

Zundiqondisise!

**Investigating Voice, Visibility and Agency in the
Work of Xhosa Women Crafters Who Work in
Community Art Centres in the Eastern Cape**

By

Zodwa Tutani

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Arts (Curatorial Practice) at Rhodes University

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Co-supervisor: Dr Thembinkosi Goniwe

Abstract

A curatorial practice, *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice* is a twofold study comprised of curatorial practice and a written thesis, both of which are interdependent, examining the significance of space, agency, voice, and visibility in the works of Xhosa women crafters from the Eastern Cape. The study explores ways of reading and displaying indigenous art, as well as the archiving and inserting of these essential but neglected creative works of black women into the discourse of South African contemporary visual arts. This scholarship takes into account the social, cultural, and labour conditions that give rise to the perceived voicelessness in the 'craft' work of Xhosa women who work from community art centres. Through collaborating with two groups of women from two Eastern Cape art centres, namely Gompo Community Art Centre in East London and Nomzamo Old Age Centre in Ilitha Township, the study undertakes to locate, highlight and authorise these women's voices and agency. This undertaking is carried out through a textual inquiry and curated exhibition, two interdependent components of this study, working with black feminist and postcolonial theories that enable me to formulate a critical discourse and practice towards a reflective scholarship on black women's 'craft' work. It is a scholarship whose various chapters and curatorial interventions are tailored to excavate ancient Xhosa wisdom found in folklore and cultural practices of the everyday. This scholarship also provides new understandings that demonstrate and appreciate the fertile and significant though marginalised indigenous ways of creative expressions and knowledge production.

Declaration of Originality

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

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. J. J.', written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Date: 15th January 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	6
List of Illustrations	7
INTRODUCTION.....	9
CHAPTER ONE: The Indigenous Art of Women of the Eastern Cape: A Curatorial Intervention	17
CHAPTER TWO: <i>Zundiqondisise!</i> : Reclaiming Our Voice in Context	31
CHAPTER THREE: <i>Zundiqondisise!</i> : Reclaiming Our Voice and Mother’s Garden	44
CHAPTER FOUR: A ‘Room’ of One’s Own: Xhosa Women Crafters and Agency	52
CONCLUSION.....	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY	64
ILLUSTRATIONS	68

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Concept development meeting at Rhodes University's Cory Library, 2018.

Figure 2. Two viewers in Exhibition 1. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice* at Steve Biko Centre, Ginsburg. 2018.

Figure 3. Layout for Exhibition 1, *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, which featured ceramic works of women crafters Nosikhumbuzo Jali and Yanela Jija from Gompo Community Art Centre in East London, 2018.

Figure 4. The bead workers at their first exhibition attending the opening night. For many in the audience, it was a first experiencing an exhibition opening and were new *to the idea of an art exhibition*, at the Steve Biko Centre in Ginsburg. 2018.

Figure 5. Poet Vathiswa Bunguza performing her response to the poetic works of Notsizi Mgqhwetho at the opening of Exhibition 1. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Steve Biko Centre in Ginsburg, 2018.

Figure 6. A trip with women crafters to the National Arts Festival in Makhanda to experience an exhibition walkabout with artist Sikhumbuzo Makhandula, 2019.

Figure 7. A visit with women crafters to engage with a beadwork archive at the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus, with the university's archivist Sinazo Mtshemla, 2019.

Figure 8. Looking through the beadwork archive of the University of Fort Hare in Alice, 2019.

Figure 9. A visit with women crafters at the Amathole Museum in King Williamstown to view its beadwork collection, 2019.

Figure 10. Inspecting space for Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, held in the storage dungeon of Amathole Museum in King Williamstown, 2019.

Figure 11. Exhibition preparations, storage dungeon of Amathole Museum, 2019.

Figure 12. Exhibition preparation, storage dungeon of Amathole Museum, 2019.

Figure 13. Opening night of Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Amathole Museum, 2019.

Figure 14. Storytelling and music regarding the beadwork and craft artists, Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, 2019.

Figure 15. Performance by storyteller and scholar Nompucuko Zakaza on the opening night of Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Amathole Museum, 2019.

Figure 16. Performance by storyteller and scholar Nompucuko Zakaza during the walkabout of Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Amathole Museum, 2019.

Figure 17. School children interacting with the craft art during the walkabout of Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Amathole Museum, 2019.

Figure 18. School children participating in walkabout of Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Amathole Museum. 2019.

Figure 19. Names of Artists featured in Exhibition 3.

Figure 20. A chant recited before the performance of intsomi. The words are used at traditional ceremonies and are a sort of prayer to the ancestors, and in the case of intsomi session, are required in order to enter into the world of the ancestors. In this way, the intsomi is a portal into their world. These words are also said to break the curse of listening to intsomi in daylight.

Figure 21. Mam' uNombuyiselo Skeyi *Inxili*, 2018. Beads on Fabric. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.

Figure 22. Mam' uMam' uNowest Ramba *Zundiqondisise! (2)*, 2019. Xhosa Woman Bead Attire. Gompo Community Art Centre

Figure 23. Exhibition Vinyl of the words of Simphiwe Dana and Nontsizi Mqgqwetho who have been referenced in the Thesis and the creation of the three Exhibitions.

Figure 24. *Counting Strings and Beads*, 2019. Cikizwa Kentane. Photographic Print.

Figure 25. Mam' uNombuyiselo Skeyi *Isikhakha*, 2018. Embroidery on Leather. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.

Figure 26. Mam' uNombuyiselo Kokhwe *Khaya (3)*, 2018. Beads on Fabric. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.

Figure 27. Mam' uNowam Vika *Ubuhomba 1*, 2018. Beads on Reed Mat. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.

Figure 28. Mam' uMasithathu Balani *Sakha Umzi Omtsha*, 2018. Beads on Fabric. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.

Figure 29. Mam' uNomthandazo Shweni *Umhlaba Wethu*, 2018. Embroidery and Beads on Fabric. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.

Figure 30. Cikizwa KC Kentane *Ingqungquthela 2*, 2019. Installation.

Figure 31. Cikizwa KC Kentane *Ingqungquthela 1*, 2019. Installation.

Figure 32. Cikizwa KC Kentane *Amanina*, 2019. Photographic Print.

INTRODUCTION

Are African women voiceless or do we fail to look for their voices where we may find them, in the *sites* and forms which these voices are uttered?

(Molara Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 11)

The Eastern Cape is renowned for its craft objects such as beadworks, embroidery, and pottery produced by Xhosa women from the region. The craftwork is predominantly channelled through craft shops that mainly cater for the tourist trade, and therefore a viable commercial prospect for the women. What is overlooked, however, is the resulting loss of visual content, personal narrative, and the individuality of the creator of the work. Further, there is a possibility of the work being propelled into the contemporary South African art sector by employing curatorial strategies that will encourage a reimagining of the art of the Eastern Cape.

My research thesis and curatorial practice explore the social, cultural and labour conditions that lead to the perceived voiceless-ness and lack of agency in the 'craft' work of Xhosa women who work from community art centres. I work with two groups of women from two community art centres in the Eastern Cape: Gompo Community Art Centre in East London and Nomzamo Old Age Centre in Ilitha Township. I also draw some of my research from the Xhosa women-focussed Keiskamma Art Project in Hamburg, where I was employed as an Art Project Manager (October 2017 – November 2018). My research attempts to locate, validate and highlight their voices and agentic positions by using various collaborative black feminist methodological approaches in the curatorship of my exhibitions and the writing up of my thesis. I employ a process of "disseminating knowledge and of ensuring that research reaches the people who have helped make it" and in this procedure espouse 'reciprocity and feedback' (Smith 2012: 16), to facilitate a de-colonial approach where both research and the researched benefit equally.

The focus of my study is the Eastern Cape 'craft' sector. I examine early African art paradigms that intersect with anthropology and missionary art centres, to gauge the tension between the labels, 'craft' and 'fine art', which has stereotyped black creative works in hierarchical ways. Okwui Enwezor (1997), Salah Hassan (1999), Sidney Kasfir (1999), and Olu Oguibe (2004) have written on this matter, examining the problematics of authenticity, identity, modernism and postcolonial representations of 'black' art and non-western artists in contemporary art. Their different though complementary arguments are concerned with the western obsession and insistence on (racial, ethnic and geo-cultural) *difference* (Oguibe, 2004) and the presentations of this African art as spectacle and entertainment rather than artwork that possesses and posits a *voice* (Enwezor 1997). Oguibe (2004:14) has noted the 'origins' of such a problematic 'frame' to be that of 'the colonial ethnography and the colonial desire for a faceless native, the anonym. The faceless native, displaced from individuality and coalesced into a tribe, a pack, demands and justifies representation because she is a lack.' Homi Bhabha (1994) and Edward Said (1991), have contributed to this argument, speaking to the effects of cultural hegemony and the 'othering' of colonized individuals, as well as the exploitation of these individuals' collective image as a construct of the western world's imagination. This is what Frantz Fanon (1967: 14) called the construction of black subjects as 'a white man's artefact', and hence Steve Biko (2004: 115) rejected the negative definition of black subjects as 'non-white'. The often categorisation of the women's artwork as 'craft' demonstrates not only this negative definition of black

subjects as ‘other’, which according to Stuart Hall (1996: 221) is ‘the ‘dark’ side – forgotten, repressed, and denied; the reverse image of enlightenment and modernity.’ It also marginalises and thus excludes them from the mainstream of the contemporary art sector.

Added to this, the rural social conditions in which these women live are influenced mainly by the effects of colonialism, apartheid and patriarchy. The legacies of these strategies of domination and oppression have created further constrictions in terms of their work becoming more visible and audible. This concern is in line with black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins’ argument that ‘the authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power, elite groups, in exercising power, manipulate ideas about black womanhood’ (2000: 76). These strategies are the reason for the perceived voicelessness of black women, the consequence of which is little effort to listen to their voices. It seems the solution then is, as Molar Ogundipe-Leslie (1994: 11) suggests, to

look for African women's voices in women's spaces and modes such as in ceremonies and work songs ... look for them in places such as kitchens, watering sites, kinship gatherings, women's political and commercial spaces where women speak, often in the absence of men.

In this study, I therefore, explore ways to draw out these voices by writing and curating the women's ‘craft’ work, the purpose of which is to engage them as productive participants in contemporary discourses of South African visual arts. In pursuit of this inquiry, I have found the work of African feminist scholar Nthabiseng Motsemme helpful, in particular the premise of her essay, *The Mute Always Speak*. It provides insights from which I draw her ideas of ‘silences speaking’ that articulate what Xhosa women have been doing in many areas of their lives already. Motsemme argues about ‘using silence to formulate new meanings and enact agency in constrained surroundings’ (2004: 910). I also read the Xhosa women as *subalterns* (Spivak, 1988) of the art industry, to denote their perceived marginal positioning and lower status. Thus their voices are unable to be heard by the affluent or elite class that dominates the contemporary visual arts industry.

In this context, the ‘craft’ work of these women is rendered non-art, and the women are often defined as an ethnic tribe. They are therefore excluded from the contemporary art scene which privileges the artist as an individual, recognised by name. Whereas ‘crafters’ are perceived as a collective whose names are erased, and thus are isolated to construing them as ‘authentic’ and anonymous’; a problem Sidney Kasfir (1999: 94) explains to be ‘anonymity [which] precludes any consideration of the individual creative act.’ Some of the reasons for their exclusion are that they are unschooled and their craftwork is inferior, unrefined, and produced in excessive quantities mainly as souvenirs for tourists, their location in rural areas also contributes to this exclusion. These reasons have been instrumental in relegating their ‘craft’ work, subordinating it to the lower bottom of the prejudicial hierarchy as has been the case with ‘primitive art’ and ‘traditional art’ perceived to be produced by inferior, tribal people locked outside modernity. Salah Hassan has questioned this problematic perception of ‘traditional’ art ‘as consensual, communally based and created according to rigid and unchanging conventions’ attributed to ‘representing societies that are unchanging, static, closed or village-based’ (1999: 219).

In discussing the predicament of African art in the postcolonial and postmodern context, Kwame Appiah articulates a provisional solution to this problem by stating: ‘To sell oneself and one’s products as art in the marketplace, it is important, above all, to clear a space in

which one is distinguished from other producers and products—and one does this by the construction and the marking of differences’ (1991: 143). This undertaking involves, according to Appiah (1992: 143), ‘the characterisation of the artwork as belonging to the oeuvre of an individual—and the absorption of the artist’s life into the conception of the work can be seen precisely as modes of identifying objects for the market.’ In this regard, I want to argue that Xhosa women ‘crafters’ are subject to such construction and marking of differences. At the same time, they as creatives and their ‘craft’ work requires to be rethought in ways that write and curate them in the light of postcolonial discourses explained by Appiah as ‘the space-clearing gesture’ (1991: 149). The basis of this proposition is the understanding that I am studying Xhosa women ‘crafters’ in a postcolonial, post-apartheid context. It, therefore, calls for a decolonial approach that, according to Linda Smith (1999: 2), ‘identifies research as a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other.’ This resistance is critical precisely because

To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve what we were and remake ourselves. The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices – all may be spaces of marginalisation, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope (Smith 1999: 4).

The margins is vital in this study, as a site of both resistance and retrieving marginalised subjects. Thus I work with bell hooks’ (1989: 209) idea of the ‘margins as a site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility.’ What is fascinating about hooks’ theorising of the margins is the knowledge that in such spaces ‘We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world’ (1989: 209). It is the transformative productivity I have sought to explore in this study, applying a multidisciplinary curatorial approach of storytelling. It features oral traditions of poetry and live music, to situate the Xhosa women and their ‘craft’ work within the context of the contemporary visual arts. In this way, employing hooks’ opening sentence of her ‘Preface’ in *Feminist Theory: from margin to centre* (1984) insight that ‘To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body.’

By engaging with the traditional art of Xhosa storytelling such as poetry and oral literature, the women make their voices heard and in the process, disrupt the norms of the contemporary South African art sector. This undertaking, I argue to be a strategy of finding novel ways of ‘speaking’ both in the creation and re-presentation of their work. The women perform such an approach through interacting with and interpreting the works of three Eastern Cape born women artists—Nontsizi Mgqwetho, Nongenile Masithathu Zenani, and Simphiwe Dana—who affected their ‘craft’ work in ways that are transformative in content and form. This transformative undertaking worked with alternative platforms such as newspaper publication instead of a courtyard stage to deliver poetic thoughts and reflections as *iimbongi* often did, to carry out the meaning and messages of their artistic production.

I should also note that these Xhosa women work from community art centres where restrictions are imposed on their self-hood, free-will and desires. Such restrictions call upon questions of (their) subjectivity, agency and autonomy, which I examine concerning the structures of power that determine the kind of work that conceptually and aesthetically comes out of the community art centres. My concern is the conceptual and aesthetic orientation of

their work and the platforms in which the public receives this work. Art centres, according to South African writer and curator Khwezi Gule (2007: 143), ‘serve the dual purpose of, on the one hand, providing the tourist with idealised pictures about the region/culture being visited, while on the other being the primary outlets for artists in that region to show their work.’ Especially so, in the Eastern Cape, where these kinds of institutions often use this dual-purpose to control the region's creative output, a phenomenon Ogundipe-Leslie (1994: 10) describes as ‘frequently calling on African women to play the role of ventriloquists’ puppets, speaking to other people’s agenda.’ That is why I investigate and reflect on the role that art centres and their funders contribute to silencing the women creatives and generating dependency rather than fostering empowerment, independence and self-determination. This silencing and dependency—if read in both literal and metaphoric meaning of Dambisa Moyo’s book title, *Dead Aid* (2009)—perpetuates the colonial perception of Africa and its people as always needing rescuing.

Curatorial practice

My study is not only conventional writing of the thesis but also entails curating of an exhibition. The latter works with a curatorial practice that employs collaborative strategies through working with Xhosa women ‘crafters’ and facilitating dialogues about visual concept development and creation. It results in the making and curating of their ‘craft’ work, which becomes a contribution towards enhancing their voice and rendering them visibility. At the core of my curatorial practice is the cultivation of these women’s subjectivity and agency. Through these strategies we employ techniques of excavation and recuperation as some of the methods necessary in ensuring that the women participate in artistic practices described by Pumla Gqola (2001: 12) as ‘worlding our environs, reshaping and actively engaging with the world we inhabit.’ These practices are necessary for activating and enabling their knowledge systems and ways of being in the world, adding to being a creative and discursive space that they deserve in the expanded context of contemporary visual arts. The experimental nature of these strategies and practices is geared toward what hooks (1989: 29) explains as follows: ‘The most important of our work—the work of liberation—demands of us that we make a new language, that we create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice.’

My curatorial practice also works with the idea of continuous movement, a process of perpetual motion in the sense of becoming or progression where there is an unfolding of events or activities that connect even if there are stops and gaps between them. This idea explains the three editions of the exhibition I have curated in the course of this study, *Zundiqondisise!: Reclaiming Our Voice*. And they took place at different venues but were curated as a sequence of an unfolding narrative comprised of work-stations or reflective-terminus, whereby different ideas, contents, strategies, forms, techniques are explored, discovered and developed, even evaluated, modified and discarded. *Continuous movement* implies a curatorial build-up that takes the first two exhibitions as research elements and research process for the final exhibition. One is staged; is a site; is a subject; is an object; is an event, and thus performative for the examination of this study. The first two exhibitions have been necessary for experimenting and testing theory and praxis of my research, both of which have accumulated into the refined and consolidated third, final exhibition.

The afore-discussed curatorial practice is conceived with Irit Rogoff's ideas of 'the curatorial' as what champions exhibition as a complex, ambiguous site of various manifestations that give rise 'to engage increasingly with the performative nature of culture, with meaning that *takes place* as events unfold' (2006: 1). Rogoff is interested in the kind of 'criticality' through which 'the curatorial' 'brings together that being studied and those doing the studying (2006: 3) in intersectional dialogues that are in line with my curatorial practice engaging the Xhosa women crafters. Explaining this particular practice of 'the curatorial' Rogoff (2006: 3) writes

In the realm of 'the curatorial' we see various principles that might not be associated with displaying works of art; principles of the production of knowledge, of activism, of cultural circulations and transitions that begin to shape and determine other forms by which arts can engage. In a sense, 'the curatorial' is thought at that, that does not rush to embody itself, does not rush to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the question until they point us in some direction we might have not been able to predict.

It is essential to consider the craftwork of the Xhosa women as much visual and textual as it is oral and spoken narratives. For their creative process of beading in itself and in relation to other practices or phenomena is both an art form and subject content, in which the oral narratives are part of the making and the end product, both of which also extend to performance in song, poetry, and dance. This intricate work is often misunderstood both in craft markets/shops and the conventional (white commercial) gallery spaces owing to its creative production and associated performative activities I have just noted. A useful approach to dealing with the intricate work of these Xhosa women crafters resides in a flexible curatorial practice, one explorative of alternative strategies that are accommodating and adaptable to contextual requirement. This particular curatorial approach could be explored via Chuz Martínez's idea of 'the maybe', which implies not just what could be possible or feasible but an act of taking a chance where certainty or conviction is suspended. 'Maybe', in Martínez's (2012: 46) explanation, 'comes also to the possibility of discovering unsuspected positions between the animate and the inanimate as well as among the many forms of life; an imagination capable of conceiving an act of knowledge among those who live beyond language.' What I am formulating here is the following curatorial approach:

It names a tension, a state of imagination aiming toward the potential reorganisation of the structure of the known and those who think they know. The "Maybe" is the emblem of attention, a positive form of privation—the privation of certainty, of the statement that forms a conclusion—that introduces not only fiction but a dimension of theatricality, since it puts all elements into play ... "maybe" can be taken as a journey that introduces us into the realm of artistic research as an active reconsideration of certain representations of knowledge in the context of art (Martínez 2012: 46).

Working with Martínez's articulated ideas, my study focuses in the Xhosa women crafters whose craftwork I have curated in the way that is an active reconsideration of certain representations of knowledge in the context of visual art. This undertaking is in line with Rogoff's (2006: 1) notion of 'embodied criticality' in the sense of 'living out the very conditions we are trying to analyse and come to terms with' to 'marry our knowledge and experience' in formulating new and inclusive spaces where artistic discourse can manifest in different and non-restrictive ways, free of the marginalisation of certain groups; 'a shift...essential for the actualisation of contemporary cultural practices' (ibid. 2).

Research methodology

For this research, I have used four research methods. The first is a theoretical exploration of my curatorial approach, regarding Sarah Ahmed's (2010a: 3) work on *feminist killjoys* where she argues: 'To be "estranged from" can be what enables a "consciousness of.", this is why being a killjoy can be a knowledge project, a world-making project.' A 'killjoy' is a disrupter of the norm, to bring in new ways of being that allow room for questioning and critiquing rather than just accepting. Like the trickster character in many folktales, she challenges the conventional codes of conduct that various hierarchies ensure are always in place (Fisher 2002). This strategy allows my curatorial workroom to deviate from and skilfully sidestep convention, bringing women to the forefront of artistic discourse.

The second method involves conducting a series of informal, conversational engagements taken from the idea of Yarning method, where 'an informal and relaxed discussion through which both the research and participant journey together visiting places and topics of interest relevant to the research study' (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010: 38). These informal interviews were conducted with the women working in the two community art centres I have chosen. These engagements guide my curatorial approach using Yarning to 'interact and learn from indigenous people' (ibid.) to facilitate the processes of making, framing, displaying, archiving and writing of the work, and used together with various texts.

The third method uses alternative spaces for exhibiting the works of the women crafters, spaces that are conducive, complementary and enabling for the amplification of the already existing though marginalised voices of Xhosa women. Here I am interested in the ideas of communal spaces where gatherings are usually held, where the beadworks of the women crafters operate on multiple levels (Malatjie 2013: 367). For example, these beadworks are created for ceremonial purposes in Xhosa culture; play a part in identity rituals and aesthetics; serve the dual purpose of display and interaction with different audiences that would not necessarily have inhabited an art gallery (Mam' Nowest Ramba, personal interview 2018).

And the fourth method engages with ways of archiving (Hamilton et al 2002) the process of creating the work, the work itself and the conversations that develop from the interviews to counter and address the erasure of the history of black African women creators. Given Amhed's argument that 'Our activist archives are thus unhappy' archives as this archival discourse is essential to purposefully insert their inclusion in a domain of contemporary visual arts that has historically to date marginalised and excluded women crafters. I work with archiving having taken into account Amhed's (2010a: 2) observation that women's 'archives are thus unhappy archives.'

I also explore auto-ethnography, a way of writing that prioritises 'giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding' (Wall 2008: 39). I use this device as an excavatory practice to examine my own experience concerning the relations I undertook in engaging with the creators and management in community art centres, and the commercialisation of the work. This method enables me to research, write and curate from an informed position owing to the access I have gained in the course of interacting with these different players and stakeholders from personal, professional and scholarly perspectives. I use excerpts from my journal to record my thoughts as a researcher, and this process allowed for mapping outgrowing understandings of roles as researchers and interviews invading

personal spaces of others (Ortlipp 2008). I have used this method to document my observations and note my thoughts during my field experiences at the centres.

With the preceding choice of methodological approaches, I engaged the marginalised subjects in the empowering sense. Similarly, Gayatri Spivak has argued about the ways of “learning to learn from the subaltern” and more precisely “learn to learn from below” as well as ‘acknowledge that subaltern are in fact able and allowed not only to speak and to talk but also to “teach”’ (cited in Zene 2011: 96).

Thesis structure

Chapter 1 looks at the history behind the silencing and background of Xhosa women's voices and agencies both within their communities and then through their creative outputs. Investigated is the formulation of the differences between craft and fine art, and this formulation's role in the marginalisation of the work considered craft from the community centre. I interrogated early colonial definitions of ‘native’ peoples and their art, specifically Xhosa women, and their role in the reduction of their work as primitive productions of cultural narratives that have no place in the modern world. I use historical documents on missionary stations and churches from the 19th century in the Eastern Cape.

Chapter 2 discusses the first exhibition held at the Steve Biko Centre in Ginsberg, King Williams Town. Here I deal with the visibility or lack thereof of Xhosa women's craftwork within contemporary South African art practice and the perceived voicelessness of the work produced by these women. I theorise on the existence of voice in the women’s craft and interrogate curatorial strategies that give volume to their artistic outputs in the course of working on the exhibition and the creation of the craftwork as practical research. I base this on theoretical essays like Ntabiseng Motseme's *The Mute Always Speak* (2004) and Gayatri Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1994). I also probe into the literary archives of the Eastern Cape to find voices of previous Xhosa women who spoke through their art and use their strategies in making the voices of the community art centre women more audible. An investigation into the possibilities of alternative platforms to display the work will be a vehicle into the re-situation of it from the status of invisibility to one that defines and allows their work visibility.

Chapter 3 looks at the second exhibition held at the Amathole Museum in King Williams Town and its theme on exploring storytelling as a vehicle for the exhibiting of the works of Xhosa women bead workers. Using the exhibition itself as further research, I attempt to extract more curatorial strategies by working with a storyteller and musicians from the Eastern Cape. Using the age-old Xhosa storytelling methods, the chapter will discuss the components within uMakhulu’s *intsomi* that can be employed in the putting up of work in a space for it to be able to tell unique stories embedded within beadwork art. It also discusses the walkabouts resulting from the exhibition, including school children from the King Williams Town region to add the perspective of younger viewers in the researching for the final exhibition.

Chapter 4 explores the labour conditions under which these women work in community art centres and the possibility of curated exhibitions which provide a *room of their own*. Their work is often geared towards the tourist market to create a stable economy for them, an

economy which then is partly owned by the art centres. I use Virginia Woolf's notion *A Room of One's Own* (1929), to investigate the need of money and space for creative freedom for these women, in contrast to the influence that community art centres have, having provided the 'room' for creative freedom, then restrict their agencies. I also investigate the impact management structures of these centres have on the sustainability of these women work, together with the 'white matriarchy' and governmental structures that restrict the growth of the work for tourism. This information, along with the research gathered from the first two exhibitions, informs the third, final exhibition which serves as the practical component of my thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

The Indigenous Art of Women of the Eastern Cape: a curatorial intervention

Within the South African art industry, the Eastern Cape is known for its craft output rather than the more refined art, an output mostly dominated by the Xhosa women of the region. The work of these women seems to be consistent with the same concept: beadwork items that are primarily created for bodily adornment, decorative pottery, and embroidered cloth. This consistency gives the impression that the works are a generic idea that every creative woman in the Eastern Cape produces. Curiously, they are however popular as souvenir trinkets for tourists who would like to leave with a piece of the reminder of their African experience.

This inevitably creates a commercial angle to the product, where if the demand for the items is tourist-based, the only logical space for them to be displayed would be craft markets and gift shops. Alternatively, spaces that run poverty alleviation schemes where the 'poor' women of that particular district would display items to be bought by funders and visitors to the area. Gallery space is used solely for the aesthetic display and discursive engagement of fine art objects. In contrast, the market/gift shop space leaves no opportunity for such critical discourses with the creator's ideas or story, not to mention the disconcerting disinterest in who the creator is. Moreover, the way the items are displayed have no curatorial inclination as an exhibition for various engagements, that include the context in which they are produced, presented and will circulate. Put plainly; these creative products are mainly submitted to a monetary exchange between consumer and seller; they are a product that is plausibly linked to the consumer's desperation for an exotic experience of the place he/she is visiting.

The Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture together with the Eastern Cape Development Corporation and the Small Enterprise Development Agency have attempted to create an opportunity for the visibility of craft artists beyond just the craft shops available in small towns and museums. According to Eastern Cape crafters Miss Yanela Jija and Mrs Nosikhumbuzo Jali, the three organisations support crafters by selecting a few for most of the arts festivals within South Africa. They pay for their travel, accommodation, necessary fees for stalls to display their work, and a daily stipend for food (personal interviews 2019). It seemed like a favourable opportunity, one that would not only solve the problem of visibility for them but attempt to resolve the economic side of it also. The few selected craft artists then have another platform to show their work without worrying about the financial implications of such ventures.

What is, however, concerning is the marginalisation and exclusion of the craft artists from so-called main attractive festivals featuring elite disciplines such as Fine Art, Theatre, Dance, Opera, and Music. One example is the annual National Arts Festival in Makhanda, which rarely features craft artists in both their mainstreamed and fringe programmes. While the elite, creative expressions are afforded the main galleries, museums and various stages as platforms to showcase and market their work, the designated spaces for craft artists are always on the discouraging peripheries of the Festival's curated set up. These peripheral locations are tents near the food quarters and in spaces where craftworks are mainly featured

as the minor artefacts accompanying prime shows. An exemplary case was during the 2019 National Arts Festival where some craftworks were displayed as extra décor props to supplement an Indigenous Languages Literature talk at Amazwi South African Museum of Literature. Just like the tents for most crafts near the food court, the particular craftworks were poorly displayed, no curatorial effort made to render them visible and thus solicit the attention of and afford the chance for an in-depth engagement with the audience. Instead, they were an invisible present, ghost artefact lost in their silence somewhere in the Museum of Literature. People using both these venues were mainly there for food and conversations with friends in the case of the food court, and indigenous literature in the case of the indigenous talk at Amazwi Museum.

A glaring contrast could be observed in the care and respect given to Fine Art works, most of which are in curated galleries and museums; even project and experimental spaces are somehow engaging. For Fine Art works receive the privilege of not only curatorial care but also effective interventions in the form of official openings, speeches, walkabouts and reviews all discourses unheard when it comes to craftworks at the Nation Art Festival. The craftworks endure neglect and muteness as non-discursive things to be picked and purchased while the audience is ‘catching up’ with loved ones, friends and colleagues. The kind of support given by the above noted three organisations presents no solutions. It rather exacerbates to the disconcerting predicament of the Eastern Cape’s craftworks as an art form, creative practice, and aesthetic objects in their own right compared to other types of art productions with and beyond the domain of contemporary visual arts. The undermining of the value of craftworks is an observable fact. Small town craft shops, museums shops and Festivals are platforms that contribute to diminishing their statures into mere beautiful, exotic, consumables than also activating their seriousness, significance as socio-cultural objects that deserve critical engagements and utility.

In light of the preceding argument, this chapter focuses on the historical factors that have rendered the craft of Eastern Cape Xhosa women silent and lacking in visibility within the South African contemporary arts. Owing to this silence and invisibility I investigate about the Xhosa women as subalterns, individuals who cannot ‘speak’. It is not because they are unable to, but because their ways of speaking are not accessible nor customary in the acceptable normalised discourse of mainstreamed art elitism or affluent art circles. Colonialism and apartheid have created conditions that in return, constructed social, cultural, political and economic sensibilities of these women in society. Thus their disempowered state of being subaltern in the world they inhabit. Their subaltern status, adding to the cultural patriarchy they experience, is therefore by design, not natural nor normal. It is designed and maintained marginalisation in a context that black women occupy the most bottom hierarchical echelon. Thus it is not surprising that these black women have been spoken for, but hardly ever listened to, so they could to be heard. Their marginalisation, however, presents critics and postcolonial scholars with possibilities for alternative thinking around the knowledge that they embody.

Postcolonial feminism and the margins

I have already discussed in the previous chapter, the importance of the margins, with reference to Linda Smith (1999) and bell hooks (1984 & 1989). Without repeating but reiterating the significance of the margin as a site of both resistance and retrieving marginal subjects, here, I want to articulate the postcolonial feminist thoughts. bell hooks perceives the margins as a location of radical openness and possibility, where individuals and collectives are transformed through the making of radical creative space which affirms and sustains women's subjectivity. Gayatri Spivak however, sees the margins as a 'theoretical position for challenging the Eurocentric privileged positions of knowledge' and 'a location of postcoloniality' that is not 'a fixed location which demands certain validation', but rather 'a deconstructive space' advocating 'a signal of the ethical re-positioning of one in relation to the other' (Sehovic 2016: 4).

I derive my curatorial practice from this black, postcolonial feminism. I work with Spivak's ideas of "learning to learn from the subaltern" and more precisely "learn to learn from below" as well as 'acknowledge that subaltern are able and allowed not only to speak and to talk but also to "teach"' (cited in Zene 2011: 96). Raisa Sehovic provides another useful definition of "Postcolonial feminism". She argues how it 'seeks to account for the way that racism and the long-lasting political, economic, and cultural effects of colonialism affect non-white, non-Western women in the postcolonial world; it originated as a critique of feminist theorists in developed countries' (Sehovic 2016: 1). These postcolonial thoughts informed my endeavour as a researcher and curator. I collaborate with the women instead of speaking for them. In the collaboration, I learn from our interaction and the making of their craftwork. They are mainly working with beads that are key in this study.

To understand the beadwork in context, I must begin with the history of missionary interventions and influence in the Eastern Cape. The missionary project was effective in shaping Xhosa people's view of themselves, their individual and collective ways of thinking as well as articulating their ideas affected by the socio-economic conditions that work hand in hand with British colonialism in the region. Given the broader scope of both the missionary and colonial projects, I have sought to focus on the educational and social structures that affected cultural identities and artistic production of Xhosas. I focus specifically on women and how these projects contributed a curious uniqueness to the already existing Xhosa patriarchal narrative on the role of the woman in Xhosa society. Where Xhosa men expected total obedience from their women, the Europeans' set of ideas deemed women not only as useful and submissive beings but also subjects whose presence and outputs are required only within the confines of the home front. Their subjecthood and contribution were never free beyond the limits of their domestic households and the needs of colonialists and missionaries. In this imposed structural arrangement, Xhosa women were deprived of the status of being part of the fabric of community decision-making and participation in cultural developments that stretched beyond Xhosa society. Part of my argument in this chapter is to show how these missionary ideas have led to a gendered engagement with craft/art in the Eastern Cape and the prevalence of a singular notion of a 'woman's place'. I also discuss curatorial approaches that give rise to the visibility and agency of both the craftwork and its creators, when attention is paid to the importance of context and its relationship to content. My arguments are informed by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's notion of finding women's voices 'in the sites and forms in which they are uttered' (2001: 11).

Missionary education and Xhosa women: its influence on their self-expression

The infiltration of Eastern Cape by colonialism and missionaries should be viewed as an extended wave in the subjugation of Xhosa women by an already existing Xhosa patriarchy. This subjugation rendered these women subalterns in the sense of being marginalised. As a result, they suffered what Gayatri Spivak argues to be the voices of the subaltern that become lost between ‘white men who save brown women from brown men’ (1994: 92) and the African male elite who dominated within their native cultural setup. ‘Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation,’ Spivak explains that, ‘the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernisation’ (1994: 102). In this context, in which missionaries, colonialists and native patriarchies contested and dominated over African women, voices of the Xhosa women were not only assumed non-existent but also subjected to the dictates of the civilising mission and colonial modernisation through religion, education and labour.

The mission to ‘Christianise’ and ‘civilise’ the so-called savage races, however, dates to the 1700s in Africa. Churches thought it their duty to enlighten and save these Africans from the clutches of the devil by introducing them to the virtues of living a godly life. This life was to be free of barbaric rituals like initiation rites, scarification, incision, and traditional dancing – all of which were pitied against the beliefs that came with conversion into Christianity. Upon arrival, specifically in the Eastern Cape, missionaries would be scattered around the region taking residence in isolated mission stations (Erlank 1995), where they would live among the natives to make their interaction daily and easier, instructing them on the ways of civilisation.

The missionary was expected to build a house and church, the former to live in and the latter to congregate and teach the word of God. Later, when the mission station had a suitable gathering of ‘believers’ among the natives, a school would then follow, for further instruction in the ways of the Victorians both in lifestyle and belief systems. Once the ‘converts’ have received the message and accepted it as part of their lifestyle, they were to abandon all links to ‘heathenism’ by getting rid of their clothing made from animal skins and adopting European clothing made from fabric. It was part of a series of markers demonstrating civilised life, what also attests to ‘scramble the indigenous code of body management in its entirety – and then to reform it inside out’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 233). In this regard, the mission stations were also spaces to demonstrate a domesticated life which, missionaries thought, was lacking in African societies, where there were ‘women toiling as beasts of burden, and children parading around in various states of nudity’ (Vernal 2012: 117).

Coupled with the introduction of Christ to the ‘dark continent’ was the hidden imperialist agenda to enrich the lives of white settlers living in the surrounding areas of these missions. The mission station, then, was ‘a Trojan horse ... allocating the land and exhorting the occupants to obey the rituals, beliefs and behaviour that was characteristic of Victorian values’ (Khabela 1996: 29). This was done in close partnership with the colonial government. In fact, with the arrival of the 1820 settlers, there was a great need for a labour reserve for the farms surrounding the mission stations. It was then agreed by both governmental authorities and the various mission societies that the mission should serve a dual purpose, one to create converts and the other a docile labour reserve for the settlers.

There was the growing fear of employing Africans who, left to their own devices showed signs of indiscipline and inexperience when given a chance to work in the settler farms. Reverent William Shaw, a minister and missionary of the Methodist Church, was one of the firsts to attempt putting this strategy to the test, as Fiona Vernal (2012: 119) explained he

hoped that the creation of “a native peasantry” at Farmerfield would represent “a respectable class of coloured persons to which the poorest native would soon see that he might easily introduce himself by the exercise of steady industry for a few years in the service of the [white] farmers[.]” Such a plan would be mutually beneficial to the employer and the African labourer, with the one gaining workers and the other supposedly gaining skills, an abode, and a very important lesson in the value of steady employment.

This new model of missionary stations gained popularity as it made the station appear as progressing in significant strides in the letters written to Europe telling about the progress of the native under the guidance of the missionary. It further created a dependency of the native on the missionary, making it easier for the British government to acquire land and full control of the frontier and its native occupants who had been made docile and subservient to Victorian rule via indoctrination of Christianity and civility.

The Xhosa woman and her education under missionary rule

If the African man was Christianised, civilised and educated, what about African woman, in particular her education? This gender question is essential considering that, during this time, the Xhosa women were described in letters by missionaries as ‘drudges, subject to polygamy and, as a result of the latter, duped into all sorts of unstated immoralities’ (Erlank 2000: 28). For these reasons, they were therefore deemed as needing an educational intervention which would be provided by the mission stations. They would not, however, need ‘the intellectual end envisaged for higher male education’ but ‘the sort of education that would fit them for their roles as wives and mothers’ (ibid). These nineteenth-century views, which considered women to possess a ‘natural’ aptitude for spirituality because of their emotional and gentle ‘nature’, afforded the missionaries the idea that Xhosa women would be well suited for the ‘domestic sphere, their appropriate station in life’ (Erlank 2000: 30). This white patriarchy also considered the homes of these women as the best places to exercise their evangelical and civilised newly acquired statuses. These imposed ideas on African womanhood came from the Victorian background where a woman was considered, according to Oliver Goldsmith, as follows:

The modest virgin, the prudent wife, and the careful matron, are much more serviceable in life than petticoated philosophers, blustering heroines, or virago queens. She who makes her husband and her children happy, who reclaims the one from vice and trains up the other to virtue, is a much greater character than ladies described in romances, whose whole occupation is to murder mankind with shafts from their quiver, or their eyes (cited in Beeton 2009: 80).

Such views were entrenched in the minds of Victorian women through publications such as Elizabeth Beeton’s *Big Book Of Household Management*. Every self-respecting English woman of the 19th century was to own this book and from it regularly recite poems like *Angel in the House* by Coventry Patmore, describing the ideal woman. This literature became a cultural reference for Victorian living and most certainly influenced the missionaries in their quest to civilise Xhosa women in the Cape Colony. For Xhosa women, this new way of life meant being removed from the socio-economical engagements within the communities from

which they came, and becoming restricted only to house duties and child-rearing. As a consequence, their contributions to their communities become limited to women gatherings such as church women, *umanyano* groups, *imigalelo*, stokvels, and around cooking fires during social gatherings and within their homes. Their confinement to the 'domestic sphere' slowly reduced their involvement in collective decision making within their communities. This, in turn, provided what the missionaries had intended for the African family, for the men to 'take their rightful place at the head of their household' (Vernal 2012: 54), and the women to follow, rather than lead. It created the prevalent notion of the black woman as a labour device that cannot be heard in public spheres, and whose ideas and intellectual properties can only be expressed through others, and often misinterpreted. Their true selves predominantly remain hidden from open platforms and thus tucked away in 'women only' gatherings.

Missionaries' written historical accounts of the converted Xhosa women were laced with the 'angel in the house' narrative, where their only virtue was their devotion to God who could be translated as their white male missionary employer as well as their husbands. Robert Young (1892) is one such missionary who wrote of the women as these devotees, describing their absolute loyalty to the family of the missionary for whom they work. His writings, in *Trophies from African Heathenism*, suggest an equivalence between devotion to whiteness and God, with an emphasis on 'a lifelong service' to the white family as a virtue. Not only were Xhosa women to change their lifestyles for missionaries and Xhosa men, their only way of being 'seen' was this total adoration of both employer and beholder of civilisation. They were reduced to happy, preferably silent servants, who spoke only when the need arose, and that need almost always afforded to them by both white and black men.

And yet it should be noted that the role of the African woman in African society is manifold. Of course, she is mother and nurturer, wife and keeper of the home. These particular roles not only defined but limited African womanhood as they were mainly the vehicles exploited by missionaries in rendering the women powerless, passive followers and labourers. These manipulated roles were in contradistinction with the various and dynamic functions of African women who within their social environs assumed many in leadership responsibilities. Of the many layers and understandings of Xhosa women in Xhosa society, I have sought to single out one stage of Xhosa womanhood as a study source useful not only in contradicting the missionary manipulated knowledge about Xhosa women but enabling inspiration and thoughts for my curatorial practice in the visual arts. Here, I am interested in the powerful and mystical role that *uMakhulu* plays in Xhosa community settings, to which I turn in the following discussion.

The significance of uMakhulu in Xhosa community

uMakhulu is a grandmother, not just to children of her own but often to children of her siblings and relatives, as well. Besides being the treasured pipe-smoking figure who spits long tobacco-laced saliva at least a mile from where she sits, *uMakhulu* is a keeper of sacred knowledge of the Xhosa culture. She is a teacher, a respected admonisher and mediator should there be a need for such in the family and community. She is a stand-in for mother, aunt and sister in the absence of these maternal roles. The size of her *doek* and length of her pipe, together with the thoughtful lines around her piercing eyes, tell so much of ancient wisdom passed down from many women before her, ready to be delivered to her

grandchildren in turn. In the Xhosa historiography, *uMakhulu* is viewed as the glue that keeps the family, community and society together both socially and spiritually.

Through *ingoma* (song), *intsomi* (story) and *ukuzithutha* (praise), *uMakhulu* is known to be *isisele senyathi*, a living library as well as a mental, emotional and physical archive of Xhosa culture. She connects history to the present to guide the path through which a healthy, evolving community should follow. She does so through unconventional methods of play, improvisation and housework to deliver her message across, often, according to Hortense Spillers and Marjorie Pryse (1985: 2), by turning 'domestic necessity into the occasion of art'. In this way, she was an institution of knowledge for Xhosa households, her stories and songs serving as oral pedagogy in cultivating a culture of self-preservation and continuous knowledge, to ensuring that values and customs of the community are intact. Dr Nomathamsanqa Tisani expands on the significance of *uMakhulu* as *isisele senyathi*, one of storytelling as one of the 'genres of oral tradition [that include] beliefs and values which in turn reflect the world view of the people', a storytelling that is also an 'important medium in which wisdom and philosophy are stored and transmitted' (1998: 2).

Christianity, colonialism and apartheid altered the dynamic leadership role of *uMakhulu*. They have transformed her into what Patricia Hill Collins calls (1990: 72) 'the mammy', described as 'the faithful, obedient domestic servant' mainly subjected to "loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and 'family' better than her own." Thus she 'symbolises the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power.' Where previously she had the time and energy to tend to the emotional and spiritual needs of her community, she has now exchanged all that time for the 'white family' and had very little to spare for her own. In fact, she is worn out, having been dried up of all the human qualities necessary to nurture her own various grandchildren, family and community. The idea of 'ageing into' community wisdom which should be passed down and guide her own people has become a distant concept and defunct experience after the many years she has been subjected to spend labouring in houses of whites and black elites. There she is exploited both humanly and economically 'in a capitalist political economy' (Collins 1990: 74).

Another disconcerting predicament about *uMakhulu* is the fact that she slowly and undoubtedly became the sole caregiver to her grandchildren in the historical rise of intensifying black oppression, deprivation and poverty during colonialism, the civilising mission and apartheid. Even after these systems are no longer official, the practical consequences remain in place to this day. For, the imposition of Christianity and civilisation into African societies came with such tactics as 'the introduction of new wants, new tastes and new principles' whose master 'plan was to create new consumers, new labourers, new Christians' (Vernal 2012: 120). Through this imperialist master plan, the being-ness and operational status of black women, for most of their lives, in society were reduced to servanthood. Young mothers left their babies with exhausted old grandparents, whom themselves have returned to homelands from the very same back-breaking exploitative work-system that they themselves as young mothers were subjected to do.

Of course, their men were also forced to leave homelands to go work in life-damaging and killing mines, as well as unpredictable constructions firms responsible for railways tracks and station, roads and buildings. These black men would only return to their home-lands once or

twice a year, having made little money compared to the expense of their affected lives, families and communities. Adding to the domestic work to fix this and that, organise and perform various customary rituals and ceremonies during their short visit back home from domestic work, the black men were also unable to play the role and responsibilities of fatherhood to their children (Richter and Morrell 2006). Such duties, again, have to be shouldered by *uMakhulu* and hence her role becoming increasingly burdensome. The extended oppressive weight of colonialism and civilising mission by apartheid with all its racist laws and brutal violence accelerated and intensified the nightmare of black people who were not just reduced to second-class but stripped off citizenship their land.

Black women, especially *ooMakhulu*, bear the devastating thrust of these unbearable troubles of being black in society. She endured servanthood and patriarchy practised in both her black community and the white spaces in which she worked. This disconcerting situation in modern South Africa created a different version of the Xhosa beloved *Makhulu*. Although, destroyed and watered-down, the residue of the magic that she once fully possessed continues to occupy the villages and townships of today, especially in the Eastern Cape. In this Xhosa part of democratic South Africa, *uMakhulu* is still revered as an elder, but much less as a bearer of knowledge and wisdom of any kind. The premise of my study is to explore the possibility of reinstating *uMakhulu* into her historical role and position of significance, to do so in the light of Maya Angelo's *Phenomenal Woman* (1994) but curating her neglected discourse in the context of the Xhosa women who are the subject of this study. Through creative work that employs the age-old performance of *intsomi* (story), my curatorial undertaking is to ensure her participation in the visual discourse of contemporary art and culture discourse. This undertaking is regarding Herold Scheub's insight into what African storytellers do for their societies in his book; *The Tongue is Fire: South African Storytellers and Apartheid*, one of its chief focus storytellers being Nongenile Masithathu Zenani. For Scheub (1996: xxi) views storytellers as

The storytellers of South Africa—tale-tellers, historians, poets—are repositories of remembered images, of the shadows of memory, of wraiths at once unambiguous and Delphic, shimmering between certainty and irresolution, a set of images that quaver in time, now lending confident insight, posing unanswerable questions. The material of a storyteller is a compound of images sometimes brilliantly designed, often vaguely conceived, always dependant on the vagaries of memory; these images of memory and their organisation by storytellers provide, in the end, the only means of shaping reality.

UMakhulu is this storyteller. If platforms are provided to discuss and engage with her world as a living ancestor, much could be gained from her historical experiences and weighty wisdom. It would aid in grappling with both yesterday's and today's socio-political realities while prophesying an unknown future of a desirable human existentiality and aesthetic atmosphere in Eastern Cape. She is a valuable trope for remembering and re-shaping her world through acts of memory that are useful in retrieving the past and reworking it into new, imagined realities for today and tomorrow. To think of *uMakhulu* in this way is an essential discourse of creating and influencing new thought and practices that contribute to the shaping, enriching and complicating the creative sector of the Eastern Cape's art and craft division.

It is in this manner that this study has engaged with the Xhosa women bead workers from Gompo Community Art Centre in East London and Nomzamo Old Age Centre in Ilitha Township. Both groups use beadwork as an economical and recreational activity to sustain themselves and their families, as well as to create social gatherings with other women outside of their home environments. They are all grandmothers and operate in different capacities, essential caregivers in their families and elderly advisory community members in the villages and townships in which they live. These are active, involved, productive *Makhulus*. Beadwork for them is more than a craft for selling and financial gain for relief; it gives evidence to the ability to create, communicate, socialise, share and nurture communities. More than symbolism, beadwork connects them to their mothers and grandmothers who lived before them, and the necessary cultural exchange that they transferred to them. Beadwork is thus not only an art or craft form of expression but an essential communal communication process indispensable in the retaining and reconceptualising of memory and storytelling.

It is also a feminist practice in terms of asserting the voices of women within cultural spaces. bell hooks and Linda Smith, in their different ways, perceive it to be instrumental for resistance and retrieval in the discourse of making possible the birth or emergence of new ideas, new subjects, new realities. These also marginal spaces that Gayatri Spivak would argue to be important for certain validation and where subaltern are able and allowed not only to speak and to talk but also teach those who might be ignorant of precious knowledge and wisdom possessed by these Xhosa *Makhulus*. Thus, as subalterns, these women speak in beadwork but cannot be heard, as their muted articulations struggle against forces that are content on muting and undermining them as inferior crafters to fine contemporary artists. It is for this preceding argument that Nthabiseng Motsemme's articulations that *the mute always speak* is essential, as it encourages a re-thinking of these silenced articulations. Motsemme advises that we listen further within and around the spaces that these women reside in order to find their muted voices. My point is that if we consider both the space in which and the process through which beadwork takes place as the margins we might be able to discover and understand new ways of viewing, recognising and appreciating the neglected art and world of *ooMakhulu* in our contemporary era.

The presentation and reading of Xhosa beadwork

Beadwork is a craft closely associated with adornment within black South African cultures. Although style and use of colours differentiate beadwork between Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele and Pedi, the basics of it are similar. A general and historical understanding is that the beadwork is mostly created by women for their husbands and children to wear or by teenage girls for their boyfriends, (Broster 1967). The process of beadwork was usually a communal one, from the purchasing of the beads to advise on style, structure, colour and pattern to the use in the final product. Mainly created to be worn at different ceremonial rituals and celebrations, the items were manifestations of cultural pride and individual skill, adding an aesthetic vibrancy to all the events for which they were intended.

In contemporary Xhosa society, bead working is still a significant part of cultural advancement. Even though the making of bead products is now mostly economically driven, and mainly made for the tourist market, it functions as a marker of what it partly is to be a Xhosa individual from the Eastern Cape remain in place. Xhosa beadworks are housed in

many museums such as the Amathole Museum in King Williams Town and the Nelson Mandela Museum in Mthatha. It is questionable that only very few people can name the different pieces, name the artist who created the pieces and what role each of the pieces plays in the entire outfit of the beadwork attire. All this information becomes important when working with museum archival material. How does one display and provide information on any of the items when one cannot name the pieces? What becomes the purpose of the display/exhibit other than 'a thing placed to be seen', with no story or person to attach to except its geographical location and race of origins? Often very little thought is given to the significance of both the beadwork and its relation to the artists. The focus seems to prioritise the viewer, and even then, the viewer tends to be of western origin and far removed from the meanings and functions of the beadworks. In this study, I undertake to resituate the beadwork into spaces and places where there can be a shift from its tended anonymity to a new way of reading it where its creators are named, visible and recognised.

Beadwork has been part of black South African communities for centuries. Used by the Portuguese for trading purposes, beads were transported by ships via the Cape during the (colonial) voyages of Vasco da Gama and Bartolomeu Dias, and came into contact with the people of the Eastern Cape through bartering and sometimes when washed ashore from shipwrecks (Broster 1967). Before the presence of these beads in the Eastern Cape, various wild seeds were dried up and used in creative ways, for different purposes such as being worn, decorating different items, and adornment to spiritual rituals. In these various uses and purposes, beads have always been significant for the specific meanings and messages they carried, represented and communicated.

Each piece of beadwork 'yields an art, a craft' explained by Joan Broster (1967: 17) 'an accepted design and motif, the beauty of which is rich in imagination and aesthetic appreciation.' Thus beadwork is never 'silent' or 'mute' as it tends to be rendered in enclosed glass-cases that museums and galleries use for display and engagement with audiences. The beadworks are more than colourful objects made by African people; their geometric designs and stylised motifs are 'often based on plant and floral forms, signalling concern with agriculture, growth, and fertility. (Marshall 2002: 46). The beadworkers crafting these beadworks are certainly thinking through them as creative means of expression and communication; they are articulating concerns that are personal and are about the world around them. Rendition of meaning for some of the beadworkers comes more from colour than the design, (Mam' uRamba, personal interviews 2018). The shapes mainly enhance the colour, which gives meaning and form to the story being told. For example, Broster notes that:

in young people's beadwork turquoise, blue and white beads predominate, with navy and red used sparingly for contrast whereas, in mature years, navy and white predominate with rose-pink as an accessory, while pregnant women and young parents favour green and yellow. For ritual use, only white beads are bought but these are not immediately made into a necklace (1967: 19).

Broster makes important observations about the symbolic meanings and associated functions of bead colours, yet such meanings and functions are not as prescriptive or categorical as she tells us. From interviews, conversation and interaction with bead-makers from Gompo Community Art Centre and Nomzamo Old Age Centre, I have learned the varying, overlapping and mix-up meanings and functions of the bead colours. One colour never symbolises one, fixed meaning and function; its symbolism tends to be shifting according to

contexts, rituals, ceremony, locations and age. The multi-layered-ness of beadwork colours ranges from the attributes listed by Broster to symbolisms that are necessary life components such as water, land and fertility – all essential in the growth and preservation of a culture and its people, (Mam' uRamba, personal interview 2018).

If the beadwork is made to be worn, it is not for daily adornment but such occasions as healing rituals and rites of passage events. For this reason, there is a performative aspect to the items, where the colours and shapes dictate a story and the body interprets it into movement and sound. Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall wrote on this performative aspect of most indigenous artwork in their article *The Cultural Biography of Objects*, where they argue that 'meaning must be enacted' (1999: 175). To demonstrate their argument they give an example of the Kwakwaka'wakw people and their indigenous masks, indicating that the work is silenced when removed from its context because 'it was the act of showing which was powerful and which established a mask's meaning. Possession of a mask was not in itself significant because the mask possessed meaning only in the context of its performance' (1999: 175). The beadwork of the Xhosa women of the Eastern Cape operates similarly but has been decontextualized in regard not only to its imprisonment in enclosed glass-cased in local and international museums and gallery but also consumption by tourists and various individuals for their different purposes.

That being the case, though, the beadwork remains a creative production that is multi-layered and irreducible in its meaning and function, in particular as a storytelling medium. Not only for its makers but also other agents such as storytellers, poets and musicians, curators can collaborate with both the bead-makers and the community to tell individual and collective stories, in particular neglected narratives, histories, heritages and cultures. It is this collaboration my study explores, working with conversational and curatorial practices whose productive dialogues with Xhosa women beadworkers manifested into a series of exhibitions. In this collaboration, I take beadworks as artistic objects in the respectable sense of traditional, modern and contemporary works of visual art. This undertaking is not merely to contest the futile and unproductive tension or dispute regarding discourse of craft versus fine art. My interest is in the art that comes from such marginalised places, specifically Gompo Community Art Centre and Nomzamo Old Age Centre, of the Eastern Cape where they are often not given enough platform in the contemporary South African art discourse. My focus is on the art produced by the black women who reside in the rural areas of this region.

The women who work from the community art centres that I have already mentioned above and with whom I am in collaboration in art and curatorial practice are categorised as 'crafters' more than artists. Because of their communal work processes and the channels used to market and sell their work, the tourism market and cultural festivals, their artistic output is often rendered inferior and without meaning. Their work is viewed as lesser than the 'fine arts' because of the spaces it is afforded. It is also given very little visibility in spaces that would allow it to be read and displayed in manners that would elevate its current marginal status. Very few of the creators of this kind of work are allowed to present their work in the ways that they intended during the making of it even though academic scholars and museum curators have held numerous exhibitions and written publications on the so-called indigenous art. The work remains seen and read as display items. According to Mam' uBalani of the Nomzamo Old Age Centre beading group, missionary schools shaped the idea of indigenous

creative work as devoid of content and context, shedding some light into the 'othering' of artistic objects that come from marginalised areas:

Our teachers encouraged the making of beautiful objects in the handwork sessions of our school curriculum. We were not allowed to bring or include any of the practices from home into the handwork class. Our songs and ritual dances, our mothers' stories and the games that we played down by the river all were not permitted in school and church and were therefore classified as 'heathen practices' of which God disapproved. We made baskets and embroidered tablecloths and did sewing classes, the finished products often sent abroad to the sponsors of our schools to prove the civilised status of the native children, attracting more funding (personal interview 2018).

Colonialism and missionary education contributed to the marginalisation of Xhosa women craft from the Eastern Cape by inserting and making mandatory the ideas of Western culture and both repressing and distorting any of the indigenous thoughts and cultural practices. The process of colonising a nation requires that the coloniser gains absolute power over the native in all spheres of their lives, as Homi Bhabha (1994: 70) explained,

to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction...a form of governmentality that in marking out a 'subject nation', appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity.

These strategies of domination worked on two distinctions. According to Okwui Enwezor (1997: 24), 'the ontological description of the native as devoid of history, and...the epistemological description of the native subject as devoid of knowledge and subjectivity'. Both arguments by Bhabha and Enwezor reference Frantz Fanon's critique of colonialism's 'perverted logic' in the sense that:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today (Fanon 1962: 210).

The creativities of these marginalised women exist under these destructive systems. These women are 'spoken for' and named by the art world's elite, and therefore denied any opportunity to participate in the contemporary discourse of any kind. Gayatri Spivak explains this marginalisation in her essay on the subaltern, arguing the plight of rural brown women, where those who have political and economic agency determine who possesses the ability to articulate their positions and who cannot, rendering the powerless presumably speechless (1987). The Xhosa women beadmakers have been subjected to this similar predicament of a subaltern. It is adding to the fact that their indigenous art is perceived as stagnant cultural productions instead of being allowed space for new ways of engagement that take serious its reading and its creators as artistic forms of knowledge production.

My study is interested in these new ways, which the Eastern Cape craft work needs so it can be 'seen' (including received and appreciated) differently from its problematic reduction to curio and souvenir. These new ways include the retrieval and reimagining of the ancient authority and wisdom of *uMakhulu* through storytelling which provides a vehicle into this desired novel way of 'seeing' and engaging the works of these women differently and seriously. Her performance of *intsomi* is a creative strategy that she uses to transfer her knowledge and is a strategy I emulate in curating the craftwork of Xhosa women. My curated exhibitions are therefore *iintsomi*, incorporating the three key elements of African

folklore, to educate, archive and entertain. In modelling these exhibitions with *iintsomi* I have sought to explore curatorial strategies and writing forms that think through and work with indigenous, bead art in terms of its multi-layered-ness and multi-disciplinary modes of storytelling, poetry, music and bodily gestures. These curatorial strategies and writing take *uMakhulu* as both the subject and medium of narration, in this way utilising the rich trope of *Makhulu* telling *iintsomi*. The basis of this undertaking is the knowledge that beadwork performs and is interpreted in traditional oral forms. Hence, for it to be fully appreciated in its re-presentation, one should investigate how it has been named, used and performed in its original contexts. Its contexts are communities where women of such communities mostly create it, women who through it tell their stories and express socio-cultural conditions of their communities—*UMakhulu's* storytelling functions in this way. The bead workers are themselves grandmothers who find joy and purpose in the process of beading, and economic relief in the selling of the work. Added is the wisdom of *intsomi zikaMakhulu's* to the work to not only give the voices of these women a new platform but also allow them to participate in contemporary discourses by telling their own stories, their societal conditions.

To make this possible, I have devised a curatorial approach that creates participatory platforms for conversations and workshops, platforms that operate as exhibitions and performances. This curatorial approach follows on Jean-Paul Martinon's (2013: 4) ideas that:

The curatorial is a jailbreak from pre-existing frames, a gift enabling one to see the world differently, a strategy for inventing new points of departure, a practice of creating allegiances against social ills, a way of caring for humanity, a process of renewing one's own subjectivity, a tactical move for reinventing life, a sensual practice of creating signification, a political tool outside of politics, a procedure to maintain a community together, a conspiracy against policies, the act of keeping a question alive, the energy of retaining a sense of fun, the device that helps to revisit history, the measures to create effects, the work of revealing ghosts, a plan to remain out-of-joint with time, an evolving method of keeping bodies and objects together, a sharing of understanding, an invitation for reflexivity, a choreographic mode of operation, a way of fighting against corporate culture, etc.

Another feature of my curatorial approach is the trickster, which in African folklore is often used to change the rules in any given situation, giving way to new worldviews and altering the norm. For David Leeming (2000: 163), 'the trickster is profoundly inventive, creative by nature, and in some ways, a helper to humanity.' Whereas for Jean Fisher, the trickster has the potential to subvert structures created by the dominant authorities that prevent the flexibility of new thought. Thus she asks whether art can be 'an effective agent of change or resistance to hegemonic power or is it doomed to be a decorative and irrelevant footnote', Fisher answers by proposing to employ a defiant trickster to dismantle the power structures within the contemporary art world through an interrogation and disruption of its rigidity (Fisher 2002: 65). Another device that gives potency to 'the curatorial' is Irit Rogoff's concept of 'smuggling', which 'operates as a principle of movement, of fluidity and dissemination that disregard boundaries' (2006: 4). This notion of 'smuggling' takes 'the curatorial' as 'an opportunity to 'unbound' the work from all of those categories and practices that limit its ability to explore that which we do not yet know or that which is not yet a subject in the world' (2006: 3).

All these curatorial figures discussed above have enabled me to work with a discourse of *bringing in* as well as making visible and heard of subjects, objects, ideas, experiences and aspirations that excluded, marginalised and suppressed. It is this curatorial approach that intends to redirect and disorientate the questionable norm. I have engaged the Eastern Cape

women crafters, whose voices are perceived silent in their work and therefore unheard as a contribution to the contemporary discourse of South African visual art and culture. To interrogate this problem of viewing women crafters as silent and thus situated outside the discussion of contemporary visual art and culture, I work with the 'killjoy' strategy. Sarah Ahmed describes it as the feminist disruption 'of how happiness is used to justify social norms as good (2010a), especially when women are subjected to stay within the rules, even if the rules mean their silencing. This feminist strategy advises that 'to speak is already a form of defiance if you are supposed to recede into the background', and it is this will *to speak out when something that I perceive to be wrong* (Ahmed 2010b: 61), which my curatorial approach explores in writing and curating the Xhosa creative work of women crafters. Furthermore, I am encouraged by Ahmed's argument that 'When you are charged with willfulness it is as if your being is an insistence on being, a refusal to give way, to give up, to give up your way.' And thus: 'If we are charged with willfulness, we can accept and mobilize this charge' (2010a: 5).

The work of the women crafters needs this kind of intervention, where an outside influence allows for better ways of reading, engaging and interpreting it, but doing so with Spivak's causation on not to speak for but 'learning to learn from the subaltern'.

Iintsomi zikaMakhulu that are incorporated both in the process of beadworking and in my curatorial collaboration with the women crafters operate as an inquiry to question, challenge and subvert the prevalent narrative that indigenous art is silent, passive or docile. This discursive mission—in the form of research, dialogues, workshops and a series of curated exhibitions featuring beadwork, storytelling, poetry and music—becomes a platform in which the voice of the women crafters could be listened to, heard and understood. It is in such platforms that perceptions are subject to disorientation and change. It is more so when the curatorial display of and engagement with beadwork are not conventional in the manner of exoticizing and primitivising the creative work of the Xhosa beadworkers. It is what I mean by 'seeing' beadwork differently and thus taking it seriously.

Her performance of *intsomi* is a creative strategy that she uses to transfer her knowledge and is a strategy that I intend to emulate in exhibiting craftwork that is produced in the Eastern Cape. By working in a collaborative, innovative curatorial approach, I plan to assist the crafters in the developing of their artistic concepts during the process of creating their artworks. Then they, in turn, through their experience in the articulation of ideas through story, will inform the production of the exhibitions that I will put up of their work. The exhibitions will then become an *intsomi*, incorporating the three key elements of African folklore, to educate, archive and entertain.

CHAPTER TWO

***Zundiqondisise!:* Reclaiming Our Voice in Context**

Awunguwo uvimba wam
Ungeyiyo indima yam
Zange ndathi andazi nto
Nguwe owandenz' iqaba
Ndinendlela yam yokuthetha
Ndinendlela yam yokubhabha

(Simpfiwe Dana, *Zundiqondisise!* 2006)

Simpfiwe Dana's words above speak to the silencing of the Xhosa women's voice. It could be a patriarchal silencing, but Dana's lyrics cannot be mistaken for indicting the 'Christianising' and 'civilising mission' carried out by missionaries and colonialism in her native country, South Africa in general and Eastern Cape in particular. In *Zundiqondisise*, she describes how the missionaries and colonialist, on arriving in (South) Africa, misunderstood the nature of black people and work with their preconceived assumptions about Africans. It included knowing and doing things on the behaviour of black people. In this sense, the song speaks of the historically prevalent silencing of indigenous people and more explicitly expressing the cry of a Xhosa woman for not being heard. The song also verbalises the prevailing tendency of elite groups imposing their ideas and ways of being onto indigenous people without engaging with them as equals in social relation, political affairs, economic system and more especially the production of knowledge in society. Indigenous people are patronised and victimised in this context whose societal organisations and human relations are dominated by interests and values of the affluent-ruled patriarchal classes. Dana's statement *zundiqondisise* is therefore both a call and a command to stop the silencing of indigenous people, in particular voices, expressions and ways of black women in society. The song also campaigns for the importance of listening to understand black women than making assumptions about who they are.

In my curatorial approach, I take heed to the words of Dana in observing and listening, living and working with the Xhosa women crafters to understand their meanings, expressions and aspiration before attempting to curate their work. This approach is also guided by Gayatri Spivak's advice *not just to allow the subaltern to speak and to talk but also to 'teach'* (cited in Zene 2011: 96) those who are interested, sensitive, sincere and committed to engaging with them and meditating on their narratives. I employ the women's unacknowledged but present black feminisms that are 'an act of living and an act of resistance' (Davidson 2017: 1), as well as acts of producing knowledge through women's creative narratives.

I consider this curatorial approach a means towards knowledge production. It is a method that speaks to a way of working through a conceptual framework that does not approach its intended outcomes from a predetermined, inherited knowledge, but rather from working with and from the very conditions that one is trying to articulate (Rogoff 2006). The craftwork of the Xhosa women with whom I work could easily be displayed in some cultural preservation or exotic spectacle, where the works perform only one of their many, complex functions: a reductive, decorative aesthetics. Approaching the work using the concept of 'the curatorial' as a creative and intellectual tool allows the possibility to embark on an unassuming discourse, one which is aware and hence should also question its motives while stretching its limits into unfamiliar realms. I am talking about socio-cultural spheres in which Xhosa

women crafters live and work, domains that are different from those of mainstreamed contemporary art mainly restricted to major, famous cities like Johannesburg and Cape Town in South Africa. The Xhosa women crafters I work with operate in the margins of even the urban setting of East London: they in the townships of Gompo and Ilitha, locations haunted by deficiencies, squalor and all sort of undesirable human experiences.

Besides these socio-economic difficulties, the socio-cultural realms in which the women crafters work and to which their work responds is fertile with historical and contemporary contents and modes of beadworking, storytelling and poetry that are wrapped up into melodic songs and sewn into the beautiful designs of the artistic objects. These creative products are a continuous conversation- one tracing its history to the ancient cultural life of Xhosa people and society. It is a cultural conversation in the creative form, re-telling of the past in the present while imagining the future. As a scholarly device, 'the curatorial', in this regard, brings into my research, writing and curating processes 'principles' that, according to Irit Rogoff (2006: 3), pertain to 'the production of knowledge, of activism, of cultural circulations and translations that begin to shape and determine other forms by which arts can engage.' With these principles - of course including insightful cues from Spivak (1994), Sidney Kasfir (1999), Salah Hassan (1999), Motsemme (2004) and Amhed (2010) – I approached Xhosa crafters to work in search of their voices and narratives. They deserve to become not only more audible and visible but also be able to shape the spaces that they inhabit and negotiate through their past and present experiences. Important to note is that they do all of this as *uMakhulu* does with poetic wisdom of telling *iintsomi*.

Through postcolonial feminism—a critical theory and methodology for research and knowledge production in the form of interviews, conversations, workshops, writing and curating—I take the figure of *uMakhulu* and her *iintsomi* seriously. They enable me to have empowering and engaging interactions with the women crafters; with them also visiting missionary sites and discussing their childhood, youth and adult recollections within the Eastern Cape, where the Xhosa women's art education began and craft skills developed. It is through this postcolonial feminism that I have been able to think, write and curate a study that re-situates the works of these women crafters in spaces that allow for their visibility and voice, spaces. That provides the possibility of teasing out the meanings, messages and aesthetics that are embedded in their beadworks. The figure of *uMakhulu* and her *iintsomi* are embodied in these beadworks, which are also thought concerning the feminist biographical approach, whose objective is to study the lives of women to understand their work. This approach has enabled me to 'delve into the messy and often unacknowledged area of power, privilege and oppression through the women's stories and the readings of cultural stories, myths, [and] studies' (Popaduiik 2004: 396).

My research methodology involved conversations, workshops and trips to museums, galleries and universities where we engaged with various collections of beadworks, as well as discussing with caretakers of this Xhosa heritage. This methodological approach was useful as a way of creating contexts or platforms to learn from each other, especially allowing the Makhulu crafters to 'teach' me. This approach also displaced the subjection of the women crafters to only consider their creative work as only commodities for monetary transaction. It was through the conversations, workshops and visits to institutions that I developed methods of reading and displaying craft. Together with the women crafters, it was a learning

experience in search and developing (new) ways to ‘speak’ through, with and about craft art. The first edition of my curated three exhibition emerged from this explorative discourse.

Exhibition 1. *Zundiqondisise: reclaiming Our Voice at the Steve Biko Centre in Ginsberg, King Williams Town*

On the 9th of August 2018, the first exhibition I curated opened at the Steve Biko Center in Ginsberg, King Williams Town. The show featured the works of the bead crafters from Gompo Community Art Centre and Nomzamo Old Age Centre. My curatorial approach focussed on space, visibility and agency.

The Steve Biko Centre is a resource centre in the hometown of the late Steven Bantu Biko, a black consciousness advocate who died under police arrest in 1977. The Centre houses a library, amphitheatre and boardrooms, as well as a restaurant and film theatre. It houses historical archives of the works of Biko. It is also a gathering venue for educational and entertainment purposes, as well as hosts exhibitions and talks on the history of the Eastern Cape and Southern Africa. I chose it as the first venue for my series of three exhibitions whose purpose is to introduce the women crafters into exhibition practice.

Instead of a conventional art gallery, the Steve Biko Centre was an ideal socio-culturally driven space for the women crafters whose upbringings have been coloured by communal events that are concerned with sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences through entertainment. The practice of sharing involves the passing on of knowledge through an indigenous form of archiving and method of *intsomi*, telling of stories and transferring folklores—space, then, matters for the women. An art gallery would not have been useful as it can be an intimidating space for first time exposure to curated art scene and activities. The conventional gallery is a space associated with silence, with a sterile environment that restricts free movement and play, as it is mainly designed for the elite or affluent class. The Steve Biko Centre provided the desired cultural space to not only host the works of women crafters, but also accommodated the social experience to which the elderly women could relate, an experience that is familiar to their everyday activities in their communities. I purposefully chose to open the exhibition on the 9th of August and fix its duration within August, because of the significance both this date and month: the 9th is Woman’s Day, and August is Women’s Month in the South African calendar. The exhibition date and month was not only exciting and essential to me. It was also to the women crafters whose work was made visible, and their voices were given a hearing in a platform on both the nationally recognised day and month that honour the women of South Africa.

In this regard, I, therefore, considered the exhibition a curatorial act of black feminism, one which is also expressed in the exhibition title, *Zundiqondisise!* that I borrowed from Simphiwe Dana and whose lyrics are the epigraph of this chapter. The word, *zundiqondisise*, implies an instruction to the other who must ensure to understand the self I am; it often used as a warning when the other misunderstands the self. In short, it calls for as comprehension of my position in the event of misunderstanding and confusion, be they as a result of ignorance, unawareness or intent, deliberation. I chose the title, *Zundiqondisise*, because of the disregard and undermining of 'craft' and its creators by the elite. It is done without any engagement or understanding of the creative thoughts, processes, meaning and circumstance

of craftwork and crafters. This tendency is built of the assumptions that craftwork and their makers are silent phenomena.

Dana's lyrics, which I have discussed above spoke to the work of the Xhosa women crafters, work through which the Eastern Cape women are talking. It is through this work that the women crafters' agency, voices and visibility are mobilised and played out. The work of the women also performed an excavatory role in exhuming and retrieving the voice of Nontsizi Mgqwetho, a poet whose content and meaning are a significant heritage and reminder of her call to 'come back to African-ness'. The work of the women crafters, on one level, reiterated Mgqwetho's call while, on another, engaged with her poetry in a way that activated, if not returned, their creative and womanist confidence in recalling and 'speaking' about the significance of their cultural heritage and historical knowledge. They were even reminded of the importance of sharing and passing down of such cultural heritage and historical knowledge to the younger generation. These acts of excavation, exhumation and reminder spoke not only to Linda Smith's *decoloniality* (1999) and bell hook's *black feminism* (1989), which are concerned with the *margins* as spaces for resistance, retrieval and liberation of subaltern subjectivities and agencies. But also to Amilcar Cabral's notion of a *return to the source* (1973), which means the extraction of traditional cultures and historical pieces of knowledge that are necessarily reimagined in ways that inform, shape and enrich the present and future. In this context, the exhibition and its accompanying activities of speeches, poetry, songs and audience interaction became a cultural event. It was a curated performative event that meditated on the possibility of a desire or a need to return to the Xhosa ancient ideas and practices of learning about oneself through the art and culture, in this case, the work of Xhosa women from the Eastern Cape.

Voice and the Call to a re-imagination of emancipation

My job is to somehow make them curious enough or persuade them, by hook or crook, to get more aware of themselves and where they come from and what they are into and what is already there, and just to bring it out. This is what compels me to compel them and I will do it by whatever means necessary.

(Nina Simone 2013)

To name ourselves rather than be named we must first see ourselves. For some of us, this will not be easy. So long unmirrored, we may have forgotten how we look.

(Lorraine O'Grady 1992: 14)

Nontsizi Mgqwetho, Nongenile Masithathu Zenani and Simphiwe Dana are three great female artistic minds whose origins are from the Eastern Cape. Writing in isiXhosa, poetess Mgqwetho is known to be the first Xhosa woman to have published an extensive body of poetry (Opland 2007), which was featured in the multilingual weekly newspaper *Umthetheleli Wabantu* in Johannesburg around the 1920s. The newspaper enabled Mgqwetho to publish her work so it can be circulated and heard publicly, as well as archived for future generations. An Eastern Cape storyteller, Zenani during the 1970s told and recorded stories focussed on women and their positionalities within Xhosa society and

cultures. She worked with Dr Harold Scheub (1996) on archiving African storytelling as a means of social change. And Simphiwe Dana is an Eastern Cape-born contemporary musician who, in albums such as *Zandisile* (2004) and *The One Love Movement on Bantu Biko Street* (2007), uses poetry to bring awareness to socio-political issues affecting black people in contemporary South Africa.

The Xhosa women have contributed significantly to South Africa's literature, art and culture. Their work demonstrates the visibility and voice of black women in a society dominated by patriarchy. Previously, black women have been muted by patriarchy, social structures, lack of resources, and various gender oppressions or marginalities of the communities from which they came. However, Mqgqwetho, Zenani and Dana took bold steps towards altering the status quo by inserting their voices into mainstream platforms in ways that access a wider audience. Their use of words to contextually paint their country's struggle, pain and joy are extraordinarily admirable, encouraging and empowering. Although all three had entered the world generations after the arrival of missionary interventions in the Eastern Cape, their effective use of isiXhosa language in their work can only be attributed to their upbringing in the region. Hailing from villages in the Eastern Cape, hypothetically, each should have had *uMakhulu* and her *intsomi* as part of their education growing up. Their aesthetics of language and bold approach in deliverance speaks of similar qualities in performance as that of an *intsomi*, confident in its expression.

Through poetry, Mqgqwetho embodies the role of *uMakhulu* in Xhosa society, a position that comprises of the strict admonishing of a community to encourage a sense of pride in who people are and from where they come. She recognised the role of mothers and grandmothers in black communities, a position she illustrates in her poem about her mother whom she describes as the light of love that is similar to a flower:

Isibane sothando lwakhe besinje ngemingcunube,
Etyalwe ngasemijelweni yamanzi adlayo.
Phakathi kwazo iinyibiba

(Mqgqwetho cited in Opland 2007: 45)

Zenani echoes the same sentiment in her storytelling, invoking *uMakhulu's* methods in 'giving Xhosa society its roots, in providing conduits to the ancient past, to give contemporary society its foundations' (Scheub 1996: 52). Her stories are lengthy renditions of isiXhosa oral literature, peppered with song and poetry, thoughtful in their descriptions of both place and characters, not to mention the literary quality of possessing the indelible magic that folklore unfailingly delivers in every sitting.

Dana's music is also a derivative of *uMakhulu's* many methods of creativity. Her sound evokes a recollection of *ukombela*, songs whose origins are stories or poems, all of which contain a rich history of the triumphs and woes of the Xhosa nation. Her use of language not only demonstrates a rootedness and confidence in isiXhosa; it also elegantly revisits the beauty of ancient words that currently are rarely used. These are poetic words resonant of the deep mountainous airs and bushy plains of village life. She demonstrates an old soul in her craft, a voice whose background is a collage of the Xhosa women before her.

Mqgqwetho, Zenani and Dana have had, in some way or another, the benefits of the voices of phenomenal Xhosa women who came before them. Their creative works possess the traces

of inspiration passed down, imaginatively added and subtracted, to create new versions of the same truth and contributing to the preservation of cultural identity and heritage. Through these phenomenal Xhosa creatives, *iintsomi zikaMakhulu* have taken many forms of innovations, reincarnated in fresh sensibilities tying the past to the present. Through their poetry, storytelling and music, Mgqwetho, Zenani and Dana are transferring old and new lessons about life, identity, language and culture to the generations that will come after them. It is for the reasons as mentioned earlier that I have sought to engage these women's work, not to mention their daring attitudes and rogue methods of lifting their black gendered voices that articulate the socio-political issues. Their voices participate in contemporary cultural discourses that are usually dominated by men. Thus the works of art are nothing but black women voices that are claiming space, visibility, and being heard. Also, their voices are mouthpieces for those who have no means to get on public platforms and speak.

Lorraine Hansberry, an American playwright and civil rights activist, once proclaimed in a keynote speech at a conference that 'one cannot live with sighted eyes and a feeling heart and not know or react to the miseries which afflict this world' (1959). She was speaking of the role of art in society. Like Nina Simone, who felt 'compelled to compel' the black community to 'see' themselves, Hansberry did her own compelling by writing a play, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1964), which tackled the conditions of black life during her time. The title of the play was taken from a fellow activist and poet Langston Hughes's poem *A Dream Deferred* (1951). The play became an extended version of Langston's thoughts articulated in story form through theatre. With 'sighted eyes and a feeling heart', Hansberry took a line from a poet and gave it a different articulation, currency and platform, whose theatrical staging compelled her audience to see themselves. Her play, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* (1958), is a collection of her letters and journals, which took another form as well. Nina Simone turned these lines, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, into a blues song long after Hansberry's death; in so doing gave the latter's work yet another articulation, currency and platform on radio, music halls and recording. Through the lyrics of *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* (1969), Simone urged black folks to understand that 'your soul's intact, and don't you forget it!' and in so doing she augmented Hansberry's critical thoughts on the black condition in America. It is an example of words borrowed from both contemporaries and predecessors to give life to new works that extend to the next generation of artists. This act of borrowing also functions as an inspiration to young and future generation of artists, adding to encouraging them to carry the same message across in a multitude of different platforms and spaces.

South African musician, who incidentally is a Xhosa woman herself, Mirriam Makeba also used her creativity to speak out on the injustices of apartheid in her country. Seeking solidarity, she sang freedom songs in the United States of America, demanding peace and humanity for the black people of her land. Her style of music came from her mother, a similar sound to Simphiwe Dana's distinctive ukombela sound. Music was a gift passed to Makeba by her traditional healer mother, who also got the gift of this music from her mother. The political message of her music spoke of the conditions of her time and compelled people to see, feel and act. Such a compelling message is also communicated by Simphiwe Dana (2014), when singing 'Bonke baxhentsa ngamandla, awaphekwa iminyaka / Wen' uth' uzokwenza njani, xa udela awakho?' In this song, Dana is invoking a call to her African race to get up from its downtrodden state and become what it was meant to be before its

disempowered and disenfranchised state. She appeals to her people, compelling them to retrieve and return to the source of their pride and deliberate in their ways of being in the world.

Nontsizi Mgqwetho had not only asked of us the same questions but also urged us in the same way as Dana to wake up in a poem proclaiming African people's loss of land: 'Uthi mayibuye? Makubuye wena!' (1929). Mgqwetho's line has reference to the famous pan African slogan *Mayibuye iAfrica*, which South African liberation movements were having shouted out at their political gatherings to incite the people's drive towards reclaiming back their land and their continent. Mgqwetho re-articulated the slogan into a quest, summoning the African people to return to Africa because the land had not gone anywhere; it is the people who had left it behind by adopting European traditions at the expense of forgetting their own. She tapped into their memories by describing the beauty of what they had 'left behind' and proclaimed again and again, 'makubuye wena!': you are the one that must come back to Africa.

The confidence demonstrated by Mgqwetho, including Zenani's and Dana in her voice and bravery in inhabiting space, is what, through my participatory research, I have intended to encourage in the Xhosa women bead workers. My humble efforts have been to bring to their attention to how Mgqwetho, Zenani and Dana as artists who have not only pushed boundaries in their creative use of language and reflective vocalization of social ills. They have also resituated and inserted themselves in spaces that will allow them to possess their subjectivities and utilised their agencies productively. In the creative spaces in the form of poetry, storytelling and music, these artists have the possible freedom that is restricted, repressed and curtailed in a society whose human relations and social structure are dominated by patriarchy and eurocentrism.

Zenani's stories were recorded for future generations by Harold Scheub, a professor of languages from the University of Wisconsin in the United States of America. Realising the richness of the kinds of stories she was giving Prof Schoub, Zenani was wise to request them to be returned to South Africa after the liberation from apartheid. Zenani understood the significance of the archive just as *uMakhulu* did, where history and heritage are preserved for the generations to come. An archive is critical for the future generation to reference their past. She also realised the power that Scheub's platform gave her and her people. Her stories can reach a far wider audience than she can reach in her rural home village in the Eastern Cape. Having them travel far and wide abroad gave other countries an insight into the inner workings of a marginalised society within an oppressive nation.

For Mgqwetho, it was essential to identify herself as *Imbongi*, a Xhosa praise singer, even though *Imbongi* is a cultural figure whose inherent right and practice to address crowds publicly were reserved for men. Jeff Opland explains *Imbongi* as follows:

a man intimately connected with a chief, and invariably formed part of the chief's official entourage...he had the privilege of criticising the chief in his poetry with impunity, (the chief's councillors could disagree with him, of course, but never in public, as the *imbongi* did),...by constant reference in his *izibongo* to the chief's genealogy and the history of the group, he not only acted as an ethnic history book but also moulded communal solidarity...overriding all was the peculiar ability of the good *imbongi* to arouse intense emotions in his audience, especially pride, loyalty and bravery (1998: 17).

By assuming the identity and status of *Imbongi*, Mgqwetho was not merely defiant but transgressive in challenging and proclaiming both the situation and voice of such a significant figure in the cultural realm of Xhosa society. Her act is the evidence of claiming space, visibility and agency. Mgqhwetho, as is the case with Dana and Zenani, made use of her poetry as a potential space to enter the public domain where she could criticise those in a position of power, adding to express her views that the public could share. Her status as a woman in the traditional context of Xhosa nation would not have allowed her to speak as freely as she does in her poetry, which enjoyed a broad publicity. She would have been restricted to the designated Xhosa woman platforms, where women mainly gather doing household chores. *Umthetheleli Wabantu* newspaper was an ideal space to explore her ideas and to speak her mind in a sense Steve Bantu Biko says *I Write What I Like* (2004). Like Zenani and Dana, her artistry and powerfully political voice could not be bound to one place, and they became *imbongi* whose words travelled further than any other traditional *Imbongi* of any region. The newspaper was exposed to a 1920s Xhosa-speaking South African readership of all classes, and it can still be read in contemporary South Africa through its archives, which can be translated into different languages for even a wider audience.

My research has tapped into the artistic wisdom of these three women. Their use of literary, art, cultural and media spaces, whose alternative and unconventional character, for visibility and voices, inspired my search for similar spaces for the work of Xhosa women bead workers in the Eastern Cape. Postcolonial feminist discourses inform the ideas of alternative and unconventional spaces for my curatorial practice of the margins and subaltern. Thus craft markets and shops are not ideal for artworks that are thought, written and curated through such dialogue. Of note is that craft markets and shops do not give the work and its markers any visibility and voice, nor provide the volume and character needed for the scholarly inquiry of my study. My thesis argues for a different understanding, reception and appreciation of the Xhosa women, whose beadwork I discuss in the context of the historical conditions that informed their contemporary experiences.

Historical conditions the informed the Eastern Cape's Xhosa women bead workers

The women's ability to create beautiful works of beads that inspire many to return again and again to the Eastern Cape is astonishing considering the hardships they endure daily. Four oppressive regimes had settled over the backs of Xhosa women over centuries and have not moved today. These regimes are missionary, colonialism, apartheid and cultural patriarchy, and have been instrumental in the hardships and silencing of women on almost every aspect of their lives within the region. I am concerned here with the historical conditions that informed the contemporary experience of these Xhosa women, oppressive conditions from outside and inside forces that create an ongoing cycle allowing their visibility and voices only on the terms dictated by those in dominant and leadership positions.

Missionary work and colonialism, coupled together, taught Xhosa women to despise their cultural traditions and artistic expressions such as rites of passage, body adornments, scarification, ritual songs and dances. Among these rites and rituals are *imitshotsho*, *imbholorho* and *intlombe*, as well as the art of maintaining households such as *ukusinda* and

ukutyabeka. Some features of these cultural traditions and artistic expressions are carried on and infused into the women's craftwork. If missionary and colonialism affected 'Christianising' and 'civilising' of the African natives, apartheid taught black people to live in constant fear of the violence and disapprovals exercised by white men. In this context, black people were reduced to 'things' mainly useful for white needs.

These systems destroyed the traditional life, family and culture of Africans while imposing a lousy mixture of foreign and invented customary ways of being African in a modernising society. Ancient African lives were further destroyed by the introduction of exploitative labour system where Africans were forced to leave their homelands in search of work in the mines and urban areas. Women, that is all mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers of various age have had to raise children almost on their due to their men, husband and fathers being away for work. These conditions forced African men to be incompetent, irresponsible and uncaring husbands and fathers. Thus most men were subjected to extreme compromises, with many failing even to fulfil their patriarchal right in rearing their children, sometimes unable, reserving and withholding not only the physical, emotional and mental but the financial support as well. As a consequence, these problematic, conditions, behaviours and attitudes tended to be an exercise male power over women and hence affected the African households.

These historical conditions included prohibition and compromised education of African women. In particular, women in rural areas of the Eastern Cape were not fully afforded the advantages of higher education because most rural schools went no further than Standard 6. However, most women dropped out of school to become wives and mothers who subsequently depended on their husbands for support and livelihood. Despite these conditions, African women always had the inclination to rise up, lifting themselves to support and maintain their families and communities. Especially having children tended to arouse in them the need of education and the desire to free themselves from dependence on men and the burden of being 'cared for' by their men, while equipping themselves to confront the oppressive conditions effected by missionary, colonialism, apartheid and patriarchy.

Many Africans today are proud of their achievements in thriving against these oppressive regimes and conditions. Moreover, they stake a claim in the success of their children because of rising above their despotic situations prevalent with limited resources and opportunities. They are always aware of the need for one to push themselves further because of their zeal over the years to climb out of bleak circumstances and watch with satisfaction the fruits of their hard work manifest in their grandchildren. Black women have been the cornerstone in these achievements and successes. One of the bead crafters, Mam' Nomeisi Khuphiso, for instance, cannot read or write because she was never allowed to attend school as a child. She has worked as a maid all her working life beginning as a little girl and except for a brief break working at a factory in East London. She has endured domestic subservience until old age forced her to stop. Having laboured for so long as a domestic worker in the homes of Europeans, she knows very well the unfairness and cruelty of the apartheid regime.

The apartheid prime minister from 1958 to 1966, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd in collaboration with his colleagues is well known for the devastating decision that *there is no place for the Bantu in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour*. This decision severely affected the people working in urban areas where, for instance, while providing a

service that the Europeans needed were simultaneously treated like animals. Black people were dehumanised to the extent of being turned into what Frantz Fanon (1967) called *thingness*. The curfew laws for black people in white areas; their illegalised gatherings in white neighbourhoods; and more so the infantilization and ill-treatment of black women within the white homes for which they worked altogether disempowered black women in many ways. Such determined dehumanisation did little to deter black women from their care and ambitions for their children, who were also facing the police brutality and vicious white supremacy intent to cripple, subdue and kill them.

The communities in which black children were raised during colonialism and apartheid did as much as they could in instilling human and cultural values in them even though Christian education and white supremacy were resolute in brainwashing them. Mam' Nowam Vika and Mam' Nombuyiselo Kokhwe grew up attending *imitshotsho*, *imibholorho* and *intlombe*, all three gatherings of singing and dancing for various Xhosa celebrations for teenagers. In doing so, their community leaders had created a blueprint inside of them, a memory of the necessity of one's cultural knowledge and pride. Both Vika and Kokhwe, born in the Eastern Cape's small rural towns Berlin and Kei Road respectively, understood the struggle of straddling two worlds as children. Both grew up in families that upheld ubuXhosa and its cultural customs, but also attended the Christian church on Sundays and obeyed its cultural and religious rituals and values. In place of *iintlombe*, where youths gathered to court, sing and dance, the missionaries introduced concerts where the singing of Christian songs was encouraged rather than the native songs, and competitions of Bible scripture memorisations occurred. Mam' Nombuyiselo Skeyi remembers the prizes to be won in these competitions and performances: 'we won European items of clothing, Bibles and sweets' (personal interview 2018). A system of rewarding that privileged a European lifestyle as gifts for good European behaviour not only cemented in them the superiority of whiteness but also inculcated the inferiority of blackness. From these kinds of experiences, black women have had to contend with the changing world around them while trying to instil and maintain a cultural identity and human values that are sound for a new Xhosa nation for their children.

Of concern to them are the legacies they will leave behind for the next generation. Besides education for their children, they want to leave a sense of hope for them. They hope that the on-going cloud of oppression and poverty devastating black people would somehow lift off the lives of their children and give way to an emancipation of the mind. Ownership of land plagues their dreams, the elderly women say. What disturbs their daily thoughts is the idea that when they will depart this earth, their children will remain packed together like sardines in minute RDP houses, which are token of freedom and democracy. Basic needs like water and electricity are still a struggle for their communities. Clean water and inadequate healthcare are some of the everyday necessities without which they continuously live. A seven-year-old child from their communities can spend their entire school career having never stepped inside of a library. Spousal abuse is a norm and often goes unreported, and if reported, goes unresolved. The socialised oppressive behaviour of men towards their wives and daughters continues to plague marginalised black communities through the prevalent preached admiration of the culture of silence. These are some of the social ills elderly women wish to speak about through their craftwork.

Bead working for them became one of the few links left to their histories. To use it for the restoration of native pride amongst their people became a legacy for them to leave behind. Their history of oppression compels them to use their creativity to unburden themselves of the years of racial and gender focussed violence towards them and their children. Their urgent wish is to re-imagine the past and present in ways that project a new, better future. The creative discourse championed by the artists Nontsiszi Mgqhwetho, Nongenile Zenani and Simphiwe Dana through their artistic practices are efforts on their part to compel the Xhosa nation as well as the broader South African black nation to assert their positions in the land of their birth as proud citizens. The beadwork of the Xhosa women, with whom I have collaborated as a curator, performs the same purpose espoused by Mgqhwetho, Zenani and Dana. Inscribed in their craftwork are their life journeys of triumphs and adversities in search of a liberated voice. Their work reminds and teaches the communities in which they live to pay attention to the ancient voices, wisdom of their past and factor them in shaping their futures.

***Zundiqondisise!:* Exhibiting the works of Xhosa women in the Eastern Cape**

The craftwork of the Eastern Cape is rarely ever given the opportunity of being exhibited, nor are the women creators given the platform to talk about their work. The crafters from Gompo Community Art Centre and Nomzamo Old Age Centre have never been exposed to the culture of exhibitions or exhibition spaces. In addressing this dearth, the practical part of my MFA research comprises of a series of three exhibitions, with the first two editions curated as ‘thinking-out-loud’ experiments to turn the structure of traditional exhibition into a storytelling session. I sought to curate a cultural event that embodies, if not appropriates, the ancient model of *intsomi ka Makhulu*. The conversational interviews with the crafters guided the first two events, advising on layout, the deliverance of meaning of the work and archival methods for the storage of the work as a memory for the future. The work is the voice of the Xhosa woman in the socio-political issues concerning the communities in which they live. It is also a series of conversations about culture and the voice of Xhosa women within their communities, whose patriarchal norms through cultural activities disallow the involvement of women in the decisions that determine the futures of the Xhosa culture. These patriarchal norms are instrumental in the constant silencing of women voices; hence the work of the women crafters is a refusal of them being silenced. In her article, *Black Women-hood and National Liberation*, Phyllis Ntantala-Jordan speaks about women being able to express their views on culture to overcome oppression which is based on patriarchal domination:

Black women, especially African women, are the victims of threefold oppression. One dimension of this is the traditions and mores of their communities. It is our fear of addressing these retrograde customs and traditions which lies at the root of people's opposition to the issues of women's emancipation ... Doubtless, such an exercise will encounter resistance. But, as is the case with all new ideas, those who have been brought up with the old feel uncertain and threatened by this process ... [W]e censor or outlaw radical ideas merely because they cause some of us discomfort ... It is high time we dared to grasp the nettle and subject all these to withering criticism. The ones best suited to the task are the women from the communities in question (1984: 15).

Ntantala-Jordan's words speak to the silencing of black women's voices in spaces where they should be heard. He calls the silenced women to speak up. It is similar Sarah Ahmed's (2010) appeal to all women to ‘disrupt’ the kind of ‘happiness’ that is predicated on the idea

of doing things to keep people happy and maintain harmony rather than speak your truth to oppressive power. Both Ntantala-Jordan and Ahmed urge women to dare to imagine a life where their thoughts, dreams and concerns matter and must be voiced out freely. It is precisely the implied meaning of Simphiwe Dana's song *Zundiqondisise!* which speaks of the many unheard voices of the native Africans in the colonial course of invasion and dispossession of their land by Europeans.

In such lyrics, 'Ndinendlela yam yokuthetha, ndinendlela yam yokubhabha!', Dana makes a case that there has always been a 'voice' in Africa, an African way of speaking. By making this case, she is essentially arguing that the invaders have neither been listening nor found ways of listening to this African voice, her African ways of speaking. Dana is exposing the fact that, without listening to the native, the invaders rushed to name her and place her in a category meant for European ways of knowing. This European failure or neglect to learn the ways of the African native is now integral to contemporary patriarchy which is adamant in its refusal to listen to and thus hear voices of black women who in particular exist in the margins of democratic South Africa. It is what my study engages, reflecting on the contextual understanding of the Eastern Cape as key to creating a cultural space within the region wherein black women have not only the ability but means and freedom to 'speak' their mind through the arts.

I wanted the work to be attractive to a younger and older audience, and the engagement with it to include traditional ingredients of storytelling, poetry and music. The purpose was to bring together in communion different generations of people from the King Williams Town area so they could discuss the musings of their senior citizens. In simple terms, I curated the opening night of the exhibition as a cultural event of *intsomi* by *uMakhulu*, just like the fireside evening stories that the bead workers enjoyed as children. My interest was in sessions that informed and delighted them into the idea of the love of their cultural identities. More than the nostalgia of times past, I wanted to imagine with them the future. Their work stood beside Nontsizi Mgqwetho's political voice in calling for a restructuring of the thought processes of the black mind.

The musical performance by Eastern Cape jazz artists, as well as a poetry performance in response to the stories in the beadwork art, complimented the experience. Working with Eastern Cape artists Vathiswa Bunguza and Thulani Nongogo of *Poetry in Motion* from Ginsberg Township, and the King Williams Town jazz band Kwame added the communal way that Xhosa people create and share experiences. It is how an *intsomi* performance was carried out in *uMakhulu*'s sessions of storytelling. It was rarely just an oral rendition of literature but an amalgamation of music and poetry, creating a vivid portrayal of the idea being put forward. A teacher and principal of Zameka Secondary School from Bhiso, Mrs Thenjiswa Mchiza also spoke of the importance of the story in Xhosa societies. Her expertise is in the teaching and preserving of the significance of the isiXhosa language and how music, poetry and story are vital tools in doing so. The book, *Uncwadi Lwemveli*, which she put together with her colleagues, speaks of the critical role that language plays as resistance. With all these different but complementary cultural forms and activities, the exhibition spoke in three different tongues: through the art on the wall, the interpretation of the art in poetry, and a musical rendition of the dreams of Xhosa women of the Eastern Cape.

The placement of the works on the wall and the floor read like a story. I wanted the viewer to be able to connect the work in front of them with the work next to it like a puzzle. Because the artworks were created out of conversations between the women, they are themselves connected pieces of dialogue, telling many narratives in one story. Walking full circle around the space and engaging the artworks to give a comprehensive picture of the women's utterances, including the viewer in their private lives and conversations. The room recreated *uMakhulu* telling her community of young and older people, *intsomi*.

The Steve Biko Center in Ginsberg, King Williams Town was an appropriate venue for the exhibition. Discussion of cultural production and socio-political conditions of black women from the Eastern Cape in such a place that prioritises the development and education of black communities enhanced the overall intention of the exhibition. For Steven Bantu Biko, voice was an essential tool in the upliftment of black people. His legacy is manifest within the Centre's museum created and used for the views of black people. By adding to their archival material, the voices of the women from the area in which the museum is located gives their archive a much more inclusive resource and platform for its educational programmes.

Many of the attendees at the opening night, on 9th August, like the crafters, had never attended an art exhibition before. In the same way, some had not heard *uMakhulu* tell a story and seeing actual grandmothers having produced story-work in an exhibition form was eye-opening. It was eye-opening not just for the nostalgia of *uMakhulu* and who she was in Xhosa communities, but also for the realisation of the extent to how side-lined her status is in contemporary life. Thus the exhibition was a reminder of her voice and the necessity of having it retrieved and fashioned in modern society. In this way, recalling Spivak's and hooks' ideas, the exhibition expounded on the discourse of the marginal space as a place of possibilities, taking seriously the potential of community's 'untrained' eye and indigenous art for re-imagining of the exhibition as a space that speaks directly to the region's living cultural creativities.

CHAPTER THREE

Zundiqondisise: Reclaiming Our Voice and Mother's Garden

Uthi mayibuye? Makubuye wena!
Izizwe zomhlaba zixhwithana ngawe!
Ziphuma eNode, ziphuma eSude, kwaseMpumalanga naseNtsonalanga.
IAfrika ihleli, ayiyanga ndawo
Khangela engceni wofik' isahluma, khangel' imithombo yamanzi isatsitsa
Khangela yonkinto ime ngendlela

(Mgqwetho cited in Opland 2007: 59)

In the first epigraphy, Nontsizi Mgqwetho offers a way back to the idea of nation-building. She appealed to the consciences of Africans who seem lost in the wild-west searching for an Africa that went nowhere but remained where it has been since the beginning of time, life, humanity, culture, politics, economics and the many problems in the world. Like Amilcar Cabral, Mgqwetho calls for *the return of Africans to their source: Africa*. She enlightens her reader about the invented perception of African's absence from Africa as the root of the predicament that Africans have been confronting as outsiders in the land of their birth.

For Xhosa women (who are my concern here) from and based in the Eastern Cape, this Africa is the land, the country, the continent and all the natural, cultural, material, intellectual and artistic concrete and intangible phenomena. Africa has not left its people; it is its people that seem to have left Africa. Mgqwetho alludes to the capturing of African resources and knowledge by Europeans while the Africans themselves stand by vulnerable and helpless, having been conquered, violated, dispossessed, exploited and wounded physically, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually.

The women crafters from Gompo Community Art Centre and Nomzamo Old Age Centre read Mgqwetho's verse with both amusement and apprehension as their memories and reminiscences were touched. Most importantly is that the elderly women were inspired and encouraged; hence all their reaction and response to Mgqwetho's lines were explored in their beadwork. It, for me, was a creative dialogue not only between words and images, poetic lines and beadwork expressions but also between the dead and the living, elderly Xhosa women, who are more than creative producers but *oomakhulu bentsomi*. I read their dialogue as *incoko yabantu abadala* exploring what Simphiwe Dana has called *zundiqondisise*, precisely because they are reclaiming their voices in a context that has neglected and marginalised them as a subject of no meaning and consequence in the discourse of current affairs, contemporary art and culture. Their voices should be included in the discussions of contemporary South Africa as agentic individuals, and also, in Maria del Guadalupe Davidson's words as 'the foundation that black women's resistance to systems of oppression is built on' (2017: 1).

Following the Steve Biko Centre exhibition in August 2018, I curated the second edition of *Zundiqondisise!: Reclaiming Our Voice* at the Amathole Museum in King Williams Town. I opted to use the South African women's August month, to continue my exploration of curatorial strategies with the potential to do justice for exhibiting the Xhosa beadwork. The conversations that stemmed from the first exhibition between myself and the crafters gave more insight into an exhibition method that I should employ when working with spaces in the

Eastern Cape. Nongenile Zenani's methods of storytelling, as well as more conversations with the women, informed my thoughts on using an art exhibition to tell the stories of these women, to engage with school children from the surrounding areas of King Williams Town. The exhibition focused on the stories and wisdom of the women as well as the archiving of these experiences for further study; hence the Amathole Museum was the best place to host the event.

The space is a familiar environment for the people of the area. It is situated in the main street of the town. It houses historical documents and objects, as well as an in-house library containing historical books written by and for the people of the Eastern Cape. They also host school tours and events such as book launches and public talks. It became a continuation of my use of 'gathering' spaces that are divorced from the traditional art gallery and are instead more accommodating to an audience that is still illiterate regarding the intricacies of the contemporary fine art world.

The museum has an underground dungeon that the staff use to store unused and broken items. It is where old artefacts that are of no use to the museum come to die. It has a small door at the bottom of the Xhosa Museum's veranda steps, with small barred windows that face towards the museum's archive rooms. Once inside, after having to stoop when you get in as if entering a hobbit's home, the space is small with a low ceiling and a musty smell. I immediately knew it was the space appropriate for the show. Symbolically, it spoke to the side-lining of *uMakhulu's* voice in contemporary communities, but also the marginalisation of indigenous art within the modern South African art spaces. Dungeons were often rooms in castles or cathedrals where things and even people were either buried to hide or punish them. It was a sound-proof space where people were imprisoned to die slowly. This particular dungeon of the Amathole Museum appealed to me as the space to use for the exhibition because even in its evocations of unpleasant histories, there were features it possessed that created a peculiar nostalgia in me. The pillars in the middle of the room reminded me of *intsika*, the post in the middle of a hut that holds its roof up. As children, on rainy grey days when we could not play outdoors, we held on to the circular shape of *intsika* and swung ourselves round and round the room for amusement. It was always a wonderful feeling for us children chatting and singing loudly to the annoyance of the grandmothers.

As we viewed the dungeon space together with the women crafters, we laughed at these childhood memories and many others associated with *intsika* until the laughter slowly died out, replaced by a thoughtful silence. Seriousness and significance kicked in. For *intsika* in Xhosa households is the pillar that symbolically holds the family together as well. Grandmothers are said to be the pillars of their homes and their communities even with the limited resources they have to exercise this critical role. None of the contemporary elderly women owns a hut for their children and grandchildren to swing around, sing and laugh anymore; they instead own government housing with little room for children to play whether outside or inside. Their RDP houses are worse than the rondavels of the rural and village dwellings. The museum's dungeon reminded them of their living environments and the pain of having to pass that on to the next generation. It became the right space to tell the stories of the women crafters. I wanted to present their voices in a space that has a history of incarceration. However, my curatorial approach was to think and pursue a discourse that would emancipate these marginalised voices. I intended to disrupt perceptions of their work as trapped in the inferiority and 'silence' of the margins. This mission was possible by way

of a curatorial invasion of forbidden areas and spaces of the museum, sites in and through which to make their voices visible and their wisdom and knowledge heard.

As part of the process, a few of the ladies came to the space on different days to walk around and formulate ideas about how their work would fit into the space, and how the space would be a site to negotiate and interpret their stories. Walking around the room, around the pillar in the middle, gave the idea of walking around an artwork instead of just being confronted by its face. The pillar was already an architectural prop, an artefact or a sculpture, in some sense. With children in mind, we thought of ways to bring the work not only to the level of adults but to theirs as well. Rummaging through the back storeroom, we came across old unused easels, and the ladies took an instant liking to them. Because the exhibition would incorporate stories being told to schoolchildren as walkabouts, the easels were a useful tool for sitting in front of and walking around the work, as children often do when inspecting something. Walking with the women excavated memories from them that were the building blocks of the planning of the exhibition as a space of re-imagining indigenous art as a vehicle to new knowledge in the rewriting of it into the contemporary South African art dialogue.

Taking a walk: in search of our mothers' gardens

Having had the opportunity to read about the history of the Eastern Cape, I had come to a relative understanding of the root of 'silence' in black communities with regards to the voice of the Xhosa woman. Thus I decided to now walk through their history to physically 'hear' it and its construction of oppression and its search for freedom. It would provide me with a link to its residue and the contemporary reality in which we now live, that of the 'silence'. I wanted to be able to link history's restriction of *being* to today's hesitation of *being* in black communities in the Eastern Cape, and link that to the art of the Eastern Cape and its marginal status. I visited missionary churches and mission stations, many long since decayed and rotted down to mere fragments of what they had been in the 1800s. They are ruins now and home to various creatures and homeless black people.

Walking through them, I wanted to walk around and within what the meaning of ritual was and is in the same communities surrounded by these ruins and reminders of shame and horror. Rituals meant and still mean resistance in the very same communities—resistance to the complete eradication of culture. Xhosa celebrations and rites of passage gatherings, where black women supposedly constructed black identities for their children and grandchildren were where joy presumably resided. In the same breath they are where, according to the children and grandchildren of these women, restrictions and hesitations of being are currently being discouraged (personal interviews, 2018). Through my walks, I wanted to look for a language to use in thinking about and speaking of the works of the Eastern Cape's Xhosa women crafters because of the same women's status as interpreters and keepers of history and culture. I also wanted to listen to possible ways of influencing their voices in their works, to speak more audibly on contemporary society and provide their children, who feel to a degree oppressed by their culture, a link from the past to the present as a reference to the construction of a new reality today. The ruins set the tone in thinking through the history of pain while the ritual aspect of my walking gave way to ways of thinking about resistance during the time of missionary rule. They became indirect 'speech' for the dispossessed and downtrodden.

Ruins

The English Oxford Dictionary defines a 'ruin' as 'the physical destruction or disintegration of something or the state of disintegrating or being destroyed'. It is a building that is dying of old age, but more significantly, dying of non-occupation and therefore collapsing due to its newly acquired state of uselessness. Walking through the old buildings of the Eastern Cape's early missionary churches makes one aware of a heavy absence, an unspeakable silence whose whispers occasionally permeate the air around them through the sudden flutter of birds or scurry of small creatures disturbed by the intrusion of a stranger. Weeds and goat droppings, spider-webbed windows, sometimes stained-glass, all communicate the emptiness of human life replaced by nature. With each step, I negotiated the troubling remains of the once wooden floors and polished staircase, the gaping holes now home to moles and rats, and in my mind's eye I conjured up the hullabaloo of everyday mission life.

I listened to the music. What was it like for the sound of the piano's musical notes to travel through a land of *umngqokolo* and *uhadi*? Similarly, the classical voice of the hymnal and that of *ukombela*? I listen for the sounds of school shoes and bells ringing, and disconnected voices of native mothers and children calling each other from different ends of Christianity and heathenism. I listened for the formations of languages that educated and uneducated the natives, the 'shrugging off' of folklore as an institution of learning for both young and old, and the fashioning of the native body as European. What was the sound of the eradication of a culture?

Walking around, I felt all this rather than heard it. Like a phantom limb, there was an echo of disorientation within the dilapidated walls that one can only explain via a chill through the body or a 'crawling down the spine' sensation—a quiet hum. The splendour of the Victorian architecture belies the internal anguish within the ruins, once disguised as beautiful and 'of God', they also housed the slow deconstruction of the black mind into a replica of European standards. The hum here, mostly felt rather than heard, reiterates the thoughts in Tina Campt's book *Listening To Images* on quiet humming being an 'exquisitely articulate modality of quiet' (2017: 4). She understands the hum as being able to amount to a multitude of things, it can be "presence in absence or can take the form of a gritty moan in the foreground or a soothing massage in the background" (Campt 2017: 4). The ruins tell stories in their gentle hum too in the way that Campt describes the photographs that her book describes. They are pleasant and unpleasant, 'sublimely expressive unsayabilit[ies] that exceed both words, as well as what we associate with sound and utterance' (Campt 2017: 4), they manifest themselves only through a 'looking beyond' what is physically in front of the eyes and respond in ways that "animate the recalcitrant effects of quiet as an undervalued lower range of quotidian audibility" (Campt 2017: 40). They are a gentle breeze of the quiet hum of an uncomfortable past still present in its future.

Rituals

Noun 1 a religious or solemn ceremony involving a series of actions performed according to a set order. 2 a set order of performing such a ceremony. 3 a series of actions done regularly and without variation (Lexico.com 2020).

After walking the ruins, I was compelled to look at what sustained cultural practice during the erasure that mission stations implemented in the 19th century. What forms were of resistance exercised to counter the teachings of civilization and Christianity, teachings that forbade the essence of blackness or what it meant to be a Xhosa woman/man? To what did the people hold on?

I have already mentioned the rites of passage and healing rituals that Xhosa people perform to preserve identity. However, the rituals I am interested in for the research are that of the everyday. I am specifically interested in the tea-making routine that almost every Xhosa woman and girl know and have come to understand as a process that is close to a worship ceremony in Xhosa culture.

Making tea, according to Mam' Kokhwe of Nomzamo Old Age Centre, is an act of service to the senior members of one's community as well as an acknowledgement of their status as elders in their communities, (2018). The act requires a process, a set of rules to follow that guide the perfection or lack there-of, and the result which is the actual tea. The ritual of the laying out of cloth over the tray, usually a cloth that is never used for any other purpose but tea-making, and the arranging of the cups and milk jug in a circular formation to allow the served to have easy access to the cups during the service. The required bending of the server's back as she serves, it is a sign of disrespect to serve tea with your back upright. All of it sounds mundane and has become an invisible act because of its mundaneness. Hidden inside the action is the reciprocity of it, the idea that while serving, one is receiving as well. This exchange between *uMakhulu* and the younger generation of women and girls is a vital ingredient in their community engagements. *UMakhulu* needs to feel valued and taken care of for her to, in turn, distribute her nuggets of wisdom within her community, just like the younger generation needs her to link them to their past. Care becomes a reciprocal ritual between the two generations, a method of extracting knowledge from and receiving it, creating a life-line for the continuity of a people's culture (personal interviews 2019).

Tea-making also serves as a social ritual, where once made, the communal tea drinking becomes a gathering space where women discuss their concerns, joys and sorrows. Tea is made for a grieving parent, a visiting community leader and a neighbour, and over these cups of tea, a solution or advice is given. In this way, most collective decisions with regards to women's issues come to pass. In this ritual, there also resides one of the spaces that Molaru Ogundipe talks about on the question of black women's voices and their whereabouts. She speaks of 'observing the women in their various sites, paying attention to female bonding...would yield a more correct epistemology of women' (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 13), reiterating the importance of the notion of the everyday ritual as part of a community's site of resistance, 'a space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power...where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity' (hooks 1989: 209). I have made many cups of tea for the bead workers, and have, in return, learned about the value of stillness and patience in the delivery of knowledge. 'A story, in its performance, is not in a hurry to prove its moral standing but lingers on the details of the process of getting there, fixing it into the memory of the listener' (Mam' uNombuyiselo Skeyi, personal interview, 2019).

Walking through the ruins and placing myself inside and outside the ritual of tea-making and drinking fed into the way I think about the articulation of the women's work in exhibition form. Having casual conversations with them about beads and the process of beading was

one way of teasing out strategies of curating them. There also exists within these informal conversations over tea an unavoidable hovering of the ghosts of the ruins of mission stations. Almost all the women are products of mission life, with a few having never had any form of western education. They were all raised under the strict Victorian regimes of mission or farm life where most of their mothers worked as maids, and then they, in turn, inherited the jobs. My walks among the ruins helped me 'listen' to their pain, which translates into their everyday lived lives, and manifests itself in their anguish over the little that they possess to leave to their children and grandchildren due to poverty. The walks helped me to understand their positions of being viewed as voiceless when they are not; when what their voices need and have always needed is a different platform that highlights them rather than speaks for them.

In the same way, inside the process of beading lie stories embedded within the rows of colour and pattern - the same ghostly hoverings of the ruins mixed with the ritualistic tea-making, and retellings of historical events as mythology- stories becoming poetry, becoming songs, becoming movement. Truth becoming myth and myth becoming truth. All these parts of the process are weaved together to create identity. The walks revealed to me the ingredients for my curatorial strategies. If my collaborative approach to the work involves me 'meddling' in the processes of their work influencing the messages that they bring across, then they should in turn 'meddle' in my part of the work as well, the making of the exhibition. Their work process involves many parts and is built on storytelling. The exhibition that results from their work should then reflect their process and let the works continue their performance as planned. To separate the elements that make up the work from the display of the work is to amputate a limb from it, and to send it out into the world incomplete.

The making of the exhibition should then also speak to the meanings embedded within the works. To inspire the emergence of a more durable and sturdier voice in the works, I looked back into history for bold Xhosa women voices in the Eastern Cape, particularly voices who used art as their instrument in defiantly delivering their otherwise would not have been heard voices. These voices, speaking in their language and articulating conditions of the Eastern Cape and the broader South Africa, faced the same restrictive conditions as the Xhosa women bead workers in their contexts, but sought other methodologies in the performances of their works. In the same way as the trickster character in African folklore, they altered the status quo in their given fields of the arts and found different platforms to express their creativities. Their voices stretched far wider than the spaces that they lived in and found their way into a nation's collective memory.

The works were enhanced with the voice of storyteller Nompucuko Zakaza, a storyteller from Kei Road and part of a storytelling organisation called Lisahluma. She is also associated with the Nali'Bali organisation which promotes reading for children across South Africa and produces books in various South African languages. She is a performer with the precision and passion of Nongenile Zenani. Her stories are created to sharpen the mind of an African child in the same way that *uMakhulu* did. In timeless tales, she records her children's books in indigenous languages. Zakaza is interested in the resurrection of the Xhosa language as a tool to restore hope in Xhosa communities amidst such atrocities as poverty and ill-education. The same interest is shared by Mrs Mchiza, whom I had worked with during the conception of the Steve Biko exhibition. Zakaza, through the story, expressed this desire. She spun her storytelling magic on opening night and together with the King Williams Town jazz band

KWAME, they interpreted the creative works of the crafters in song and story. The older crowd was given a moment of collective memory of fire-side evenings of storytelling by *uMakhulu*, and the younger an opportunity to travel back in time and be part of that memory in the present time.

The crowd was drawn in as Zakaza moved through it, turning each artwork on the walls and the floor into sound and movement, her voice enhancing the local isiXhosa language. Audience participation was encouraged, the people joining in when the story morphed into a song, clapping to the rhythm and chanting along to the familiar poetic chants that usually accompany indigenous stories. The artworks came to life with the inclusion of the performance; at that moment, the beadwork enacted its full purpose. For indigenous art to deliver its message in completion, all three aspects of its life need to be played out. The experience for the viewers and crafters at the exhibition did more than show works of art displayed on the floors and walls of the dungeon. It also recreated *uMakhulu's* storytelling as a platform to, according to Harold Scheub, 'fuse idea and emotion into story, and in that interchange audience members are wedded to the past, as a significant exchange occurs: the past influences and shapes the experience of the present, at the same time that experience of the present determines what of the past is useful and meaningful today' (1996: xv).

For the walkabouts, I as a curator, assisted by Nompucuko Zakaza, interacted with some of the schools of the King Williams Town area; Ndzondelelo Primary School from Zwelitsha, Charles Morgan High School from Ginsberg and Qonce High School which is situated within the town itself. The Lisahluma organisation provided the storytelling sessions while I facilitated the walkabouts for the children and their Creative Arts teachers. The walkabouts were an opportunity to bring another educational tool to Eastern Cape schools that would provide ways of talking through the currently contested issues within the region such as culture and religion. Using such expressive and inspiring methods as the creative arts, the message is more easily digestible, and like the *intsomi*, lingers in memory through performance. Similarly, having the works of the older generation of the community interacting with the youngest generation ensures continuity and innovation in future thought and practice.

Presenting an exhibition to them with walkabouts in their language isiXhosa, shifts how they perceive the indigenous arts and lifestyle and encourages the use of its methods. The children did just as the women had predicted when advising on the layout of the works. They wanted to see the work from different angles, which involved walking around the works and interacting with it from their eye level as well. They were presented with the opportunity to touch the work, photograph themselves with their favourite works and conjure up memories of their own grandmothers' stories passed down to them. The quiet space that a gallery usually is was not found here. The work and the space that inhabited it invited conversation. Just like *intsomi*, the exhibition as a whole incited participation from its audience and so became a collective experience of memory and imagination.

In this way, the exhibition fulfilled another of *uMakhulu's* purpose, to pass down knowledge to the younger generation. The school children were also allowed to tell the stories the craft works depicted in their own words with their personal views of what cultural expression is. The craft works and stories then became a bridge between the young children and the senior

citizens. The evolving nature of cultural expression was evident in these exchanges. It was interesting how the use of a centuries-old medium, beads, could communicate to a contemporary audience and continue to find new languages that express the desires of the old to build the new.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘A Room of One’s Own’: Xhosa Women Crafters and Agency

Just as happens with a flower in a plant, in culture there lies the capacity (or responsibility) for forming and fertilizing the seedling which will assure the continuity of history, at the same time assuring the prospects for evolution and progress of the society in question.

(Almícar Cabral 1973: 42)

It seems in this retrieval of African customs from a besmirched ethnographic cupboard, only those aspects of African culture which entertain are presented. Such are the images of Africans which are beginning to enter the archival bank of the new South African nation.

(Okwui Enwezor 1997: 28)

Some of the functions of beadwork in the Xhosa nation are adornment, identity, pride and various symbolisms, all of which are phenomena of culture that is core to human and societal developments. Amílcar Cabral’s comment above speaks to the importance of culture in such development, arguing that it is not stagnant but evolves with time to accommodate changes and new knowledge. The work of Xhosa women bead workers has proved—through the two research exhibitions I have staged and discussed—that there are existing meanings and messages within their work. There are also new ideas, experiences and aspirations emanating from the world around them and these can be brought out through display and performance. The works of the women need not always be presented as entertainment, exotic and souvenir for tourists. Instead, they can also be curated works of art, implicated in performative engagements and interactive activities. The latter has been my curatorial approach in working with the women bead workers. I have collaborated with the crafter artists in ways that demonstrate Cabral’s idea of cultural evolution and progress through art. My curatorial strategies have also been to create the conditions that will allow fostering of agency and free speech to occur.

In the view of British novelist Virginia Woolf, ‘a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction’ (1929: 6). Addressing a crowd, Woolf made these comments regarding the difficulties women experience, as opposed to men, in living out their creative lives in full. She made her life an example, as a published writer with ‘privilege’, because of an inheritance from an aunt that afforded her the liberty to be a full-time writer without financial strain. Woolf was aware of the fact that very few women have this liberty which is not only because of monetary freedom but also affected by household duties and commitments that various women are implicated in through social structures like church, fraternities and affiliations. Her financial freedom afforded her three rooms: a space that is a quiet room to create; freedom that enables her the ability to work without the responsibility of housework; and agency for the ability to produce at will in her own time, using her own ideas.

The group of Xhosa women bead workers that I work with from the Eastern Cape would do better in their creative outputs with these three rooms at their disposal. For them, lack of financial resources deprives them conducive space to work and the ability to set aside time from their many responsibilities such as being a wife, household duties, children and the community. Unlike the esteemed Woolf, the black women are neither related nor have access to wealthy aunts or uncles, and therefore their idea of a 'room' differs tremendously from that of Woolf's. Space for these women means their home or each other's homes. The average house in the Eastern Cape townships is a cramped four-room, with a yard not so big enough even to cultivate a reasonable vegetable garden. There is rarely a room dedicated to a quiet moment for any members of a single family, let alone the mother and grandmother of the family. Township houses have no privacy afforded to its inhabitants in any form. Each room performs a crucial function for the day to day living of the families of the women. Every room, including their own bedrooms, is a communal space that is almost always busy with activity of one kind or another. The few who live by themselves still share their spaces with the community by taking care of neighbours' children and elders. At the same time, they are also frequently required to house various people who need temporary or permanent living spaces. The idea of Virginia Woolf's room is not a reality for the black township and rural dwellers whose shared spaces leave little 'room' for any private recreational and intellectual activity.

Similarly, the freedom to dedicate specific times to the creation of artistic expression or intellectual reflections is minimal. All focused responsibilities of family and community that these women carry are numerous and demand much of their time. Besides being wives and mothers, they are grandparents and surrogate parents for any individual within the community who requires such care, not least always stepping in for various roles prompted according to the needs of the people. It is prevalent, for instance, for neighbours to leave their children at the gate of any local grandmothers' houses. These kinds of neighbours would ask for help that the children be looked after while they are attending to an errand, already walking away or rushing off to attend to it. In reciprocity, the same neighbours are at ease with the 'intrusion' of these grandmothers into their home, asking for a few vegetables from the garden or fruit from the neighbours' tree. This constant 'intrusion' into each other's lives without prior arrangements nor permissions given creates environments where time seldom belongs to an individual but is shared. Rarely can there ever be a moment of solace for the individual mind to stretch and ponder on matters of the world for creative use in one's artistic expressions. Given this predicament, then, the women's work is consequently derived from and produced in communal thought. Woolf's 'room of her own' becomes for them a hall of shared reflection and expression.

Community Art Centres create a 'room' for them, not only as a space in which to work but also a place free from the monotony of household and community duties, even if for a few hours a day. They provide communal gatherings that are part of their everyday living with the added benefit of space for creative thinking and working. For the women from Gompo Community Art Centre, such space allows them to work without the responsibility of electricity and water bills. Their worries are temporarily relieved because the space is government-run. Thus opportunities for the accessing of funds for further development can be possible. It also provides an interactive space where the women are among other creatives working in different mediums of ceramics, fashion design and music. It also enables a cross-

pollination of creative ideas that can extend the creative outputs of the women to more than the wearable beadwork they produce.

The space for women of Nomzamo Old Age Centre functions in almost the same way as Gompo Art Centre. Yet, the Nomzamo Old Age Centre women, unlike the Gompo Art Centre women, do not necessarily create for their economic survival but extra income and recreational purposes. The space is for their everyday use or hangout. Most of them live alone with grandchildren to look after. While the children are at school, the centre provides them with the adult interaction that they need, as well as a meal for nourishment and space to work. It functions as an opportunity for their care for a few hours, after which they then have to go back to the responsibility of being parents all over again to their grandchildren.

The challenge with these community spaces is the fact that they are run by governmental entities that are required to account for the money spent on them. It necessitates regulation of their operations, resulting in the work produced there being policed in terms of its content and where it will be marketed and sold. Little consideration of the agency of the artists is taken into account when these decisions are made. Gompo Community Art Centre provides opportunities for workshops for the artists, giving them the advantage to run their studios as a business from which to make a living for themselves. However, the marketing spaces they provide are limited to the tourist industry and are therefore open only to a specific type of product to attract this particular market. There is little 'room' for the exploration of varying creative productions that are outside of the tourist trinket, which stubbornly wants a homogenous, collective mass production of the wearable Xhosa women beadwork. The 'room' which Woolf describes is again, in this regard, far out of reach for the Xhosa women crafters.

The women of Nomzamo Old Age Centre also experience their 'room' in almost the same manner as Gompo Community Art Centre. They are often presented as anomalies, a group of individuals who create craft art that is 'proof' of them being cared for and supported during their final years of life by both the government (and white do-gooders) for the needy. The centre is supported by the Social Development enterprise and is, therefore, a government-run project aimed at creating a safe space during daytime for senior citizens. A note should be made of the fact that it was the women's efforts that the bead working was added to the Centre's program. From then onward the Social Development enterprise assumed the responsibility to find outlets for the sale of the women's work with the proceeds going back into buying the tools and equipment that they need for more production and the continuation of the project. That the Social Development enterprise is bound by a governmental obligation to report back on how the financial assistance being given is benefiting the women yearly, the work that the women create to a certain extent being controlled by the Social Workers. Their 'room' is a regulated space that would seem to provide freedom but does the opposite.

The community art centres are ideally supposed to create 'employment' for underprivileged communities. However, often wealthy patrons 'discover' these indigenous creativities and isolate them, taking charge of their exposures to markets, economic gains and ideas expressed in the work. In this regard, community art centres become 'alleviation projects' that are often manipulated not only for the exploitation of what is produced but also a misleading account of the conditions the Xhosa women endure as poor helpless beings. Such a disconcerting

problematic, in the words of the Victorian era missionaries, describes them as ‘drudges...duped into all sorts of unstated immoralities’ (Erlank 2000: 28). An underlying hook here is that the masterminds behind ‘alleviation projects’ need subjects of village and township life so they can justify their need for providing ‘care’ for the needy poor. At the same time, there is masking of monetary gain on behalf of disadvantaged blacks and for the native expressions. Exploited in this manipulative scheme are the donations provided by sympathetic agents on the knowledge of helping the poor blacks as well as alleviating poverty that bedevils native peoples. The solicitation of these funds emerges from and is provided because of the narrative offered by the white matriarch. It is a story of the poor disease-ridden condition of native women and their offspring.

Such narrative and solicitation are often without consultation with said native women, and on whose behalf the white matriarch speaks exploitation. Spivak’s notion of ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’ (1994: 92) comes to mind, but with a modification that, in this case, I have been arguing, white women are doing the saving, not to mention exploiting black women crafters. As art project manager of one such related organisation, Keiskamma Art Project in Hamburg in 2018, I observed the silencing of Xhosa women. It was silencing from their lived experiences and their creative expressions when it comes to the subject matter, content and aesthetics of the craftwork (personal journal 2018). The silencing was used to solicit funds from charity organisations. More than exploiting the women economically, these (alleviation) projects create a long term (if not a permanent) dependency on the white patriarchy. To use Dambisa Moyo’s words regarding aid and its effects on Africans, this is a disconcerting misfortune of which she describes as ‘Africa is addicted to aid...Like any addict, it needs and depends on its regular fix, finding it hard, if not impossible, to contemplate existence in an aid-free world’ (2009: 75). It is not a natural but created dependency, one which prompts and gives reason for a critical inquiry I have sought to pursue through a study. The reflective writing and curatorial intervention are my effort to challenge the condition of Xhosa women bead workers as silent crafters, whose works are devoid of the possibilities for the creation of new thought, new knowledge and new aesthetics. The recognition of the novelties is essential and necessary even if they are not radical shifts in the historical trajectory of bead working in the Eastern Cape.

In a search for different and alternative ways of understanding, so I can get writing and curate the beadwork of the Xhosa women, crafters benefitted from five important sources, among others. One is reading available literature and surfing exhibits. Two is interviewing and conversing not only with the Xhosa women beadworkers but related curators, scholars, administrators and appreciators of beadwork. Three is visiting exhibitions and attending workshops. Four is researching public and private collections of beadwork. Five is an explorative and experimental curating of two exhibitions in which I tested and put into practice my theoretical thoughts and curatorial approaches I have been studying. These were research exhibitions, useful for providing me with the practical perspective of the Xhosa women discourse on bead working, storytelling and poetry all embedded in the existential experience and sentiments of Xhosa cultural cosmology.

As research practice, these exhibitions facilitate a process whereby I develop ideas and forms of curating the final exhibition for examination. This final exhibition ‘is not only the result of the research but also its methodological vehicle, where the research unfolds in and through the acts of creating and performing’ (Borgdorff 2010: 4). The final exhibition then becomes

the embodiment of active research, where it ‘seeks to convey and communicate content that is enclosed in aesthetic experiences, enacted in creative practices’ (ibid. 4). It also then creates the opportunity for acquiring the tools for the construction of Woolf’s ‘room’ for women, but a different and alternative ‘room’ that is produced out of a work that affords the women’s voices a space within the contemporary arts of South Africa. Through indigenous knowledge inspired curatorial interventions, their work should find a space within which it occupies not only the margins but also the centre. It should be a place where their unique expressions appreciate the opportunity of a diverse audience rather than the one that is interested in them only as exotic souvenirs for the purposes of decoration.

Our mothers’ gardens: intsomi and the exhibition of the beadwork of Xhosa women

More than anything, I have extensively benefitted from interacting and working with the elderly women crafters, poets, storytellers, musicians and scholars. It is from them that my study found guidance, shaping and enrichment. These elderly Xhosa women creatives have been the significant, wise figure of *uMakhulu* and her *iintsomi* to me.

A further argument I want to make is that, just like *uMakhulu*’s *intsomi*, an exhibition is a vehicle for purposes such as entertainment, education and preservation of art, literature, culture, identity, heritage and wisdom. The time spent with the women from Gompo and Nomzamo Old Age Centre has revealed this in their processes of beading and conversations with me, not to mention in their interweaving of personal lives and communal thought resulting in their remarkable craft art.

Similarly, engaging with the works of Simphiwe Dana, Nontsizi Mgqwetho and Nongenile Masithathu Zenani has provided a different way of thinking through the exhibition as more than just a space to look at works of art individually. It shares an appreciation of the works and their makers; a space to remember the past; reconnect past and future; while imagining the future. The exhibition could act as *isivivane*, a secluded place where Xhosa and Khoi people came to honour the ones that came before them, the ones that informed and guided them. It could also be an archival place for the collection of stories lived and performed by a people as well as passed on through symbolic prayers and performative offerings. The final exhibition embodies some of these thoughts, experiences and aspirations but does not pretend to deliver an absolute truth, reality and factuality of the Xhosa women crafters’ intricate beadwork and cultural world.

The final exhibition for examination takes place on the 17th of January 2020 at the Ann Bryant Gallery in East London. I chose this space precisely because it is a gallery; this is not a contradiction to my earlier critique of conventional galleries and museums but a deliverance to the driving premise of my thesis. That is, having expressed earlier in this thesis my desire to bring the work of the women crafters into the contemporary art discourse, I sought the final exhibition to live up to that proposition and desire. This gallery, though it is not an alternative space like the previous exhibitions had employed, is a setting that will in all intent allow the beadwork the attention often given to the work that is classified ‘fine’ art. The hopeful purpose is also that, this gallery will afford the beadwork the freedom to be and communicate its meaning and message in the manner the elderly Xhosa women have intended in their individual and collective process of thinking, planning and creating their

craftworks. I wish it to be viewed as one form of creative production among varyingly different works of visual imagination.

Space/Place: a ‘room’ to re-define and re-imagine craft art

Another notable incentive about this gallery is its historical change in meaning and use. This gallery was once a home to Mrs Ann Bryant after whom it is named. Mrs Bryant donated her home to the municipality of East London to house the art collection she gave as well as for the use by the local art community. The gallery is therefore significant for exhibiting works of these women creatives. Especially because their life experiences have been shaped by contextual factors in the Eastern Cape region which includes not only East London but extends to areas such as King Williamstown, Alice and Butterworth.

I should also make a political comment on the historical question of the Xhosa women crafter. One way or another at some point of their lives they have been subjected to subservience or servitude of white people like Mrs Bryant in the Eastern Cape and other South African regions. Undoubtedly, the Xhosa women have been cleaners and caregivers of white families like the Bryants, doing all of it for little wages while dealing with working conditions that were discriminatory due to the colour of their skins. Thanks to missionaries, colonialism and apartheid. Black women and black men come from a history of brutal discrimination such as required permits to walk the streets of suburban East London. Even then they were restricted by curfews, and regulations put in place to monitor the times they were allowed to come to town. Even within the home of the many Mrs Bryants, if they were live-in workers, their lives were regulated by their employers. What they said and did, and who they met with when was under apartheid protocols. The experience of domestic live-in-workers was an incredibly lonely living situation, but one compelled by necessity to earn an income to pay for being alive in apartheid South Africa. Mam’ uNombuyiselo Skeyi remembers the strain of life during those years:

I lived with my employers for many years and remembered one Thursday afternoon when I and three friends of mine who were domestic workers as well gathered in my little room at the back of my employers’ home for a prayer and singing. You see, Thursday afternoon was reserved for Mothers’ Union church meetings back home. Because we lived in town we missed these meetings in the locations and villages. Our meeting that day was an effort to remind us of home. I had asked my employers for permission and was granted owing to having stayed and worked for them and their children for many years. The other three domestic workers were not allowed to but they came anyway. Minutes into our singing sessions a police car drove up and two policemen, together with our neighbour Mr Palmer stopped the meeting and arrested us for ‘unlawful meetings in a suburban area’. I called my employer, Mr Stanford, a respected lawyer of the King Williams Town region. I did not get arrested because I had thought to make that call. My friends, however, spent an evening in jail. We endure a lot of humiliating experiences while working to feed and educate our children (personal interview 2018).

Black women worked for homes of wealthy white families like the Bryants, attending them even when the white families were on sea-side or game-reserve holidays. They cooked at white homes, weddings and funerals, as well as cleaning after these events; not least doing a range of extra commitments that went without additional or overtime payment. They were an essential part of these families’ lives albeit lesser than and treated worse than the domesticated animals in white households.

For the black women crafters to come back years later to Mrs Ann Bryant's art Gallery as creative is an intriguing affair. They do not come as domestic workers but as creative producers and agentic members of their society to re-establish their voices in the fraught creative sector of visual art and culture. Their discourse should also be viewed in the context of undoing historical wounding and championing healing for them; in this way understand that the project *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice* is not just an exhibition of their work but also a project of postcolonial and black feminism attending to the question of marginality and subalternity. Thus the Ann Bryant Gallery is not only a space that provides the Xhosa women crafters with the platform to showcase their bead art. It is also a meaningful discourse that highlights, recognises, enhances and solidifies the voices of these black women in a historical zone in which they were previously subjugated, exploited, violated and abused. The exhibition positions the women crafters and enables them to remind the Eastern Cape, not only of the subjugation of Xhosa women. It's a reminder of the importance of *uMakhulu* as bearer of wisdom and knowledge; a beacon of strength and lighthouse for the future cultural ambassadors – the children of the Eastern Cape. It establishes a place for their contributions as valuable and worthy as part of the South African history of visual art.

Strategies of Storytelling: *uMakhulu nentsomi*

You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, "Get out of here!" We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person, because knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing.

(Zora Neale Hurston 1935:18)

Having orientated the women into the intricacies of art and display, I had gathered pieces from their conversations, pieces that would enable me to curate the exhibition of their work in a meaningful and aesthetic manner. My task was not easy knowing that seldom does one get immediate answers when asking questions to senior citizens of Xhosa women about their thoughts, experiences and aspirations. Thus listening becomes a skill as the women stretch out and about their conversations speaking around the information one is seeking. A substantive response to questions tends to manifest days later, the answers hidden in the multi-layered textures of the stories they tell during our (informal and conversations) interviews. An example is a conversation I had with them while making tea for them. We were discussing the Xhosa language and the deliverance of stories. In-between our conversation, Mam'uMasithathu gifted me with a memory that resonated with me only later that day:

In those days, when we were young *makotis*, we derived ways of surviving the unknown. We learned from our mothers and grandmothers that there are things one endures as a woman. The trick, therefore, was to find strategies to keep danger at bay. My young neighbour, newly married with a baby, was suffering from the constant anger outbursts of her husband. These often ended in beatings. Feeling sorry for her, we came up with a way to warn her of his drunken arrival so that she could find a way to save herself and her baby. While at the river fetching water, we decided to use music to help her. Anyone who spotted the husband first—he usually came home in the late afternoon—would take a broom and pretend to sweep their front courtyard. Loudly, he would sing of the return of a tyrant and how women should gather their children and ready themselves to dodge bullets. Over and over, the song would repeat this information, skilfully constructed into a poetic stanza and delivered musically, the broom sweeping to its rhythm, the singer joined by others in ensuring that the receiver of the warning heard it loud and clear so she can ready herself for the drama (personal interviews 2019).

This narrative account illustrates the complexity and poetics of the everyday language and its effective use of a performance that carries out a crucial message through the creative mechanisms of prose and song, the blues movement and mundane activities like sweeping as a critical form of speaking. Creativities seem to be born out of these ordinary activities, like secret codes that reveal themselves only through joining and participating in the acts of unravelling messages or unpacking symbolic meanings. As a curator I had to wrestle with the exciting though challenging discourse of symbolic gathering, by listening attentively, acting carefully in my response and action in the process of both deciphering and comprehending the women's stories. Slowly, as I learned to listen and be open to being taught by these subaltern women, I began to look at their creative production with unassuming and predictive eyes. In the process, I discovered the complexity and potency of the narrative and voice, both demonstrating their agency in the sense that Nthabiseng Motsemme teaches that *the mute always speak*.

In working with the black women crafters, I discovered a feminist practice that seems to have existed before the fashionable word, *feminism*. My discovery is regarding Maria del Guadalupe Davidson's argument that earlier, old black (feminist) women 'did not give the language of intersectionality' to their gender experience or practice but 'lived it. What they did give me was the will to resist all forms of intersectional oppression' (2017: 1). My curatorial approach in the display and presentation of the women's stories should reflect this black feminism, one in line with Marjorie Pryse's suggestion that:

studying the forms and themes in which black women have chosen to record their struggle, preserving in fiction the strengths they have long orally and personally passed down to each other as fact, can provide students and scholars alike with a laboratory for examining the origins and patterns of development that characterize literary traditions in general (1985: 3).

My curatorial strategy sought to reimagine the beadwork, which is traditionally worn, not shown on the wall, working with the above noted gendered forms and themes. Reimagining meant working with it as a creative production that should not be restricted to its traditional function and purpose but to stretch it to other forms of uses and displays without undermining and losing its traditional significance. It also meant to take into account the fact that it is made to be handled, looked at from up-close and admired from bodies in performance. This curatorial undertaking was made easier by the fact that the women beadworkers have a keen understanding of what the display of art is; albeit not in the traditional European sense. It was aided by them having grown up around murals at their homes, performance rituals, ceremonial celebrations and *iimbongi* recitals and *intsomi* by *uMakhulu*. For the Xhosa women, creative art is there to interact with people and the environment as it is an integral part of daily life. As children, they walked around murals that adorned their huts; they attended traditional dance events for different occasions where their bodies were decorated in various styles that celebrated their culture. They recorded these creative ways of living through stories. The exhibition *Zundigqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, was neither a strange nor foreign 'room' for the Xhosa women bead makers, but a cultural space in which the display of their beadworks and live performances and interventions that took place in such a pregnant 'room' excited their memories of 'living' with art.

For the last two editions of *Zundiqondisise!: Reclaiming Our Voice* exhibition, the women and I worked with both their current work as well as newly created work. More work was added to the second exhibition as both an interrogation of language as a tool in the thinking and curating of exhibitions through collaboration. Such investigation and cooperation were critical in our getting accustomed to working together, especially me learning to learn by their teaching. Therefore, more work developed from our series of conversations and workshops. There has been an emergence of stirring themes in the work. The exhibition then became an extended conversation in itself, and the curation of it a performance enacted both from these conversations and subtle everyday rituals such as us taking walks, making tea and remembering as an excavatory and recuperation act in thinking through indigenous art.

In resituating the women's work from being muted to 'speaking' creative expressions, I looked at previous display methods of beadwork. Art museums are still trapped in that ethnographic arrangement that is associated with the presentation and archiving of African art. Beadwork is placed in glass boxes with items labelled as 'anonymous', 'native art' or 'Xhosa beadwork', with no mention of the regions from which the work comes and the names of craft artists or group of crafters involved in the making of such work. The work is usually placed to be viewed as beautiful objects, if not exotic artefacts, but not as art to be studied in concerted efforts that lead to new understandings of indigenous art and its meanings, forms and aesthetics, for instance.

Working with the notion of 'the curatorial', rather than curating as an act of display provided me with a conscious way to 'see', 'hear' and 'feel' a difference in outlook that the work of Xhosa women needs. What 'the curatorial' offers is questioning and thinking through a process that does not require fixed answers or solutions but provides space for 'thinking out loud' and playing with possibilities. It creates the opportunity to be used 'productively to question hegemonic power structures and defend lesser-known art forms and cultural productions' by employing such strategies as 'shifts of language' and 'the instrumentality of language', (Martinon 2013: 6) and performance as a communication tool for the unexplainable. Working with Xhosa beadwork as a cultural object, form and tool has been productive in my study whose premise is to give volume to the muted voice of the Eastern Cape's Xhosa women beadworkers. This undertaking speaks to Amilcar Cabral's productive thoughts on using cultural practice as a means for cultural development (1973). It means looking within the margins for the liberation of the marginalised voice and to 'learn to learn from the subaltern' (Spivak 1994: 91). It means looking for the views of these women 'in the sites and forms in which they are uttered' (Ogundipe-Leslie 2001: 11) where, in Ntabiseng Motsemme's (2004: 909) words, 'the mute always speak'. The curatorial provides tangible ways of 'speaking' in marginal spaces because these 'spaces can tell stories and untold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice' (hooks 1989: 209).

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude by exploring the question of social, cultural and labour conditions that led to the perceived voicelessness and lack of agency in the craft artwork of Xhosa women working from community art centres in the Eastern Cape. My interest is in how these conditions affect how these Xhosa's women craft work is presented, received, read and archived, adding to its omission from the contemporary South African art sector. These are questions that my study explored both theoretically in this written thesis and practically in a series of curated exhibitions. Given the prevalence of beadwork in the Eastern Cape both as an art form and a cultural repository, I am interested in its use as a vehicle for employing Xhosa women and its implication in the socio-political conditions in which these women crafters live. As indigenous art, beadwork often falls prey to the tourist industry, resulting in the work and its creators being exploited for monetary gain mainly beneficial to (white) managers and coordinators.

Another problem is that individual expressions are grouped as one, in this way presenting a single and homogenous view of (a heterogeneous) Xhosa creative work that is chiefly directed towards European consumption and fantasies of black life. This work is often displayed, talked and written about as objects with no individual subjectivity, agency, history, geography or socio-cultural meaning the consequence of which is its exclusion from the discourses and archives of South African contemporary visual arts and culture. The collection of the craft work by various European brokers has led to ethnographic displays in foreign museums, related institutions, and 'craft' books that are regrettably far removed not only from its creators but also the context in which it is produced.

The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song (Hurston 1935: 18).

In the above excerpt on the collection and subsequent thought on black life in the American South, through folklore, Zora Neale Hurston, after various interviews and storytelling sessions, got a glimpse into what the invasion of black culture by white racism yields. A lack of interaction with indigenous people results in the problems I have discussed in this study, in particular the engagement of indigenous creations and creators at surface level and in most cases without their involvement. This study has looked at ways of looking deeper into indigenous life to gain knowledge, meaning and uses of its creative expressions, to question and counter these problems. By engaging with Xhosa women, who create the beadwork, I have not only gained access into but learned about and productively discoursed with the meanings of their craft works. I have also found that the process of beading in groups yields more information for an in-depth reading of the work for archiving purposes. This study, through its interactive methodology, in the end, became a collaboration between the curator and artists, both parties involved in each other's work process.

The thesis breaks down the research into chapters whose contents inform the curating of the final exhibition. Chapter 1 looked at the history of Xhosa women in the Eastern Cape and the conditions that lead to their silence, particularly muting their voices both in the societies they live in and in their everyday personal expressions. Chapter 2 and 3 discussed the research exhibitions and devised strategies for working with indigenous art within the communities

where it was created. This research and strategy contributed to the production of the final exhibition, an exhibition that was developed through curatorial explorations and experimentation of two exhibitions, one in 2018, another in 2019. Chapter 4 reflected on the strategies collected in these two exhibitions that were necessary for thinking, developing and constructing ideas, contents and forms of display for the final show presented for examination.

My findings have been that working in the margins, or with subalterns, requires time spent within their spaces to understand them and in the process extract their correct details that question and undo common assumptions about their meaning, character, situation or condition. Gayatri Spivak's question 'can the subaltern speak?' refers to this phenomenon, about the marginalised that are always spoken for and almost always not given a chance to speak for themselves and hence whose voices and stories are never heard. As bell hooks suggests, the margins can be a place of resistance and create new ways of thinking if allowed the autonomy to represent themselves in the way that they intend, using their voices, to tell their personal stories. Despite the assumptions and misgiving about subjects of the margins, these women subjects are never silent but do as Nthabiseng Motsemme illustrates in her instructive argument that, 'the mute always speak'. This is possible when black postcolonial feminists learn, research and develop appropriate gender-sensitive strategies in finding their voices. Forms, textures, grammar and tone of these voices should be understood as the subaltern way of 'speaking' as well as be recognised as 'speech'. To find the voices of Xhosa women crafters requires that we look for them 'in the sites and forms in which these voices are uttered' (Ogundipe-Leslie 139: 11). Gompo Community Art Centre in East London and Nomzamo Old Age Centre in Ilitha Township are these sites, and the work of the women crafters are these forms about which Ogundise-Leslie talks.

Beadwork in the Eastern Cape is both an object and a language within the arts that the South African contemporary art sector has not yet delved into understanding through written and curated research, as I have attempted in this study. What my research suggests is an interdependent scholarly written and curated study that looks into the visual narration and representation of this indigenous art. Its premise is to advocate for the inclusion of craft work by women into the history of South Africa art and visual culture. Finding strategies to represent this kind of work has required engagement with the craft artists, where the conversations and workshops I experienced during the craft making processes provided me with a wealth of insights into ways of thinking, writing, displaying and archiving the women's craftwork. Where the work tends to be viewed as 'native curiosities' with no names of their makers but a collective reference to 'black' identity, my study has challenged and subverted this problematic situation. Thus my research is an effort to restore meaning, value and appreciation of beadwork. Simultaneously, I provide it a scholarly context in which its creative sensibilities and artistic expressions are liberated from the historical conventions whose prejudices have imprisoned the beadwork within the shackles of 'craft' as that which exists outside the domain of contemporary (fine) art.

I worked with 'the curatorial' rather than just the act of curating in a way that 'explores all that takes place on the stage set-up, both intentionally and unintentionally.' In this way, I have managed to curate an exhibition of beadwork 'as an event of knowledge' (Martinon and Rogoff 2013: ix). 'The curatorial', in this regard, provides a path into an understanding of the complexity of indigenous artworks to fittingly articulate and curate its contents and forms.

It also allows space to use the curatorial intervention as a means of asking questions and ‘thinking-through’ ideas, establishing novel gateways into avenues that allow for the production of new knowledge. My curatorial research, therefore, has been one that uses the practice as research to find appropriate re-presentations of Xhosa beadwork. It takes into consideration the contexts of the work, the Xhosa women’s lives, and how they interconnect with the production of their creativities and the spaces available to them to work and showcase their work.

By looking at the ancient Xhosa figure of *uMakhulu* and *intsomi*, I found that delving into African mythology in the form of storytelling and song revealed strategies in reading the art of beadwork. *Iintsomi* were employed in creating work that provides apt context and highlights voices of the women within their communities. The trickster in folklore and the feminist ‘killjoy’ were also used to ‘speak’ of the unspoken in the discourse on liberating the muted voices of Xhosa women who reside in marginal spaces. These gendered references informed the curatorial devices I employed in organising the display and soliciting interaction of the audience with the work. These devices have unearthed ways of re-introducing the importance of previously undermined creative expressions of these Xhosa communities as social and educational vehicles in contemporary cultural development. In this regard, to end, this study undertook to champion a discourse that makes visible and heard Xhosa women who produce craft work, not least their dreams and aspirations.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 18. Concept development meeting at Rhodes University's Cory Library. 2018.



Figure 2. Two viewers at Exhibition 1. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice* at Steve Biko Centre, Ginsburg, 2018.



Figure 3. Layout for Exhibition 1, *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, which featured ceramic works of women crafters Nosokhumbuzo Jali and Yanela Jija from Gompo Community Art Centre in East London. 2018.



Figure 4. The bead workers at their first exhibition attending the opening night. For many in the audience, it was a first experiencing exhibition opening and were new *to the idea of an art exhibition*, at the Steve Biko Centre in Ginsburg. 2018.



Figure 5. Poet Vathiswa Bunguza performing her response to the poetic works of Nontsizi Mgqwetho at the opening of Exhibition 1. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, at the Steve Biko Centre in Ginsburg. 2018.



Figure 6. A trip with women crafters to the National Arts Festival in Makhanda to experience an exhibition walkabout with artist Sikhumbuzo Makhandula. 2019.



Figure 7. A visit with women crafters to engage with a beadwork archive at the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus, with the university's archivist Sinazo Mtshemla. 2019.



Figure 8. Looking through the beadwork archive of the University of Fort Hare in Alice. 2019.



Figure 9. A visit with women crafters at the Amathole Museum in King Williamstown to view its beadwork collection, 2019.



Figure 10. Inspecting space for Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, held in the storage dungeon of Amathole Museum in King Williamstown. 2019.



Figure 11. Exhibition preparations, storage dungeon of Amathole Museum. 2019.



Figure 12. Exhibition preparation, storage dungeon of Amathole Museum. 2019.



Figure 13. Opening night of Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Amathole Museum. 2019.



Figure 14. Storytelling and music regarding the beadwork and craft artists, Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*. 2019.



Figure 15. Performance by storyteller and scholar Nompucuko Zakaza on opening night of Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice, Amathole Museum.* 2019.



Figure 16. Performance by storyteller and scholar Nompucuko Zakaza during the walkabout of Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Amathole Museum. 2019.

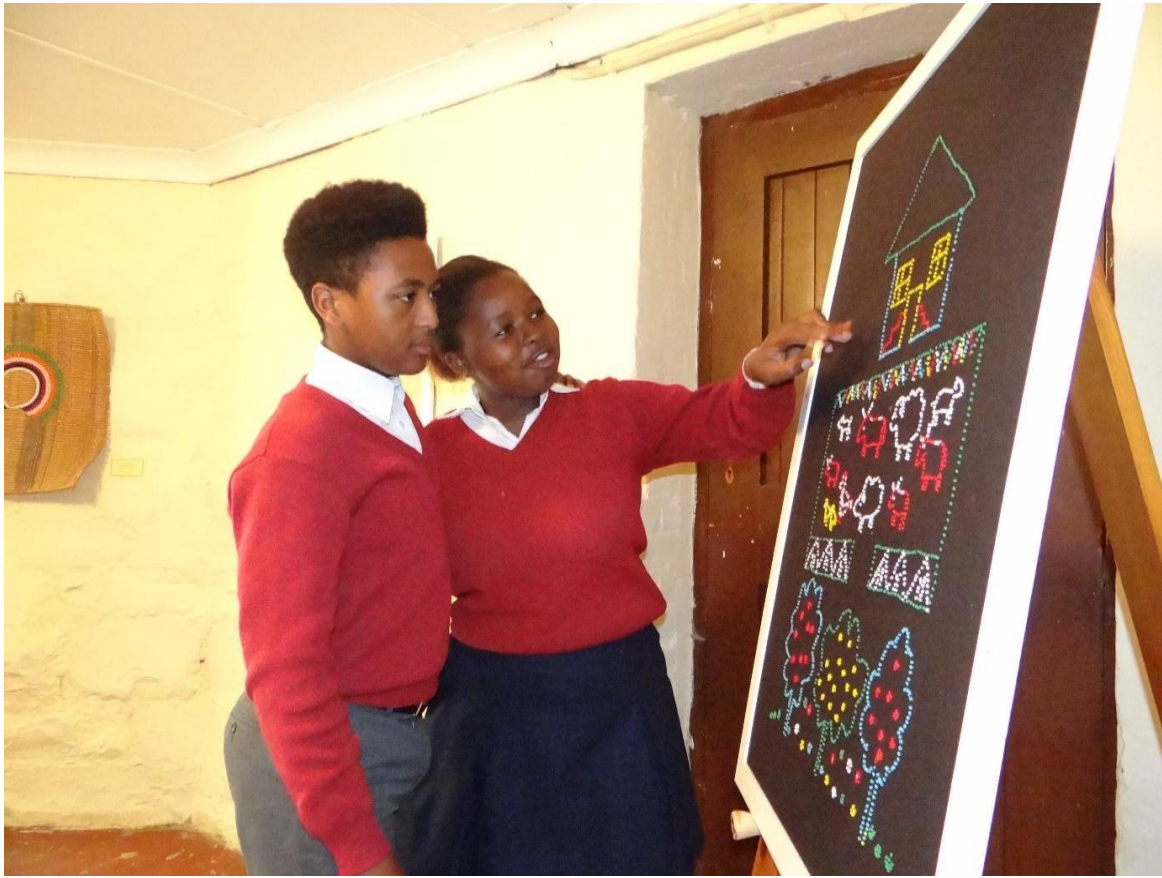


Figure 17. School children interacting with the craft art during the walkabout of Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Amathole Museum. 2019.



Figure 18. School children participating in walkabout of Exhibition 2. *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Amathole Museum. 2019.

Final Exhibition: *Zundiqondisise! Reclaiming Our Voice*, Anne Bryant Museum. 2020.



Figure 19. Names of Artists featured in Exhibition 3.



Figure 20. A chant recited before the performance of *intsomi*. The words are used at traditional ceremonies and are a sort of prayer to the ancestors, and in the case of *intsomi* session, are required in order to enter into the world of the ancestors. In this way, the *intsomi* is a portal into their world. These words are also said to break the curse of listening to *intsomi* in daylight.

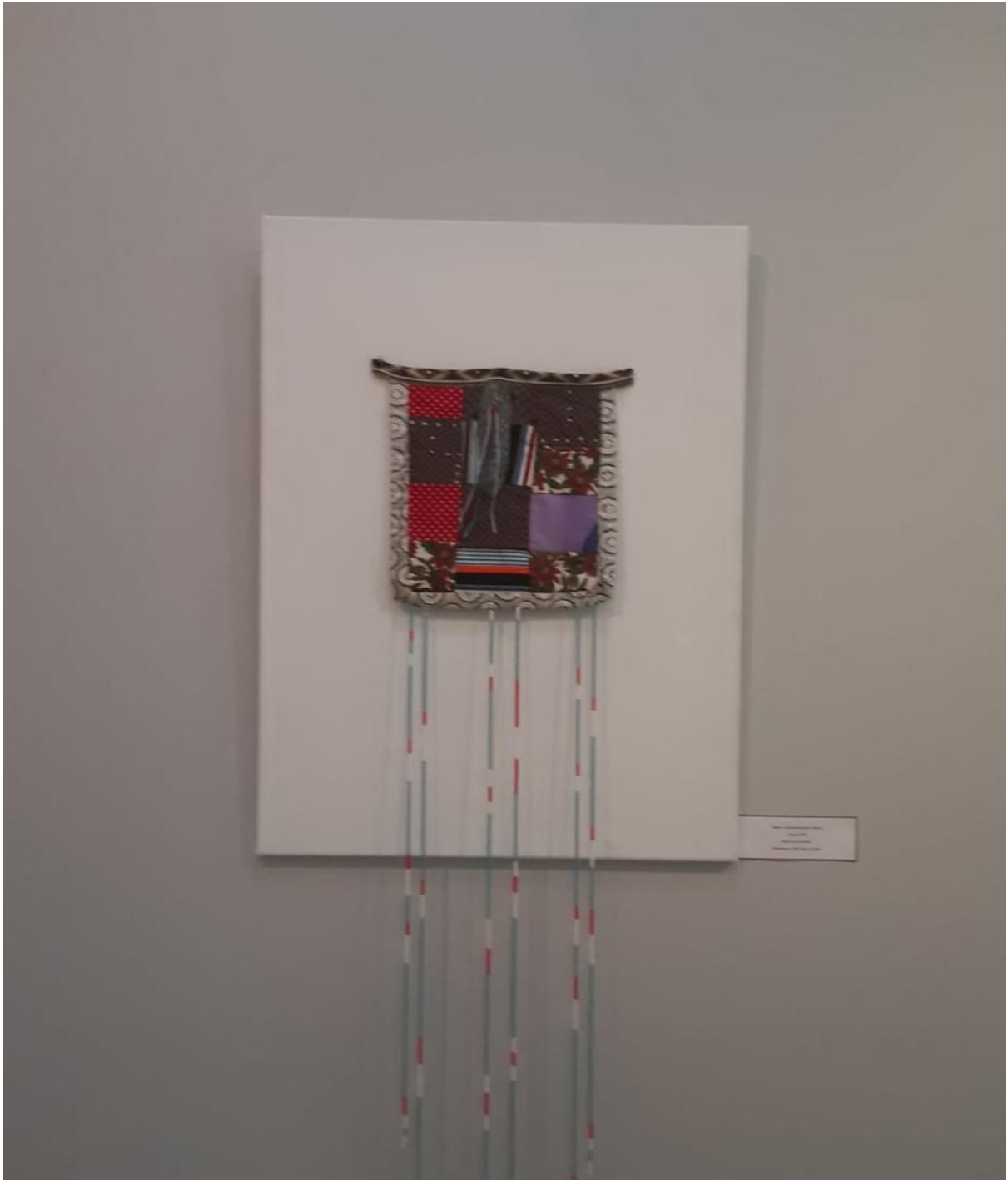


Figure 21. Mam' uNombuyiselo Skeyi *Inxili*, 2018. Beads on Fabric. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.



Figure 22. Mam' uMam'uNowest Ramba *Zundiqondisise!* (2), 2019. Xhosa Woman Bead Attire. Gompco Community Art Centre.

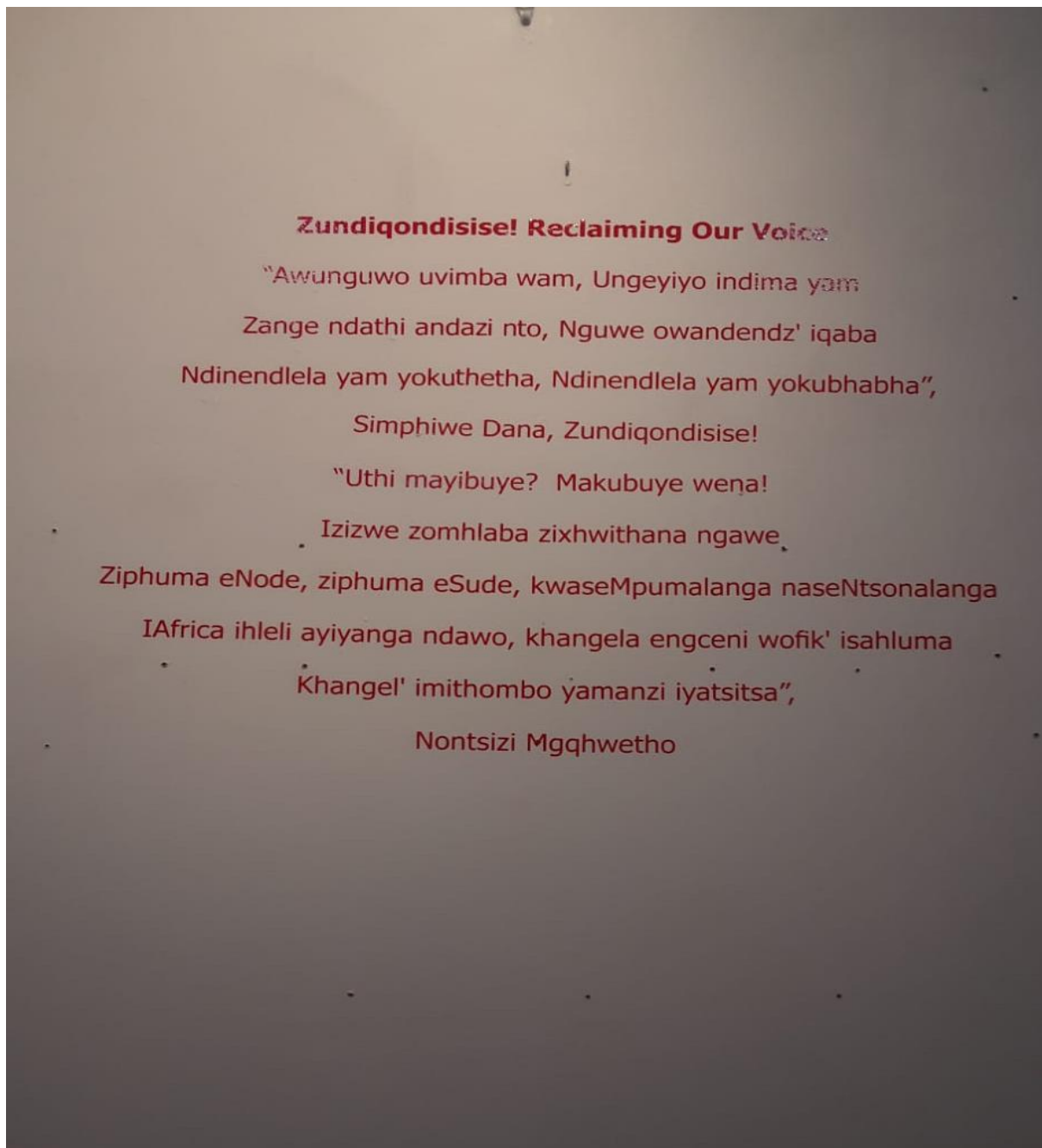


Figure 23. Exhibition Vinyl of the words of Simphiwe Dana and Nontsizi Mgqwetho who have been referenced in the Thesis and the creation of the three Exhibitions.



Figure 24. *Counting Strings and Beads*, 2019. Cikizwa Kentane. Photographic Print.



Figure 25. Mam' uNombuyiselo Skeyi *Isikhakha*, 2018. Embroidery on Leather. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.



Figure 26. Mam' uNombuyiselo Kokhwe *Khaya* (3), 2018. Beads on Fabric. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.



Figure 27. Mam' uNowam Vika *Ubhomba 1*, 2018. Beads on Reed Mat. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.



Figure 28. Mam' uMasithathu Balani *Sakha Umzi Omtsha*, 2018. Beads on Fabric. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.



Figure 29. Mam' uNomthandazo Shweni *Umhlaba Wethu*, 2018. Embroidery and Beads on Fabric. Nomzamo Old Age Centre.



Figure 30. Cilizwa KC Kentane *Ingqungquthela 2*, 2019. Installation.



Figure 31. Cilizwa KC Kentane *Ingqungquthela 1*, 2019. Installation.



Figure 32. Cikirwa KC Kentane Amanina, 2019. Photographic Print.



Figure 32. Cikirwa KC Kentane *Amanina*, 2019. Photographic Print.