought to not satisfy social criteria. Marginalisation is often expressed through violence. As has been discussed in the thesis, bisexual or homosexual identities are faced with the challenge of hate-crimes (sometimes murder) that are, at times, taken lightly. It is intriguing, therefore, that in the name of African-ness, lives vanish. Hlobo's and Muholi's work challenges the concepts that have fostered violence against that which is deemed foreign.

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