

**CULTURE AS A WEAPON OF THE STRUGGLE: BLACK WOMEN
ARTISTS CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOUTH AFRICAN ART HISTORY
THROUGH CONFERENCES AND FESTIVALS BETWEEN 1982 AND
1990**

Student: Avitha Sooful (207051704)

Promoter: Dr Jillian Carman

Co-Promoter: Prof Raimi Gbadamosi

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ABSTRACT

Studies on art made by women have been deprived of their place in the history of art, globally, however, within the South African context, white women were placed firmly within the arts while black women were marginalised. This study makes two assertions, that culture was used as a weapon during apartheid in the 1980s, and that black women, as artists, contributed to South African art history through conferences and exhibitions.

The process adopted in securing these two stated positions was to use the frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and grounded theory as methods to elicit personal experiences through interviews with six women involved in the arts and who contributed to the apartheid struggle during the 1980s. The process used to structure the research and collect data, was an argumentative review of selective literature. Exhibition reviews, conference presentations and proceedings, as well as journal publications between 1982 and 1990. The review concentrated on ‘what’ and ‘how’ statements made on black artists, specifically black women, to understand the reasons for the neglecting of black women artists in the construction of South African art history in the 1980s.

Culture as a weapon of the struggle constructed a substantial part of this research as the study considered aspects that constituted struggle culture during the 1980s and the role of black women within this culture. Important to the role of black women as cultural activists was the inclusion of the oppressive nature of class, gender and race as experienced by black women during apartheid to expose the complexities that impacted black women’s roles as activists.

A discussion of conferences, and festivals (with accompanying exhibitions), and the cultural boycott against South Africa, the official adoption of culture as a weapon of the struggle, and the resolutions taken at these conferences is investigated. Also of importance was the inclusion of women as a point of discussion at these conferences: their poor position in society, and support for the inclusion of more women into the visual arts.

In support of black women’s contribution to South African art history, a discussion on black women as cultural activists is included. This includes interviews with six activists who were part of the liberation struggle during the 1980s who shared their experiences. The study asserts that black artists, specifically black women artists, were prejudiced during the 1980s.

This did not however serve as a deterrent to their contribution to a South African art history. Anti-apartheid movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the anti-apartheid movement (AABN), Amsterdam, played an integral role in creating alternative cultural platforms that supported a ‘people’s culture’, that enabled the use of culture as a ‘weapon of the struggle’ against apartheid.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor Technologiae: Fine Art at the Vaal University of Technology, Vanderbijlpark. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

29th day of November, 2018

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAM	Anti-Apartheid Movement
AABN	Anti-Apartheids-Beweging Nederland
ACE	Amandla Cultural Ensemble
AHWGSA	Art Historical Work Group of South Africa
ANC	African National Congress
ANCWL	ANC Women's League
AZAPO	The Azanian People's Organisation
AZASO	Azanian Students Organisation
BAT	Bartle Arts Trust
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BWL	Bantu Women's League
CAP	Community Arts Project (Cape Town)
CASA	Culture in Another South Africa
CAW	Community Arts Workshop (Durban)
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
COSAW	Congress of South African Writers
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DAC	Department of Arts and Culture
DAG	Durban Art Gallery
DESCOM	Detainees' Parents Support Committee
DNE	Department of National Education
DoHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DWCL	Durban Worker's Cultural Local
FEDSAW	Federation of South African Women
FEDTRAW	Federation of Transvaal Women
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
FUBA	Federated Union of Black Artists
GWU	General Workers Union
HAU	Historically Advantaged Universities
ICA	Institute of Contemporary Arts
JAG	Johannesburg Art Gallery

MCE	Mayibuye Cultural Ensemble
MDALI	Music, drama, art and literature collective
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MOMA	Museum of Modern Art (Oxford)
NCU	National Cultural Unit
NEC	National Executive Committee
NiZA	Nederlands Instituut voor Zuidelijk Afrika
NOVIB	Dutch Organisation for International Development Cooperation
NOW	Natal Organisation of Women
NSA	Natal Society of Artists
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PUTCO	Public Utility Transport Corporation
RAU	Rand Afrikaans University, today University of Johannesburg
RDACC	Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre
SAAA	South African Association of Arts
SAAAH	South African Association of Art Historians
SAAWU	South African Allied Workers Union
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAHA	South African History Archive
SANG	South African National Gallery, today Iziko SANG
SASCH	South African Society for Cultural History
SAVAH	South African Visual Arts Historians
SRC	Student Representative Council
STP	Silkscreen Training Project
TUCCC	Trade Union and Cultural Centre
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
UDF	United Democratic Front
UDFWC	United Democratic Front Women's Congress
UDW	University of Durban-Westville, today University of KwaZulu Natal
UKZN	University of KwaZulu Natal, formerly University of Natal

UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNISA	University of South Africa
UP	University of Pretoria
UWC	University of the Western Cape
UWCO	United Women's Congress
WAM	Wits Art Museum
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WOSA	Worker's Organisation for Social Action

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the contribution of black female cultural activists to South African art history within the anti-apartheid struggle as its central research question. The two secondary questions that arise from this enquiry are: What specific art making transpired during the 1980s by black female artists? and What does the slogan ‘culture as a weapon of the struggle’ contribute to South African art history?

The history of South African art from 1982 to 1990 has been documented as being predominantly that of the white artist. An art history more inclusive of black¹ artists, specifically black women and the collective cultural impact on South Africa of major conferences and festivals held in exile, is almost non-existent.² The contents of conferences discussed in this study, hosted in Botswana, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (UK) from 1982 to 1990 have not been considered as collective discussions that impact South African art history. Specific reference is made to the Culture and Resistance Conference and Festival (Gaborone 1982), which has generally been discussed in relation to South Africa but not to other anti-apartheid conferences in exile.³ The Cultural Voice of Resistance: Dutch and South African Artists Against Apartheid Conference (Amsterdam 1982), Culture in Another South Africa Conference (Amsterdam 1987), Malibongwe Conference (Amsterdam 1990) and the Zabalaza Festival and Conference (London 1990).

¹ This is the term used by the South African Government to refer to previously disadvantaged groups. The use of ‘black’ in this way is part of an explicit rejection of the divisive apartheid categorisation (Williams & Hackland 2016:33).

² The call for a re-invigorated academic and cultural boycott against South Africa during the 1980s stagnated the availability of information on discussions, debates and conferences that transpired internationally on post-apartheid cultural transformation. Such documented information has been housed in archives, mainly in The Netherlands. The severing of the Cultural Accord agreement by The Netherlands with apartheid South Africa in 1982 and the recognition of the banned African National Congress as a legitimate cultural partner instead, exacerbated South Africa’s international relationships.

³ There are various publications post-apartheid that link the Culture and Resistance Conference and Festival to apartheid South Africa as a political statement only; for example, Seidman (2007), Wylie (2008), Kellner & González (2009a) and Peffer (2009). This study argues differently, that these five conferences are imperative to cultural discussions and that of women in South Africa during the decade of the 1980s.

Apart from these conferences being marginalised, there are few publications during the 1980s relating specifically to art made by black South African women artists⁴ - not least because their efforts were seldom recognised as art. It is, therefore, necessary to deconstruct the idea of South African art history of this period, to consider the contributions of black female cultural activists to South African art history through a discussion of cultural festivals, conferences and political complexities of that time.

The political complexity referred to, is the oppressive nature of apartheid that affected black women specifically. Women had to be multi-skilled in order to negotiate a path through the repressive laws that affected her. To this end, black women became members of progressive black women's associations that fought specifically for women's rights within the apartheid struggle. They assumed assertive roles within trade union organisations alongside their roles as single parents, fending for their family, whilst their male counterpart worked in the mines, away from home for extended periods of time (Patel 1987; Hassim 1991). A reading of black female experiences and their resistance to apartheid provides a foundation for an understanding of the oppression that was experienced, including reactions to it and how these translated into cultural expressions against apartheid.

Cultural expressions, by black women during apartheid, have not occupied a place as an integral part of South African art history yet. The prerequisite to bringing this narrative into focus from the periphery, demands that black women's stories are contextualised, emphasising their role in the anti-apartheid struggle. This study on black women is not argued from a feminist viewpoint, and should therefore not be conflated with the ideals expressed by the likes of Germaine Greer (1970)⁵ and Gloria Steinem (1983)⁶ that were largely Western concepts, foreign to a large proportion of African people.

⁴ Black women were documented as collective groups of crafters from specific rural areas that make beadwork, grass mats and beaded dolls. Art making by black artists was mainly documented by art historians as a black male occupation. Gladys Mgudlandlu is often referred to in early publications as a black female artist, however, neither Mgudlandlu nor her works were politically motivated.

⁵ Germaine Greer published *The female eunich* (1970), that was considered seminal in the history of the women's rights movement. This publication was perceived as being part of the second feminist wave as it recognised women as being oppressed by men, men who saw women only as sex objects and that women had a choice in overcoming this oppression (Reed 1971).

Historical background

Apartheid ideology affected the lives of all South Africans. The effect of this ideology was a social construction of hierarchy and segregation between its black and white citizens with white citizens assuming the position of superiority (Posel 2010; Block & Hunt 2015). Most adversely affected within this dispensation were black women and it is within this context that this study is undertaken. Black women were forced to carry their 'pass'⁷ document that allowed access to specific white suburbs to work as a 'domestic worker'. Failure to carry this document resulted in her immediate arrest. Black women lived in fear of being forcibly removed from their homes by the apartheid government and relocated to places unknown to them, further away from their work place and having no means of immediate contact with their absent husbands to inform them of their predicament. Such alien places had no infrastructure or transportation to their places of work. It is against this background that black women began to resist against apartheid and their oppressed position in society.

Research dealing with women is often contextualised within a Western feminist position, which considers a comparison with men as the 'other'. This perspective focusses on gender, specifically looking at the subordination and domination of women and remains largely silent on other matters affecting women. In determining this research, I considered the ideas of Shireen Hassim (1991), Karen Beckwith (2000) and Gillian Young, Kathleen Jones & Jan Jindy Pettman (2010) on the women's movements in South Africa. Hassim (1991) identified a distinct difference between feminist movements in the west and women's movements in

⁶ Gloria Steinem was a social political activist who rose to a leadership position in the American feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Her book, *Outrageous acts and everyday rebellions* (1983) contested women as subservient to men and sexual prejudices against women. Steinem believed that women are generally conservative when they are young and grow a rebellious nature when they are older. Women in her opinion, also outgrew the idea of them being sex objects and child bearers, however, should women retain a patriarchal paradigm then it would render her invisible. Steinem argues for women's liberation that shaped American feminism (Steinem 1983).

⁷ This document controlled and restricted the movement of black people during apartheid. It contained details about the individual, including a photograph, fingerprint, address, the name of her/his employer, how long the person had been employed, and other identifying information. These passes became the most hated and despicable symbols of apartheid (Boddy-Evens 2018).

apartheid South Africa. Hassim argued that western feminist movements have a political agenda that exposes the oppression of women and thus confronts patriarchy. Women's movements in South Africa, on the other hand, may be collectives of women congregating as women to address matters affecting women, or addressing a particular social base without questioning its power relations. Issues such as race, class and gender also inform black women's movements in apartheid South Africa. These experiences remain complex matters dealing with histories of struggle and specific locations, issues that are not considered within traditional feminist theories (Young, Jones & Pettman 2010). Furthermore, women's groups in South Africa are often associated with specific political parties. The relationship that exists between the two (political parties and women) underlines an inherent 'double militancy' in these female political activists (Beckwith 2000). It is for these reasons that black women's groups addressing issues of race, class and gender within a South African context cannot be considered under the umbrella of traditional feminist studies. The inclusion of black women's struggle within the broader liberation struggle was viewed as a shared pursuit promoting social justice.

South African art history is a direct result of apartheid repercussions as vital areas of cultural representation and expression remain, to some extent, porous or unwritten.⁸ In researching conferences held in exile during the 1980s and the position of black women as an overlooked aspect of history, it was important to recognise that art history is not a history of artists, but a collective ideology of artworks in their historical context (Hadjinicolaou 1978).

Mainstream South African art history during the 1980s relied on a western perspective and aesthetic appreciation, which acknowledged attention to specific styles and signatures that identify the artwork, time period and artist. This also placed the artist in alignment with Eurocentric trends, retaining the umbilical cord with Europe as a symbol and yardstick of

⁸ The historical trauma of apartheid is still being written, as such information is reliant on memory and archival documents. Publications both published and unpublished, for example, Peffer (2009) and Mdluli (2015) respectively, capture aspects of what had remained as an unwritten South African art history. "*Tributaries. A view of contemporary South African art* (1985), The 3rd Cape Town Triennial (1988) and The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New South African Art History (1989). All three share a common thread in the way in which they introduced some of the so-called rural artists into the mainstream, positioning them in relation to the attendant politics of race, class, gender and representation " (Mdluli 2015:6).

civilisation. In contrast, the social context experienced by black South Africans defined the art made by cultural workers/ activists during the 1980s that defied these Eurocentric canons, as their approach to art making was creation of images for a communal society. The artworks were saturated with information regarding the political turmoil during that period. Concentrating on depicting apartheid atrocities as content allowed the public access to social conditions in the townships based on artists' personal memories or shared experiences. As Sylvester Ogbechie (2008) theorises, the principal reason for the paucity of knowledge generation, to do with African culture, is western hegemony. African culture, observing its own canons of art making, does not necessarily offer an immediate understanding or bear similarity to documented western art history.

This thesis considers the valuable role of black women within the struggle against apartheid and their use of culture as a weapon of resistance to the regime, officially declared at the Culture and Resistance Conference and Festival in 1982.⁹ The focus of the study is the impact of culture on liberation during apartheid and the role of black women activists. This study reflects on the contributions made at the various conferences and festivals in exile that dealt with culture and liberation as central themes during discussions. Despite various overarching publications dealing with protest art and women's art in South Africa, such as Younge (1988), Williamson (1989), Arnold (1996), Williamson & Jamal (1996), Atkinson & Breitz (1999) and Arnold & Schmahmann (2005), there remains a paucity of the literature exploring the direct contribution that the conferences and festivals in exile and black women made to the visual arts in the 1980s.

A study on the contributions made by black women as cultural activists to the liberation and art history further creates a sense of identity and history of black women in South Africa. Black women participating in cultural activities such as plays, poetry, and visual art making, created a different sense of identity that recited the atrocities experienced by black communities during apartheid. Such participation recognised their contributions to the struggle for liberation. These cultural activities established creative opportunities for black women, confidence and a shared burden of the struggle.

⁹ Refer to Chapter 3.

Rationale for the study

The change from apartheid to a democratic system of governance in 1994 necessitates a change in defining South African art history. The atrocities of apartheid remain undeniable, and the attributes that can assist in constructing a legitimate history of this country, especially in the arts, remain marginalised.

This research foregrounds CRT as a framework to understand the visual arts experience in South Africa during apartheid. Race remains the most important form of identification and determined social structure during apartheid (Steyn 2001). This study interrogates the racial contexts of South African society that created and legalised racial subordination as well as gender and class oppression; it challenges the notion of whites as superior and blacks as 'other' and inferior (Taylor 1998; Morris 2001; Cole 2009).

Insights are provided into black women's experiences in the 1980s as triple oppressed individuals (race, class and gender) and the role they played towards liberation from apartheid. Black women were directly affected by their racial classification (black), class (subordinate to white citizens by apartheid law) and gender (subordinate to men and white women). The research reveals cultural behaviour during the 1980s that indicates art making by black women that should have been included in mainstream South African art history and discussions amongst cultural activists towards a new cultural policy in a post-apartheid South Africa.

Few studies have been conducted in this area of the visual arts and there is no known prior work that has researched the contributions of black women cultural activists and the influence on them of the cultural conferences and festivals held in exile during the 1980s. The new information given in this study will assist in bridging the gaps that remain in our historical documentation. Research of this nature remains integral to addressing the national imperative of gender sensitivity, as it considers the contributions to South Africa art history of female cultural endeavours towards liberation from apartheid.

This study investigates the participation of black female cultural activists within the apartheid struggle as its central research enquiry. The two secondary questions that arise from this enquiry are: What specific art making transpired during the 1980s by black female artists?

and, what does the slogan ‘culture as a weapon of the struggle’ contribute to South African art history?

This study views the written art history of cultural representations in South Africa by white art critics and historians during the 1980s as imposing specific trends that excluded certain sectors of the art making community. Black activists were excluded as they considered local knowledge, social interaction and experiences as contributions to a history that would have been termed by white art historians as cultural rather than art history (Sefa Dei & Asgharzadeh 2001). The focus of this study is to identify the contribution to South African art history by black female cultural activists through conferences and festivals in exile between 1982 and 1990. This will insert a history that transpired in South African during this time on cultural dialogue and activities of black female cultural activists.

Research methodology

This research is conducted within a qualitative research paradigm that looks at CRT, grounded theory and social representations theory. The use of CRT as a framework for this study foregrounds race and racism in all facets of the research process and confronts conventional research texts and worldviews (Creswell 2007). According to Parker & Lynn (2002) and Cappiccie, Chadha, Bi Lin & Snyder (2012), CRT has three primary objectives:

- To present experiences of discrimination from the viewpoint of people of colour;
- To argue for the eradication of racial oppression, which is a social construct; and
- To deal with matters of gender and class discrimination amongst other social injustices.

CRT moves beyond race to include gender and class as sectors of prejudice. CRT also highlights various forms of insults towards others although the producer of such insults may not see themselves as racist, however their actions and words show prejudicial attitudes. Such ambient insults are referred to as micro-aggression. The term micro-aggression refers to normalised behavioural and environmental indignities (hostile, derogatory or negative racial and/or gender insults) that people communicate to groups of people considered, ‘other’ (Sue 2012). CRT considers power relations in society and notions of privileged groups oppressing

subordinate groups. Such critical inquiry looks at the practice and system of class, race and gender oppression (Harris 1993).

Grounded theory, as espoused by Glaser and Strauss (2006) and Creswell (2009) and Social Representations theory (Kadianaki & Gillespie 2014) were used as methodologies in order to develop a theory about a phenomenon of interest as opposed to the process of testing an existing theory. Grounded theory, as a methodology, was necessary, as primary data collection through interviews is subjective and the information collated specifically for this study was based on interviewee's personal memories. The documenting of memory is important in this study as memory recordings assist in legitimising history and further commemorate and adjudicate the past (Huysen 2000).

Grounded theory is associated with an interactionist approach where individuals are known to share understandings of their world that are shaped by similar beliefs, values and attitudes. In this sense, the focus lies with the symbolic meanings that are revealed by people's interactions, actions and resulting consequences (Creswell 2007). Knowledge is generated through the embodied experiences of individuals and communities of people that contribute to the shaping of their lives. It is a methodology that is cognisant of a fluid world, where nothing can be strictly determined. What is in review is the nature of human interaction and responses to confronted situations. The complexity of this methodology is in order for experiences to be understood and accepted as valid, they must be located within individuals and communities (Corbin & Strauss 2008). This allows for the research to explore people's views and perspectives of their experiences.

The use of social representations theory as a method is applicable to visual representations during apartheid as this theory looks at power relations in society and notions of privileged groups oppressing subordinate groups. Moscovici argued that "representations are prescriptive, that is they impose themselves upon us with irresistible force. This force is a combination of a structure which is present before we have begun to think and of a tradition which decrees what we should think" (Moscovici in Kadianaki & Gillespie 2014:4).

As stated earlier, South African art was determined by a Eurocentric trend and the arrival of 'protest art' did not fit into this framework of specialised training, thus prompting the 'othering' of such work. Images considered 'other' prompt barriers and rejection as they

threaten the stability of the norm. This threat of the 'other' triggers resistance, isolation and the undermining of such art making by the dominant group (Gillespie 2008; Sammut & Sartawi 2012). Both grounded and social representation theories consider the relationship between culture and behaviour and its contribution to social change.

This study draws on primary and secondary data from national and international archives that was largely inaccessible to South African scholars during apartheid, personal interviews with women artists and academic and general publications to argue for the role black women played in the liberation struggle. The primary data for this study, apart from the interviews, is housed at the Nederlands Instituut voor Zuidelijk Afrika (NiZA)¹⁰ archive in Amsterdam. The reason for approaching NiZA as a database is that this international archive is dedicated to information on Africa. Data relevant to arts and culture development and international women's conferences in exile was reviewed. The archive allowed access to records including reports, minutes and agendas of workshops and meetings, all concerning the role of women and the role of the arts in the context of the struggle. These records capture the perceptions of black 'cultural workers' and document the artwork made during this period. The records also supply evidence of female protests in South Africa, women's meetings held to discuss the position of women during and after apartheid, and black women's involvement in art making during the apartheid struggle. The analysis of these documents is fundamental to the content of the discussion in this study as they form the foundations for the events that unfolded from 1982 to 1990 and for the finalisation of the position of black women in the liberation in South Africa.

Of primary importance nationally, are the archives of UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives (University of the Western Cape, Cape Town) and the South African History Archive (SAHA, Constitution Hill, Johannesburg) that also house documents relating to the apartheid era.

The contributions made by the Iziko South African National Gallery, formerly the South African National Gallery (SANG), in Cape Town, the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) and

¹⁰ NiZA is a non profit organisation that was founded in 1997. It functions as an archive dedicated to Africa with its focus on Sub-Saharan Africa.

the Durban Art Gallery (DAG) determined the 'art face' of South Africa; their responses to acquisitions and exhibitions during the 1980s were also examined. Local and national South African newspaper critiques on exhibitions, artworks and artists were reviewed as this offered contemporary criticism from art critics. These publications offered consistent commentary and these newspapers had a high reader and circulation rate nationally.

In addition to this, material from the ANC's online archive was used, which includes contemporaneous memorandums on the subject of the cultural boycott and political campaigns and retrospective papers on the subjects given at conferences during the campaign against apartheid. Through these documents, we are presented with specific time periods of history to be assembled into a constructed composition representing social behaviour during the 1980s (Mbembe 2002).¹¹ This process assessed the extent to which protest art, discussions on culture in a post-apartheid South Africa and women making art were considered important, both in South Africa (where they often worked beneath the radar of officialdom) and outside the borders of the country.

As stated above, I conducted interviews with selected female cultural activists who promoted the use of the arts as a weapon of the struggle during apartheid. I used a flexible approach allowing the respondents leeway in answering questions and myself to probe further as information revealed itself, without deviating from the topic. The questions were open ended allowing the respondents to explain events and thoughts as extensively as possible. These interviews proved rich in data, as they provided an opportunity for interviewees to speak about experiences not shared before, as well as insights into and after-thoughts about their personal behaviour. To this end, the six interviews held with Bulelwa Margaret (Nise) Malange, Judy Seidman, Bongiwe (Bongi) Dhlomo, Sakunthala (Sanna) Naidoo, Thunai Govender and Ujala Sewpersad validate and enhance documented texts. The interviewees did not mind their identities being revealed. Participation in the study was voluntary. The study

¹¹ Constructing behaviour and thought processes during apartheid is imperative as communication and social behaviour were censored, which prevents a legitimacy of this period. Mbembe (2002) argued that archives have no agency until information is arranged to a specific purpose. It is mainly through documents and personal interviews that a plausible situation of social behaviour can be constructed that represents a specific time period.

followed strict ethical and technical guidelines in order to guard against plagiarism, and inconsistent or fabricated data reporting.

Chapter summary

The introduction to this study provides the framework within which this thesis was conducted, stating the rationale, aims and methodology used to harvest information in arguing this research. Chapter 1 reviews the construction of South African art history during apartheid – showing that the written history suffered from an inherent sense of superiority, revealing a lack of awareness and respect for black artists and in particular, black female cultural workers. Critiques of exhibitions in national newspapers, the ADA art and design magazines, published texts on South African art, publications on women artists, as well as the content of conferences held in and outside South Africa, were undertaken. The purpose was to seek information on discussions by art historians and art critics on protests during the 1980s and artists' responses to these protests in South Africa. Information sought was on black women as cultural activists or artists and information on conferences that discussed the politics of South African art during and post-apartheid.

Chapter 2 interrogates the complexity of race, class and gender that black women negotiated. This provides a background to black women resorting to cultural activism, their role in the liberation movement during apartheid and the support received from banned political organisations such as the ANC. The discussion in this chapter introduces the idea of 'culture as a weapon of the struggle', a strategy that was employed by many African countries when seeking independence from colonialism. This chapter expands on the idea of what 'culture' meant, its role within an apartheid context and the role of the cultural worker. It explores the shift in the type of art making done by black cultural workers as a cultural reflection of the time – a new cultural position.

Chapter 3 discusses specific exhibitions, conferences and festivals that transpired during the 1980s. It is at these conferences that culture was initially adopted and subsequently reiterated as a 'weapon of the struggle'. The two South African exhibitions unpacked in this chapter are, *Tributaries. A view of contemporary South African art* (1985), curated by Ricky Burnett and *The Neglected Tradition. Towards a new history of South African art (1930-1988)* (1988), curated by Steven Sack. Esther Mahlangu's painted BMW (*Tributaries. A View of*

Contemporary South African Art, 1985) was a break-through for black women and untrained black artists in South Africa. Both *Tributaries* and *The Neglected Tradition* showcased a low number of black female artists compared to black male artists in these exhibitions. If the curators had insight to the rarity of black female artists (a reason for the low number), they failed to highlight the value of these women's art making.

This chapter looks at the following conferences and festivals:

- Culture and Resistance (Gaborone 1982)
- Cultural Voice of Resistance – Dutch and South African Artists Against apartheid Conference (Amsterdam 1982)
- Culture in Another South Africa Conference and Festival (Amsterdam 1987)
- Women's Cultural Festival (1988)
- Malibongwe Conference (Amsterdam 1990)
- Zabalaza Festival and Conference (London 1990)

Chapter 4 presents women's contributions to South African art history. This chapter documents the following artists' contribution to the liberation struggle and their art making: Tshide Sefako, Noria Mabasa, Helen Sebidi, Nise Malange, Judy Seidman, Bongzi Dhlomo, Sanna Naidoo, Thunai Govender and Ujala Sewpersad. The documentation is based on publications as well as personal interviews. Chapters 3 and 4 present my research on black women's contribution to South African art history.

Findings and Conclusion present the findings from the literature study where it indicates that exhibitions by black and white artists were critiqued differently. White art historians entered into very little discussion on either the nation being in crisis or on black women artists. However, this study presents evidence that black women, as cultural activists, contributed to South African art and the conferences and festivals held in exile firmly entrenched the idea of culture as a 'weapon of the struggle' during apartheid. And while it is clear that the cultural pursuits of black and white South Africans were divergent, yet they are both equally relevant to the art history of South Africa during the 1980s.

Cultural activists were firm in their belief that art could advocate for eventual social change and that art made during apartheid expressed a collective social need within the community (Doy 2000). This research sought to reveal discussions on cultural endeavours that had

transpired during apartheid and black women cultural activists who had made protest art as cultural weapons. It serves as a documentation of apartheid society during the period 1982 to 1990 and announces a cultural position denoting an identity, reclaiming a black history and creating an archive of art that was not preserved and had little traces of existence during apartheid (Mbembe 2002).¹²

¹² “Archives are the product of a process, which converts a certain number of documents into items judged to be worthy of preserving and keeping in a public place” (Mbembe 2002:20). Such archival documentation housed in a foreign country served as a reference point for this study in constructing and preserving the cultural phenomena and cultural interpretations amongst black people of South Africa during the 1980s.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE STUDY

1.1. BACKGROUND

The creation of an art tradition requires sound support – of structures, exhibitions, research, education, collecting, art criticism, art appreciation and general social interaction. Changes in art help us to think about changes in society and culture, since art represents and helps to constitute socio-cultural trends and currents. Our everyday ‘reality’, in fact, is shaped by numerous socio-cultural influences and ideological constructs.

Just as race, class and gender impacted the entry of black women artists into the political arena; these factors played a crucial role in the determination and documentation of a specific South African art history. In Marion Arnold’s publication, *Women and art in South Africa* (1996) she acknowledged the neglect of an archive of South African women artists when she proclaimed:

In South Africa we have not yet retrieved our female histories. As a result writing confronts two problems: we must make women of the past visible; simultaneously we must present a contemporary post-colonial critique, cognisant of international theory, African circumstances and the new South African dispensation (Arnold 1996: preface).

I use Arnold’s proclamation as a starting point to determine the extent to which black South Africans, specifically black women were neglected in the art history of the 1980s. Various published texts, art critiques and conference presentations were consulted. This allowed for an assessment of the level of neglect of particular artists that transpired during apartheid, especially during the 1980s. apartheid, simply stated, was an ideology of political, economic and social domination of black people by white people under the guise of a ‘separate but

equal' racial policy.¹³ One consequence of the inhumane conditions black people, particularly black women, lived under was the neglect and negation of their contributions to cultural practice during the 1980s. This cultural denial by the white minority state is researched through the framework of CRT¹⁴ when viewing apartheid's ideological impact on the visual arts. "Looking through a CRT lens means critiquing deficit theorising and data that may be limited by its omission of the voices of "People of Color" (Yosso 2008:75).

Danielle Becker provides a possible reason for this deficit in information,

[H]istorically, both exhibitions and written texts about the art of 'Africa' in Europe and America before the latter part of the twentieth century follow an

¹³ Throughout South African apartheid history, each successive government reinforced the extensive policies that further separated white from black people. These policies institutionalised racial discrimination based on skin colour. Amongst these dehumanising policies were:

The Native Land Act, No. 27 (1913) prevented an African from buying or hiring land in South Africa. Black people were confined to 7% of South Africa's land and could be moved as per the will of the government (South African History Online 2017).

The Population Registration Act No.30 (1950) that required people to be identified and registered from birth as belonging to one of four distinct racial groups: White, Coloured, Bantu (Black African) and other (Boddy-Evans 2018).

The Group Areas Act (1950) and the Natives Resettlement Act, No. 19 (1954), reinforced land dispossession and segregation in South Africa. These Acts divided South African residential areas along racial and ethnic lines designating residential areas for Blacks, Whites, Indians, and Coloureds. This resulted in many forced removals from areas like District Six and Sophiatown uprooting millions of black people and resettling them in alien areas without infrastructure (South African History Online 2016). Refer to Chapter 4.

The Bantu Education Act No. 47 (1953) developed a specific educational package for black children that ensured their limited education. Their education was centralised under the Bantu Education Department with the pupil: teacher ratios of 46:1 in 1955 and 58:1 in 1967. Due to the poor educational offering, there was a lack of teachers, and many underqualified 'teachers' (South African History Online 2011).

¹⁴ "CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Colour as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged" (Yosso 2008:69). As a framework, CRT focusses directly on the effects of race and racism whilst addressing the dominant system of apartheid imposed by whites, shifting the focus from a dominant white culture to the relevance of culture in black communities.

ethnographic model, one defined by a view of Africa as a continent without a credible history, as being primitive, undeveloped and therefore, static and one whose people made objects that were of anthropological interest but could not be considered worthy of the term ‘art’ (Becker (2013:4).

Mario Pissarra is also of the opinion that “although the historical trajectories of black and white South African artists overlap they have long been subjected to efforts to keep them apart. Consequently, South African art has deep faultlines, primarily based on race, but also on ethnicity, class and gender” (Pissarra 2003:n.p.). In revealing a racial attitude in South African art history, one recognises the role that race has played in determining cultural ideals, such as acceptance, value, aesthetics, content, creation and reception of art making by black artists (Holloway 2016).

In order to establish discussions and trends in mainstream South African art during the 1980s, the literature study was undertaken in two parts. The first part constitutes a review of published material in the public domain in the 1980s that referred to the fraught political situation, black artists and black women artists. The second part constitutes a review of later published material that reassesses art making and cultural attitudes of the 1980s.

Inserting black female artists ‘contributions’ into South African art history was an arduous process that required retrieval from national and international archives, unpublished material, interviews and information about conferences and festivals in exile that was not accessible within South Africa in the 1980s. This information was combined with a literature study of published material (much of it not academic) that was available in the 1980s. Books, articles in art journals and magazines, exhibitions and catalogues, art reviews and commentaries in the press and conference gatherings and proceedings were used to establish a database of information on black female artists’ contribution to the liberation struggle under the rubric ‘culture as a weapon of the struggle’. This literature study looked specifically for information on protest art (by both black and white artists), ‘township’ art, the social roles of black women, art made by black men and women, women’s art making and patterns in critiquing exhibitions. Within the context of apartheid, art making by black women artists, or cultural workers as they recognised themselves, was not considered part of South African art history.

Consideration was given to literature referencing ‘art of the townships’ as an all-encompassing phrase to embody images of lived experiences in the black townships. The term ‘township’ was created in the 1960s to “categorise and clearly separate – emergent black visual expression from what was then considered to be the ‘main stream’ in South African art” (Proud 2006:22). It referred to a particular art form that encapsulates in its art making, the atrocious socio-political conditions of black people in South Africa. This further determined ‘white’ South African art history of the 1980s in relation to Europe and provided insight into art making by black artists of the same period, resulting in a kind of two-sided, white/black, South African art history. This development is discussed in later chapters.

Andrew Verster in his paper ‘Is there a South African art or is it still to happen?’ presented at the State of the Arts Conference, held at the Michaelis School of Art (1979) acknowledged the ‘non-engagement’ of white artists with the political situation and the lack of freedom that confronted blacks. Together with other participants, he called on white artists to not participate in state-funded projects.

[T]he true artist remains highly individualistic. He has always put himself and his own private involvement first. Artists are egocentric; art is a self-evolving activity. It is personal and revolves around the specifics of personal experiences (Verster 1979:23).

Unfortunately, Verster’s statement betrays a Eurocentric perspective that often raised its head, which contradicts the communal approach adopted by black artists to art making during apartheid.

As expressed by Qanita Lilla, black artists referred to themselves as ‘cultural workers’ “to counter the trap of individualism” (Lilla 2018:139). Within the context of apartheid, art making by black artists or cultural workers, as they recognised themselves (post the Culture and Resistance Conference 1982), embodied themes which were embedded in shared personal experiences and realities of an apartheid era. In Gen Doy’s publication *Black Visual Culture. Modernity and Postmodernity* (2000), she referenced similar responses by black artists living in Britain who were affected by the politics, culture and the society that they lived in.

There remain specific themes and issues which are embodied in the works of Black artists and black visual culture more than they are in practices by non-black artists – for example history, memory, belonging and identity while these themes are not exclusive to black artists, they seem to be more important in their work, and are given particular attention (Doy 2000:3).

Another problematic statement was voiced by Verster at the 1979 State of the Art conference, “when that liberation occurs, art too will be liberated and assume its own indigenous identity... Until then we will have no art, no culture, no hope and no future” (Verster 1979:31). This statement elicits the idea that one should deny all the cultural attributes of this period and in so doing erase a historical period of art making and visual story-telling by black artists during apartheid. This attitude could explain why there is a paucity of documentation on black artists, specifically black women artists, during the 1980s.

In South Africa, the presence of black women in the visual arts is unsecured as legitimate contributors to this marginalised history. References to black women artists in historical documentation are few. Art making by black artists was alien to most white South Africans who generally regarded such art making as curios and craftwork. The creation and appreciation of the arts by a white community was considered symbolic of high cultural upbringing, a status not afforded to black South African artists.¹⁵

¹⁵ Under apartheid, higher education in South Africa ensured the power and privilege of the ruling white minority. There were two types of institutions: universities and technikons. There were 19 institutions for white students, two institutions one each for coloured and Indian students and five for African students. The five universities for Africans, controlled by the Department of Education and Training, were Fort Hare University, Medunsa University, the University of the North, Vista University and the University of Zululand. The universities for Indians and coloureds were the University of Durban-Westville and the University of the Western Cape respectively, both controlled by houses in the tri-cameral parliament (Bunting 2006:44). The universities that offered art were University of the North, Fort Hare and Durban-Westville. Fort Hare’s Fine Art Department was established in 1976. The University of the North offered art but not art history. Durban-Westville offered Fine Art and Art History under two separate departments. “Under apartheid, black people were intended to do manual labour and work with their hands not their minds. In order to fulfil this stereotype, black people needed to copy examples of craft. For the apartheid state, African art was craft and ‘fine art’ was white” (Nettleton in Lilla 2018:165).

1.2. PUBLICATIONS WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA IN THE 1980S

Under the Publications and Entertainment Act (1963), many publications considered ‘undesirable’ were censored for example, *Confused Mhlaba* (Khayaletu Mqayisa), *Burger’s Daughter* (Nadine Gordimer), *A Dry White Season* (André Brink) and *Move Your Shadow: South Africa, Black and White* (Joseph Lelyveld). Publications available during the 1980s spoke predominately to white artists’ practices and their need to benchmark against their international European peers. Publications such as newspaper articles, apart from academic publications, were consulted as these documents indicated active cultural currents during this period. The intention was to document evidence of art making, writing and conferences (their terms of reference and proceedings) that referred to the political situation facing all South Africans and black artists, specifically black women artists.

1.2.1. Books and catalogues

In much of the available documentation on art making in South Africa, reflections on the political realities of the country affecting art production during apartheid are limited. Although mentioned, using terms such as ‘township’, ‘transitional’ or ‘protest’ art, the value of black artists as co-creators of a South African art history is almost always down-played or ignored. For example, Esmé Berman, in her publication *Art & Artists of South Africa* (1983), states that “Bantu culture never manifested a tradition of pictorial or sculptural expression” (Berman 1983:17). Berman’s attitude towards art by black artists was that these artworks were unique examples of colourful but primitive works and that the public’s sympathetic response to this art making created a false impression of their artistic quality.

In her text, Berman felt that there was no threat in South Africa unlike the threat of the ‘bomb’ in war-time Europe during the 1950s (Berman 1983:16). This suggested her complacency when South Africa was already at war with itself during the 1980s. Her continued negation of art made by black artists is encapsulated in her statements, “Although the term ‘Black Art’ has gained currency in contemporary art literature, it would be inaccurate to suggest that, at the time of writing, there existed in SA an identifiable class of work that might be so described” (Berman 1983:63). Further, her belief that credible black artists outgrew township art, which remained a naïve rendition of human activity in the townships (Berman 1983:63), provided a means to limit the so-called false imprint of protest

art, as well as the weight of political statements made by black artists. Berman's arms-length approach to the true content of black artists' work is read in her description of Peter Clarke's work, "this is not a political commentary, but rather an observant, witty and compassionate response to the ordinary people and the humdrum situations which provide the texture of the daily scene around him" (Berman 1983:98). Mslaba Dumile's works were dispensed as "simply products of his unsettled mind" (Berman 1983:118).

Berman's cursory overview of South African artists provides a synopsis of white artists and their artistic contributions, without focusing attention on the political strife engulfing South Africa that had seeped into the content of art making, especially among black artists. Berman's response to the exhibition *Black Artists Today*, hosted in Soweto in 1981, was that it satisfied a black ethnic pride (Berman 1983:64). Once again, she refused to acknowledge the artistic validity of such a politically charged exhibition or acknowledge it as 'Black Art'.

Despite her short-comings, in largely side-lining the existence of an art form by black South Africans with which she was either not familiar or ignored, Berman was revered for her insightful publication by many white artists – specifically Andrew Verster in his critique published in *The Daily News*, referring to her 1983 publication as 'THE' book on art in South Africa' (Verster 1984:3). This validated the irrational perceptions created by white writers and artists who served as art critics and informers to the public.

De Jager's *Contemporary African art in South Africa* (1973)¹⁶ positioned art made by black artists in the South African context. He categorised township art as reflecting social images and social identity. Similar to Esmé Berman and her responses to township art, De Jager digressed from the political content inherent in many of the works he described, thus dislocating the artist's intentions.

This denial of art making by black artists was also glaring in Frieda Harmsen's 1985 publication *Looking at South African art – a guide to the study and appreciation of art*, which glorified only white artists. In her comments on black women as crafts people she

¹⁶ The content for this publication was predominantly from the collection at the University of Fort Hare and to a lesser degree, the South African National Gallery.

claimed, “Although there was no tradition of weaving (other than grass and reed weaving), nor of narrative visual art amongst the Black tribes of South Africa, they proved to have natural aptitude for it, and after having been taught the technique of weaving with fabric on a loom by people from overseas, produced admirable work” (Harmsen 1985:153). This comment refutes traditional African weaving with grass as an acceptable art practice. The content of this publication belied the title, in terms of what constituted art in South Africa at that time and the parameters within which art could be considered (Harmsen 1985).

Women artists in South Africa (McClelland & Alexander 1985) included four essays (published in English and Afrikaans) of which three are of significance to this study. The first by Ivor Powell, *Some questions about the art of women in South Africa*, projected a feminist perspective and highlighted the roles of white women within the arts:

[The]South African art world is – and has always been – composed of females: many of the major art schools are and have been controlled by women; most of the significant historians and critics of art are women (Powell 1985:6).

By implication, Powell’s statement placed responsibility for the state of black artists and their history, specifically black women’s history, at the doorstep of white women in South Africa. Powell highlights the differences and hierarchy between white and black female art making by stating that a colonial tradition in art making denoted ‘high culture’ and, that which did not conform to this canon as inconsequential:

[T]he post-colonial institutions of ‘high culture’[...] (that tradition rooted in British Imperialism which still dominates the institutions of art in this country) [...] [and] forms of expression that do not conform [...] (like the arts of black people) (Powell 1985:7).

Powell, in his essay, acknowledged the divergent female histories that belonged to white English, white Afrikaans and black women in South Africa. Diana Kenton’s essay, *Feminist issues and art*, explained the emergence of women’s art as “a culture borne out of oppression” (Kenton 1985:12). Unfortunately, her statement did not include the art made by black women. Patricia Davison’s essay, *Art unframed: aesthetic expression among black women*,

stated that ‘fine art’ and art history were both European cultural traditions “equipped with its own vocabulary of discourse and criteria of distinction. To impose these criteria on the creative forms and expressions of an African culture would be an ethnocentric exercise” (Davison 1985:18). Davison referenced Ndebele beadwork as an example of art making different from painting and sculpture that responds to “*our* yearning for visual experience”. She comments further in the same paragraph, that African art is “collective community action” and that “there is relatively little emphasis on the aesthetic expression of an individual” (Davison 1985:18). The points raised are that ‘visual experience’ and ‘collective’ are terms that populate this study when establishing black artists’ responses to art making in the 1980s. The *Women artists in South Africa* exhibition showcased 102 artworks, 68 female artists, of whom two were acknowledged as individual black female artists, R. Mdluli and Gladys Mgudlandlu, while others constituted a ‘bulk’ collection of Ndebele beadwork.

The non-registration of black female artists’ names against their works housed in collections during the 1980s shows prejudicial attitudes towards black artists, and a disregard for black women’s contribution to the visual art history in South Africa. Davison’s explanation for the Ndebele collection underlines the power relationship between European individualism and African collectivism in the approach to art making.

Echoes of African art (1987) can be considered a seminal publication as it is the first art book by a black author, Matsemela Manaka, who wrote about black South African artists. In his response to the term ‘transitional’, as a category for black artists, Manaka found its use problematic. “We would not be in a position to talk about the stylistic development of artists if artists were not involved in some form of transition. If the term is applied to these sculptors, then it should be applied to all artists simply because art is always in motion. It is always in the state of transition” (Manaka 1987:12). With reference to ‘protest art’, Manaka posits that artists who were politicised made art that reflected black experiences of struggle and protests against injustices, forced removals and “above all, art has become a tool for liberation” (Manaka 1997:17). Manaka positioned black art making within its political and historical context; yet in his list of black artists, he acknowledges only one woman, Noria Mabasa, a Venda sculptor.

Gavin Younge's *Art of the South African townships* (1988) was the first book on South African art representative of the apartheid struggle. It is dedicated to the idea of 'culture as a weapon of the struggle'. Black protest artists did not engage specific methods of production nor were there defined boundaries determining the make-up of protest art, but they were firm in the belief that art could advocate eventual social change. The black female artists acknowledged were Bongiwe Dhlomo, Noria Mabasa, Marta Mahlangu, Sarah Mahlangu, Leya Mguni, Sophie Mguni, Melita Molokwane, Emily Motsoeneng, Helen Sebidi and Matshitiso Sefaka.

Resistance art in South Africa (Williamson 1989) published selected artists, both black and white who responded to art as resistance to apartheid. Of the 63 artists selected, 23 were black. There were 19 males and only four black women, namely Helen Sebidi, Noria Mabasa, Bongiwe Dhlomo and Sarah Tabane. The publication included nine 'projects' inclusive of beadwork, murals, ceramic plates, political slogans, banned t-shirts and children's drawings.

The lack of specific information on black women artists is evident in *Aspects of twentieth century black South African art, up to 1980* (Jephson 1989), which included only one woman artist, Gladys Mgudlandlu, who was described as a non-political artist (Jephson 1989).

Mention is made in *Ten years of collecting (1979-1989)* edited by Hammond-Tooke & Nettleton (1989), of protest art made by black artists in an essay, Transitional sculpture (Dell 1989).¹⁷ Elizabeth Dell mentioned Noria Mabasa as one of these 'transitional' sculptors together with nine others based in Venda (Dell 1989:45) Dell was scathing in her interpretation of Mabasa's clay sculptures,¹⁸ she referred to them as 'transitional' and the political association attached to her work, misplaced. Dell believed that Mabasa was "producing work for a market and context which she does not understand" (Dell, 1989:50). "I take issue[...]with the mantle of 'political intention' that the Transitional myth is made to wear" (Dell 1989:52). Steven Sack's essay, From country to city: The development of an urban art (1989a) speaks to the difficulties experienced by black people in South Africa.

¹⁷ Also see Nettleton (1988).

¹⁸ Mabasa's clay figures of policemen and political figures are accepted as her response to her surroundings. These sculptures were exhibited nationally and internationally, carrying a political tag.

Amongst the various ‘township’ artists’ works he discussed, Sack referenced Helen Sebidi and her work, ‘Mother Africa’ that dealt with womanhood (Sack 1989:56).

African art in Southern Africa: From tradition to township edited by Anitra Nettleton and David Hammond-Tooke (1989) promoted “indigenous and modern black art in South Africa” (Nettleton & Hammond-Tooke 1989:7). What is praiseworthy is the inclusion of a black author, David Koloane and his essay, The Polly Street art scene, in this publication (Koloane 1989). In the construction of South African art, often one is faced with publications where authors are white. An essay by Frances Verstraete, Township art: context, form and meaning (1989) conveys the idea of art made in the townships, “it is essentially the expression of awareness by the individual of his existential situation in an alien and changing society” (Verstraete 1989:156). She posited that the term ‘township’ referred to a political site determined by an apartheid government. This interpretation infers that political art is identified together with a political site and is thus filled with political significance. Verstraete points out that the art content was a search for identity within the struggles of apartheid experiences that were determined by political domination (Verstraete 1989:152). Verstraete does not embark on any association between ‘township’ art and ‘protest’ art. She states, however, that “Township Art, thus, must be seen as the first group movement in the art of the urban black man, an art of transition and a manifestation in the visual arts which is part of a cultural continuum” (Verstraete 1989:171). This should be seen in response to Berman’s (1983) claim that there were no groups of black artists. Steven Sack’s essay, ‘Garden of Eden or political landscape?’ Street art in Mamelodi and other townships paid homage to ‘public art’ in the townships that gave ‘visual voice’ to the brutality experienced (Sack 1989b:205).

Images of wood. Aspects of the history of sculpture in 20th century South Africa (1989), by Elizabeth Rankin was a catalogue accompanying a curated exhibition at JAG.¹⁹ In her observation she realised that:

...there was so little existing literature on the subject...not only has sculpture in the medium of wood been of some importance in the recorded history of

¹⁹ Applied art from white communities and traditional African art with its social function were omitted (Rankin, 1989:9).

white South African art, but it is also an established tradition amongst the black peoples of South Africa, a tradition which has had little recognition (Rankin 1989:8).

Further, in her assessment of black and white sculptors' approaches, there were similarities as well as differences of approach "too fundamental to ignore" (Rankin 1989:8). Rankin provided a history of black sculptors as well as the training afforded to them nationally (formal institutions and art centres) and internationally, which clearly indicated the western influence in their works. Rankin mentioned Noria Mabasa as one of the accepted entrants into the *Cape Town Triennial* (1988) and the unusual idea of a rural black female practising sculpture (Rankin 1989:45); however, she did not elaborate. Based on Rankin's statement, "Certain criteria continue to be important to the visual arts...the necessary skill to create the form and the appropriate form to convey the meaning" (Rankin 1989:55) her focus was to capture the European influences on South African black sculptors rather than allocate meaning to African sculpture. Rankin's dismissal of Mabasa as 'unusual' without recognising her contribution as a black female sculptor to sculptural practice within the history of South African art, removes Mabasa again from the centre, to the margins, of art making.

There is a thread running through these publications: that art made by black people was not entirely part of South African art history and was generally overlooked by galleries and art historians during the 1980s. The position taken was to exclude black artists – specifically women – as makers of art and to delegitimise black art making during apartheid as such art making did not follow the canons of European standards. Art works that are associated with black artist are also de-politicised. It is only after 1990 that the stance of art historians, critics, administrators of galleries and art museums changed, criticising the apartheid government and placing the blame at the door of the apartheid state for their cultural myopia and racial selectiveness. For example, Marilyn Martin (National President of the South African Arts Association, SAAA), in her article, *Meer geld nodig vir kuns* (1988) stated, "Art history in the twentieth century from 1917 onwards, with the October Revolution, shows the enormous extent to which Communism used art to propagate its ideology. A person may not agree with their methods but their reality will never be accepted in this country" (Martin 1988:19).²⁰

²⁰ My translation from Afrikaans into English.

Two years later in 1990, Martin became the Director of SANG. Qanita Lilla (2018) claimed that it was only from 1990 onwards that, “Martin started publishing extensively on South African art having to be redressed” (Lilla 2018:133).

This is evident in Martin’s *Transforming the National Gallery* (1999), that claimed that SANG presented the true face of South African art history in its collections and programmes. Martin acknowledged previous Eurocentrism and “imbalances created by our history” in order to make redress, through participation in “the writing and rewriting of South African history and art history and to use the context of art to address the historical problem of cultural differences in South Africa” (Martin 1999:145). Martin laments (without qualifying reasons) the “lack of black researchers, art historians and curators who can fulfil the task of reclaiming and representing history and art history” (Martin 1999:146). In Martin’s essay (2001), *Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa (1945-1994)*, she claimed that South African society was a product of imperialism and colonialism however; cultural production had played an important role during the liberation. “What is pertinent here is the way in which art and popular culture were harnessed in the struggle” (Martin 2001:37). The examples provided support Lilla’s (2018) claim and evidenced Martin’s hostility and racial discrimination towards ‘people’s culture’ in the 1980s that was realigned post 1990. The added insult was that Martin occupied a seat of power as the director at SANG, which appeared to have ‘erased’ her earlier statements of hostility whilst celebrating a new era in South African history.

In response to collecting art made by black artists during the 1980s, The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) together with the Standard Bank of South Africa set up the *Standard Bank African Art Collection* in 1978 (About the WAM Collection n.d.). Three years later, the University of Fort Hare (Eastern Cape), established a museum and gallery in 1981 that collected contemporary art by black South Africans. The Wits collection included a range of beadwork, wooden artefacts, traditional skirts and grass work from areas in the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu Natal. The contemporary collection that was housed at Fort Hare covered a range of artworks by artists such as “Gerard Sekoto, George Pemba, Sydney Khumalo, John Muafangejo, Lucas Sithole, Ephraim Ngatane, John Mohl, Cyprian Shilakoe, Ezrom Legae, Louis Maqhubela and Dumile Mhlaba Feni” (Museums & Galleries n.d.; de Jager 1973). It should be noted that these collections were housed within institutions of

higher learning (Wits and Fort Hare) and not public institutions such as galleries and museums that were state funded. State funded institutions collected art by black artists with less enthusiasm than works by white artists.

In contrast to an approach that largely ignored art made by black people or separated it from that of white people are two exhibitions curated by Ricky Burnett (1985) and Steven Sack (1988). According to Burnett, he attempted to assert a common culture when he curated *Tributaries. A view of contemporary South African art* (Burnett 1985: n.p.). This exhibition consisted of two parts; an exhibition of art works and an exhibition of BMW cars painted by international artists. Esther Mahlangu, an Ndebele female artist, who had no formal art training, represented South Africa in the latter part (Burnett 1985: n.p.). Her design for the BMW exhibition was familiar Ndebele motifs that she painted on homes. The painting of these specific motifs on Ndebele homes were signifiers of a specific African identity. The Ndebele people faced the indignity of being forcibly removed and resettled and the bold painted motifs allowed them to reclaim their African identity.

In 1988, Steven Sack repositioned black art making in an exhibition titled, *The Neglected Tradition. Towards a new history of South African art (1930-1988)* at JAG, accompanied by a catalogue documenting the show. Sack referenced the political strife in the townships of South Africa and its effects on the black population. He described works by artists such as Dumile Feni, Peter Clarke, Helen Sebidi, Noria Mabasa and Thami Mnyele, among others, as criticisms of apartheid and reflections of personal experiences (Sack 1991). Sack's positioning of these artists' works is in contrast to that of both Berman (1983) and De Jager (1973), who preferred to be noncommittal about the South African politics inherent in artworks by black South Africans. Sack's exhibition and publication at that time was pivotal in reclaiming and acknowledging the history of western-type art made by black artists in South Africa. However, out of the 102 artists he curated, only 11 were women. The merits of these two exhibitions are discussed in Chapter 3.

1.2.2. Exhibitions and press reviews

In the 1980s, South African exhibitions were predominantly by white artists. A comprehensive survey of these exhibitions via press reviews provides insight into the shaping of South African art and culture during this period.

Apart from solo shows, there were group shows (of white artists only and sometimes of both white and black artists), themed exhibitions curated by art galleries and museums, exhibitions accompanying book launches on South African art and conferences, major art competitions and various shows at the National Arts Festival (formerly known as the Grahamstown Arts Festival). Group exhibitions by white staff members at tertiary institutions such as Tshwane University of Technology (TUT, formerly Pretoria Technikon), University of South Africa (UNISA), Wits and University of Pretoria (UP) also provided insight into trends and teaching practices at these institutions, which influenced new generations of artists and their thinking.

An exhibition in 1987 by lecturers from TUT was critiqued in two newspapers, *Beeld* and *Pretoria News*. *Beeld* declared that the exhibition was an excellent show of art for art's sake (Abrie 1987:6) and in the *Pretoria News* the critic claimed that it was a non-cohesive, uncomfortable and visually confusing show (Arnold 1987a:18). Similarly, in *Die Burger*, an exhibition by staff from UP showcased at the Gallery International in Cape Town (Viljoen 1986:6), did not engage in socio-political art. Black artists were not part of these shows.

An exhibition by UNISA lecturers at the UP in 1986 appeared more socially and politically engaged, according to a review by Marilyn Martin (1986). She wrote that Johann Moolman created figures in a timeless position of conflict and predicament whilst Arnold looked at her position as a white female within an African context. Dietrich painted 'dark-skinned people' that considered daily relationships in a racist South Africa and van der Watt considered the undermining of black culture and the meaning of the object. These images, according to Martin, were in touch with the realities and demands of their time and their place (Martin 1986a). Martin's arms-length approach to South Africa's separate societies is evident. In her commentary, black South Africans are reduced to 'dark-skinned people' bearing the indignity of a dispossessed identity. Martin further applauds white artists for their ideas on the 'black subject'.

The exhibition by Wits staff at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg in 1986 showcased white South African artists who were 'politically engaged', Michelle Raubenheimer, Colin Richards, Penny Siopis and Paul Stopforth. Elza Miles and Marilyn Martin favourably reviewed this exhibition (Martin 1986b:21; Miles 1986:2).

A private collection of works by Jackson Hlungwane and Ndebele beadwork was exhibited by Wits and critiqued in the *Pretoria News*. Once again, the only references to black female artists at this exhibition were the nameless crafters of Ndebele beadwork (Town Reporter 1987:10).

Esmé Berman's book, *Art and Artists of South Africa (new enlarged edition)*, was launched with an accompanying exhibition in November 1983 at Wits (Gertrude Posel Gallery). According to Andrew Verster, Berman's publication registered 1670 painters, sculptors and graphic artists since 1875 and he considered this publication to be "THE authoritative work on our art" (Verster 1984:3). Although Berman provided extensive biographical information on the white artists published, the political content in the works of South African black artists or the documenting of black artists as contributors to this history was dismissed.

Two exhibitions of significance in 1990, *Maidens, mothers and madams – images of women* and *Women choose women*, both hosted at JAG, echoed the feminist theme of a conference held by the South African Association of Art Historians, Transvaal branch, (SAAAH), *Women and the Visual Arts*, held at Wits (1990). Michael Coulson critiqued both exhibitions in the *Financial Mail* in which he cites feminism as an overriding theme (Coulson 1990: 35).

Coulson wrote that works by some female artists were of such a poor quality because they were untrained; therefore, the works should not have been showcased. The untrained artists that Coulson referred to were Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi and Maggie Mamatlakeng Makhoana (Coulson 1990:35). One questions the repudiation of Sebidi's work by Coulson as she was the first black artist to have won the prestigious Standard Bank Young Artist Award in 1989. Coulson's derogatory remarks clearly show gender and racial discrimination as well as his bias towards white trained artists.

Another example of prejudice against untrained artists was a review in the *Business Day* of an exhibition of acquisitions by Wits at their Gertrude Posel Gallery. Attention was drawn to the individual approaches used by a black artist from the Katlehong Art Centre and a white artist, Louise Linder, to make a train. Attention was also drawn to William Kentridge's etchings, 'After Hogarth' that were accorded a more privileged position than the safety pin-decorated Shangaan cloth. Terminology used on labels also drew criticism as 'camouflage', "diversity becomes a euphemism for the inherent differences between the two, differences

that cannot be wallpapered by neat labels such as ‘transitional’ and ‘contemporary’” (Failing to blur 1987:22). Once again, the artists hosted at this exhibition were mainly male; David Goldblatt (acclaimed photographer of the effects of apartheid atrocities) and Tommy Motswai. Ndebele and Shangaan artefacts were showcased, reminding an audience that black people really made craft. More shocking was the continued insults that black artists endured from white critics because they were trained at Art Centres and art works by black artists were labelled ‘transitional’. The categorising of art made by black artists as ‘transitional’ immediately separates it from the norm, reiterating the hierarchy of western - trained artists as superior.

At the 1987 Grahamstown Arts Festival, four art exhibitions were reviewed by Kathy Berman in her critique, *Bye Bye Pierneef, Hello Apocalypse*, in the *The Star* (Berman 1987:8). The four exhibitions comprised a collection of Pierneef prints, William Kentridge’s Young Artist Award Winner exhibition, the National Drawing Competition (won by Jeremy Wafer) and what Berman called “the exhaustive Vha Venda group exhibition”. The Vha Venda group exhibition showcased, amongst other artists, Nelson Makhuba, Doctor Phutuma Seoka, Noria Mabasa, Albert Munyai, Jackson Hlungwane, Freddie Ramabulana and Doctor Jim Ngumo. Berman’s response to this exhibition was that it was a necessary feat to have exhibited the Vha Venda artists; however, “one is struck with a strange ambivalence, an ethical and ideological dilemma. For there all the works stood, neatly arranged in glass display cabinets, devoid of any history, stripped of any tales, simply a collection of memorable artefacts – objects for veneration, intellectual consumption and acquisition” (Berman 1987:8).

First, what “strange ambivalence, an ethical and ideological dilemma” was Berman speaking of? Secondly, why was there no reading into the Vha Venda artists’ work? Referencing that the works just stood separate, denotes again a desensitised thinking behind white South African critics as black artists were meekly categorised as makers of objects; there seemed to be a distinct reluctance to access black South African art, thus retaining a white supremacy within the arts. Berman not only insulted the black artists and their art making with her comments but also dismissed their cultural practices as insignificant when compared to the other three exhibitions that she had reviewed.

Richard Cheales in *The Citizen*, Around the Galleries, reflected on an ‘intercultural Visual Kaleidoscope’ in which forty Southern African culture groups from the Witwatersrand and Pretoria areas exhibited their ‘crafts and artefacts’ at the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU, today the University of Johannesburg). His statement, “this makes for immensely fascinating viewing for the whole family or anyone and everyone” (Cheales 1986a :21) responds to black cultural artefacts as one would animals in a zoo.

An exhibition at the Natalie Knight Gallery of three white artists and one black male artist, Job Mokgosi, was reviewed by Coulson in the *Financial Mail*. He acknowledged a history attached to the three white artists in respect of their content and style; unfortunately, this was not extended to Mokgosi (Coulson 1987:125). This Eurocentric separation made by Coulson, Berman and Cheales admits to the fact that South African art critics were desensitised to the cultural endeavours of black people and ignored any meaning attached to their work. They unashamedly insulted and discriminated against black artists, refusing them entry in to South African art history.

Many other exhibitions by young artists celebrated ‘art for art sake’. An example is that of David Rossouw at the Karen McKerron Gallery, Johannesburg, which was reviewed in *The Star*. Roussouw’s works were described as being imbued with power, brutality and guilt (James 1987:8). Unfortunately, no overt reference was made to any political intention in this review.

Andrew Verster critiqued Burnett’s BMW and *Tributaries* exhibition in his article, Nothing will ever be the same, *The Daily News* (Verster 1985:15).). Verster was correct in that both black and white artists shared the same exhibition space, which made it difficult to acknowledge and insert black artists into the white South African art history of the 1980s. Unfortunately, Verster failed to state that of the 111 artists on show, 37 were black artists, which included only three female artists, Noria Mabasa, Maria Mabhena and Sara Mhlangu. Unfortunately for all the racial and class barriers this event broke, black women were still marginalised.

Women and art, was an exhibition at the Natal Society of the Arts (NSA) gallery, reviewed by Carol Brown, that showcased women’s art making in KwaZulu Natal. The artists were Sylvia Kaplan, Fiona Kirkwood Lib Steward, Maggie Mikula, Martha Zettler, Fee Halstead,

Pippa Lea, Judith Carlile, Jean Powell, Marianne Meijer and Bonnie Ntshalintshali. The exhibition coincided with the celebration of the 'International decade of the Woman'. In Brown's review, she stated, "Ntshalintshali's work shows fresh, exciting work, which draws on tradition and at the same time expresses individualism and joy of creation. Her work is sculptural and the three-dimensional pieces lend an importance to this show" (Brown 1985). Although Brown claimed that Ntshalintshali retained her traditional African approach, the notion of individualism that Brown referenced, alludes to western ideas of art making.

The Durban Art Gallery (DAG) also commemorated the international decade of the woman (1985), by displaying the work of three women artists, namely Bongiwe Dhlomo, Ada van de Vijver and Caroline Rule. In van den Berg's critique of the artworks in the *Sunday Tribune*, she accorded the metaphoric images of the white artist Van de Vijver with political content rather than Dhlomo's images of black people forcibly removed by apartheid legislation (Van den Berg 1985), imposing a power relationship.

An exhibition by Claudia van der Merwe at the Café Gallery, '*Op Safari* in Durban', used a garden series to reference three black leadership figures, Mandela's Garden (a Robben Island view), Gandhi's Garden (an Eastern paradise) and Gatsha's Garden (more African in feel) (Brown 1986:10). This exhibition showed great insensitivity towards apartheid struggle leadership and the title of the show (On safari) is a further indictment of this insensitivity. When one is on safari, one either hunts or looks out for animals in their natural habitat. Either Brown and the artist were unaware of their insensitivity, or it did not matter. Naming each work deliberately does not appear to be an oversight as it denotes specific assumptions and racial descent of a person. Furthermore, 'Gatsha' is a derogatory use of a name to reference a leader. Both the artist and the critic embed ethnic associations with black leadership and add insult at the same time by representing them with specific garden types. The Rivonia Trial (1963-1964) that sentenced Nelson Mandela to Robben Island, the activities of Mohandas Gandhi as a civil-rights activist in South Africa and respect for Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi as founder of the Inkatha freedom party were lost to van der Merwe and Brown. The micro-aggressions CRT points out are clearly embedded in this work and in the critic's response.

Many white artists travelled and exhibited internationally despite the cultural boycott²¹ imposed by the United Nations (UN). The United Nations' call to South Africans and the international community to respect the call for a boycott was to add pressure on the apartheid government to change. The 'civil disobedience' of white artists is apparent in Ronald Albino's review of the exhibition titled, *The French Connection*, at the NSA Gallery. The exhibition included the artists Penny Siopis, Andrew Verster, Larry Scully, Deborah Bell, Danie Craven and Sonja Britz's travels to France (Albino 1987:4). Bettie Cilliers-Barnard also travelled and showcased her works in London, New York, Sao Paulo, Venice, Florence, Lisbon, Monte Carlo, Paris and Taiwan (*Insig* 1987:58). Artists from the USA were showcased at the Natalie Knight Gallery, Sandton (Powell 1986:21) and other exhibitions of international artists were showcased at the President Hotel, Cape Town (Munitz 1986b:5). The Consultancy in Sandton, held an international showing of etchings and lithographs (Cheales 1986b:19), a lithograph exhibition by Greek artists was hosted at the Lorimer Hall, King George VI Art Gallery (today the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum), Port Elizabeth (Bentley 1986:15) and the Goodman Gallery hosted an exhibition of French Masters (Martin 1986c:2). These exhibitions provided white South African art lovers with a taste of international artists. International visits and exhibitions are important to record as they indicate white artists' indifference to the UN's call for a cultural boycott against South Africa.

Not all exhibition reviewers disregarded black artists and the contents of their work when positioned alongside white artists, however, these are scarce. Merle Huntley (1987), reflected on an exhibition at Ruddell Theatre, Waterkloof House Preparatory School, Pretoria in which Mike Tshawe's *Effects of Teargas* done in conté crayon, portrayed the emotional effects and physical experiences of teargas in the townships. Charles Mdluli's *Overtime* represented an army truck with mounted guns and Fanie Matjie's *Hungry Cat* was used as a metaphor for anguish and deprivation. These works were showcased among Norman Catherine's Fook Island creatures, Jean Beeton's wildlife paintings and Muffin Stevens' *The Family*, that spoke of a breakdown in family norms. Huntley acknowledged the difference in the content approach between the black and white artists on show, stating "A strong thread of

²¹ A discussion on the cultural boycott is presented in Chapter 3 of this study.

emotionalism appears to run through the works of most of the black artists [...] whilst the majority of the white artists' works are more esoteric, less didactic" (Huntley 1987a:3).

An exhibition reviewed by Lucinda Jolly, *The Argus* (1987), 'Untitled: An exhibition of South African Art', hosted at the Hiddingh Hall Campus in Orange Street, Cape Town, included both trained and untrained black artists. The exhibition space was a prefabricated structure that suggested a military encampment, reinforced by sculptures of firearms, reminiscent of the violent times of the 1980s. The two artists cited in this review were Brett Murray and Jo Ractliffe whose works reflected the South African police state and the decrepit environment black South Africans called home. Murray's work, *Policeman*, made in resin, depicted a policeman in uniform with boots that were larger than his feet size. This work is reminiscent of the clay figures by Noria Mabasa of policemen created in the 1980s. Ractliffe, a photographer, exhibited an image of a shack next to a polluted river that served as a reminder of the living circumstances of black people in South Africa (Jolly 1987:9). Jolly's decision not to mention the name or reference the artworks exhibited by the untrained artists indicated a continuous pattern of neglect by white critics of black artists even though they exhibited with white artists.

Christopher Johnson's review in *The Star* of a group show, *Isolation*, highlighted the work of McCullum's *Stand Accused* that dealt with the political, social and moral dilemma affecting South Africans. The other artists appeared to have indulged their personal themes and ideas in their art making (Johnson 1986:7).

Speels of gekunsteld? was a sculpture exhibition at the Gencor Gallery, Johannesburg that was reviewed by Elza Miles in *Die Beeld*. It showcased 10 sculptors, six black and four white. Noria Mabasa was the only black female artist (Miles 1987b:2). This was one of the few exhibitions that showed more black artists than white artists in a single exhibition.

Cheales in 'Art Note', *The Citizen* (1986), referred one to an extended date of an exhibition (paintings, pottery and sculptures) by Helen Sebidi at the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) Gallery in Newtown (Cheales 1986b:19). This brief reference spoke to what was important to the white South African cultured palate. The importance of this exhibition is that it was the first solo show of a black female artist in a gallery space and Sebidi remained

unacknowledged and yet Skawran (1994) questioned the lack of notable black female artists from such centres.

[T]he following community art centres were founded between 1972 and 1986: Johannesburg Art Foundation, Katlehong Art Centre, Community Arts Project in Cape Town, Fuba Academy, Johannesburg, Nyanga Arts Centre, Mofolo Arts Centre, African Institute of Art, Funda, the Community Arts Workshop, Durban, and the Alexandra Arts Centre. It is noteworthy that, as yet, none of these institutions has promoted or exhibited any significant number of black female artists (Skawran 1994:277-278).

Another review by Coulson in the *Financial Mail* (1986) titled, Wheat and Chaff, considered a fund-raising exhibition for the Alexandra Art Centre. Although it was judged a noble feat, Coulson commented that “Work from some of our finest artists hangs cheek-to-cheek with canvasses by people not best known for their art, that would scarcely qualify for Artists in the Sun” (Coulson 1986:104). He listed the well-known white artists but not the black artists apart from the sculptors Noria Mabasa, Ezrom Legae and Sidney Khumalo (Coulson 1986:104). In the various reviews by Coulson, there is a pattern of general disregard for art made by black artists. Not only did he insult black artists, he instituted a power relationship between the trained white artists and the untrained black artists. He is also racially derogatory, referring to untrained black artists as worthless (chaff).

At a four-person exhibition of white artists at the Gallery International, Cape Town, Lautenbach singles out the artist Deon Venter as the only one who paid attention to socio-political references in his work (Lautenbach 1986:4). Some of the entries into the national art competitions such as the *Cape Town Triennial*, *Corona del Mar* (Durban), and the *ABSA L’Atelier* (previously named *Barclays L’Atelier*), Johannesburg, during the 1980s revealed an awareness of the violent political situation in the country. An artistic social awareness is evident in the work of Diane Victor’s *Great White Relief* in the Corona del Mar competition. Brown, in her review, attributed the moments of angst and anxiety in the work to German Expressionism rather than the artist’s awareness of the violence prevalent in the country. The works of Dennis Purvis, Clive van der Berg and Guy du Toit also reflected the country’s

political tension; however, Brown fails to linger on any socio-political thoughts (Brown 1989).

A review in the *Natal Mercury* highlighted an important event in the history of black women in South Africa. The Durban Art Gallery employed its first black female professional, the educational officer Ms Christina Jikelo in 1987 (Municipal reporter 1987). This was a laudable achievement for black women and art institutions and was one of the first cases of a black woman employed in a professional capacity in a white domain.²²

The announcement in 1988 of the joint winners, Bonnie Ntshalintshali and Carol Hayward-Fell, of the Corobrik National Ceramic competition in Durban (Brown 1989b), was a major break-through for Ntshalintshali and black women artists in general. Ntshalintshali's 'craft' was elevated to that of a trained white artist and her name was attached to her work, a practice that was neglected in the 'bulk' purchases of craft for collections by museums and galleries.

In 1988, Helen Sebidi was awarded a Fullbright Scholarship to travel to the USA and to exhibit at the Worldwide Economic Contemporary Artists' Fund Exhibition. In 1989, Sebidi won the Standard Bank Young Artist Award and in 1990, she held a solo show at the Durban Art Gallery. Korber referred to Sebidi as relatively unknown in a world dominated by white males and quoted Marion Arnold's romantic explanation of Sebidi's work in the catalogue.

Sebidi is about being a black woman in South Africa[...]it expresses the conflict between rural and urban life, women and men, past and present. Things and people are torn asunder, literally and figuratively[...]the space of contemporary society and the overcrowded townships where violence erupts and psychological tension is generated (Korber 1990:5).

²² This study did not consider researching the employment and collecting practices of art institutions, however, the acquisitions at DAG and catalogues of collections at other galleries, provided some insights into this area. Most works acquired were by white artists, and almost all professional employees were white.

This was the first positive acknowledgement by an art critic of a black female artist's work and of its political content that spoke of apartheid atrocities and the plight of black women.

Jikelo, Ntshalintshali and Sebidi are important in South African art history as they infiltrated the arts industry on three different levels. White women dominated public art institutions during apartheid and Jikelo was able to leave an indelible mark as an educational officer in a gallery space. Black women as crafters were showcased and their works were collected and archived in bulk, nameless. Ntshalintshali managed to gain the attention of the white art fraternity to reconsider their responses to ceramic work made by black women when she shared the winning entry in the Corobrik National Ceramic competition, 1988. Helen Sebidi's, Standard Bank Young Artist Award in 1989 is another example of a black female artist breaking into a space reserved for white artists during the 1980s. All three black women together with Esther Mahlangu and Noria Mabasa impact South African art history in the 1980s. Unfortunately these contributions were purposefully overlooked and their art making ridiculed by art critics.

1.2.3. Journals and conferences proceedings

To understand further the intellectual currents in the visual arts, it was important to assess South African art historians' views on art making by black artists, what historians considered 'struggle' art and the role of black women artists or art historians' lack of interest in these matters. The art magazine *ADA Architecture. Design. Art* (1986-1990) is of particular interest for gauging the contemporary art scene, as its purpose was to provide articles on current issues in South Africa (Sorrel 1986-1990). It had a quick turn-around time, which the more academic journals like *de Arte* or the *South African Journal of Cultural and Art History* (later titled the *South African Journal of Art and Architectural History*), with peer-review requirements, did not have. A notable feature of *ADA* is that it had little coverage of works by black artists and specifically black female artists. White artists, however, featured prominently especially when their works were associated with political content such as Manfred Zylla (Barker 1986), William Kentridge (Crump 1987; Jephson & Vergunst 1987), Angela Ferreira (*ADA Reporter*, 1986), Gavin Younge (Dubow 1987) and Eugene Hön (Munnik 1987).

The only black male artists who featured were Tito Zungu (Guede 1986; Younge 1986a), Jackson Hlungwane (Younge 1986b), Nelson Mukhuba (Younge 1987), John Muafangejo (Wagner 1987), Dr Phutuma Seoka (Martin 1987a), Sipho Sepamla (*ADA Reporter* 1987a) and Tyrone Appollis (Maurice 1989).

Two years after *ADA*'s first publication, the works of black female artists featured. In issue 5, 1988, the art of Bongiwe Dhlomo (Jephson 1988) and a group of Shangaan craftswomen (Sloman 1988), who were not identified by name, were published. Dhlomo was one of the few black female artists in South Africa who played a significant role in raising awareness of fragmented township life and experiences of women in her linocut prints. Bonnie Ntshalintshali appeared in two publications (Brown 1988; Brown 1989b), however, Ntshalintshali was not referenced as an artist in her own right but always as a student of Feé Halstead. Issue 7 of *ADA* published an article on Helen Sebidi (*ADA Reporter* 1990; Arnold 1990) that included segments of Marion Arnold's essay on Sebidi published in the Standard Bank 1989 catalogue (Crump 1989). The neglect in recognising both the Shangaan craftswomen and Ntshalintshali removed their dignity as artists.

Black artists appeared in articles on art centres for black artists such as the Nyanga Art Centre (*ADA Reporter* 1987b) the Katlehong Art Centre, Community Arts Workshop, Community Arts Project and FUBA (Hagg 1989) that recognised the lack of funding for facilitators and students at these centres. In contrast, Martin's article questioned the value of the extension to the Johannesburg Art Gallery which reminded one of both the state and public's neglect in upgrading facilities and the lack of support for black artists (Martin 1987). In Steven Sack's article, *The neglected tradition. Black South African art (1930-1988)*, he recounted the value of this exhibition to South African art history (Sack 1989).

In as much as the *ADA* magazine was insightful, only three black women artists were mentioned by name and the Shangaan women were referenced as bulk crafters. None of the black male artists were discussed in terms of the political content in their artworks.

Apart from art magazines such as *ADA*, South African art history is also determined by publications in local academic journals and conference proceedings that reflect specific thoughts and ideas – and conflicts – within the academy. As an instrument for gauging the temperature of academic thinking, copies of the following were consulted: *de Arte* (journal of

the department of art history and fine arts, UNISA, 1985-1989), various conference proceedings from 1985 to 1999, in particular those of the South African Association of Art Historians (SAAAH), which was founded in 1984,²³ and the SAAAH's accredited journal, initially published in collaboration with the South African Society for Cultural History as *South African Journal of Cultural and Art History/Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskift vir Kultuur-en Kunsgeskiedenis* (1987-1989), and then independently as *South African Journal of Art and Architectural History/Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Kuns-en Argitektuur-geskiedenis* (1990-1991).²⁴

Of interest is that the SAAAH, aligned with English-language universities, was founded in 1984 in order to establish its own journal, to be accredited by the Department of National Education (DNE) and financed by government.²⁵ Also in 1984 another group of art historians aligned with Afrikaans-language universities and wishing to found their own accredited journal, established the Kunshistoriese Werkgemeenskap van Suid Afrika/Art Historical Work Group of South Africa (AHWGSA) in opposition to SAAAH.

The rationale for an accredited journal was fostered on the principle that academics must publish in order to retain academic currency and the UN's call for an academic boycott resulted in a situation of desperation for white academics. In order to retain academic rigour, a South African accredited journal was needed. The DNE approved SAAAH's journal, the first accredited South African art history journal, but this had to be published in alliance with the conservative South African Society for Cultural History, not the aim, but expedient (Rankin in Ramgolam 2004:13). The need for the AHWGSA was that "Afrikaans speaking

²³ For a history of SAAAH see Ramgolam (2004) and Becker (2017).

²⁴ "Issues for June 1987-Oct. 1989 have a distinctive title: Cultural and art history, Kultuur- en kunsgeskiedenis. Publications were in Afrikaans and English. These publications were produced in collaboration with the South African Society for Cultural History and the South African Association of Art Historians and later split into: South African Journal of Cultural History (1990) and South African Journal of Art and Architectural History" (Trove n.d.). After the withdrawal of government funds at the end of 1991, the *South African Journal of Art and Architectural History* struggled to survive financially and eventually ceased publishing after volume 6 of 1996.

²⁵ Accredited journals were published by the Bureau for Scientific Publications at the Foundation for Education, Science and Technology, under the auspices of the Council for Scientific Publications, with financial assistance from the Department of National Education (information printed in the journals).

historians, unlike their English counterparts, who could publish internationally, arose out of an absence of a South African journal of art history” (Rankin in Ramgolam 2004:32). The AHWGSA was based at RAU, which “had close ties to the ruling National Party and funds from the infamous Broederbond (Afrikaner Brotherhood)” (Becker 2017:102). The AHWGSA therefore had independent funds to start a separate journal, the *Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Kunsgeskiedenis/South African Journal of Art History* “that was accredited in 1984 and published their first volume in 1985” (Becker 2017:103). The establishment of AHWGSA indicated the close relationship that some academics had with apartheid government structures that influenced separatist thinking and practices. A possible merging of the two art journals was met with distrust between the editorial committees and resulted in ‘academic slandering’. “The point of contention between the two coalitions was the fear that the dominant coalition would impose their preferred language and ideology” (Ramgolam 2004:70). In Becker’s (2017) research, language played an integral role in establishing dominance within academic platforms, not only in the initiation of separate journals for Afrikaans or English-speaking academics.

Of importance are that both Ramgolam (2004) and Becker (2017) reference the problematic practice by Historically Advantaged Universities (HAU) of using either the language of English or Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Ramgolam claimed that “inherent in the mediums of instructions were political agendas associated with language” (Ramgolam 2004:17). Language confers a position of dominance on those who speak that specific language and the use of either English or Afrikaans during apartheid was a symbol of colonialist oppression for the majority black population in South Africa (Ramgolam 2004:18). The use of a specific language remains a sensitive matter in South Africa; reference can be made to the 16 June 1976 Soweto uprising that was instigated by the refusal to accept Afrikaans as a language of instruction or communication by black South African students.

With regard to SAAAH’s journal *South African Journal of Art and Architectural History*, articles on art making by black South Africans were scarce. The first article that dealt with South African art by black artists was Anitra Nettleton’s *Myth of the transitional: Black art and white markets in South Africa* (Nettleton 1988). Nettleton acknowledged that art made by black artists was different from western art but it should not be denied its place in the art world because of this. She disagreed with the use of the term ‘transitional’ in describing these

artworks as the term implied that the art making was in process, from one state to another, thereby denying the works of their rightful identity (Nettleton 1988:302). Her paper explored the making of Ndebele dolls and sculptures from Venda. Amongst the many artists discussed, Nettleton refers to Noria Mabasa and Helen Sebidi. She claimed that “there has been a tendency to maintain an artistic ‘apartheid’ or cultural hierarchy by separating these so-called ‘transitional arts’ from ‘high art’ produced by other South Africans” (Nettleton 1988:306). In her second article in the journal, ‘Dream Machines’: South African headrests, Nettleton discussed the idea that these objects were a “mediation between the world of the living and the world of the spirits and ancestors” (Nettleton 1990:147).

Ramgolam highlights the power associated with the HAU decision-makers of SAAAH, who selected papers for presentation at its conferences, the journal articles that would be published and the venues for its conferences (Ramgolam 2004:71). This indicated specific intentions on the part of the decision-makers to influence what constituted intellectual currents of South African art history during the 1980s. In consideration of membership of SAAAH, Becker claimed that South African “institutions of art history: universities, galleries, museums and the market” were predominantly white (Becker 2017:101). This was the case with SAAAH, despite being open to all races (Ramgolam 2004:69). The lack of black membership, according to SAAAH and Marilyn Martin (Martin 1999), was attributed to a lack of black art historians²⁶ in South Africa. This justification was contested by Ramgolam, attributing the minimal number of black academics in the country to the apartheid state, which refused to introduce art into the school curriculum for black learners (Ramgolam 2004:69).

In Becker’s (2017:94) response to a western Eurocentric art history disseminated through SAAAH, she quotes both Mario Pissarra and Anitra Nettleton’s explanation that many of these white academics were trained within a European tradition and imported this training into university curricula. This is possibly the reason why “the rather scant writing on South African art occurred exclusively by white writers and when it did occur, the art of black South Africans was often excluded, scarce or labelled as ‘other’” (Becker 2017:94). Becker references Lize van Robbroeck as one of the few white academics who attempted to locate art by black South Africans within the discourses presented at SAAAH.

²⁶ Also refer to Steven Sack’s article, Some thoughts on black education (Sack 1984).

Becker traced the history of presenters at the SAAAH conferences from 1985 to 1988; they were all white until 1989, when one black presenter participated. At the 1989 conference, ten papers were presented of which three were on South African art. Becker highlights Nettleton's presentation on San art in which "Nettleton draws attention to the way in which historical African art has been studied within the framework of Western art history[...] neither allows for the possibility that another methodology (that may, for example, be African in origin) exists" (Becker 2017:96).

The first SAAAH conference (1985) *Untitled*, hosted at the University of KwaZulu Natal, (previously known as the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg) had ten presenters (Ramgolam 2004:28). The second SAAAH conference (1986) titled, *Art and Social Change*, hosted at the University of the Witwatersrand, had twenty presentations. "A number of relevant concerns became apparent in the papers from the 1986 conference, including the obvious recognition by white South African art historians that the art of black South Africans (historical and contemporary) had been ignored and that this situation was in dire need of change" (Becker 2017:114).

The third SAAAH conference (1987) titled, *Re-Writing the Art and Architectural History of Southern Africa*, hosted at Stellenbosch University, had 19 papers presented. The conference dealt with "the need to transform South African discourse" (Becker 2017:115). The SAAAH (1988) conference titled, *Art and Copyright*, hosted at the University of Pretoria did not publish its proceedings. The SAAAH (1989) conference titled, *Diversity and Interaction*, hosted at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal persevered with presentations on western art, however it considered diversity as a broad brushstroke discussion "in areas such as architectural styles, primitivism, 'transitional art'" (Becker 2017:115).

At the SAAAH (1990) conference titled, *Current Perspectives in South African Art & Architecture*, there were more presentations on South Africa's changing landscape. Becker draws attention to Elizabeth Delmont and Michelle Jersky's paper, The South African Association of Art Historians: Between two stools? The authors felt that "the Association [had] not gone far enough in addressing either the needs of the changing discipline of art history or the needs of the community within which this discipline functions" (Delmont & Jersky 1990: 1-3; Becker 2017:117-118).

In 1990, the Transvaal Branch of the South African Association of Art Historians (SAAAH) held its first conference, *Women and the Visual Arts*. Amongst the papers delivered that dealt with matters influencing the South African white art experience, there were two papers of significance to this study, Lize van Robbroeck's *Women and Community Arts* and Penny Siopis's *Some Thoughts on Women Representing Women*. Van Robbroeck's paper provided insight into a pattern of exclusion of black female artists from curated exhibitions. She listed:

The 1986 'Historical Perspective of Black Art in South Africa' at the Alliance Française featured 57 artists, only 3 of them women, while 'Black Artists at the Sandton Sun' included 9 male artists and 1 woman artist. The 1987 display at the JHB gallery's collection of works by black South African artists had an all-male representation. At the 1987 Tatham retrospective of art from Rorke's Drift, for instance, the Fine Arts section included only one woman amongst 18 men, while the weaving was entirely represented by women (van Robbroeck 1990:24).

Siopis's paper considered the positive and negative responses to the *Women's Mail Art* exhibition (1990) that travelled to various national and international destinations. The exhibition included artworks by both trained and untrained artists, a strategy questioned by some members of the public who were prejudicial against artists who were academically untrained. Siopis referenced comments from Niall Kramer (member of the public) that exposed his prejudice, "because people are relatives of political prisoners that their art is worthwhile? [...] How relevant or enlightening would it be to read the poetry of illiterates?" (Siopis 1990:49).

In responding to the SAAAH conferences, Ramgolam (2004:27) holds that,

[A]ll the titles of the conferences imply a challenging of a monolithic approach to the writing of art history. They also reveal a relationship with the transformation process, for example, *Art and Social Change*, *Diversity and Interaction*, *The Mechanisms of Power and Negotiating Identities*. This relationship also extends to the changes that have transpired within the discipline itself, for example, *Re- Writing the Art and Architectural History of South Africa* and *Mechanisms of Power*. However, each conference

proceeding presents an array of papers adopting pluralistic approaches to the discipline and the social context (Ramgolam 2004: 28).

Further, Ramgolam indicates that the choice in language played a hierarchical and significant role in this Association. “Prior to 1995 only the covers of the proceedings were bilingual. After the 1994 elections, the proceedings were published in English and only two papers were presented in Afrikaans in 1987 and in 1991 respectively” (Ramgolam 2004:28).

Similar to the review of ADA, SAAAH and its publications, *de Arte* publications from 1982 to 1990 were reviewed. As stated above, this journal was issued by the department of art history and fine arts at UNISA. The initial issues had articles in both English and Afrikaans, but from 1984 to 1990 only English was used.

It was interesting to note that the September 1983 (29) *de Arte* publication was themed *Women in Art*. In his editorial, Ivor Powell dedicated this publication to women in the arts as they had played a significant role in South Africa. “Now what is interesting about the position of White women in the arts in South Africa is not their relative absence, but on the contrary, their ubiquitous presence” (Powell 1983:2). The sentiment of specifically white women’s contribution to art in South Africa was echoed by Skawran (1994), discussed later in this chapter. Steven Sack’s article, Some thoughts on black education, in the September 1984 (31) edition emphasised the lack of art in black schools and raised the question, should its teaching be different from White art education? Sack provided statistics of “22 Black, BA (FA) graduates over the past decade, can be compared to approximately 730 White graduates (1970-1979)” (Sack 1984:28). These support Ramgolam’s (2004:69) response to SAAAH and Martin (1999) as to the reason for the lack of black art historians. In Sack’s argument of a different approach to teaching art made by black artists, he referenced Mslaba Dumile, Julian Motau and Ezrom Legae and highlighted their different approach to art making, neglecting examples of black female artists.

The April 1985 (32) issue of *de Arte* featured two articles, which proclaimed art as a political statement: an article on David Goldblatt (photographer) and a review of the *Tributaries* exhibition (1985) sponsored by BMW, which subsequently travelled to Germany. Linda Lassman’s article, Transcripts from a conversation with David Goldblatt, January 1985, captured his working as a ‘political activist’. “By taking photographs of what was happening

here and publishing them, I would publicise some of the awful things that were happening” (Lassman 1985:38). Goldblatt’s statement is the first published ‘white’ acknowledgment of apartheid atrocities in all three journals reviewed (*ADA*, SAAAH’s journal and *de Arte*). Powell’s article, *Killing the father: some thoughts on South African art and the BMW show* (1985), curated by Ricky Burnett, admitted to white South African artists’ desire to benchmark against international standards so as to retain the ‘authenticity’ of their art making. Powell considered the works of the untrained artists, ‘naïve’ as they did not adhere to standards or historical place (Powell 1985a:47). A benchmark of standards in creating artworks was used by white western-tradition artists to profess creative rigour.

In April 1987 *de Arte* published Carolyn Morrison’s article, *The craft of rural black women* (with specific reference to the Tiakeni and Twananani), that provided a historical context of apartheid restrictions experienced by black women. These restrictions impacted on family life and created economic hardship (Morrison 1987:12). This article is the first published recital of apartheid’s restrictive laws that directly affected black women in the rural communities. Morrison’s article highlighted the association of rural black women with craft-making, the reason for the establishment of The Intermediate Technology and Small Industries Development Unit (ITSIDU) in the 1980s. This Unit promoted entrepreneurial projects, namely Twananani and Tiakeni Textiles, Sasekisa Sisal producers and Tlhari Bead workers in rural communities (Morrison 1987:14). *de Arte* (35) also published a report by Wendy Ross on the Ceramic Education Conference (1986), at the University of KwaZulu Natal (previously known as the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg). This article provided insight into ceramic education at secondary and tertiary level, white institutions and referenced collections in museums and galleries (Ross 1987:55). The papers delivered at this conference made no reference to ceramic work by black women, or to the lack of ceramic (or art) education in black schools.

The September 1987 (36) issue of *de Arte* was dedicated to the *Distance Education in South Africa: preparing for the 21st Century* conference, held at UNISA, Pretoria. The papers delivered emphasised course content at tertiary institutions, with reference to UNISA. Of importance to this study was Arnold’s paper, *Forget and forgive her sex: integrating women artists with art history*, requesting that consideration be given to the art history of both black and white female artists in South Africa (Arnold 1987b). Lize van Robbroeck’s paper, *Art*

history in Africa: a look at course content, reflected on western art history taught at UNISA, at the expense of women's art and art made in 'third world' countries that could add to new content in the art curriculum. She elucidated that African art was taught within the restrictive perceptions of Europe, categorised as 'primitive'; thus reinforcing a European cultural dominance (Van Robbroeck 1987:37).

Clare Graaff's article, *The Nyanga Art Centre*, provided a historical background to an art centre that was of great importance to black artists in the Western Cape, during apartheid. Graaff presented the artworks of brothers Sidney and Patrick Holo from the Centre (Graaff 1988). Koos van der Watt's article (1990), *Ruben Xulu: Die St Lucia-Beeldhou-Werke*, captured the wooden sculptures carved by Xulu that were influenced by stories from the Bible (van der Watt 1990).

Patricia Davison (1990), *Art as artefact: another way of seeing*, stressed the need to rethink white perception of art making by black artists. She stated that "fine art is itself an artefact of western thought[...]the categories that inform our ways of seeing are culturally and historically constructed [and have] the potential to stimulate creative rethinking and, therefore, to make possible another way of seeing" (Davison 1990:38). Davison's concern was that the distinction between fine art and craft was perpetuated at institutional levels (museums, collection policies and exhibitions), which created a distinctive hierarchy, "We had history, including the history of art; *they* had timeless tradition" (Davison 1990:39). Davison realised that European art was based on a timeline that determined its history, whereas art from Africa did not respond to time for definition.

It should be mentioned, however, that despite relative exclusion from white academic debate, the position of black women and their aspirations were well documented in critiques of the 1980s in magazines such as *Speak*, *Staffrider* and *Agenda: A Journal about Women and Gender*, most of which included poetry, art making by women artists and black women's experiences under apartheid restrictions. Such journals were the exception and not the norm and do not appear to have been considered in academic art history discourse.

1.3. PUBLICATIONS AFTER THE 1980s

Spring is rebellious. Arguments about cultural freedom by Albie Sachs and respondents (1990), edited by Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press, published a controversial paper delivered by Albie Sachs at an ANC in-house seminar in Lusaka (1989), *Preparing ourselves for freedom*. In his paper, Sachs rebuked the art making of only 'protest' art from South Africa rather than a broader spectrum of image-making that should have included beauty and love as thematic interpretations, themes that appeared absent from the artists imagination. There were twenty-two published respondents that could easily serve as a conference proceeding publication. The responses were from individuals, black and white, English and Afrikaans activists as well as organisational responses, none of these respondents, however, agreed with Sachs's perspective. Individual responses were published in national newspapers, presented at talks and seminars in Cape Town and KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng (previously known as Transvaal). Amongst the organisational responses were Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) Natal and Transvaal regions, Culture and the working life project,²⁷ Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU),²⁸ and the Transvaal Interim Cultural Desk (de Kok and Press, 1990). What is important to note in this publication is the vehement defence of 'culture as a weapon of the struggle' by anti-apartheid activists. This slogan exemplified to activists freedom of expression and at the same time, a defiance against an apartheid ideology.

The 1990s brought with it a new euphoria, the end of apartheid. However, change is not instant, especially in the writing-up of the arts. Lucy Alexander and Evelyn Cohen's publication, *150 South African paintings. Past and present* listed 150 South African painters in a documentary fashion of which only 13 black artists were listed. Of the 13 artists, nine were male and four female: Anna Mashinini, Gladys Mgudlandlu, Esther Mahlangu and Helen Sebidi (Alexander & Cohen 1990)..

²⁷ Nise Malange, Pax Magwaza, Mathabo Moloi, Alfred Qabula, Lanly Simpson and others responded on behalf of the Culture and the Working Life Project. Nise Malange's further contribution to South African art history is discussed in Chapter 4.

²⁸ COSATU was represented by Mi S'dumo Hlatshwayo, Director: Cultural Desk.

Erica Clark stated that exhibitions and publications of the late 1970s to early 1990s reflected the lack of works by black artists in public art collections and the almost complete lack of documentation on 'struggle art' (Clark 1992). Pre-democracy academic debates and conferences about the status of women and the relevance of art made by black artists suggest the viewpoint that such art making was scarce. A serious challenge to the recognition of art made by black artists was that their visual representations were not in accordance with the canons of western art trends, the reason that they fell short of being appreciated alongside the accepted realm of white art making (Clark 1992).

Elizabeth Rankin's *Images in metal. Post-war sculptures and assemblages in South Africa*²⁹ (1994) was partly based on the collection at the University of the Witwatersrand. I realise immediately that collections during apartheid had their own shortcomings. However, Rankin highlighted the fact that the medium of metal marginalised black artists and women as this medium required specific skills and facilities that were not available to these artists (Rankin 1994:6). Similar to her publication, *Images in wood* (1989), the strategy adopted by Rankin in writing this book was to focus on academically trained artists. The selected black artists were written under the chapter, 'Art on the margins' and discussed the European intervention in their works. Rankin promoted Noria Mabasa as a rare black female sculptor who worked predominately with wood and clay as mediums. For the first and only time, Mabasa was known to have worked in metal during the 1980s, trained by Etienne de Kok (Rankin 1994:147).

Skawran's (1994) essay, South African women and the fine arts, in Margaret Lessing(ed.), *South African women today*, presents a view of specifically white women's contribution to South African art history, "White women artists, art historians, critics, administrators and writers on art have indeed played a significant role in the history of South African art" (Skawran 1994:275). She provides a summary of black artists and community centres without any significant contribution to this history. Skawran comments, "It is noteworthy that, as yet, none of these institutions has promoted or exhibited any significant number of black female

²⁹ Both publications, *Images in metal. Post-war sculptures and assemblages in South Africa* and *Images in wood* were catalogues of exhibitions at JAG.

artists” (Skawran 1994:278). Skawran’s lack of empathy for black artists is noted as community centres were set up to address the lack of an art offering in black education. Her question should rather have been why have art historians had not documented any significant black female artists as many black female artists had exhibited at these community centres during apartheid. For example, Helen Sebidi (Cheales 1986), Bongiwe Dhlomo, Tshide Sefako, Nirupa Singh, Sophie Peters amongst others and Sarah Mhlangu, Noria Mabasa (Coulson, 1986) and Maria Mabhena were participants at the *Tributaries* exhibition (1985) and *Culture in Another South Africa* (1987).³⁰

In presenting women’s contributions to the arts, Skawran (1994:280) cites various exhibitions in which women, predominantly white, participated: *Tributaries. A view of contemporary South African art* (1985), *The Cape Town Triennial* (1985), *Women Artists in South Africa* (1985), *The Standard Bank Young Artist Award* (1989) and *The Cape Town Triennial* (1991). She referred to these artists as “a new generation of white artists[...]in a uniquely personal manner, tried to come to terms with the changing realities of South African society” (Skawran 1994: 279-279).

In Skawran’s essay, both Gladys Mgundlandu and Zainab Reddy are recognised as black female artists of the 1960s, Mgundlandu as winner of the *Arts South Africa Today* Award in 1963 at the Durban Art Gallery and Zainab Reddy, for her solo exhibition in 1965 (Skawran, 1994:277). Bongiwe Dhlomo and Matilda Gasela are discussed only as administrators at the Alexandra Arts Centre and the Rorkes Drift Art and Craft Centre respectively and Dhlomo is also credited as “heading the Thupelo Workshop” (Skawran, 1994:276). Noria Mabasa, Sara Mhlangu and Maria Mabhena, Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Dinah Molefe, Elizabeth Mbatha, Esther Nxumalo and Ailena Ndebele are referenced as practising craft persons (Skawran 1994:278).

In contrast to these black artists who remained peripheral in her essay, Skawran listed more than 90 white practising women artists from the early twentieth century until 1990 and 49 white females who occupied positions as heads of departments, publishers and editors of

³⁰ Refer to Chapter 3

books and journals, gallery directors, administrators and chairpersons of art associations and councils as having contributed to South African art history (Skawran, 1994:275-283).

Jo Thorpe's *It's never too early* (1994) was a publication dedicated to artefacts, functional and commercial as well as artworks made by black men and women in KwaZulu Natal (Thorpe 1994). This book was about the African Art Centre, Durban that was the only commercial outlet for black artists in KwaZulu Natal.

Insight into acquisitions displayed in the exhibition *Contemporary South African art 1985-1995 from the South African National Gallery permanent collection* (SANG 1996 – 1997), curated by Emma Bedford, was given in an interview held in 1995 with Neville Dubow, chairperson of the acquisitions committee of SANG, from 1982 to 1995. He reported that in the 1970s, the acquisitions committee strengthened the collection based on their collective belief of what was of cultural value and interest. Dubow (1995) indicts SANG in his statement:

I think one has to make the distinction between deliberately not buying black art in the 1980s, as opposed to not really knowing or caring about the fact that black art was being made... I think that what was being done by so-called black artists in the late 1970's and in the early part of the 80s might not even have been (even self-perceived) as being the kind of stuff that was meant to end up in art galleries (Dubow 1995:9).

In his response to a question regarding the purchase of works supporting the slogan 'Art as a weapon of the struggle', Dubow identified such struggle works as those made by white artists, such as Paul Grendon's *Ons vir jou Suid Afrika* and Marlene Dumas's works that were on loan (Dubow 1995:4). Furthermore, Dubow stated that the Victorian collection at SANG was its strength: "They certainly do show where we come from and I think that it is entirely futile for us to try to wish away our colonial past and to pretend that it did not happen" (Dubow 1995:7).

Dubow's interview was a declaration of the state of the art history that was documented at SANG during the 1970s and 1980s. It implied a very poor association with the art content of black artists, who were generally relegated to the status of crafts-people or unprofessional

‘township’ artists. SANG further retained its association with Europe, which played an important part in its art collection and exhibitions. The interview with Dubow testifies to the white cultural heritage underpinning South African art at the time, perpetuated by curators and art historians.

In a catalogue for *Common and uncommon ground – South African art to Atlanta* (1996), an exhibition curated by Steven Sack at the City Gallery East in Atlanta, Georgia, Sack addressed a controversial issue raised by Albie Sachs in his paper *Preparing ourselves for freedom*³¹ at an African National Congress (ANC) in-house seminar (Sachs, 1989). Sachs had lamented the lack of beauty in the protest works made during the apartheid struggle. Sack responded by stating that the notion of beauty was difficult to address as it was not part of the cultural workers’ palette. He claimed that artists used their art as a form of protest and resistance against the apartheid government and within this context, there was no beauty.

During the years of apartheid the most difficult concept to address was that of beauty. The conditions of life under the forced laws of segregation meant that the individual and the personal was conditioned by the daily brutality that infiltrated into so much of human interaction. No conversation, no intellectual or emotional exchange, brush to canvas, chisel to stone, pen to paper was exempt from this ugliness (Sack 1996:n.p.).

The publication, *Art in South Africa the future present* (1996), co-authored by Sue Williamson and Ashraf Jamal, considered art making in South Africa post-apartheid and realised that artists were still engaged with social issues. Of the artists published, there were no black female artists; however, it is important to note the appearance of a black author (Jamal) within a white domain (Williamson & Jamal 1996).

Land and lives. A story of early black artists (1997) by Elza Miles, accompanying the exhibition at the JAG, provided a history of black artists both trained and untrained. The artists selected were born between 1800 and 1930, an era of art making by black artists that was incomprehensible to a white community (Miles 1997:7). Amongst the published women

³¹ Refer to *Spring is rebellious. Arguments about cultural freedom by Albie Sachs and respondents*, (de Kok & Press, 1990).

artists were Gladys Mgudlandlu, Valerie Desmore, Rose Buthelezi, Rita Ngcobo, Anna Mashinini, Francina Ndibande and Dorothy Zihlangu. Of interest to this study was the exhibition of works by Valerie Desmore and Gladys Mgudlandlu at the Argus Gallery, Cape Town in 1942. At this exhibition, Mgudlandlu was accorded the honour of being the first non-white artist by the media, whilst Valerie Desmore was overlooked. Desmore born on 29 June 1925 as a 'Coloured' African and was possibly overlooked because her surname sounded 'white'. Miles claimed that, "Her paintings of people were strong expressions of the human dilemma...the hazards of racial discrimination" (Miles 1997:89).

Elza Miles's much later publication, *Nomfanekiso who paints at night. The art of Gladys Mgudlandlu* provided a profile of a black female artist, Gladys Mgudlandlu who described herself as "dreamer-imaginist" and was prolific in her art making during the 1970s (Miles 2002). Her works were often exhibited at the Association of Arts Gallery and Rodin Gallery, Cape Town. Although Mgudlandlu held five solo shows and her works sold well to a white audience, her death in 1979 went unnoticed (Miles 2002:13). However, greater than this was the impact of apartheid laws³² on black South Africans as described by Dawn Haggie, a patron of the arts, who visited Mgudlandlu's exhibition in Johannesburg in 1964. In response to Haggie's offer of assistance, Mgudlandlu asked:

Will you take me somewhere where I can go to the lavatory? I'm not allowed to use the one in this building. Haggie accompanied Mgudlandlu to Park Station, where there were separate toilets for blacks and whites (Miles 2002:28).

In as much as a few black artists were recognised as artists in publications on South African art history, their experiences (as related by Haggie) provided a glimpse of what black people endured under apartheid and it cannot be ignored.

³² The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, No.49 of 1953 entrenched the inhumane and shameful attitude of apartheid lawmakers towards black South Africans. This Act provided that there should be separate amenities such as toilets, parks, beaches, public facilities, including buildings, and transport for specific race groups so as to limit contact between the different races (Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1953:328).

Texts such as *Images of Defiance South African Resistance Posters of the 1980s* (Posterbook Collective, 2004) reflect on a specific type of art making during apartheid: communication posters. Most of the posters were produced by collectives without emphasis on individual art makers. This publication accompanied the first exhibition in South Africa of previously banned posters, opened in 1991 by Mandela. It constituted a selection from the collection of the South African History Archive (SAHA), today based at Constitution Hill, Johannesburg.

Marion Arnold and Brenda Schmahmann's (2005), *Between union and liberation. Women artists in South Africa 1910-1994*, was a response to male-dominated art history in South Africa. Unfortunately, but characteristically, the authors were all white. In Brenda Danilowitz's essay on Constance Stuart Larrabee, Larrabee explored modernist aesthetics that were captured in her photographs of Ndzundza Ndebele. Most telling about Larrabee was her interview with the *Pretoria News*, quoted by Danilowitz, that described black people, "Natives are the most photogenic people" and she further 'claimed' them as "beautiful objects" (Danilowitz 2005:71). The use of the term, 'native' by Larrabee acknowledges apartheid terminology that 'othered' black people in South Africa. Larrabee further alienated herself from black people by her reference to them as objects, a term that dehumanises the Ndebele people reducing them to commodities for aesthetic pleasure only.

In the same publication, black women as crafters were discussed by Brenda Schmahmann, Nessa Leibhammer and Wilma Cruise as embroiderers, basket weavers and ceramists respectively. Brenda Schmahmann's essay recounts four embroidery projects, The Xihoko project (1982), Chivirika (1986), Kaross Workers (1988) and Mapula initiated in 1991 that were set up for black "women to negotiate the effects of impoverishment and disadvantage in apartheid South Africa" (Schmahmann 2005:152). This statement glossed over the oppressive nature of apartheid on these women and celebrated rather, the embroidery projects. Nessa Leibhammer's essay on basketry attempted a discussion on gender specific roles within rural black communities in KwaZulu Natal that were affected by the migration of black men to urban areas. In her discussion, Leibhammer acknowledged that the 'traditional' baskets had become commercialised and that weaver's names were not always acknowledged on these baskets (Leibhammer 2005). Wilma Cruise's essay deliberated the western influence on traditional African clay vessels made by Nesta Nala and Bonnie Ntshalinshali's clay sculptures (Cruise 2005). Jacqueline Nolte (Nolte 2005) related an in-depth essay on Noria

Mabasa and Helen Sebidi as cultural activists. The essay on Mabasa and Sebidi is the only essay that provides historic and political contexts of two black female artists living in South Africa during apartheid.

Marion Arnold's essay revered Gladys Mgudlandlu as "the first black South African woman easel painter" (Arnold 2005:17).³³ Arnold, however in her essay, makes perplexing statements, "research into art made by black women is rendered difficult by a paucity of black women historians and art historians within South Africa. There is no history of commitment to western-driven 'fine art' in the black community, since apartheid education offered no art training" (Arnold 2005:19). This implies with authority that there was a hierarchy and bias towards formally trained artists and that art making that was not western in its ethos remained outside the confines of being considered 'legitimate' art, not for documenting and publication.

Predicaments of Culture in South Africa by Ashraf Jamal (2005) spoke to matters concerning culture during and post-apartheid. Jamal interrogates Sachs' *Preparing ourselves for freedom* (1989) that "challenged the received beliefs and objectives of the ANC movement" (Jamal 2005:1). Jamal celebrates Sachs forward thinking in pre-empting ideas on 'freedom' and Sachs questioning of "what does it mean to be a South African?" (Jamal 2005:2). In answering the latter, Jamal believed that it would 'free' cultural activists from a blinkered cultural position.

Lize van Robbroeck (2006) posited in her thesis, *Writing white on black: modernism as discursive paradigm in South African writing on modern black art*, that the dominant conversations in cultural discourses during apartheid South Africa specifically the manner in which white South Africans wrote were perpetuated from a western perspective on black modern art between the period 1930 to 1990. Van Robbroeck interrogated the use of the term 'primitive' used to describe cultural products from Africa and its entrenchment in modernist discourses. Her research findings included the need for in-depth research on black artists to undo their facelessness (Van Robbroeck 2006).

³³ Refer to *Land and lives. A story of early black artists* (1997) by Elza Miles.

By 2006, according to Hayden Proud in *Revisions. Expanding the Narrative of South African Art*, a combination of academic, curatorial and political processes shifted the understanding of black artists and their artworks from the periphery to the centre. This meant according black artists equal status to South African white artists such as Irma Stern and Maggie Laubser (Proud 2006:18). Of interest was the inclusion of Mzuzile Mduduzi Xakaza (black male) and Gabi Ngcobo (black female) as contributors to this publication. Amongst the black artists referenced, only two were female, Gladys Mgudlandlu and Noria Mabasa.

Red on Black-The Story of the South African Poster Movement (Seidman 2007) was published in acknowledgement of artists and activists who contributed to protest image-making via posters during the apartheid era. Posters voiced the repressive nature of apartheid in a direct visual manner so that the content could be read and understood by the general public immediately. The poster images of defiance and resistance to apartheid were simple, bold black figures that sought to evoke an emotional response in the viewer, demanding a better life. These posters were banned until 1990.

A specific discussion on the use of art as a cultural weapon during the apartheid struggle was researched in *Art + Revolution: The Life and Death of Thami Mnyele South African artist* (Wylie 2008). Wylie paid tribute to the artist and his contribution of drawings to the anti-apartheid struggle.

Further documentation on the notion of ‘culture as a weapon’ of the anti-apartheid struggle is published in *Thami Mnyele + Medu Art Ensemble Retrospective* (Kellner & González 2009), which had specific reference to the role of the Medu Art Ensemble during the liberation struggle and the Culture and Resistance Symposium held in 1982 in Gaborone. This symposium provided a platform to adopt the slogan ‘culture as a weapon of the struggle’ towards liberation in South Africa. The fact that texts like Wylie (2008) and Kellner & González (2009) were published fourteen years post-apartheid, indicates the scarcity of information relating to the cultural strategy during the liberation struggle.

John Pepper’s publication *Art and the End of Apartheid* (2009), examined the art making in South Africa during the 1980s that he considered ground-breaking. In Pepper’s text, he interviewed 83 individuals (South African and non-South African, black and white, male and female) who assisted him in determining his study. Of the 83 persons interviewed, 65 were

male and 18 females of which only 4 were black female participants in his study, Lungile Bam, Bongiwe Dhlomo, Esther Mahlangu and Helen Sebidi (Peffer 2009:xii). In as much as this text assists with the reconstruction of South African art history, there remains a dearth of published contributions on and by black female artists.

The centenary of the Johannesburg Art Gallery was commemorated with a publication, *One Hundred Years of Collecting*, edited by Jillian Carman (2010). The essays in this publication provided insight into the Gallery as an exhibition space and its one hundred year old collection. The African artefacts in this collection recited unrecorded artists, however, apart from the extensive European collection; there were artworks by black female artists within the modern and contemporary collection. The black female artists that featured in this collection were Gladys Mguglandlu, Bonnie Ntshalinshali, Helen Sebidi, Reshma Chhiba, Berni Searle, Billie Zangewa and Tracy Rose. An observation was the inclusion of a black female, Bongiwe Dhlomo and a black male, Khwezi Gule as authors of separate essays in this publication.

Same Mdluli's (2010) dissertation, *Paintings and Drawings of Fatima Meer in the Context of the Struggle Narrative at Constitutional Hill*, focussed on the art making of Fatima Meer, an acknowledged South African black female political activist. Mdluli analysed twenty paintings and drawings created by Meer while incarcerated in the 1970s at the Women's Jail, Johannesburg. In the analysis, Mdluli stated that apart from documenting an experience of prison life, the works challenged the historical documentation of the liberation struggle as a masculine space. Mdluli suggested that the works be seen as tools against apartheid thus creating a more diverse narrative.

South Africa: the Art of a Nation (2016), edited by John Griblin and Chris Spring which accompanied an exhibition at the British Museum, provided a fleeting view of South African art. The publication reaffirms the political significance of Esther Mahlangu's participation in the international exhibition of BMW Art Cars with her Ndebele designed *BMW Art Car 525i Number 12* and Helen Sebidi was acknowledged as an artist that critiqued life experiences in the African townships during apartheid.

Same Mdluli's intention in her doctoral research, *From the State of Emergency to the Dawn of Democracy: Revisiting Exhibitions of South African Art Held in South Africa (1984-1997)*,

was to bring ‘rural’ South African artists into centre focus in order to construct a case for ‘African art’. She considered these artists within the spheres of South African and African art history and the non-categorisation of art made by black South African artists. Mdluli looked at the inclusion of rural artists into major national exhibitions in South Africa during the 1980s and their subsequent disappearance from mainstream art practices. *Tributaries, A View of Contemporary South African Art* (1985) and *The Neglected Tradition. Towards a new history of South African art (1930-1988)* are discussed in detail, providing a historical background to these exhibitions as well as to selected ‘rural’ black male artists. She conceded that these two exhibitions shaped both South African art and its history during the 1980s (Mdluli 2015).

An area of interest is a recent international contribution to the notion of ‘culture as a weapon’, David Toulson’s (2016) doctoral study submitted at Warwick University, *Culture is a Weapon: Popular Music, Protest and Opposition to Apartheid in Britain*. Toulson’s research considered the relationship between politics and music. This study focused on the cultural boycott against South Africa, the impact of music and musicians and the history of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in Britain and their effectiveness on apartheid in South Africa. Toulson referred to the use of music as a tool to “educate, agitate and mobilise its audience” against apartheid (Toulson 2016:282). This study is relevant to the current research as it broadened the idea of the use of culture as a weapon within spheres of struggle. The research provides expansive discussion on the cultural boycott against South Africa as experienced from a British perspective.

Qanita Lilla in her dissertation, *Setting Art Apart: Inside and Outside the South African National Gallery (1895-2016)*, traced the ‘flawed’ history of the South African National Gallery (2018). She interpreted its historical documents relating to SANG from a visual culture perspective and from the standpoint of a South African woman of colour. This methodology, she asserted, allowed for contemporary debates on how South African institutions proclaimed themselves during apartheid. Lilla considered SANG’s independence as an institution, as a space of cultural production and the enactment of race and power where “whiteness came to be normalised in South Africa and how blackness was institutionalised by museums like the South African National Gallery as Other” (Lilla 2018:6). This study considered three specific research aspects: exclusion based on gender and race, the

importance of personal experience and the framing of the black subject in the discourse of white art history (Lilla 2018).

The literature study (publications during and post 1980s) serves as a methodology towards navigating the tapestry of South African art and artists during the 1980s that determined a particular viewpoint. The reflection on newspaper art critiques provided evidence of prejudice against black artists that was constructed by separatist thinking. The establishment of SAAAH (1984) at the height of the apartheid struggle, provided insight into academic 'wars' fought over language dominance and conference papers that shed little light on art made by black artists, least of all black women. The review of academic journals drew attention to the predominantly white, non-South African content that was 'predetermined' by academics from HAUs. The publications post 1980s highlighted a sluggish response to the establishment of a redefined South African art history and that of black women artists. What was enlightening was that more black authors in recent years were writing about the need for a black art history to be inserted into the already documented South African art history.

CHAPTER 2

THE ROLE OF WOMEN, CULTURE AND RESISTANCE

Part of this study's title, 'culture as a weapon of the struggle', presents the idea that culture was an integral part of the struggle against apartheid, affirming a new value system separate from the dominant, white minority's understanding of 'culture'. During apartheid, culture was predetermined by Eurocentric trends in art making and responses to museum and gallery collections. This was supported by state funded academic journals and public support for the purchase of art in collections that bolstered the white cultural position. Within the 'struggle' context, culture played an active role in society. It had specific purposes and was adopted as a viable strategy to defy the apartheid government. Black women's roles as cultural activists are viewed within this framework and will be expanded to include women's experiences under apartheid.

[V]ictory in the struggle against apartheid is the absolute condition for any change in the social status of women as a whole, their participation is an expression not only of their desire to rid all South Africa of the curse of apartheid, but also of their deep concern for their status as women (Bernstein 1978:61-2).

The term 'culture' was further clarified by Mi Hlatshwayo (Cultural Officer: COSATU Cultural Desk) in Hein Willemse's paper, *Fighting for new definitions*:

Working-class culture was synonymous with people's culture or revolutionary culture in South African politics. The culture comes from the people, controlled by the people with the aim of enhancing the struggle for liberation. It's a kind of culture which seeks to promote the interests of the majority, which does not seek to enhance the individual, and is not primarily commercial (Willemse n.d.:43).

This encouraged Europe to engage and recognise apartheid's atrocities forming organisations and arranging discussion forums where facilitators worked with cultural workers to define

‘culture’. These discussions took place largely at conferences either outside South Africa, or in the country but ‘beneath the radar’.³⁴ The discussions provided insight into what people assumed culture and cultural expression to be. Keyan Tomaselli in *Rethinking Culture*, defined culture as the manner in which we make sense of the world in collective practices and behaviour. This process informed the way meaning is created and accepted. Culture is not static; it is subject to change and it is adaptive to circumstances. Within this context, culture is capable of being mobilised (Tomaselli 1989).

There were three important strategies inherent in ‘people’s culture’, first, it allowed any person to be creative (song, dance, poetry, fine art), secondly, the idea of being creative together created comradeship (factory floors were platforms for creative activities), appreciation and an identity within communities. Thirdly, culture is about communication amongst people and this communication was about people’s realities and experiences during apartheid expanding on the idea that culture remained a continually evolving but shared process.

2.1. WOMEN

2.1.1. Black women’s experiences during apartheid

Apartheid was enforced by restrictive laws that allowed police to arrest, humiliate and treat black South Africans, especially black women, with disdain. This brought to the fore racial and gender oppression that encouraged the need to transform such practices. The discussion that follows emphasises the situation, which engulfed black women specifically, to explain the context or ‘situation’, which black women felt was necessary to change.

Race, class and gender are inextricably linked in South Africa (White 2002). CRT as a framework for this study enabled a discussion on black women that highlighted how oppression through race, class and gender influenced black female resistance in South Africa.

In order to grasp these complexities of oppression in South Africa, one accepts that apartheid created a separate social structure that clearly marked the territories of white and black lives.

³⁴ Refer to Chapter 3.

This was understood as “we share identities with some and are distinguished from others – [...] making [...] boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Maré 2001:77). This separation is explained further by Sarah White, “one must accept that race is a socio-historical construct, which generates identity and manufactures social structure” (White 2002:413). She cites Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, who posited that racial structures abound in the power vested in “the central motif of self/other, subject/object” (White 2002:413). Race also impacted class divisions within social structures, creating power relationships between groups of people. An apartheid ideology determined all aspects of the state, economic development, cultural affirmations and social lifestyle. Embedded within this construct, was a Eurocentric attitude that allowed white South Africans to create ‘satellite’ European lifestyles and tastes in South Africa.

Gender inequality is another construction based on a power/domination relationship, though it is often overshadowed by the race/class debate (Manicom 1992). In the South African context, gender inequality and poverty (though linked) represented distinct forms of disadvantage for black women, exacerbated under apartheid. Apartheid institutionalised new forms of inequality, which included restriction of movement specifically for black women as opposed to the freedom enjoyed by all white citizens. Apartheid legislation reduced black African women to the status of minors when gender and racial identity were linked. Black women had no financial independence, little access to education and legal assistance and were forced to depend on male relatives for decisions on land and assets.

The apartheid government enforced a system of migrant labour, compelling black men to a world of labour predominantly on the mines, which had a devastating effect on black lives. Separation from their partners entrenched various forms of poverty for women at home in rural areas who, though forced to assume the role of heads of households with dependants were generally unable to access money or assistance. Broken homes and poverty among rural and township inhabitants were daily experiences and black communities were often uprooted and relocated to outlying areas with few amenities and infrastructure (Melville 2004:xi). These relocations were often done while husbands were away from home, which meant that women had to bear the responsibility for their families alone. The relocations of communities of black families to alien places was a common practice, with minimum warning to the families.

With the migration of most men to mining towns, women had little choice but to seek employment away from home, often in the cities, as domestic workers, further fragmenting black families that were already fragile. This situation made women more vulnerable to poverty and exploitation by employers (Baden, Hasim & Meintjies 1998; Seidman 1999; Kuumba 2002). The fact that women were employed mostly as domestic workers, in factories, as farm labourers and within the informal sector, rendered them vulnerable to state restrictions that guaranteed black women low salaries and the risk of unemployment. Women earned lower salaries due to gender prejudices and often lost their jobs when pregnant. Social services were not extended to them, so their vulnerability was pronounced. This vulnerability created bands of specific low-level employment for black women and a limited space within which they could function, resulting in extreme frustration and isolation that encouraged a militant attitude towards apartheid as it, in turn, directly impacted their lives.

2.1.2. Black women as political activists

The frustrations experienced by black women made them realise that their lives were intertwined with the struggle against apartheid. Desperation and being in the company of other women facing the same situation, gave women the courage to involve themselves in the liberation struggle (Gordimer 1984:110-112; Detainees' Parents Support Committee 1988:7; Russel 1989:340; Wells 1993:1- 2). They participated in consumer boycotts and became vocal and militant around issues such as unfair rent increases and lack of service delivery in the townships. Women joined cultural groups, political branch structures and other social networks, which shaped their experiences within a context of social dislocation (Baden *et al* 1998).

In 1918, Charlotte Maxeke founded the Bantu Women's League (BWL), the forerunner of the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) (Bernstein 1978). This league played a significant role in organising women's solidarity groups and international conferences. Various women's organisations, from different anti-apartheid affiliations, worked simultaneously on matters affecting women. The Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), the Worker's Organisation for Social Action (WOSA), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW), the United Women's Congress (UWCO), the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW) and (ANCWL), among many

others, organised around self-help, health, bursary scheme projects, socialism, women's issues and cultural issues (Patel 1987; Patel 1988).

The adoption of the Women's Charter in 1954 by the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) marked the foundation of FEDSAW and placed the liberation of women in perspective, both apart from and within the national liberation of the country. In the Preamble, the Charter states:

We, the women of South Africa, wives and mothers, working women and housewives hereby declare our aim of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against us as women.

Under the heading 'A Single Society', it goes on to state:

We do not form a society separate from men. There is only one society, and it is made up of both women and men. As women we share the problems and anxieties of our men, and join hands with them to remove social evils and obstacles to progress (Suttner & Cronin 1986:161).

Restrictive measures were challenged by women from as early as 1913, when 600 women marched to the mayor of Bloemfontein, refusing to carry their pass-books. In the same year, eight hundred women marched in Winburg demanding the eradication of the 'pass' books, resulting in many women being arrested. The pivotal role that these women played in the struggle while their husbands were on the mines was not often recognised in the larger liberation picture (Bernstein 1978; Walker 1982).

The first major protest against passes for African women took place in October 1955: 2 000 (mainly black African) women converged on the capital city of Pretoria. Momentum grew. On 9 August 1956, 20 000 women marched to Pretoria to protest against the 'pass' book law, which affected black female South Africans. This action showed the spirit and militancy of black women of South Africa. Their participation in the anti-pass-law campaigns led to many being arrested and jailed (Bernstein 1978:46). The protest march also raised awareness of the apartheid system imposed on black South African citizens and the 'minor' status accorded to black women.

The 1960 Sharpeville protest against the pass laws ended in sixty-nine protestors killed and more than a hundred and eight wounded. The massacre of sixty-nine black people and the ban on anti-apartheid organisations by the state had a widespread effect: protest action spread to the surrounding townships of Boipatong and Bophelong and further afield. The army and the police intervened in an attempt to prevent any further anti-apartheid or protest activity, but ultimately this proved futile. The effects of the 16 June 1976 Soweto uprising spread throughout the country and by the 1980s, the army and police operated in most townships in South Africa.

South Africa in the 1980s was characterised by a new wave of mass strikes and protests, which became trademarks of open defiance; together with the strengthening of trade unions and community-led organisations as workplace platforms, they served the anti-apartheid agenda well (Fester 1997; Seidman 1999:429; Kuumba 2002).

Very often, the contributions of women to a struggle history becomes faded memories – not only to themselves as participants, but in published history as well, which generally excludes women and ascribes struggle to a repeated masculine identity. Pat Horn, in her article, *Marxism and feminism: Uneasy bedfellows?*, quoted Baleka Kgotsisile's response to the status of black women in South Africa, "we must consciously create mechanisms to ensure women's emancipation" (Kgotsisile in Horn 1991:19). Black women realised that they lived in a patriarchal society and the onus was upon themselves to raise the issue of women's position in society within and at liberation platforms. This could only be done if women were participants in the liberation movement (Patel 1987; Baden *et al* 1998:8).

Although resistant behaviour from black women and anti-apartheid groups was met with violence from the apartheid government, the determination shown by women's groups and anti-apartheid organisations allowed women to organise within and alongside male-dominated trade union movements, creating a strong leadership of women. These organisations were further supported by the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1984, an organisation affiliated to the African National Congress (ANC). The plight of black women became more visible as an item on the agendas of anti-apartheid debates and women's role within the liberation (Bernstein 1978:46; International Defence and Aid Fund for South Africa 1981:87; Obery 1985; Tsikang and Lefakane 1988:1).

Resistance to apartheid restrictions by women activists encouraged black women to gravitate towards anti-apartheid political and union structures in order to address agendas determined by national priorities (Hassim 1991:69). Keorapetse Kgositsile stated that the non-governmental organisations and unions sensitised cultural workers to the intensity of the liberation struggle and encouraged the linking of cultural workers in exile with those in the country to create collectives that identified themselves with the struggle (Kgositsile 1986:104). The cultural workers referred to by Kgositsile were black female domestic workers, female farm labourers and women in factories. This stance created a female political activity as opposed to the very masculine position associated with the national liberation struggle that often dominated the identity of the women's struggle. Although black women's struggles for equality became part of the national liberation struggle; women remained vigilant, as they knew that the national liberation would not necessarily guarantee their emancipation from patriarchy (Kuumba 2002:505).

The ANC, as one of the lead-players of anti-apartheid activity, was encouraged to motivate revolutionary strength in South Africa. For this reason, each year of the 1980s was themed, with a strategic directive to be observed. The year 1980 was declared the Year of the Charter, 1981 the Year of the Youth, 1982 the Year of Unity in Action, 1983 the Year of United Action; and 1984, the Year of the Woman (Woods 1984). In dedicating 1984 as the Year of the Woman, Oliver Tambo (ANC President) stated:

It will be our special task this year to organise and mobilise our womenfolk into a powerful, united and active force for revolutionary change. We wish to stress the need, at the present hour, for the emergence on the political scene of a women's movement that is politically and organisationally united. Our struggle needs and demands this potentially mighty force. Our struggle will be less than powerful and our national and social emancipation can never be complete if we continue to treat the women of our country as dependent minors and objects of one form of exploitation or another. Certainly, no longer should it be that a woman's place is in the kitchen. In our beleaguered country, the women's place is in the battlefield of struggle (Tambo 1984a:5).

A year later, in Tambo's National Executive Council address, *Women fight in the front ranks* he reiterated the place of women in the struggle:

We call on our women to build on these impressive achievements. We urge other sectors of our people to continue to give their support and concrete assistance to our heroic women, mothers and sisters, so that they can play their rightful role as co-fighters and co-liberators of our motherland (Tambo 1985:3).

Tambo's two addresses supported the argument that women became an integral part of the struggle and that their participation during the 1980s remains blurred to a large extent, as it was subsumed into the broader political struggle.

Oliver Tambo's acknowledgement of black women's participation in the liberation struggle (Tambo 1984b) did not diminish the fact that black women remained vulnerable, a marginalised group, and experienced great difficulties as heads of households and single mothers (Walker 1982:1; Sherman, Ikon & Jackson 1986:38; Flood, Hoosain & Primo 1997:36). Often in the documenting of the history of women, women are still marginalised. Hassim referenced the extension of the pass laws of the 1950s as an example of the most visible of the political struggles experienced by black women. The repeal of the pass laws would, however, be considered a victory of the broader story of national liberation rather than a victory associated with the history of black women. These misplaced accounts of women's experiences and victories within the liberation movement are often not included in the principal history and thus remain invisible to a larger audience (Hassim 1991:69).

2.1.3. Black women as cultural workers

The discussion in this chapter has provided a background to some of the experiences and political activism of black women during apartheid. It was within these turbulent situations that black women realised the need to fight back against their oppression. One of the strategies that black women adopted against apartheid was culture as a 'weapon', a concept developed when political groupings and unions joined forces. Unions provided factory floors as platforms for cultural meetings and events that allowed women the opportunity to participate in activities. The platforms created by COSATU's cultural desk and Locals (local

cultural groupings) within communities helped women realise their creative potential and grow their self-confidence as participants in the struggle (Von Kotze 1988:61).

Barbara Masekela as Head of the ANC's Department of Arts and Culture, based in Lusaka, indicated the effectiveness of black women in managerial positions associated with the arts.³⁵ The anti-apartheid conferences hosted from Gaborone (1982) until Amsterdam (1990), acclaimed women as artists taking charge of their art making and discussed ways in which more women could be cultural activists. An example was the 1987 conference in Amsterdam, 'Culture in Another South Africa' (CASA)³⁶ that acknowledged women in the arts:

Women are rare in the production of graphic arts, but Bongiwe Dhlomo demonstrated that nothing is impossible for women. We must eulogise the heroines of our struggle; so many are unknown to us, because no-one has written about them. We must bring the experiences of women in the struggle within reach. There is a need for the dissemination of relevant information on female artists (CASA Paper 23 1987).

The role of an artist during apartheid was very specific. According to Wally Serote, the black artist's burden was two-fold: first, as an individual who toiled for survival in a country with little opportunity and secondly as an artist who had to shape the lives of people in order for them to attain liberation (Serote 1980). There is also a third burden – that of oppression within the arts, which was earmarked as a priority for redress at anti-apartheid conferences and festivals.

Ka Mathe posited that black South African women artists were almost invisible, even though their works were abundant as artefacts and artworks. He credited women with being involved in art making throughout their lives, producing clay vessels, beadwork, murals and works in similar media. He referred to Gladys Mgudlandlu as a pioneer black female artist and to her contemporaries who were neglected as recognised artists: Agnes Majola, Angela Khuzwayo, Letti Mtshweni, Linda Chonco, Mary Tshabalala and Faith Manaka. Ka Mathe referenced

³⁵ Refer to Chapter 3, Culture in another South Africa (1987) and Malibongwe Conference (1990).

³⁶ Refer to Chapter 3.

younger black women artists who were recognised: Bongiwe Dhlomo, Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Helen Sebidi and Miriam Ngubane (Ka Mathe 2000:6).

Black women artists were not many in number, but they were vital in their visual contributions to the struggle. Van Robbroeck (1990) in her paper, *Women and community arts*,³⁷ drew attention to the lack of black female artists represented at exhibitions within South Africa. The perception created was that black women produced only crafts and this perception was supported by exhibitions of weaving, ceramics and baskets made with grass, as artefacts of women crafters. Exhibitions of this nature seldom acknowledged the women artists by name, and works were a collective representation of women from specific rural areas.

The paucity of literature available on women artists in the 1980s, clearly an area either marginalised or neglected must be addressed. As Arnold (1996:26) stated, “In the visual arts as well as the literary world, the creativity of women has been acknowledged on terms defined by men. Sexual attitudes and assumptions have defined both ‘art’ and ‘art history’”.

The neglect of documented art making by black women during the 1980s was summarised by Hayden Proud as follows:

There are, of course, deeper issues around the reclaiming and preservation of the lost and marginalised narratives in our art history. This revolves around the question of who acts – or can justifiably act – as a revisionist, the narrator, the curator or the facilitator in this process (Proud 2006:18).

2.2. CULTURE

2.2.1. The importance of culture

The importance of art and culture to the struggle was stated by Barbara Masekela in an interview with James Cason and Michael Fleshman in 1984. Masekela (Head of the ANC's Department of Arts and Culture based in Lusaka) was asked the question: “What kind of

³⁷ Refer to Chapter 1.

culture, as an ANC person, would you wish to have in an independent, liberated South Africa?” She responded:

It is rather difficult to define or describe it, because culture is something that evolves. And it evolves out of that part that make us a people, out of the political, economic and sociological conditions that prevail at different stages of struggle and even struggle after victory. In the ANC we are trying to mirror what we consider the best that has been produced in the world, to depict and project the pitch and tenor of our people, our history. Our struggle represents the raw material from which we will fashion our art (Masekela 1984:38).

The late 1970s to 1980s witnessed an increased momentum for change, increasingly militant resistance from anti-apartheid operatives and the proliferation of the arts denouncing apartheid. The inextricable link between culture and the apartheid struggle, is encapsulated in Kelwyn Sole’s statement that “one cannot separate culture from politics: culture is not a separate force, but one which is constantly present in people’s consciousness during political struggles” (Sole 1985:54).

2.2.2. Defining ‘people’s culture’

Culture is learnt behaviour, which is accepted by a community of people and remains in a state of developing, as it is a process (Rabkin, 1986). During apartheid, the cultural expressions of white and black South Africans ran parallel to each other. White South African artists predominantly echoed the trends, techniques and materials of western art making, retaining a ‘civilised’ cultural link with Europe. Art made by black South Africans that protested against apartheid, as well those who did not make protest art for example Vha Venda sculptures, were not acknowledged as art, as it did not conform to western trends, but was recognised and referred to as people’s culture by anti-apartheid organisations. The content of people’s culture influenced the feelings and imagination of people without their being conscious of it (Maree, Kaplan & Budlender 1985; Mzala 1986).

Black people traditionally made ‘art’ as part of their community tradition. This instinctive creativity was redirected from their national cultural expression to forms more suited to a new cultural responsibility with the content and context of the images remaining central at all

times (Jantjes 1986). With the need for liberation, black South African culture had transformed and developed into a new culture of common roots and experiences, which created a common awareness among people. This awareness was a constructed culture for people in townships, who developed their own slang, hair styles, music, dance, art and poetry and which was referred to as a people's culture (Seidman 1979).

The cultural production emanating from townships and anti-apartheid activists during the 1980s had defiance attached to it, as it reflected the violent, unstable environment of black people's daily experiences. This type of deviant cultural expression was adopted as people's culture. The communication value and impact of the emergent people's culture did not go unnoticed, either by the apartheid government or by the masses of people fighting within the liberation struggle. The images that determined people's culture evinced the inhumanity experienced by black African people, including women and children, at the hands of an apartheid government. Such experiences contributed to and constructed the militant role of women in the struggle (Streek 1996).

2.3. RESISTANCE

2.3.1. Culture and resistance

People's culture was categorised in published critiques in the 1980s as township, protest and resistance art, with agreement that this type of art making was a defiant response to apartheid. However, its contribution to South African art history and the liberation struggle as a strategic imperative has not been adequately researched and documented. Serote's article, *On the role of culture in the African revolution* (1988), provided a backdrop to the reality of living in a township:

Like all the townships in South Africa, Alexandra was not created for free people with a progressive culture in a developed world. Alexandra was created to herd labourers. This was a very unnatural condition for human beings, and it was as a result of this that we developed the aspiration to be free (Serote 1988:34).

In Wa Thiong'o's speech at the fourth *Steve Biko Lecture* in Cape Town in 2003, he referred to the implanting of oppressor memory in African people. He was of the opinion that

“writers, artists, musicians, intellectuals and workers in ideas are the keepers of memory of a community” (Wa Thiong’o 2003). Similar in thought, Serote was of the opinion that art served as the voice of the people. This voice recorded periods of culture and civilisation in time: past, present and a projected future (Serote 1999:14). These statements reiterate the difference in cultural productions during the 1980s, that of a Eurocentric practice that supported individualism and that of an African practice that was supported by communal understandings. In Nolte and Pissarra’s proposed idea on people’s culture, they claimed that this type of art making was separated from an elitist platform and from the notion of the artist as individual. People’s culture was described as complex, as the images were dependent on the circumstances, which influenced their creation, confirming a visual vocabulary of transpiring events (Nolte & Pissarra 1990:34).

Images reflecting the struggle were not mimetic representations, they were to a large extent narrative and expressive and most importantly, invaluable as a documentation of township experience.

Realism in South African art is necessarily reflected in the works that identify the oppression of the black people and the exploitation of the working class. Revolutionary art is born of the struggle of the people for self-emancipation, to achieve a new society... This means that the artist’s first duty is to know and understand the people (Mzala 1986:77).

Keorapetse Kgotsisile, in his presentation, Art and resistance against Apartheid, Gaborone conference (1982), stated:

[The] message is of the greatest importance[...]the form is of inferior significance[...]The political message is the most important aspect[..]The form can contribute in that sense to the communication with public or audience[...] which develops out of the experiences of the individual (Kgotsisile 1982a).

Kgotsisile explained that the content of art made by cultural workers was the acceptance and understanding of such content, which declared protest art to be referred to as people’s culture (Kgotsisile 1982a; Kgotsisile 1982b).

People's culture allowed for the understanding that culture was how we make sense of the world. It was a collective venture and led to collective action (Tomaselli, 1989). The creation of a people's culture not only framed the circumstances of cultural production; its focus had a visual and psychological impact on its audience. The Mayibuye Cultural Ensemble (MCE) based in the UK highlighted the awareness of culture as a struggle weapon against apartheid in South Africa. This was the basis for the ANC's establishment of its Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) in 1980 and its in-house journal *Rixaka* in 1985. *Rixaka* was a platform for artists to share their creative images and thoughts relating to people's culture. The interest in culture as a weapon of the struggle was also the result of Tambo's 1985 address on the role of cultural workers (Tambo 1985) that resulted in various workshops, festivals, seminars and public pronouncements, culminating in the 'Culture in another South Africa' conference (1987). These processes gave support to the Amandla Cultural Ensemble (ACE), an ANC in-house unit that promoted culture and its importance prior to the DAC being established (Gilbert 2007).

Colin Richards echoed Manaka's belief that art remained in a constant state of flux, and Younge wrote that the use of materials by cultural workers and their attitudes in art making were not new, however, they were new to the art market (Richards 1993). In David Koloane's view, cultural workers produced a form of social realism that was an attempt to make sense of their circumstances, this sensibility permeated their use of materials and the content of their work (Koloane 1999:20). This approach to art making defied western ideals as cultural workers vested their interpretation of culture within a framework of liberation. Art making during a liberation struggle is the result of a shared relationship between culture and the struggle, where culture is influenced by the struggle. Such culture is influenced by and reflects the changing behaviour of society, thus defining the role of 'people's culture' (Cabral 1986). According to Jan Pieterse, both Amilcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon were of the opinion that culture was a necessity in any liberation struggle against an oppressive state. It was a process of creating national markers that inform identity. Culture, being a symbol of identity, could be used towards nation-building and liberation (Pieterse 1995).

The association one makes with the term 'culture' is often the registering of a heritage of a specific people or country, which served as a form of identity that was not available to all South Africans. The notion of culture is not simply an organisation of artistic skills registered

as an item of heritage. It is a communally-accepted asset, which conforms to the idea of a nation, ensuring a collective representation of that nation. According to Du Plessis, “If we are to consider art as a valid phenomenon of human behaviour, art must intrinsically be related to all society and we must recognise art as one of the major communication systems of social interaction, indelibly part of a society in transition” (Du Plessis 1989:39). Du Plessis pronounced on the idea that cultural activity pertinent to black communities existed in South Africa, activities that contributed to their cultural values and remained a living entity. This is supported by Mzala’s statement that:

Before the advent of colonisation in South Africa... the African people enjoyed poetry, music, pottery, sculpture, etc. No sharp line could be drawn between artists and the rest of the community. There was always a participatory relationship between the people and the artists, who also knew that they existed in order to serve the people (Mzala 1986:73-74).

Culture within any social construct becomes the basis of a people’s sense of identity. Within the apartheid context, the cultural constructs of erected monuments satisfied and identified with the white community’s domination. However, Raymond Ngcobo was of the opinion that monuments erected around the country as cultural features by white South Africans, were symbols of oppression to the black population. Such a situation created a world of conflict within itself. He believed that art should “remind us of where we come from, [we] understand and are inspired by our past” (Ngcobo 1999:154).

The idea of culture referencing identity is inherently a source of power within any community and must be seen as a social relationship between the members of that community and the artist. During apartheid, state culture was central to the lives of whites, as this enriched their colonial birthright as opposed to the masses of black rural and urban communities that remained largely untouched by what the state determined to be culture (Blackey 1974; Pieterse 1995).

The launch of the UDF in 1983 initiated more organisations promoting cultural resistance strategies, in a growing momentum towards liberation. Cultural events had greater political significance within communities, due to the states of emergency imposed by the South African government to curb political unrest. Within these parameters, the cultural boycott

played a significant role towards promoting the culture of a democratic movement (Bauer & Powell 1987).

Culture, was not only about its use as a weapon of the struggle, but also its value as a path towards a new, people-centred, inclusive culture. Most art produced in the liberation struggle were critiques of the state, which impacted on a society that shared the artist's experiences (Badsha & Light, n.d.). The ANC placed enormous emphasis on matters relating to culture; at workshops, discussions were on the availability of facilities that could be used to enhance cultural significance within communities. The levels of skills among cultural workers, skills transferral and acceptance of art making by black artists and cultural workers were also highlighted and impacted on the call by the international community for a cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa (Guidelines for topics at regional cultural workshops 1988).

Pallo Jordan, a member of the ANC's National Executive Committee, shed light on the role of the cultural worker in an interview with *Rixaka* in Lusaka. He postulated that the role of artists and cultural workers was to convey to people the experience of the struggle, as well as people's objectives and hopes. It was incumbent upon cultural workers and artists, to use their skill for the purposes of the liberation of South Africa (Jordan 1987:33-34).

In contrast to Jordan, Albie Sachs (a member of the ANC in exile), in an in-house paper titled *Preparing ourselves for freedom*³⁸ presented in 1989 in Lusaka and in 1990 in South Africa, provoked divisive debates when he criticised the types of international exhibitions of South African art made by cultural workers. "As someone who has for many years been arguing precisely that art should be seen as an instrument of struggle[...]suddenly this affirmation seems not only banal and devoid of real content, but actually wrong and potentially harmful" (Sachs, 1989; De Kok & Press 1990:20). This statement was of serious concern to anti-apartheid organisations, individuals and cultural workers as it negated a core principle of the ANC and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) in South Africa.

In Sachs' address at the Ecumenical Hall in Durban in 1990, he reiterated his position on the use of art as a cultural weapon, amid heated debate from members of various arts

³⁸ Refer to Chapter 1.

organisations. On another occasion, in Cape Town, he recited his address from Stockholm in 1989, in which he denounced his solidarity with poor images of South African protest art. This address was delivered to an audience that included Barbara Masekela, Helen Sebidi, Bongiwe Dhlomo and Bill Ainslie, among others. Amid this embarrassment, Sachs also stated, “culture in the broad sense is our vision of ourselves and of our musicians and painters and film-makers” (De Kok & Press, 1990:145-6). This statement links with Wa Thiong’o’s (1988) notion stated earlier, that specific persons are the keepers of memory of a community. However, Sachs’ suggestion – that images of love and sensuality would be more appropriate than the continued depiction of violence experienced by cultural workers – was viewed as lacking any sensitivity towards anti-apartheid protestors living in South Africa, given the brutal acts experienced by black people.

The importance of cultural work in the context of the struggle was that it “created a better sense of unity amongst workers which when shared, enriches us; it educates people about our struggle and puts across a true picture of things – our picture” (Culture and the Worker’s Struggle 1985:71-72). Mzala, in his discussion of Culture, the Artist and Liberation, stated that the art created by cultural workers could not be appreciated within the confines of specific Eurocentric theories as this ignored the source from which this art developed, and these specific artworks reflected a particular period in South African history. Such art must be assessed in its own social context (Mzala 1986).

In as much as culture shaped identity, the Culture and Resistance conference in Gaborone in 1982, the Cultural Voice of Resistance conference in Amsterdam in 1982 and the Culture in another South Africa (CASA) conference in Amsterdam in 1987, bear testimony to a partnership between culture and liberation (Rabkin 1986). Referring to cultural workers rather than artists acknowledges that persons making resistance art were not trained or academically skilled in making fine art. Cultural workers were drawn from all walks of life: part-time employed, domestic workers, factory workers, farm employees and the unemployed. Due to the low level of literacy among these workers, the arts played a cathartic role in allowing people to vent their anger at their situation (Malange 1989; Malange 2010). Malange’s views are substantiated by comments made by The Naledi writer unit (Medu Art Ensemble) in a debate. ‘Working class culture and popular struggle’ – initiated by Kelwyn Sole, in the *South African Labour Bulletin* (Sole 1985) – in which she reiterated the sentiment

that “our aim as cultural workers is to build the culture of resistance of the people” (Maree, *et al.* 1985:22).

Mi S'Dumo Hlatshwayo (COSATU), together with Nise Malange and Alfred Qabula, established the Durban Workers Cultural Local and The Trade Union and Cultural Centre in Clairwood, Durban. All three artists were well-known in the unions and black township communities as poets, writers and poetry performers. Furthermore, Hlatshwayo popularised the arts of the cultural workers, established democratic cultural units and encouraged cultural debates within structures at grass-roots level (Malange 2010). In 1987, COSATU adopted culture as one of its main programmes. These factors are important in the wider context of the struggle, as the CASA conference (1987) resolved to establish cultural units and train people in various skills in the arts, looking at and relating to the broader issues of their communities in moving the liberation struggle forward.

The use of culture as a weapon of the struggle is not new to the continent of Africa. According to Jurg n Schrempp, the creation of images was a legitimate way of expressing political resistance, communicating with the masses and denouncing the oppressive behaviour of governments (Schrempp 1988:8). The daily experiences of people affected by apartheid become the language understood by groups or communities in their cultural productions that created a sense of identity. This persistent interaction with apartheid atrocities strengthened their right to equality, a demand that embodied the liberation ideals of all anti-apartheid movements. It was for this reason that culture remained a key principle of national liberation (Gala 1985).

The use of culture as a strategy for the liberation struggle appealed to the masses as it remained a celebration of who they were as people with song, dance, music and art making. Frantz Fanon believed that culture remained the initial expression of a nation and that culture exerted itself over a society at all levels (Fanon 2001:393). Amilcar Cabral was of the opinion that any liberation movement should have strong understandings of factors that propelled their struggle forward and that cultural resistance was a pillar of support for such liberation. Cabral also believed that culture was flexible and at the same time a unifying process (Cabral, 1972). The national liberation in South Africa was viewed as a driving force for humanity and those involved in such a struggle understood that the oppressive apartheid state would,

without fail, violently confront any antagonism that challenged its control. The use of culture as a strategy, although confrontational towards the state, embodied the spirit of the people as a continuous momentum towards change.

Culture in the liberation context materialised as a common culture, which bound people together as a single nation (Rabkin 1986:51). The momentum created by culture as a liberation strategy was supported by the incumbent of the highest office in the ANC, Oliver Tambo. In his presidential address of 1985, he encapsulated the notion of culture and liberation:

It is worth noting here that on this occasion forces close to our movement inside the country used the weapon of culture to popularise the ideas of the 'Year of the Spear'. This drew our attention to the importance of this medium of communication and to its value in the formation of our people as new men and women (Tambo 1985).

As stated above the ANC believed that dedicating every year to a theme focussed the liberation into a specific context. 1984 had been dedicated to the 'Year of the Woman' and 1985 was declared the 'Year of the Spear'. The latter meant that 1985 was a year to fight back against apartheid with greater force and that culture as a 'weapon' was not spared.

As a national strategy of the liberation struggle, art from South Africa included moments of the liberation struggle, state terrorism, funerals, pain, sorrow, political commitment and sacrifice. The arts from this time reflected the heightened political situation, as well as participation in and a commitment to the struggle for freedom (Motsamayi 1989). This commitment was acknowledged by Mike Terry in his claim that the greatest contribution made by artists to the struggle had been their creativity. He further referred to the Culture in Another South Africa conference (CASA) 1987 resolution, with reference to the cultural boycott, which resolved that international cultural workers and academics were not to be allowed to enter South Africa unless approved by the national liberation movement, unless their intentions were to support the national democratic struggle towards liberation (Terry 1988:17-18).

The cultural conferences held outside the borders of South Africa during the 1980s cemented the idea that culture and politics cannot be separated. The resolution taken at CASA³⁹ in Amsterdam in 1987 affirmed this:

Cultural activity and the arts are partisan and cannot be separated from politics. Consequently, a great responsibility devolves on artists and cultural workers to consciously align themselves with the forces of democratic and national liberation in the life and death struggle to free our country from racist bondage (Ernst 2002:15).

Both Terry (1988) and Ernst (2002) emphasised the CASA resolutions that called for the promulgation of liberation via cultural practice, thus determining a central focus for an already growing momentum among anti-apartheid organisations. However, national liberation required more than exhibitions, gatherings and cultural workers' reflections on apartheid's inhumanity. In addition to these activities, robust discussions and debates on culture's central role in South Africa's liberation from apartheid was evidenced at the CASA conference attended by three hundred delegates (14-19 December 1987). This event was made possible by the ANC's Department of Art and Culture, the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) in South Africa and the *Anti-Apartheids Beweging, Nederland* (AABN). The aim of the conference was to debate the issue of culture in the current and future South Africa and construct a cultural framework for a democratic South Africa (Campschreur & Divendal 1989).

CASA served as a platform for the exchange of ideas and best practices in respect of cultural experiences and a meeting opportunity for delegates from South Africa and those in exile. There were 15 resolutions tabled, which unpacked the notion and role of culture in apartheid South Africa. CASA further elucidated the aim of the cultural boycott, to isolate the country to hasten its pace towards democracy. Of particular interest to this study is Resolution 6, Women and Culture, which stated that women were "integral to and have a vital role to play in our struggle" and resolution 14, Visual Arts, that confirmed the immense value of the visual arts in the liberation struggle (Campschreur & Divendal 1989:214).

³⁹ Refer to Chapter 3.

Nadine Gordimer (South Africa), Connie Braam and Fons Geerling's AABN statements at the CASA conference reiterated the belief that art remained central to liberation (Braam & Geerling 1989:180; Gordimer 1989:12). The idea that visual expressions during liberation become journals of that society echo Wally Serote's awareness that history is of the people and that their cultural expressions are enactments of that history (Serote 1989:17). Wa Thiong'o, in his paper *Education for a National Culture*, posited that "a people's culture is the carrier of the values evolved by that community ... by values I mean their conception of what's right and wrong (moral values), what's good and bad (ethical values) and what's ugly and beautiful (aesthetic values)" (Wa Thiong'o n.d.).

In developing the idea of culture's responsibility and legitimacy within the parameters of national liberation, Aimé Césaire claimed that:

[All] culture is specific. Specific in that it is the work of a single particular will, choosing between different possibilities[...]. a political and social system that suppresses the self-determination of a people thereby kills the creative power of that people[...] wherever colonialism has existed, whole peoples have been deprived of their culture, deprived of all culture (Césaire 2001:430).

In South Africa, the enormous power wielded by 'liberatory' cultural expressions exposed the dissatisfaction black people had with apartheid rule. This encouraged the South African government to control cultural venues and to censor protest art critical of the apartheid government's position (Sack 1989:75). The reason for such extreme measures by the state was that their clampdowns on black residents as well as the state's ideological position were challenged by art making as visual criticism, exposing the harsh realities of black township experiences. In as much as the ANC used culture as a strategy towards liberation, the state's censorship of South African protest culture as well as the limitation in educational schooling opportunities for black South Africans became instruments of oppression used by the South African government (Braam & Geerling 1989).

The strict control of people's protest against apartheid by the South African state did not deter the ANC from retaining this cultural strategy as a priority item on its agenda. From documentation housed at the *Nederlands Instituut voor Zuidelijk Afrika* (NiZA) archives in Amsterdam, Holland and the archive at the University of the Western Cape, it appeared that

the ANC – although based in Lusaka – had instituted plans for a democratic culture in South Africa, after the CASA conference in 1987. These plans were specific to the protection and preservation of a people’s culture, referred to as “a process of recovering, re-appropriating and re-writing our history, which has been interpreted by white settlers, nationalists and bourgeois academics” (Preservation and Protection of our Cultural Heritage 1988). Cultural and artistic freedom was a national priority and the ANC retained the use of culture as a weapon of the struggle.

Further to this, the ANC tasked individuals to research specific areas governing social, cultural and economic environments, which could be implemented in a post-apartheid South Africa. Amongst the various research activities that were prioritised were: land and agriculture, transformation of the economy, education, health, employment, culture and women. The development of these portfolios was assigned to specific individuals. Cultural activities, the Freedom Charter and socialist transformation were assigned to Pallo Jordan and apartheid culture and curriculum were assigned to Richard Jürgens. A research framework on culture was a 14-point structure that included, as Point 6, ‘The role of women in the struggle for national liberation’. The research framework for culture and the arts, included as Point 1, ‘The role of culture in the struggle for national liberation’, Point 7 ‘The role of mass media in the struggle for national liberation’ and Point 8 ‘Women in culture and the arts’. (Range of Research Activities in our Movement n.d.). This document clearly indicated the importance of both the arts and women in the ANC liberation struggle as noted in Point 8 of the document. It is also an indication of women’s central role in cultural activities within the organisation.

In the document *Significance and relevance of our programme after 25 years of its adoption* (n.d.), the ANC questioned the strategies of its liberation programme in achieving or partially achieving its goals for dismantling apartheid. Within this reflective period, the organisation reiterated the use of culture as a weapon during the struggle and its relevance as a strategy that was monitored by the ANC at all times.

The retention of culture as a weapon of the struggle encouraged organisations such as the UDF to develop further cultural resistance strategies within South Africa. In extending the use of culture as a liberation strategy, the role of the international academic and cultural

boycott was reviewed. The UDFs position was “to rationalise the boycott and to promote the culture of the democratic movement in South Africa” (Bauer & Powell 1987). Culture became the ‘social fabric’ of the struggle, something that was easily accessible to all people as it shared struggle experiences in a language that the masses understood.

The recently established cultural desk of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) resolved to create cultural units and train people in various skills in order to take the liberation struggle forward as it identified culture as one of its main programmes. Mi Hlatshwayo (National cultural co-ordinator: COSATU cultural desk) popularised the arts of the cultural workers, established democratic cultural units and encouraged cultural debates in structures at grass-roots level (Hlatshwayo 1987). In an interview with Hein Willemse published in a December issue of the *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, Hlatshwayo responded that:

[W]orking class culture was synonymous with people’s culture or revolutionary culture in South African politics. The culture comes from the people, controlled by the people with the aim of enhancing the struggle for liberation. It’s a kind of culture which seeks to promote the interests of the majority, which does not seek to enhance the individual, and is not primarily commercial (Willemse n.d.:43).

Pallo Jordan urged artists to excel in their respective disciplines and to serve the struggle for liberation (Jordan 1987). These statements from the ANC leadership, both within and outside the borders of South Africa, ignited notions of nationhood and national identity, providing credence to the endeavours made by cultural workers.

To the anti-apartheid activists and cultural workers, participation in cultural activities was strategic, aimed at national liberation from apartheid atrocities. This was a national cultural practice inherent in a post-apartheid South Africa. From the position of the state, culture during apartheid was a symbol of Eurocentric civilisation and it served the apartheid state to oppress and negate any cultural expression other than a Eurocentric one.

The South African liberation struggle was, apart from a fight for equality and justice, a reclaiming of its African identity as apartheid stripped black South African citizens of both their historic and their cultural personae and (through the use of legal infrastructure)

determined them subordinate to white South Africans. This created a privileged and protected world for the whites and an ordered, restricted world for black South Africans (Koloane 1987:6).

In Mahmood Mamdani's view, "Africa was civilised from the outside by light-skinned migrants" (Mamdani 2013:54). The use of the word 'migrant' by Mamdani reduced the power of a coloniser to someone meek. Like many other colonised countries in Africa, South Africa was not alone in its desire for liberation, equality and justice from white domination. Such domination created hierarchies and separate laws that ensured divisions between groups of people so that the dominant group ruled with efficiency (Cabral 1972). This position – the imposition of Eurocentric ideas on communities of black African people, - in which many colonised African countries found themselves - was detrimental to African identities.

The element of race has been the central issue in Africa's responses to colonialism. According to Robert Blackey (1974:204), liberation required national support that often resulted in experiences of violence by both the coloniser and the oppressed. Blackey believed that the violence of a liberation uncovered social truths.

The psychological impact of the South African liberation struggle was often presented by the media within a context of violence and brutality. This view is supported by the available historical documentation of events such as the incarceration of anti-government protesters, treason trials, states of emergency, the banning of political organisations, strikes, protest marches and clamp-downs on any anti-government political activities in education and the media. Such activities were used by the South African state as evidence of anti-apartheid activity and served to legitimise atrocities meted out to black people as punishment for their struggle against apartheid. The behaviour of the state towards black people contributed to escalating resentment by many black South Africans.

The anti-apartheid structures retained the notion of liberation as a single objective; however, the strategy for achieving liberation was based on multipronged processes to erode apartheid's hold on the masses. The uprisings and violence during the 1980s reached unprecedented levels, with no immediate effect on the actions and attitudes of the state. The ANC and other banned organisations acted with greater pressure against the apartheid government (ANC 1989) together with international support, which called for a stricter

application of the academic and cultural boycott against South Africa. The support sought by the ANC leadership (then based in Lusaka, Zambia) came from international sympathisers, individuals and organisations – from the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and from the Netherlands, the UK and neighbouring African countries. Their financial assistance and organisation of conferences and workshops throughout the liberation struggle period was invaluable to the ANC and the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) in South Africa.

Serote, in his paper *The politics of culture*, stated:

It is their expression of their awareness of their conditions of existence, our culture is a culture of resistance... their consciousness of the misery under which our people suffer, this awareness of the need to resist if we are to survive, is the soil into which our culture sends its roots (Serote 1984:26-27).⁴⁰

Serote argued that cultural workers were part of a larger people's movement of resistance and not merely individuals reacting against apartheid. Their artistic expressions were of people's awareness and experiences of the atrocities of apartheid and it was for this immediacy of visual communication that the ANC supported using the arts as a legitimate weapon against apartheid (Serote 1984:28-29).

At the Inauguration of the 1983/1984 academic year at the University of Amsterdam on 5 September 1983, ANC President Oliver Tambo, in his address, *The role of Europe in the quest for peace in South Africa* stated:

I believe that the people of Europe, and particularly the people of the Netherlands – the European nation that first colonised South Africa and laid the basis for the present growing conflict in our country – have a historic responsibility for the resolution of the problems which affect us all as members of the human race (Tambo 1983).

⁴⁰ Refer to 2.2 Culture.

This address was not an appeal, but a categorical placement of the issue of apartheid South Africa at the door of Europe.

Paper No. 9b, Development of our culture, presented at the second ANC Women's Section Conference held in Angola in September 1987, provided considered ideas on apartheid culture and a future national South African culture. This document highlighted the fact that there were two different approaches to cultural determination during apartheid and that the culture of white artists was acknowledged as superior thus suppressing that of black cultural workers, pronounced as inferior. This is evidenced in the literature study, firstly where artworks by black artists were negatively criticised by art critics⁴¹. Paper No.9b stated, the need to counteract the oppressive nature of apartheid culture and to use culture as a mechanism towards liberation (Paper No.9b 1987). The expectation from the presentation of Paper No. 9b was a trajectory towards a single national culture that was developed alongside the political engagements in the country towards liberation. The document also endorsed the content of cultural workers, "Our literature and art forms should project the unity and sense of belonging we so much need in order to be one people and have one national culture" (Paper No. 9b 1987:5-8).

The Culture and Resistance Conference in Gaborone in 1982⁴² was significant in many ways, apart from providing a shared platform for discussions relating to the role of culture in South Africa and the definition and use of the term 'cultural worker'. This conference was the first initiative to invite all progressive artists and cultural workers from South Africa and those in exile to confer on a cultural direction and subsequently direct the momentum of 'cultural liberation' and its inclusion within the broader national liberation strategy in South Africa. Delegates from the ANC based in Lusaka were also present at the conference and sanctioned the resolutions taken at the conference.

The clarification of the terms 'culture' and 'cultural worker' defined the role of workers and their impact on the liberation struggle. This provided delegates confidence to pursue their alignment with the struggle via the arts. In addition to the conference, there was an exhibition

⁴¹ Refer to Chapter 1.2.

⁴² Refer to Chapter 3.

of South African artists. Bongiwe Dhlomo was one of the artists who participated, presenting her politically-charged lino-cut print series on 'forced removals'. This was significant: a black female artist's participation in the visual arts, as well as her participation in a process that addressed strategies of liberation against apartheid.⁴³

The Cultural Desk further requested cultural workers to discuss and debate the framework of a non-racial culture and to reflect on imbalances experienced in respect of cultural expression (Molefe 1990:21). Within the confines of the framework underpinning culture after the 1982 conference in Botswana, robust discussions and debates were held, defining culture and its implementation in a post-apartheid South Africa. As mentioned above, Wally Serote, in his paper *The politics of culture*,⁴⁴ stated that "our culture is a culture of resistance" and that "Culture is a weapon in the people's movement, it is a tool that a liberated nation can use to build a new society (Serote 1984:30).

Within other discussions held, greater emphasis was placed on the utilisation of culture as a political tool within the liberation struggle. Pitika Ntuli stated that, "there can be no total liberation without a cultural revolution taking place simultaneously with the political and armed struggles of the people[...]The role of an artist in our society is to record, mirror, reflect and interpret the unfolding struggle" (Ntuli 1986:17). There was a recurring reference to culture, resistance and people's experiences of the struggle to embody the cultural content and expression during apartheid. It was the artist's duty to serve his or her community towards achieving liberation (Rabkin 1986).

Cultural expression became a medium through which people could interpret their need for liberation. Most importantly, it was a means of communication for the achievement of social and economic transformation, addressing matters of class and racial inequality (Sole 1985:47-48; Mzala 1986:81-82). Although the arts leaned towards being 'propagandistic' in order to agitate for people to commit to the liberation struggle, this was necessary, as the apartheid state had viciously suppressed and denounced the culture of black people in South Africa (Motsamayi 1989:64). The abuses suffered by black people during the liberation were not

⁴³ Refer to Chapter 4.2.3.

⁴⁴ Delivered at a Cultural Studies Workshop held from 12 to 14 September 1983 in Gaborone, Botswana.

isolated incidents, they were daily occurrences and the idea of a propagandistic approach to the arts was to actualise the abusive reality of these familiar occurrences as non-acceptable behaviour.

Securing discussions on culture opened the door to creativity, so that people could speak out against apartheid experiences that would create opportunities to garner greater mass resistance within South Africa. A conscious effort was made by cultural workers to use the symbols and avenues of song, dance, poetry and imagery that reinforced the awareness and direction of the working class. Deepening and extending that awareness was a major pre-requisite of cultural development.

The wide net of enquiry cast by cultural workers and the ANC into the construction and idea of what constituted culture was extended to interviews by the ANC held in consultation with leaders of cultural groups and organisations. This generated ideas from people directly facilitating cultural activities⁴⁵ as to how to construct a new national culture. The 'Culture and the Workers' Struggle' interviews (as recalled by Malange 2010) held in Durban in 1985, included members of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the Cultural Group Local. The representatives were Alfred Qabula, Ari Sitas, Mi Hlatshwayo, Nafta Matiwane and Nise Malange.

The Culture and Working Life Project (1985), which had been initiated at UKZN, Durban, under the guidance of Ari Sitas, Head of the Department of Sociology, played an active role in distributing cultural skills to communities. The mandate of this project was to assist with the transfer of cultural skills (drama, music, literature, art) to workers who were members of COSATU. The establishment of this project linked higher education, the unions and local communities creating a network of arts activists (Malange 2010).

It can be stated that culture was an integral part of international and national discussions by anti-apartheid organisations. Cultural content became pervasive in many organisations such as trade unions although cultural content was not the core function of unions or associated with or an extension of the arts. However, trade unions set up cultural units to extend their

⁴⁵ Refer to Interviews.

roles in protecting workers' rights at the workplace. They were a platform for cultural activities to play out on factory floors and community halls. In the 1980s, COSATU – one of the largest trade unions in South Africa – set up a National Cultural Unit headed by Mi Hlatshwayo. This Unit was an effort to challenge further the apartheid government's propaganda denouncing any strategy of liberation. Hlatshwayo claimed, "in any society, culture was a process through which history was recorded and that culture defined the character of the country. People involved in cultural engagement popularise working class politics and principles" (Hlatshwayo 1987:6).

CHAPTER 3

CULTURE AS A WEAPON OF THE STRUGGLE

The background to the reception of ‘people’s culture’ within black communities and the adoption of culture as a definite liberation strategy realised the enormous power invested in ‘culture’. Embedded within this support for ‘culture’, was the support for women cultural activists by the ANC and local progressive structures. This rooted the idea that black women were accepted cultural workers as well as ‘soldiers’ within the liberation movement.

This chapter deliberates the impact of ‘culture as a weapon of the struggle’ within the context of South African art history ‘in the making’ during the 1980s. I argue in Chapter 2 that culture had agency during the South African liberation struggle. In exploring this agency further, I consider the value of conferences and festivals with accompanying exhibitions, that debated and showcased the context and content of ‘struggle’ art making in South Africa between 1982 and 1990, a cultural practice that deviated from the norm. This study reviews these conferences, festivals and exhibitions as a process of documenting an art history of a specific place and society that provides credence in writing up a revisioned South African art history.

An interpretation of art making by black artists during apartheid was not all communal craftwork, as was often associated with Africa by the west, including many white art historians and gallerists in South Africa. Artworks that were displayed at conferences, festivals and exhibitions in exile were individually created and echoed the depiction of apartheid experiences and a changing society (at the barrel of a gun) during the 1980s. The increase in police personnel and army vehicles, with soldiers within close proximity or patrolling in black townships remained a familiar sight that often translated into the content depicted in the ‘new wave’ of art making. Although individually created, the works were ‘endorsed’ by the community as the images resonated with their own similar experiences.

Judy Seidman (1981) was of the opinion that art made by cultural workers should not only record a situation; it should also criticise it as this exposed exploitation experienced as factory workers, farm labourers and domestic workers. She believed that ‘realistic’ or narrative

artworks recorded a particular moment in time. In order to capture this experience, an artist could use symbols, distortions and everyday objects that were easily recognisable and immediately understood by local people so that the work became meaningful to them (Seidman 1981:16-18). The most important aspect of a work was the message to the audience and whether it encouraged the viewer's involvement and participation in the liberation struggle (Seidman 1982).

The 'new wave' of art by black artists that emanated from the townships became more frequent and was supported by anti-apartheid movements (within South Africa as well as the international community), especially the ANC. The reason for this was that familiarity with the images portrayed (visual art, photography and posters) and the narrative conveyed (plays, songs and dance) appealed to and resonated with people living in the black townships. In this way, culture served to unite people as they were constantly reminded of their situations and the buy-in by these communities created communal confidence in their participation in anti-apartheid activities.

Apart from cultural activities transpiring in South Africa, there was an increase in cultural platforms outside the country. The increased international platforms allowed anti-apartheid activists and exiled political movements to strategise the use of cultural practices that would benefit the liberation. This was also an opportunity to negotiate a new South African culture in a post-apartheid country. The International Conference Against Apartheid for a Democratic South Africa, hosted in Tanzania, Arusha in 1987, provided an opportunity for exiles to meet with representatives of anti-apartheid structures from South Africa. The discussions and debates held at the conference constructed a process for managing and directing cultural activities during and post apartheid. An item on the agenda was the impact and effectiveness of the academic, sports and cultural boycott on South Africa. The decision taken was to retain the use of culture as a 'weapon of the struggle' as it proved useful in uniting people and it maintained the momentum and visual impact of the liberation movement (International conference against apartheid for a democratic South Africa 1987).

Discussions and debates such as that at Arusha, as well as discussions on a future national culture in South Africa took place at various other international cultural events. The resolutions taken remained the same: continue the support for cultural activities in black

townships in South African and ensure a more effective implementation of the academic, sports and cultural boycott against apartheid.

3.1. EXHIBITIONS AND FESTIVALS IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.1.1. Tributaries. A view of contemporary South African art (1985)

The contested space of art making in South Africa during the 1980s is highlighted in two exhibitions that were considered ground-breaking at that time: *Tributaries* in 1985 and the *Neglected Tradition* in 1988. The *Tributaries. A view of contemporary South African art* exhibition, was commissioned by BMW South Africa as part of their culture programme which included a second exhibition (discussed below). The exhibition opened in January 1985, at a reconstructed market space in Johannesburg, owned by the City Council. It was widely publicised in newspapers, magazines, conferences and journal articles as this exhibition served as a re-visioning of South African contemporary art (Mdluli 2015:49).

Curated by Ricky Burnett, the show was considered ground-breaking, in that it displayed an assemblage of works by both formally trained and untrained artists. In Burnett's catalogue introduction to the exhibition, he stated that:

South Africans cannot, and ought not, to lay claim to a common culture. But there is, we hope, in this collection a sense of a common humanity. This exhibition is not about traditional, aesthetic absolutes. It addresses itself to variety and it unashamedly acknowledges social and contextual references (Burnett 1985:n.p.).

In Mdluli's view, "Burnett's selection of the specific artists and artworks indicates that he was attempting to create a particular relationship between them by displaying them in a single exhibition space and mode without the need to reflect on the socioeconomic issues affecting the cultural production" (Mdluli 2015:32). That in itself became a political statement about the South African racial disparity that existed under apartheid.

In South Africa an inflexible distinction between art and ethnology seems like a colonial anachronism – a misplaced 'exclusivity'. This 'exclusivity' has dictated that official art and culture is white and orientated towards Europe.

Ambitions for art are pervasively defined in these lights. It is unfortunate that rural art, especially that emanating from the disintegrating tribal societies, is not generally incorporated into the ongoing dynamic of art making- neither as a contribution to the debate about the nature of art nor as a tradition which might provoke contemporary developments (Burnett 1985:n.p.).

Burnett's second statement was an indictment of the European standards applied in South Africa that serviced the visual arts as an exclusive area of play. Burnett further lamented the exclusion of art that did not fit the canons of European art making that also contributed to South African cultural practices, however, such art was unacknowledged by those who constructed mainstream art in the country.

The second part of the event was an exhibition of BMW cars painted by artists from different countries. Esther Mahlangu's work stood alongside that of Frank Stella, Andy Warhol and David Hockney, among other famous international artists. According to Verster's review in the *Daily News* (15 February 1985), the *Tributaries* and BMW exhibitions turned the notion of art making on its head. The artists were black and white, trained and untrained, male and female; they were just contemporary South African artists. Esther Mahlangu employed Ndebele patterning on the surface of the car she was commissioned to paint (Verster 1985). Mahlangu was the second acknowledged black South African female artist⁴⁶ who, though untrained in western traditions was able to participate in an international exhibition and win acclaim for her originality. The *Tributaries* exhibition of 111 artists was the first representative showcasing of contemporary South African artists. Unfortunately, for all the racial and class barriers this event broke down, black women continued to be marginalised in the art world.

Margaret Lessing's critique of the *Tributaries* exhibition in her book, *South African Women Today* (1994), stated that she regarded it as a true reflection of art making in South Africa, with a range of white and black, trained and untrained and urban and rural artists participating in the same exhibition. Apart from painting, sculpture and graphic art, the exhibition

⁴⁶ Gladys Mgudlandlu was recognised as the 'first' black artist during the 1960s (Miles 2002).

accommodated functional and ritual objects, ceremonial dolls, sangoma figurines, beadwork and assemblages of unusual material. The ceramic work of Mabasa (*A portrait bust of President Mphephu of Venda*), was seen for the first time, while Sara Mhlangu's work, *Two E' Telephone* (in wood, beads and light bulbs) and Maria Mabhena's *Ceremonial Mantle* were exhibited next to the work of a new generation of white artists (Lessing 1994:278).

The *Tributaries* exhibition was seen as a shift in the conventions of both institutional practices and commercial art spaces because it was one of the first in a series of 'revisionist' exhibitions in South African art. Its significance is that it influenced how art was viewed and displayed from that point onward in the South African landscape, particularly in relation to large-scale exhibitions (Mdluli 2015:46). In as much as one responds to this exhibition as ground-breaking, it is not without criticism in its construction and presentation of new ways of 'seeing'.

A new way of 'seeing' is evident in Lessing's use of the term 'new generation' as a category of white artists, which indicated a shift in her thinking. The so-called 'new generation' was seen as 'different' and possibly rebellious and a 'break-away' from the norm of European traditions. However, this new insight into the exhibition only occurred nine years after the event and into a democracy when all past South African art history and practices were challenged by individuals who, ironically, were often complicit in maintaining apartheid's separatist ideals.

The glaring dichotomy in art making between black and white artists in South Africa during apartheid revealed a lack of acknowledgement by many white historians and art critics of art made by black South Africans. This is evident in Verster's (1985) statement, "the BMW exhibition turned the notion of art making on its head", similar to Lessing's 'dawning' that not all white artists followed the 'norm'. Verster seemed astounded that art making could be turned on its head. The safety net of a white domain in art making and exhibition practice had been tainted by Burnett's curated exhibition. Further, the selection of Esther Mahlangu, an untrained black woman who painted Ndebele designs as part of her inherited talent, to be the South African representative in an international exhibition was an exception to the trend of exclusion.

3.1.2. The Neglected Tradition. Towards a new history of South African art 1930-1988 (1988)

Steven Sack's (1988) curation of *The Neglected Tradition. Towards a new history of South African art (1930-1988)*, was seen as the second ground-breaking exhibition of the 1980s in South Africa. Hosted at the Johannesburg Art gallery, 23 November 1988 to 8 January 1989, it was an attempt to provide a broad brush-stroke of art making by black artists in South Africa and in this way rewrite the South African art historical narrative (Mdluli 2015) as stated by Steven Sack, "towards a new history of South African art" (Sack 1991:7).

Sack indicated his dilemma "Does one write about black art as a separate category or does one insert it into the 'mainstream'? Should it be displayed separately or incorporated, without concern for racial categories, simply in terms of artistic categories?" (Sack 1991:7). The dilemma that Sack encountered was an interference by the 'norm' in South Africa. The question that should have been asked was why should these works not be accepted into the mainstream? The notion of artistic categories is a European norm that inserted itself automatically into the vocabulary of Sack. This is possibly the result of Sack's training in western art history and, in his conceptualisation of this exhibition, aspects of that training had filtered through.

The works curated for this exhibition began with artworks from the 1930s up to the 1980s. Sack considered the artists of the 1930s to be a group of elite and educated men that ventured into western approaches of art making however, they retained their African traditions (Sack 1991:9). Interestingly, the white establishment recognised these artists not as craftsmen but artists as they pursued western trends in art making. Artists that had trained at the Polly Street Art Centre (Johannesburg) and the Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre (RDACC), KwaZulu Natal, worked in traditional European mediums of painting, printmaking, ceramics and sculpture. The catalogue for this exhibition included an extensive bibliography and biographical information on the artists it presented. It also presented a wide range of artworks and artists from different backgrounds but focused specifically on art created by black African artists, both urban and 'rural' (Mdluli 2015:3).

Sack, in his chapter, 'The new generation', recognised the enormous divide between black and white artists and that the arts had become politicised.

The many issues and debates that surround the art of this century continue in the art of the 1980s: transitions between art and craft, images of township life and images of Africa, the impact of Christianity and the exploration of mysticism, the control of politics and the freedom of personal expression, the power of market forces and the resultant redefinition of art (Sack 1991:24).

Sack's statement indicated that the art making between black and white artists during apartheid was specific and different in its content and that this 'difference' needed to be embraced.

The importance of this exhibition to this study, apart from it showcasing a history of art made by black artists, was that Steven Sack spoke of Helen Sebidi and Noria Mabasa amongst the one hundred artists on show. Both Sebidi and Mabasa⁴⁷ were pioneers with their contributions to South African art history during the 1980s. Sack asserted that the training received by Sebidi under the guidance of John Koenakeefe Mohl and her participation in the Thupelo workshops provided Sebidi with a greater capacity to render the paintings that she did. He did not extend an explanation into the themes that she used, which recited matters affecting black women in the rural and urban areas.

Noria Mabasa, a sculptor, created works in clay and wood (wood is a medium usually reserved for men). This clearly indicated Mabasa's vigour as a black female artist who contested the medium of woodcarving as a reserve for black men, while her clay figure sculptures created a new dynamic in their references to changes in contemporary society. Sack stated that, "[t]he clay figures have mostly consisted of portrayals of real people, bureaucrats, policemen, military personnel; a reflection of the changing society" (Sack 1991:28). Her works became political as she remodelled the content of her 'traditional' clay narratives of clay vessels and imagined forms, to clay figures of specific and recognisable people. Unfortunately, Sack overlooked the poignant work of Bongiwe Dhlomo,⁴⁸ Removals

⁴⁷ Refer to Chapter 4.

⁴⁸ Refer to Chapter 4.

1: the past...the future, that captured the fear and anxiety that plagued township residents, forced removals (Sack 1991:45, cat. no. 16).

Also unfortunate was that amongst the one hundred artists on show, only twelve were female artists. The black female artists that participated on this exhibition were Bongiwe Dhlomo, Noria Mabasa, Philda Majozi, Buyisile Mandindi, Elizabeth Mbatha, Gladys Mgudlandlu, Dinah Molefe, Ester Mncube, Alina Ndebele, Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Esther Nxumalo and Helen Sebidi (Sack 1991).

3.1.3. Women Artists in South Africa (1985)

In 1985, the South African National Gallery (SANG) held an exhibition, *Women artists in South Africa*,⁴⁹ which coincided with a conference held by the Women's Bureau titled, 'Women, Their Achievements and Opportunities'. There were 68 female artists that exhibited 102 artworks. In this exhibition, two black female artists presented Ndebele beadwork and woven tapestries. Unfortunately, of these two artists the name of R. Mdluli only was identified, a weaver of tapestries trained at the RDACC. The other artist/crafter (creators of the Ndebele beadwork) remained nameless. In Davison's explanation for exhibiting black artists only as crafters, she stated that in "predominantly subsistence-based societies... the concept of 'fine art' was alien, but women had always expressed their aesthetic impulses in different ways" (Davison 1985:279). Apart from these crafts, a painting by Gladys Mgudlandlu was also exhibited, which contradicted Davison's claim that fine art was alien to black artists, who were only recognised as crafters. The curating of such exhibitions was largely intended for a white audience to be charmed by the craft and primitive objects made by black people. This approach reflected the hierarchies inherent in South African visual culture and the manner in which it suppressed black cultural expressions.

It becomes clear that exhibitions in South Africa during apartheid lacked any enthusiasm for showcasing and appreciating art made by black artists in a non-western tradition (except for *Tributaries* in 1985). Responses to exhibitions by white artists were viewed differently to exhibitions by black artists in South Africa, as most black artists were seen by white art

⁴⁹ Refer to Chapter 1.

critics and curators as crafters, or dismissed as serious art contenders. Retaining the image of black artists as crafters maintained the superior attitude of a western culture.

3.1.4. Women's Cultural Festival (1988)

The Western Cape chapter of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) hosted a Women's Cultural Festival in 1988 at the Samaj Centre, Athlone, Cape Town – a first for this region. The objectives of the festival were:

1. To instil confidence in women and give recognition for her creativity.
2. To encourage a development in women's skills and talents.
3. To develop a process towards a national culture.

The importance of this festival was that “despite the brutality around us, we need to be able to celebrate the positive aspects of our lives, such as our unity, our creativity, our will to continue to resist and to build a new South Africa” (Motivation for a Women's Cultural Festival 1988).

The objectives of this cultural festival are of significance as they referred directly to women in the creative fields as practising artists and the organisation saw the need to provide assistance in enhancing women's skills. The discussions that transpired at this festival, considered a future national culture. This area of discussion had never entered into any of the discussions at conferences or in journal articles by white South African academics and art historians.⁵⁰ This clearly indicated the differences in approach to culture by white and black South Africans and the stagnant manner in which white art historians, critics, academics and gallerists retained South African art history during the 1980s.

The need to continue to destabilise the apartheid state was most important and with the support that FEDSAW provided, black women felt empowered to participate both in the liberation struggle and in the arts. The objectives resolved at this conference were in keeping with resolutions taken at both Gaborone (1982) and Amsterdam (1983)⁵¹ whereby, delegates declared the use of ‘culture as a weapon of the struggle’ as a ‘norm’ and all artists who accepted this were referred to as ‘cultural workers’. The Dutch Anti-Apartheid organisation

⁵⁰ Refer to Chapter 1.

⁵¹ Both these exhibitions are discussed later in this chapter.

(AABN) pledged in Amsterdam skills-training programmes and the provision of equipment to 'cultural workers'.

FEDSAW held another conference in the Western Cape, 'Women unite for a future South Africa' in August 1989, attended by 300 delegates from 45 different organisations. The delegates workshopped specific issues that affected them: work and employment, housing, health, education, children and the family, law, violence against women, culture and media, repression and religion (SPEAK 1989:13). These discussions were in response to the 'Culture in Another South Africa'⁵² conference (Amsterdam, 1987). The discussions also acted as a motivation for discussions held between the ANC and AABN in Lusaka (1989) that conceptualised the Malibongwe Conference in 1990.

The fact that the apartheid government did not fund or establish art facilities for black artists so as to benefit South African art and its history or recognise these black artists as culturally endowed, resulted in various organisations, nationally and internationally, being established in order to provide space and platforms for artists to participate. Among these organisations were the Music, Drama, Art and Literature Collective (MDALI) set up by Molefe Pheto and Wally Serote in Alexandra (1972), the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) in Johannesburg (1978), and the Medu Art Ensemble in Gaborone, Botswana (1978). These organisations were a source of skills for people, which eventually developed into a cultural exploration that became a weapon of the struggle (Moloi 1981:11). The Medu Art Ensemble (Medu meaning 'roots') was vocal in its appreciation of artwork by South African cultural workers, encouraging them to express their realities and personal experiences in cultivating a new national culture that was often referred to as protest, township or resistance art (Kellner & González 2009). These artworks not only served to enliven public spaces such as walls with 'political graffiti', but served also as a cathartic process for people dealing with their daily traumas in the black townships.

⁵² Discussed later in this Chapter.

3.2. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES, FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

The international cultural platforms were organised predominantly in conversations with the ANC in Lusaka, Zambia. Barbara Masekela headed the ANC's Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), together with Wally Serote, Mandla Langa, Lindiwe Mabuza, Patrick Fitzgerald and Louise Colvin. Masekela played a significant role in the DAC, which had a tremendous impact on the academic and cultural boycott against South Africa (Masekela n.d.). Masekela was pivotal in the coordination and content of international events. She organised various anti-apartheid conferences and cultural festivals, including the Culture in another South Africa (CASA) conference and festival (1987) and the Malibongwe Conference (1990) both events hosted in Amsterdam, on behalf of the ANC.

Amongst the many exhibitions that took place internationally was a poster exhibition by South African artists, hosted in Paris in 1982, titled *Apartheid – its back to the wall*. Albert Lévy⁵³ noted the commitment of the artists in the exhibition catalogue as:

What is apparent is their determined resolution to inform, alert and mobilise public opinion, no matter how modest the means may be, in order that South Africa may cease to be neglected by those who profess an interest in international solidarity (Lévy 1982:n.p.).

The hosting of this exhibition in Paris was a clear indication that international communities were sympathetic towards the South African anti-apartheid struggle and appreciative of the poster images created as a response to apartheid. This exhibition also provided added support to the UN's call for a boycott of South Africa.

3.2.1. Culture and Resistance (Gaborone 1982)

The use of culture as a strategic weapon during the liberation struggle had remained a peripheral option at this time, as the enormity of its power had not been harvested. With the bitter memory of the Soweto uprisings of 1976 still fresh in the minds of black South

⁵³ Albert Lévy was the Secretary-General of the French anti-racism, non-government organisation, Movement against Racism and for Friendship between People (MRAP).

Africans, artists continued to make art that became visual journals of the atrocities of apartheid.

The Medu Art Ensemble, formed in 1978 in Gaborone, Botswana to support and provide a space for South African artists in exile, saw value in creating a platform to allow the voice of South African artists to be experienced by a larger international community. Due to its partnership with anti-South African cultural organisations, Medu was watched closely by the South African Defence Force (SADF),⁵⁴ indicating the power associated with culture that the apartheid government was aware of.

The idea of an exhibition of South African art in Gaborone was born out of various individual and collective exhibitions held by South Africans at the Gaborone National Museum during the 1980s. The conference and accompanying festival titled Culture and Resistance took two years to conceptualise and organise. Due to the sensitivity of this event and the presumed danger that it posed, there were many logistical challenges such as funding of the event, organising participants (speakers for the conference and artists for the exhibition) from South Africa and their artworks that had to be transported to the venue, safely. The conference was advertised through the collective engagement of Ravan Press, CAP, FUBA and Open School, who distributed information about the event to cultural workers in South Africa, inviting their participation and their works for exhibition. The theme of the conference and the title, Culture and Resistance, was based on the fact that in South Africa, cultural workers and society were in conflict. The conference was critical to the implementation of culture as a 'weapon of the struggle' in South Africa, as it positioned culture at the vanguard of the liberation, as well as allowing a vision of the future role of culture in South Africa (Background information to the exhibition, symposium and festival of South African arts 1982).

The Culture and Resistance conference and festival of the arts was held from 5 to 9 July 1982, at the University of Botswana in Gaborone. It was a mass gathering of artists and activists from South Africa and other countries supporting the liberation of South Africa. It

⁵⁴ The SADF raided the MEDU offices in 1985, killing Thami Mnyele, a well-respected cultural activist and one of the organisers of the Culture and Resistance conference.

would appear that conferences of the 1980s such as this one provided a visual representation of the notion of culture that was prevalent in the liberation movement. This conference encapsulated the idea that cultural work was part of the struggle for freedom in South Africa (Ernst 2002:15). The intention of the conference was to politicise culture in South Africa in order to broaden the struggle against the apartheid government. The debate during the conference centred on how art could be used more effectively in the struggle against the present system and how a new South African culture could be conceived so as to replace the existing one. In Keorapetse Kgositsile's address, he claimed that artists were an integral part of society and had a duty to take part in the fight for a democratic South Africa (McGregor 1982).

Lindiwe Mabuza travelled to the event from Stockholm together with other artists (González 2009), bringing the banned ANC organisation into direct contact with the arts and cultural organisations from within South Africa (McGregor 1982). The ANC was also keen to expand and politicise the notion of culture in South Africa by reconceptualising the use of art as a more considered strategy within the liberation struggle; and in the process, redefining the artist as a cultural worker.

The objectives of this meeting between the ANC and the other delegates were:

- To expose South African cultural workers to a wide range of national cultural work, thus giving an opportunity to develop a national perspective on culture in South Africa
- To expose South African cultural developments, to the people of South Africa and eventually to give the work done by South African cultural workers international exposure
- To finally produce a book on South African culture as a product of the event. A film of the event was also to be produced (Objectives of exhibition, symposium and festival n.d.).

There were three parts to the conference programme: *Art toward social development: An exhibition of South African Art* (10 June-10 August), the Culture and Resistance Symposium (5-9 July) and the Festival of the Arts (5-9 July). The content of the discussions and debates at this conference created a framework for cultural workers in South Africa for the next 10

years and impacted responses to graphic art as a medium of expression to fast-track image-making and communication within black communities (Seidman 2009; Seidman 2014).

The National Museum and Art Gallery of Gaborone supported the exhibition *Art toward social development: An exhibition of South African Art*, both in hosting and in fund-raising for the event, along with seven international donors and volunteer agencies. The exhibition title drew on the idea of cultural workers meeting, sharing ideas and skills and contributing towards society's growth. It visually presented life inside South Africa from the viewpoint of artists and cultural workers, as well as standing as a statement against the apartheid government. The poster, designed by Gordon Metz, depicted an artist walking a tightrope between black townships and white suburban cultures, with warplanes in the distance (Kenton, n.d.). This image indicated the perilous situation that engulfed the country and the enormous pressure that was felt by anti-apartheid activists in negotiating a democracy in a country that was at war with itself. The effectiveness of the cultural boycott was also tested at this conference, as artists who had disregarded the cultural boycott sanctions against South Africa were refused entry to perform at the event.

The exhibition catalogue indicated that there were 58 artists and 29 photographers, black and white, male and female, who exhibited 169 artworks and 168 photographs, including all genres of visual content. The term artists was used rather than cultural workers; it was only during and after this conference that the term 'cultural worker' was adopted, replacing the use of 'artist' to describe a cultural activist. The artists that participated included, those trained at formal institutions (universities), the Medu Art Ensemble and community centres in South Africa (FUBA, Polly Street, Nyanga, Jubilee Centre, Open School, Bill Ainslie Studio, Soweto Art Association, MDALI and Rorke's Drift). A selection from this exhibition travelled to Sweden in 1984 and thirty artworks were purchased by the ANC and sent to their head office based in Lusaka, Zambia (Art toward social development: An exhibition of South African art 1982; Art toward social development 2009:186).

After this conference, it was impossible to separate art and culture from the liberation struggle. Human activity influences society and its behaviour, which impacted on cultural manifestations in South Africa. The exhibition validated the popular theory that an artist's conscience is fed through life experiences and manifested on the creative platforms offered to

them (The role of culture in the process of liberation, 1982; Kgositsile, 1982a). A resolution taken during the event defined art in practical terms as a weapon and in the process redefined the artist as a cultural worker.

The result of this three-part event was the transformation of a people's culture into an organ of strength to combat the apartheid government of South Africa. All the artists and cultural workers realised their roles and purpose in the liberation, which created a defined shape for the cultural weapon. The call for a cultural boycott against South Africa was intensified. This conference had far-reaching consequences for South Africa, as it contributed to and informed the next cultural conference in Amsterdam in the same year, 1982 as well as having conceptualised 'culture as a weapon of the struggle', a strategy that played to the strengths of the masses in their songs, dance, plays and art making.

3.2.2. The Cultural Voice of Resistance – Dutch and South African Artists Against Apartheid Conference (Amsterdam 1982)

This conference, held between 13 and 18 December 1982 in Amsterdam a few months after the conference in Gaborone, was organised by the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement (AABN), the political-cultural centre *De Populier* and the Dutch Organisation for International Development Cooperation (NOVIB), with and in support of the ANC (Braam, 1982). It marked the strengthening of links between the Netherlands and the ANC on cultural agreements, in response to the Netherlands' withdrawal from formal ties with South Africa. It developed the ideas conceived at the Culture and Resistance conference in Gaborone in 1982, which realised and harvested the power of culture as an anti-apartheid mechanism.

The chairperson of AABN, Connie Braam, in her statement on behalf of the organisers, explained the reason for the title to this conference The Cultural Voice of Resistance. It was

a conference about the role of art and culture as well as the role of artists in the struggle against the Apartheid regime... many individuals and organisations felt the need for a better and closer acquaintance with real South African culture... 'The Cultural Voice of Resistance' is focussed on solidarity with the ANC (Braam 1982).

AABN hosted this event for two reasons, firstly, to sever ties with the apartheid government and, secondly to contact and network with artists and scholars who embraced the liberation of South Africa in their works (Meerman 1982). Central to the discussions between the organisers and the ANC was the role of the artists and their work in South Africa and the issue of the cultural boycott apart from the supportive role that AABN would play in the resolutions taken.

This event was organised without support from the South African government, which had maintained cultural ties with the Netherlands government at that time. However, this cultural agreement between the two countries was reconsidered by the Netherlands, through their anti-apartheid movements. Braam, as chair of the AABN in 1982, called for the cancellation of the 1951 cultural accord between South Africa and the Netherlands and the replacement of the South African government with the ANC as a legitimate cultural partner (Braam 1982). The ANC validated its position as cultural partner to the Netherlands and representative of the people through its adoption of the Freedom Charter document, signed at the Congress of the People in Kliptown, Johannesburg in 1955. This was the most authentic cultural revolutionary document of the struggle and specified that liberation must be fought for by its people (Van Baarle, Masekela & Mabuza 1982).

The new cultural accord between the ANC (representative of South Africa) and the Netherlands was applauded and supported by Masekela, Secretary-General of the ANC Department of Arts and Culture and Lindiwe Mabuza, both representatives of the ANC at the conference. “For the people of South Africa, the liberation from the colonial yoke means also an emancipation from oppression and humiliating forms of culture. To regain our right to national independence we must also rediscover our free and authentic cultural expression” (Statement of the ANC 1982; Masekela 1987). Appreciation for the termination of the cultural accord between apartheid South Africa and the Netherlands strengthened international pressure on South Africa and its apartheid policies.

The commitments by the Dutch in respect of the accord are found in the Proposed Final Declaration of the Conference:

We, here, now therefore resolve that we shall

1. Mobilise all Dutch artists and cultural organisations to join in the bond made with the liberation movement of South Africa, the African National Congress, by supporting cultural workers in resistance through material support, training facilities, publishing and exhibiting their work for the purpose of promoting the authentic culture of South Africa and the creation of a democratic South Africa;
2. Urge the Dutch government to come to an alternative cultural agreement with the African National Congress to ensure the above.
3. We therefore urge the Dutch government to transfer the funds previously set aside for the severed Cultural Accord, even more, so that positive action can be undertaken accordingly (Proposed Final Declaration of the conference 1982).

The evenings of the conference were events of cultural activity with a special programme on women held at the Centre Amazone, where Masekela and Rose Motsipe read South African poems of resistance. The agenda allocated time for the discussion of Medu's organisation of the Culture and Resistance conference in Gaborone in 1982 and the value of the interaction between cultural workers from within South Africa and exiled South African activists. Further to this was a discussion on the link between Dutch history and that of South Africa (Recent developments in cultural resistance 1982).

As part of a Dutch skills-transfer initiative, four workshops were held, on mural painting and silk-screening. A discussion was held at the Centre for Chilean Art and a visit undertaken to the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, so that the South African delegates could have first-hand experience of the cultural scene in Holland. A workshop on women in solidarity with black female experiences in South Africa and an exhibition on resistance art was included in the programme (ICSA 1982:16).

The commitment made at the conference was that:

all Dutch artists and cultural organizations should be mobilised to strengthen the cooperation already established with the liberation movement, the ANC, by supporting cultural workers in the struggle for providing equipment and facilities for training, and by publishing and exhibiting their work, with the

aim of promoting the authentic culture of South Africa and the formation of a democratic South Africa (ICSA 1982:17).

Many collaborative projects, which supported South African cultural workers at many levels, were established in Holland. They were endorsed by both Hans Boswinkel (chair of the Union of Artists in the Dutch Trade Union Federation) and Fons Geerling (member of AABN), who recommended that previous funding allocations be redirected toward the new cultural agreement with the ANC (Boswinkel 1982; Geerling 1982).

These cultural exchanges impacted on other decisions taken by the ANC in support of cultural workers. The ANC was of the opinion that a magazine, the *Magazine of Arts*, be launched to publish artworks and discussions on cultural issues, as a way to sustain communication and support of the artists and cultural workers (ICSA 1982:16). Hans Boswinkel and members of parliament Jan Nico Scholten (Christian Democrats), Gijs Schreuders (Communist Party) and Jacques Wallage (Labour Party) reached an agreement with Cosmo Pieterse (ANC) to provide Dutch support to the ANC cultural workers in South Africa. This would be in the form of equipment and facilities for training, publishing and exhibiting (*Zuidelijk Afrika Nieuws* 1983). The commitment by AABN to the ANC refined the term 'cultural worker' with greater detail as AABN conceded to training cultural activists and facilitating cultural activity. This engagement moulded the concept of 'culture as a weapon of the struggle' into specific training and cultural activity that would provide the ANC with greater strength and people's participation in the liberation struggle.

The call for a strengthening of the cultural and academic boycott made at the Gaborone conference was echoed in Amsterdam. Mabuza in her paper, A case for a serious cultural boycott, presented at the conference, emphasised the need for a complete cultural boycott (Mabuza 1982). Masekela, on the other hand, specified that the liberation struggle had a life that was not static, therefore, strategies had to be flexible to address changes. However, she was adamant that there should be no support for apartheid institutions in South Africa. Mabuza called for a comprehensive cultural boycott policy that would provide guidelines to cultural workers so that they could understand the enormity of this decision and abide by the rules that govern a boycott. She stated that the cultural boycott had not taken into consideration various aspects of fine art, such as the museums, galleries and public buildings

that housed apartheid artworks. Furthermore, she proposed the notion of travelling exhibitions and that there should be vigilance regarding South Africa as a destiny for such exhibitions (Mabuza 1982). The impact of this call was reflected in the newspaper review by Getz, in which the Durban Art Gallery cited challenges in importing international travelling exhibitions and its effect on culture in South Africa (Getz 1985).

During the discussions on the boycott, artists who were not members of the ANC but who declared their abhorrence for apartheid in the content of their artworks were recognised as part of the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), therefore, part of the liberation movement and eligible for support (Kgotsisile & Schierbeek, 1982). Schierbeek stated that democracy was something that was learned and that this was only possible if you acknowledge that people had to live together in all their diversity. The policy of ‘divide and rule’ was a global phenomenon and not only a South African policy. He cited Picasso’s painting of *Guernica* and claimed that “destruction is a part of all creativity that attempts to break barriers to give us clarity of vision, so we won’t be set apart” (Schierbeek, 1982). This gave insight into the enormous workload that faced South Africa.

This conference was integral to a deeper relationship between the ANC and AABN, made more effective upon the signing of a cultural agreement between the Netherlands and the ANC. From this point onwards, the Netherlands regarded the ANC as the sole representative of the South African people and resolved that Dutch funding for the ANC would be made available, as well as assistance to South African artists from the Dutch Artists Union. The sealed relationship between the ANC and AABN also supported the UN’s call for a more effective international cultural boycott of South Africa (Boswinkel 1982; Van Baarle, Masekela & Mabuza 1982; ICSA 1983:15).

3.2.3. Botswana National Museum and Art Gallery (Gaborone 1984)

The only solo international exhibition by a black South African female artist, Bongiwe Dhlomo,⁵⁵ was held at the Botswana National Museum and Art Gallery in 1984, titled *Images of South Africa*. Thamsanqa (Thami) Mnye, a South African living in exile in Botswana

⁵⁵ Dhlomo is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

(one of the organisers of the Culture and Resistance conference, 1982), acknowledged the revolutionary aspect of Dhlomo's art making, as the content referenced forced removals and township violence in South Africa (Mnyele 1986; Oliphant & Vladislavić 1988). Dhlomo was endorsed by Mnyele as a woman who should be revered as a female artist involved in the struggle for liberation. This seemed to have pre-empted the resolution taken two years later, at the Development of Culture, 2nd ANC Women's Section Conference in September 1987. "We have to eulogise the heroines of our struggle; so many are unknown to us, because no-one has written about them. We have to bring the experiences of women in the struggle within our reach. There is a need for dissemination of relevant information on female artists" (Paper no.9b 1987).

3.2.4.Culture in Another South Africa (Amsterdam, 1987)

The Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) conference and festival took place from 14 to 19 December 1987. It discussed the South African cultural programme and the academic and cultural boycott against South Africa. It was convened following a call for a conference on behalf of the ANC's Cultural Desk and was organised between the AABN and the ANC (Amandla, 1988). There was widespread acceptance that culture was an instrument that was flexible and carried authority in South Africa and could, therefore, be the root of change. Culture had a crucial role to play in achieving a new society and this could be facilitated via the cultural boycott as well as an enhancement of cultural activities within the country (Friedman 1988:23; Africa 1990). CASA focused on the cultural infrastructure of a democratic and non-racial post-apartheid South Africa. It demanded that greater responsibility be placed on cultural workers to align themselves consciously with democratic and national liberation principles (Ernst 2002:15).

The two organisers of the CASA festival representing South Africa were William Campschreur and Joost Divendal. The aim of the festival was to allow discussion on the cultural infrastructure of a new South Africa and it was considered imperative that current cultural activities during that time be showcased in an exhibition. This six-day conference and festival hosted over 300 delegates (South Africans, those in exile and Dutch supporters) who discussed the cultural infrastructure in South Africa, how this could be supported and developed, a cultural programme and the present boycott against South Africa. Braam cited

this conference as a historical moment in the AABN's participation as it was party to developing a democratic national culture for South Africa (CASA preamble and resolutions 1987; Löwenhardt 1987; Amandla 1988).

The keynote addresses on cultural policy were delivered by Barbara Masekela and Pallo Jordan of the Department of Arts and Culture of the ANC, who paid tribute to the organisers of the event and its far-reaching positive consequences for the South African people. Jordan, in his address, suggested that South African culture should be infused with internationalism, Africanism and humanism, considered necessary as they provided a holistic understanding of culture and its place in Africa and in the context of the world (Bruun-Meyer 1988).

In Masekela's address, she referred to cultural workers as organs of the struggle who were systematically creating 'another' South Africa through a cultural liberation. Masekela asserted that resistance against apartheid by black South Africans had the necessary support from Holland and other countries; however, the heavier burden rested on the shoulders of South Africans. She declared that "cultural workers are freedom fighters first... let political creativity be the mirror in which we reflect our creativity" (Masekela 1989:252).

Both the UDF cultural desk and COSATU cultural structures were acknowledged as entities that would organise and provide platforms for cultural activities in South Africa. These platforms would give cultural workers confidence in realising their own strength and abilities, which would reflect a united society and an inevitable victory. Masekela believed that cultural workers were integral to the struggle as a collective voice. She quoted Oliver Tambo's address from 8 January 1985: "Let the arts be one of the many means by which we cultivate the spirit of revolt among the broad masses, enhance the striking power of our movement and inspire the millions of our people to fight for the South Africa we envisage" (Tambo in Masekela 1987:19).

Masekela praised the value of the cultural boycott against apartheid South Africa and referred to Tambo's Canon Collins Memorial Lecture: *South Africa at the Crossroads* delivered on 28 May 1987, in London, in which he stated that a people's culture together with institutions and structures was being created in South Africa and that was due to the efforts of cultural workers (Tambo in Masekela, 1987:21). The success of cultural activists in the country had

led to a more vigilant cultural boycott of South Africa by an international community (Masekela 1989:255).

As part of the debate and discussion points at the conference, challenges relating to organising additional cultural programmes and structures upon their return to South Africa were raised.

It was resolved that organisations will:

- Create additional local and regional cultural structures;
- Form a national cultural organization;
- Make our work accessible to the bulk of the people;
- Encourage the use of all our languages;
- Share skills and resources; and
- Provide training in various art forms (Campschreur & Divendal 1989).

Similar to the Gaborone conference, a South African cultural workers exhibition was hosted, consisting of drawings and prints from students, teachers and professional artists. This was not a themed showcase, as the organisers believed that personal interpretations of the content for this exhibition were necessary. Although the images on show were mainly from the townships and art centres, beadwork and wooden sculptures (immediate associations with South Africa) were absent. The robust debate that accompanied this exhibition concentrated on what constituted true images of South African art, the conditions within which these works were made and the definition of the role art could play in the transformation of the country (Introduction for exhibition 1987).

Workshops were held in poetry, music, dance, fine art skills and processes (including textile, graphic art, photography and film), journalism and radio and television broadcasting. The discussions probed the state of present-day cultural activities and the possibilities of different forms and structures of arts and culture in a post-apartheid South Africa (Introduction for exhibition 1987).

Twenty-seven papers were delivered at this expansive conference, deliberating on all aspects of culture in a new South Africa. The papers, which spoke directly to the arts were: Film-Makers and the Visual Arts, Posters in the National Democratic Revolution, Overview of

Visual Arts, Visual Arts, Art in Another South Africa, Introduction – Visual Arts, Report on discussion panels on poetry and visual arts, Women in Culture, and COSATU: Our Struggle to Build Our Own Culture (Lijst CASA papers 1987).

The discussions interrogated the use of the clenched fist as image content as well as the need to archive images such as photographs, as in these circumstances, the artists' names were often forgotten and it was deemed necessary to trace the origins of all images. Further discussion on women in the visual arts indicated that mainly urban women become artists, as such women were exposed to western traditions and mediums – unlike rural women, who continued the tradition of clay, beads and plaited grass utensils (CASA Paper 20 1987; CASA Paper 23 1987). However, this was no indication that rural women were not aware of the transitions taking place in the country, as can be seen in the clay portrait works of Noria Mabasa.

The value of silkscreen printing as an effective, cheap tool to communicate via posters and t-shirts was debated extensively. This discussion was based on a presentation by the Silkscreen Training Project (STP) based in Johannesburg, which taught skills to activists during the early 1980s, placing media in the hands of the people. Silkscreening was a rapid solution for advertising meetings and providing information. A point of consideration was that this medium could be extended to fine artists and other cultural workers, as it can be used as a fine art medium (CASA Paper 16 1987).

Central to the discussions on the visual arts was the notion of how best cultural workers could serve the liberation with their skills and all avenues and media were explored to this end. Additional discussions were held on how to implement effective skills training in communities, nationally. The processes of acquiring resources and structures to protect cultural workers were seen as an imperative to guard them against exploitation. The role of the cultural worker was seen as essential in building a national culture (CASA Paper 17 1987; CASA Paper 18 1987; Towards people's culture 1988).

Other contributors to the discussions were Nana Kutumela from the UDF cultural desk and Hessie Sibayoni from COSATU, who both embraced the value of the cultural boycott and ventured responses regarding cultural workers accessing international travel. It was requested that delegates consult with the ANC and the MDM to seek approval first to travel overseas.

Thabo Mbeki at an ANC information and communication discussion, Lusaka, stated that the cultural boycott was not a racial strategy by the ANC, but a cultural strategy. He posited that the obsession with race as a symbol of apartheid limited the creativity of cultural workers (Towards people's culture 1988). It was essential for the various arts disciplines to organise themselves as an alternative to apartheid culture and to promote a 'progressive' culture (Friedman 1988:23).

COSATU, in its CASA position paper, questioned the manner in which a democratic culture could be created and sustained given the parallel growth of culture in South Africa, with white privileged response on the one hand and that of the oppressed cultural workers on the other. The breadth of separation was entrenched between these two, which should be merged within a new dispensation (Hlatshwayo 1987). There were concerns among the delegates relating to the approach to be adopted in respect of the statement that 'the doors of learning and culture shall be opened'. COSATU's request was for visual arts skills and resources to advance the liberation struggle with greater impetus (CASA Paper18 1987).

The position paper of the visual arts was a request for an audit of the cultural progress made within South Africa since the 1982 Culture and Resistance conference in Gaborone. Various community-based cultural forums were active in the townships and this provided a momentum of the continual erosion of apartheid that was not easily visible. There was a need to elevate the position of the arts so that it would affect the consciousness of more people. This was seen as possible, if skills were in abundance and facilities and equipment were made available to cultural workers (a commitment made by AABN in 1982). It was important for skills to be transferred to women, specifically in the rural areas so that the liberation momentum was active in both urban and rural areas. Most men had migrated to urban areas in search of work, a situation that left women abandoned and it was necessary to reach out to these rural women. Regional and national structures were required to be created, to protect and organise cultural workers to be more effective. All of these factors could only be achieved within a collective environment within the country as communities often felt isolated (CASA Paper18 1987).

The preamble and resolutions of the CASA conference anchored the notion that cultural activity and the arts cannot be separated from politics. Apart from the arts being a 'national'

imperative, the other area for discussion was the triple oppression of women – sexual, racial and economic (Langa 1987). In the preamble, the resolution taken on the role of culture and cultural workers was that culture remained an integral part of the national democratic struggle; therefore, the role of cultural workers should remain inseparable from both the struggle against apartheid and the construction of a democratic South Africa. The resolution on people's culture was that apartheid culture remained a tool of oppression as opposed to people's culture, which reflected the social and political aspirations of culture in the country. Cultural workers were encouraged to work and develop collectively towards a valuable people's culture, sharing skills and resources. The resolution on the cultural boycott, that South Africa should be totally isolated, was reiterated. Within these demands, the progressive culture in the country should be recognised and strengthened (CASA Preamble and resolutions 1987).

The resolution on Women and Culture and the resolution on the Visual Arts showed clear respect for women as cultural workers in the struggle and the need for them to be trained and supported. For the purpose of this study, resolutions 6 and 14 are discussed, in supporting the idea that women participated in the struggle via the visual arts and that their contributions were noted and supported.

Resolution 6 on Women and Culture

Confirming: That women are integral to and have a vital role to play in our struggle, and noting:

1. That women are sexually and economically exploited.
2. That women are the victims of racist oppression and archaic patriarchal traditions and practices.
3. That South African women have historically waged a struggle against their triple oppression.

Demand:

1. That progressive cultural organisations have a duty to accord equal status to women cultural workers and ensure their training and positioning.
2. That women assert themselves in all areas of cultural activity.

Resolution 14 on Visual Arts

Confirming: The importance of the role of visual arts in the democratic struggle.

Noting:

1. That posters and other graphics have made a significant contribution to advance the national democratic struggle.
2. That architects and craftspeople are often inadvertently excluded, from such conferences.
3. That craft is an essential part of our culture and the erosion of our craft traditions by, among other things, exploitation.
4. The power of film and television as a popular cultural medium and the need to develop an authentic democratic film culture in South Africa; taking into account the particular difficulties surrounding the finances of production and distribution of film and television
5. That visual arts education in the Black Community is seriously undeveloped.

We call upon: Visual artists to apply their skills and resources to further the national democratic struggle; and

We recommend:

1. That graphics directly associated with the democratic struggle, such as posters and other art work, be further developed as our revolutionary art; and that resources be allocated to this end.
2. That architects and craftspeople be organised alongside other cultural workers.
3. That our cultural workers undertake the documentation and analysis of our visual art in consultation with the mass democratic movement.
4. That archives be established and developed to record and preserve our work.
5. That cultural workers and the mass democratic movement urgently look into the question of drawing crafts people into the cultural structures of the mass democratic movement and into production and distribution collectives.

6. That cultural workers commit themselves to the sharing of skills and resources in the form of workshops and other progressive educational programmes in the community (CASA Preamble and resolutions 1987).

At the end of the conference, the following over-arching resolutions were adopted:

CASA Resolutions:

- To co-ordinate resources and direct assistance to areas of greatest need.
- To establish community-based art projects.
- To co-ordinate action against apartheid, supplementing broader campaigns within the mass democratic movement.
- To co-ordinate the implementation of the cultural boycott.
- To deepen discussion and debate on building a “humanist, internationalist but distinctly South African character of people’s culture, which draws upon the cultural heritage of all the people of the country” (Meintjies, Hlatshwayo, & Vadišlavić, 1989:5).

An additional CASA resolution is cited by Ernst that draws attention to the symbiotic relationship that existed between culture and South African politics:

- Cultural activity and the arts are partisan and cannot be separated from politics. Consequently a great responsibility devolves on artists and cultural workers to consciously align themselves with the forces of democratic and national liberation in the life and death struggle to free our country from racist bondage (Ernst 2002:15).

The ANC’s post-mortem report on CASA recognised arts and culture as the “mainstay of resistance and struggle”; and the need to organise liberation movement members, as the UDF and COSATU were experiencing difficulties in mobilising and organising broad-based groups at grass-roots level. It was necessary for the ANC to assemble exiled artists to organise and support the struggle and make the UDF’s task within the MDM more aligned and workable (CASA conference & festival report 1988). The report shed further light on the content of the conference, which included discussions in a panel format by the UDF and COSATU cultural desk representatives on issues relating to ‘Culture and the Law’, ‘Religion

and Culture', 'Popular Culture', 'Women in Culture and the Arts' and 'Institutions and Structures' (CASA conference and festival report 1988).

The CASA conference succeeded in three aspects. First, it facilitated a meeting of artists from both inside and outside South Africa, with leaders and other members of the liberation movement, to debate issues affecting culture in apartheid South Africa. Secondly, the cultural talent of South Africa was presented to the world in the form of an exhibition. The third and most important factor was that small groups of plenary sessions allowed for intimate discussion on matters affecting the arts with solutions for strengthening the cultural movement, making it more effective as a liberation strategy. This was in keeping with the address from Pallo Jordan, which stated that the intention of such platforms was to dictate the liberation movement's line of action (CASA conference ends 1987; Step up SA isolation 1988).

In order to gauge the effectiveness of its strategies, the ANC felt it necessary to endorse this cultural event, as a guide to implementing the cultural strategy process. This was to be executed both internally and externally. Internally, it was decided that cultural groups be organised into coordinated disciplines, to widen and develop resistance and encourage mass participation in an organised alternative culture. Within these organisations, communication and information dissemination could be rapid and decisions taken democratically. External strategies would drive support for the cultural boycott, to undermine apartheid culture. The UN would continue to register the names of artists and academics who disregarded the boycott; however, another register of names would be drawn up – international artists and academics who entered South Africa to aid the liberation struggle (Towards a progressive cultural boycott 1987).

This was an important event, not only in determining the framework for cultural activity in South Africa, but also as an acknowledgement of the role Barbara Masekela and her department had played in its organisation on behalf of the ANC. The event took cognisance of the role that culture played as a weapon of the struggle and factors affecting women: the subordinate role of women as a gender and the importance of women's role in the liberation struggle as cultural workers and the need to share skills relating to culture with women, especially those residing in rural communities.

3.2.5. Malibongwe Conference (Amsterdam, 1990)

The UN, together with various anti-apartheid organisations - had organised a seminar, *Women Under Apartheid*, from 9 to 11 May 1980, in Montreal, Canada (Bevien 2015), to which a delegate from the ANC's Women's League had been invited. The Malibongwe Conference preparations began in 1989, as a response to the seminar, *Women Under Apartheid*, 1980 and FEDSAW's Women's Cultural Festival held in South Africa in 1988. Malibongwe's conceptualisation was also based on the success of the CASA conference in 1987 and its support for the arts and artists in South Africa (Turksma 1990:5). The Malibongwe Conference was conceived as large-scale, with discussions held between the ANC in Lusaka, delegates in South Africa and the AABN, which hosted the event in Amsterdam (Malibongwe 1990:5; Venter 1990).

An ANC meeting held in 1989 in Lusaka clearly outlined what would be the content and context of the Malibongwe Conference. This conference was predominantly based on the debates and discussions that took place in South Africa on the position of black women in society and on their participation in the struggle for national liberation. It was considered imperative that the concerns relating to black women specifically should not be consumed by the broader liberation struggle.

To organise the event, a culture sub-committee was established in South Africa that would collaborate with the Dutch partners to ensure an invaluable experience and learning opportunity for all concerned. The tasks and responsibilities were outlined at another meeting in 1989, held in Tunis (Tasks and Responsibilities of the Culture Sub-Committee 1989). These included taking responsibility for the cultural and artistic programme such that it would further encourage women's participation in cultural activities. Women were selected in terms of their involvement in cultural activities in South Africa and the Netherlands, to ensure that debates were robust, relevant and substantial in content and argument. Women cultural workers, artists and performers who were part of the MDM were invited and informed about the types of programmes required, which included performance, film and video presentations and exhibitions of artwork (Tasks and Responsibilities of the Culture Sub-Committee 1989).

The ANC had requested that a wide range of South African women from all walks of life should participate in this event. Many women arrived from South Africa to discuss the role of *Women Under Apartheid* and their experiences. This allowed widespread sharing of information from all sectors of the community. The short-term objectives were that women would share their experiences and network with others from both inside and outside South Africa. The long-term objectives were to mobilise women into an organised force that would be able to contribute further to the liberation of South Africa (Background information to Malibongwe Conference 1989).

The Malibongwe Conference of 8 to 18 January 1990 was hosted by the AABN and funded (with enormous difficulty) by the Dutch government ministries, city councils, trade unions, churches and women's groups. The official opening coincided with the 78th anniversary of the formation of the South African Native National Congress, later known as the ANC (Venter 1990). It was a conference about women for women, themed 'Women United for a Unitary, Non-racial, Democratic South Africa' and was a celebration of the South African Women's Federation founded on 17 April 1954 (Culture and the Workers Struggle 1985; Venter 1990:14).

The ANC was represented by Ruth Mompati, (founding member of FEDSAW who served on the ANC's Women's League) and Mittah Seperepere, (member of the National Executive Committee of the ANC Women's League) (Women united for a unitary, non-racial, democratic South Africa 1990). Seperepere stated that the Dutch people were hosting this historic event because they had realised the "moral and political rightness of our cause" (Seperepere 1990). This was more than a moral obligation owed by the Dutch; the cultural accord between the ANC and Holland dictated support for the ANC, in terms of cultural needs. She cited the moral and political rectitude of the ANC, which had mobilised the world in its reaction against apartheid South Africa and made Malibongwe an important historical event (Seperepere 1990:2).

The delegation from South Africa included members of women's organisations, trade unions, community organisations, religious communities, the youth, students and women who were part of the media, law, social services, education, performing arts, theatre, music, literature, business, industry, fine arts, science and technology (Background Information to Malibongwe

Conference 1989). Among the delegates was artist Helen Sebidi, who gave an account of her status as both an artist and a woman, who had progressed from being a domestic worker to being a celebrated artist in 1989, when she won the Standard Bank Young Artist Award. Amongst her accomplishments, she had participated in many art competitions in the USA and had won a residency in New York (Van Dullemen 1991:125-127).

The aim of the conference was to mobilise the women of the country into a powerful force for action. The discussions on culture reiterated the idea that the various approaches to culture and its manifestations were embraced as anti-apartheid strategies by the ANC and that women's emancipation depended on the transformation of the oppressive apartheid systems then in place. It was decided that organisations would be encouraged to facilitate cultural education and skills-transfer programmes, in the knowledge that culture in society changes constantly and that this should be taken into account (Programme of Action 1990). The Malibongwe Conference resolved various matters relating to women: repression, children, education, culture, violence, health and family. It was resolved:

1. To encourage all structures, particularly women's organisations, to form cultural forums to facilitate cultural education and debate, particularly around culture and the oppression of women. The task of these structures should be to facilitate this on a grassroots level.
2. To ensure that research which is taking place for example through the Centre of Development Studies Commission on Culture and Media prioritises research on women and cultural traditions, towards building a people's culture. Women should actively participate in this research.
3. To increase the participation of women in cultural life through affirmative action – equipping them with skills and confidence in the media, film and production, and performance culture (Programme of Action 1990).

From the standpoint of Mala Singh (South African university staff association's representative) in her report back to her constituency, the conference was specifically organised to discuss the position of women in society and women's participation in the struggle for liberation. To this end, it was important to address the oppression of women and

develop non-sexist policies for a democratic South Africa. She reported that the objectives of this conference were:

1. To provide a forum for discussion, exchange and analysis of women's oppression and liberation by women from various sectors in South Africa.
2. To create strategies to ensure the equal and mass participation of women in all areas of decision-making and policy-making.
3. To mobilise women into a national democratic structure which would contribute to the anti-apartheid struggle as well as safeguard women's interests.
4. To address the issues raised in various papers of oppression, culture and tradition, children, emancipation of women and women united (Singh 1990:23-25).

The Malibongwe Conference was significant, as it was the first time that a major international conference had been held in honour of women. In terms of this study, the conference addressed two important arguments: women's position in society and women's participation in the liberation struggle via cultural activities.

3.2.6. Zabalaza Festival and Conference (London 1990)

The Zabalaza Festival, hosted in London from 2 to 15 July 1990, was influenced by both the Culture and Resistance (Gaborone 1982) and CASA (Amsterdam 1987) events. The Zabalaza Festival was an ANC initiative to mobilise cultural workers in South Africa and to find reasons for the delay in the implementation of the CASA resolutions of 1987.

A group of 90 South Africans attended the Zabalaza Festival, with the mandate to discuss "Socio-cultural transformation and the quest to lay the foundations of a new South Africa" (Oliphant 1993a:15). Serote stated that it was important that within the discussions, there should be a "culture of tolerance and search for the development of an inclusive South African consciousness which transcends the divisions and violence inherent to the culture of Apartheid" (Serote 1993:17). Andries Oliphant also felt that there should be tolerance and equal appreciation for all cultural forms. This was in line with what Oliver Tambo had requested in 1987: that apartheid culture was to be isolated and that people's culture must be strengthened, supported and nurtured (Oliphant 1993a:23).

The value of the Zabalaza Festival was three-fold: first, it was a campaign to continue the isolation of apartheid; secondly, it provided an international platform for people's culture; and thirdly, it contributed to the process of building organisational structures in South Africa (Nolte & Pissarra 1990:34).

The Zabalaza Festival anticipated a celebration of change in South Africa. As part of these celebrations exhibitions of works by South African artists' were held at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in Oxford and the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London. The exhibited works, which reflected on current concerns in South Africa, were by professional artists, little-known rural and urban artists and cultural workers from grassroots community art workshops. As with previous conferences, a principal aim was to impart skills to participants that would in turn benefit the continuing liberation struggle in South Africa,⁵⁶ as well as reconsider the position of black women (Zabalaza Festival n.d.).

Although this festival was similar to the previous festivals, an important aspect that differentiated it was the inclusion of an intense skills-development programme. The training received was to be channelled back into communities (Artists prepare for London festival, 1990:9). A two-week programme of workshops and training of the delegates in various art forms was held at the Shadwell Adult Education Institute in London. The training was in performance, writing, visual art, film and technical skills and administration. The visual art training was in computer graphics, printmaking, murals, staging an exhibition and protection of artworks. Apart from these skills-training workshops, a weekend conference was held to assess cultural developments in South Africa since the CASA 1987 conference (Zabalaza South Africa speaks 1990; Zabalaza Festival n.d.). The training workshops were in addition to exhibitions of fine art and photography, murals, South African films, plays, poetry, music and panel discussions on literature and the arts. This festival marked a turning point in South African culture.

The festival and its workshops, seminars and skills-training sessions ran concurrently during this period. The workshops were a platform to discuss cultural work and its role in a

⁵⁶ Although the ANC was unbanned in 1990, the country continued to function under apartheid legislation. The liberation struggle ended in 1994 when South African undertook its first democratic election.

democracy, with the intention of fast-tracking skills among cultural workers towards creating the envisaged democracy. It was to this end that exhibitions were hosted at MMA and the ICA, and murals were painted at the ICA, coupled with discussions. The fact that first-world countries would have to negotiate an understanding of mass cultural expressions from South Africa was not seen as a setback, as there were also interactions with other third-world countries: Cuba, India, Brazil, Argentina and Nicaragua. It was imperative for South Africans to realise that they were part of an international community, which located them within a broader human experience. Zabalaza was seen to be a process through which cultural workers would claim their own space as artists in South Africa (Serote 1990a:30; Serote 1990b:5).

Discussions and debate were central to the Zabalaza Festival and Conference providing insights into thought processes. Women participated in the panel discussions and were not merely observers although the panellists were predominantly male. A panel chaired by David Elliott, consisting of Frank Meintjies, Stephen Kromberg, Andries Oliphant, Hilda Bernstein and David Koloane, unpacked the influences of western perspectives on art making and how that affects the viewing and appreciation of art making by cultural workers who have not undergone any formal training. Attention was drawn to the reality in South Africa of the lack of facilities, education and exposure to other cultural forms (Kromberg 1993:32). Language was a huge stumbling block, as (for instance) the content of art made by traditional sculptors remained embedded in the work itself and artists were not sufficiently fluent in the international language of English to be able to relate this content. There was little access for an international audience to what South African artists were saying in their artworks (Elliott 1993:33). Elliot spoke of the fact that when people's artworks are assessed in terms of quality (European standards), black artist should be acknowledged as being culturally specific, as their works relate to the cultures in which that art is seen (Elliott 1993:44).

Koloane stated that 'slogan paintings' have a role to play in the cultural expression of black communities and that the Thupelo Workshop was formed to allow artists to network and transcend the level at which they made art. A problem raised by Koloane was that "whatever the black artist does is reviewed by a white reviewer, not a black reviewer. We don't have black reviewers. Works are viewed in the eyes of a white academic rather than the eyes of a black colleague" (Koloane 1993:34). This apprehension is recognised as white academics had already categorised art made by black artists as 'other'. The art making was not understood

nor was it 'sufficient' or promoted to be part of the mainstream South African art during apartheid.

Bernstein referred to the use of particular materials by cultural workers, such as pencil and cardboard and sheets of brown paper, straw and clay in the countryside and waste materials in the towns. She suggested that this contributed to the originality of South African artworks (Bernstein 1993:39). Bernstein also quoted Jordan:

While we require propaganda art we do not demand that every graphic artist and sculptor become a propaganda artist. We would urge our artists to pursue excellence in their respective disciplines, to be excellent artists, and to serve the struggle for liberation with excellent art. But let us remember that the future imposes grave obligations on us all, artists and non-artists alike (Bernstein 1993:40).

Another panel, consisting of Maya Jaggi (chair), Andries Oliphant, Mandla Langa, Ben Mofokeng, Ben Mokoena, Joyce Sikakane and Frank Meintjies, considered challenges to artists in shaping culture in a post-apartheid South Africa. Meintjies was of the opinion that there should be a transformation of the school environment, the broader cultural space and the media situation (Meintjies 1993:131). Sikakane was of the opinion that the ANC had created an opportunity to reclaim this culture as a strategy for mobilising the people (Sikakane 1993:133).

Oliphant stated that society is a cultural formation and that protest is often the very source for mobilising people, for enabling them to overcome forms of oppression. "We cannot silence any form of art (culture). We need to allow a situation where the scribbler and craftsperson can exist side by side to realise a democratic culture" (Oliphant 1993:136).

Other discussions held at Zabalaza included the 1987 CASA festival. The artists that sat on this panel were David Koloane, Helen Sebidi, Bhekisani Manyoni, Maggie Makhoana, Sophie Peter and Tshidi Sefako. Koloane agreed that CASA was important, as cultural skills transfer was imperative in moving the liberation forward. Sebidi was of the opinion that the success (of the content) of the festival would only be realised when information was relayed

back to communities in South Africa. In Peter's view what was important, was that each representative at the conference was selected by a regional group who indicated trust in that person. Peter pointed out that representatives were isolated in South Africa and it was important that they remained in contact to strengthen the newborn network of skills and individuals. This sentiment was shared by both Sefako and Makhoana (Oliphant 1993).

Apart from participating in these panel discussions, Helen Sebidi, Maggie Makhoana, Sophie Peter and Tshidi Sefako were among the ten artists responsible for painting four murals at the ICA gallery in London (the murals were exhibited from 6 June to 8 July 1990) – an exhibition of optimism. The ten artists were Lou Aiman and Mpumelelo Maneli from Port Elizabeth; Makhoana, Sebidi, Koloane and Manyoni from Johannesburg; Menzi Mchunu and Thami Jali from Durban; and Sefako and Peter from Cape Town. The intention was that the artists should portray an attitude of optimism and not depict the same clichéd struggle images that had been shown again and again. The subjects of the murals were:

Conflict (main mural): different styles and tendencies, reflecting the overriding theme of no attempt to reconcile or compromise in the struggle for freedom;

Close Harmony (opposite wall): based on a song that kept workers going;

Migration (side wall): traditional rural life and urban life of migrant labourers; and

Creation (side wall): rich in the symbolism of African mythology, such as snakes, cats and lizards (Oliphant 1993:160-161).

This mural installation and the travelling exhibition 'Art from South Africa' (1990) organised by the the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in Oxford in association with the Zabalaza Festival reflected contemporary art making in South Africa.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The exhibition was curated by David Elliott and David Koloane with Rayda Becker, Jacqui Nolte, David Roussouw and Gavin Younge. This is the first acknowledgement of a black South African artist and activist to have curated an international exhibition on South African art. After Oxford, the exhibition travelled to the Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, Aberdeen City Art Gallery, The Royal Festival Hall, London, Bolton Gallery, City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke on Trent and Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham.

3.2.7. Art from South Africa (Oxford, 1990)

The *Art from South Africa* travelling exhibition, curated by David Elliot and David Koloane in 1990, displayed contemporary South African artworks made by black and white artists, similar to Burnett's *Tributaries* exhibition in 1985. The difference between these two exhibitions was that Burnett curated his show in an effort to demonstrate a shift in institutional convention, where as *Art from South Africa* questioned the role of art and culture. In Elliott's catalogue essay, 'Babel in South Africa' he restated the question, "What role has culture to play in the new society?" (Elliott, 1990:7). Historically, the ANC's line on culture had been the straightforward Leninist prescription of art as a weapon of the struggle – a familiar enough slogan. The *Art from South Africa* exhibition however, showcased a range of contemporary visual culture in different materials, omitting the old divisions between 'craft' and 'fine art': bead and blanket work, posters, banners, linocuts, wire toys and dolls, painting, sculpture and video. It embraced the cultural experiences of black people by equating 'craft' with fine art, giving them a sense of cultural well-being, a sense of identity and a sense of location. The liberation movement realised the dislocation of black communities in South Africa, which encouraged their resolution on retaining culture as a weapon of the struggle so that people could reclaim their identity and sense of belonging and in the same process strengthen the liberation struggle.

The following examples of works by black women cultural workers, workers/ artists from the exhibition show a synthesis of craft and fine art, and of struggle and domestic images.



Figure 1: Noria Mabasa, *Ten Soldiers*, 1989

Clay and enamel paint (MOMA Collection, Oxford, Elliott, 1990:59)



Figure 2: Noria Mabasa, *Mpho and Mphonyana*, 1989
Clay and enamel paint (MOMA Collection, Oxford, Elliott, 1990:32)

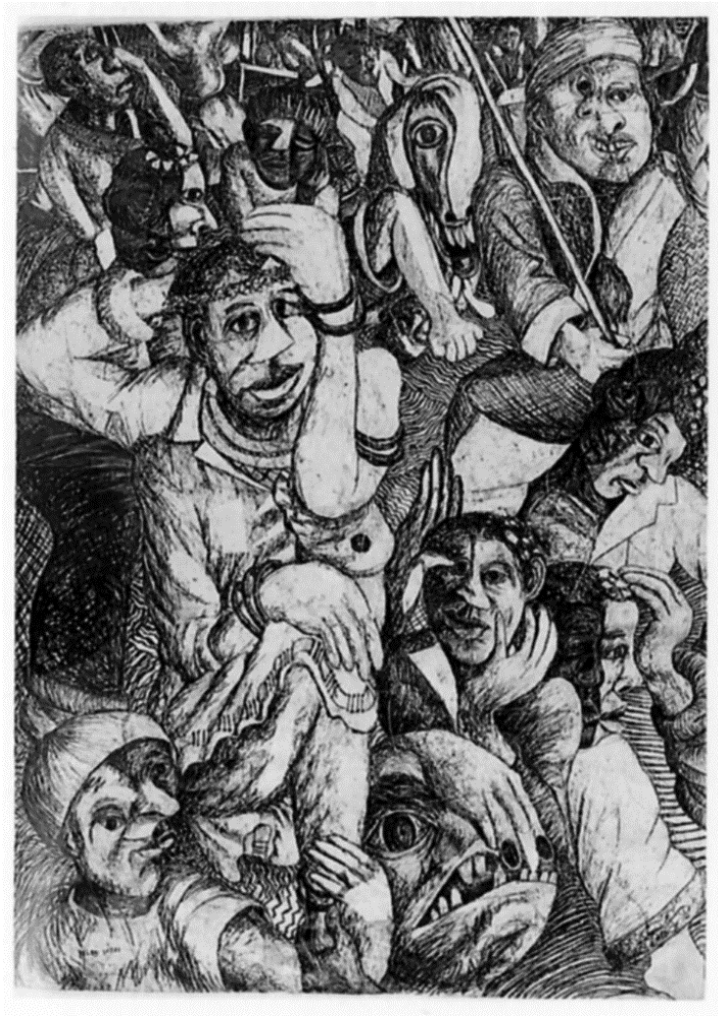


Figure 3: Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, *Anguish*, 1988
Pastel on paper (Elliott, 1990:24)

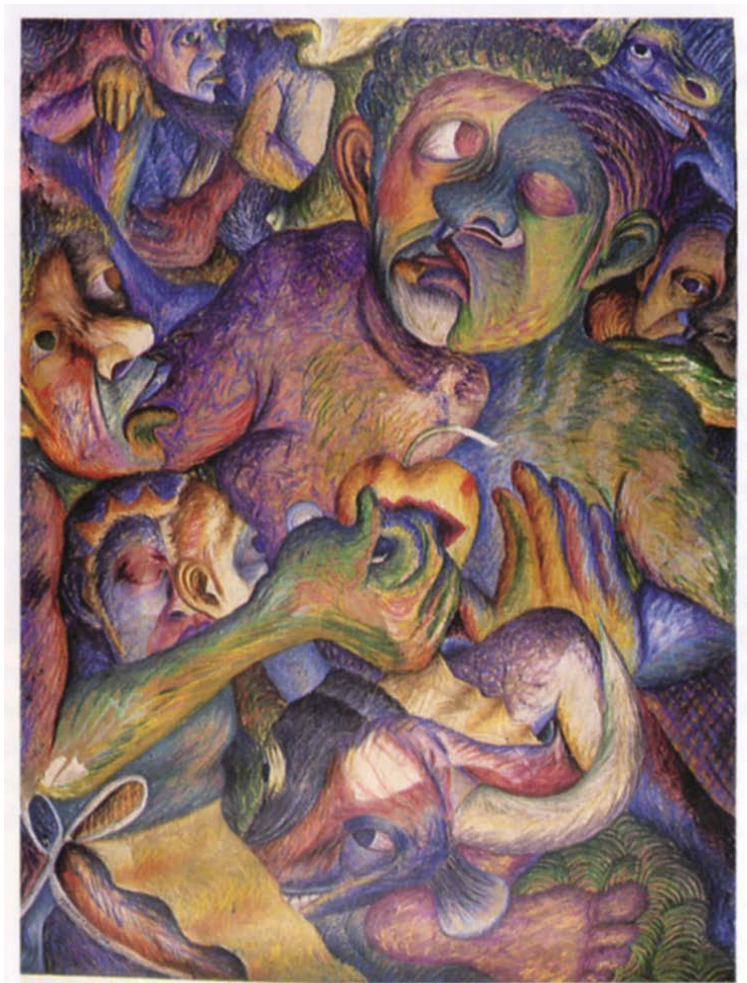


Figure 4: Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, *Untitled*, n.d
Pastel on paper (Elliott, 1990:75)



Figure 5: Dorothy Zihlangu, *The People Shall Govern*, n.d.
Embroidery (Elliott, 1990:29).



Figure 6: Dorothy Zihlangu, *A Woman's Place is in the Struggle*, 1985
Drawing on a pillow slip, applique (Elliott, 1990:79)



Figure 7: Mpumelelo Melane, *Siamese Twins*, 1989
Wood (Elliott, 1990:66)

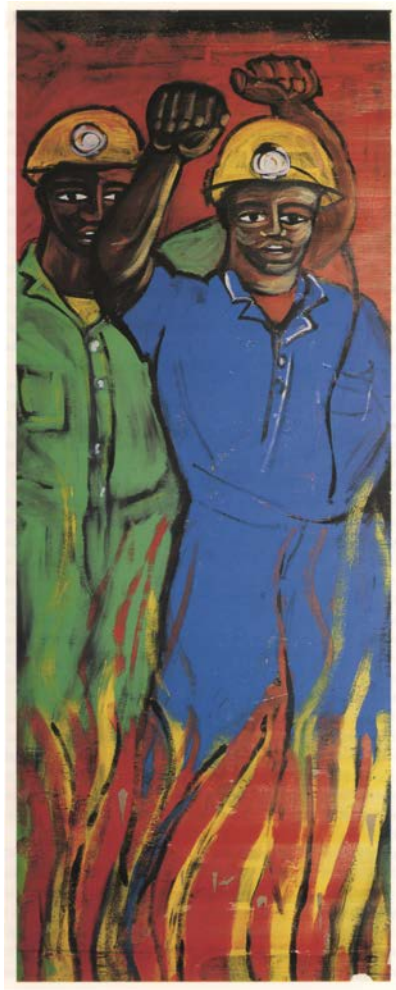


Figure 8: *Workers Mural*, 1989
PVA and acrylic paint on cardboard (Elliott, 1990:29)

3.3. THE CULTURAL BOYCOTT

The idea of a cultural boycott was originally sparked in an article in *The Observer*, a British newspaper, written in 1954 by Father Trevor Huddleston who lived in Sophiatown, Johannesburg. He stated, “I am pleading for the cultural boycott of South Africa” (Terry 1988:1). Ahmed Kathrada raised the idea once more in his article ‘Towards a cultural boycott of South Africa’, in 1956. He was of the opinion that a cultural boycott, together with the local struggle, would pressurise South Africa into rethinking its apartheid policy after experiencing international isolation (Kathrada 1956:16-19; International conference against Apartheid for a Democratic South Africa 1987; Willemse n.d.).

Apartheid South Africa became increasingly isolated from the international community. It withdrew from the British Commonwealth in May 1961 when it became a republic and its ties with various UN bodies were gradually severed during the 1950s and 1960s. In December 1968, the UN adopted Resolution 2396, which called on all states and organisations to withdraw educational exchanges with South Africa and in December 1980, the UN General Assembly adopted a specific resolution, 35/206E, on cultural, academic and other boycotts of South Africa (Terry 1988:4-6). South Africa failed to entice international black artists to visit the country and break the boycott in the 1980s. In 1983, the UN published the first register of artists to perform in apartheid South Africa, to dissuade them from future collaborations.

In a speech delivered in Dublin in 1986, Masekela reiterated the value of the cultural boycott as part of the struggle for liberation. The ANC had to maintain and sustain all strategies to eradicate apartheid with equal momentum. The boycott, she claimed, was a practical political exercise to combat white South African culture, which debunked black culture. She called upon all academics and artists to desist from visiting South Africa to share their skills and talents with the minority white population (Masekela 1986).

In September 1988, the UN sponsored the Symposium on Culture Against Apartheid, in Athens, to discuss the policy of cultural isolation of Pretoria, as art was at the heart of the liberation struggle in South Africa (Symposium on Culture against Apartheid 1988). A

document submitted to the UN's Centre Against Apartheid reiterated the resolutions adopted in 1968 to 'ring-fence' apartheid South Africa (Response of artists and entertainers to Apartheid 1988:1-8). As Jabulani 'Mzala' Nxumalo (Comrade Mzala) had written in 1986, "Art is an important weapon in the struggle; it either reinforces or undermines the powers of the oppressor" (Mzala 1986:78), an opinion supported by Tambo's earlier comment in 1984:

The interesting thing about the sports/cultural boycotts is that they have succeeded so far where other forms of sanctions have not been a success. They have demonstrated that if South Africa is effectively isolated then it will be in the interests of the people in South Africa who support the apartheid system, the electorate, ordinary people, white workers... it will be in their interests to do something about the system (Tambo 1984a).

In an address in London in 1987, Tambo stated that the boycott strategy encouraged a commitment to a South African democratic culture, which was in line with ANC thinking (Harber 1987; ANC 1990). The vigour with which the ANC pursued the arts and its role as a cultural weapon may be seen in the various guidelines that were forwarded to structures in South Africa. These guidelines included discussions to be held at regional level on the role and state of cultural organisations. Further to this is the questioning of whether the ANC itself was sufficiently supporting cultural workers with training and development (Guidelines for topics of discussion at regional cultural workshops 1988).

The cultural boycott created anxiety within the white community of artists and academics as the international cultural relationship with Europe weakened. However, the call to adhere to the cultural boycott against South Africa went unheeded by many gallery owners in the 1980s. Examples of such flagrant disregard is seen in the many international artists that exhibited in South Africa for example, an exhibition at the Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg included works by Paul Wunderlich (German) and Dame Elizabeth Frink (British) (Dewar 1987:12). Getz in her critique against the cultural boycott quoted Gill Addleson's (Director at the Durban Art Gallery) statement, "a cultural boycott is the worst stand to take against this country because culture enriches the entire population" (Getz 1985:10). The statement by Addleson that culture enriches the entire population is correct, however, within the South African apartheid context culture served the white population

exclusively. The cultural and academic boycott, which appeared on the agenda of every conference from Gaborone 1982 to Zabalaza 1990, had a serious impact on white South Africa's relationship with Europe, disengaging it from its colonial roots.

Oliver Tambo's statements regarding Europe's responsibility to South Africa positioned the South African situation in an international space for consideration and assistance (Tambo 1983). Specific emphasis was placed on culture and the role of the international community in assisting South Africa to eliminate apartheid's white domination. The emergence of a people's culture as an alternative culture in South Africa reflected the changes that had taken place over time. The human value attached to this approach was intended to draw the world community's attention, to assist in advancing the cause of democracy. The realisation of a non-racial, democratic and united South African people's culture would allow for the full potential of this 'new wave' culture to be nurtured (Oliphant 1993:16).

The drive to eradicate apartheid blurred the lines between culture and politics. Culture was not experienced as a separate force, but one that was constantly in people's consciousness during political struggles (Sole 1985:54). The call for an academic and cultural boycott by the international community as a strategy to draw world attention to South Africa's apartheid policies had consequences for artists and academics, both in South Africa and for those wanting to travel to South Africa to work. In an interview, Tambo's response to the question of the cultural boycott against South Africa was that it remained a very effective strategy for success. He felt that "if South Africa was isolated, then people who supported apartheid – including ordinary citizens not in government – would react and thus do something about it" (Tambo 1984a:5).

Serote's position on the cultural boycott was that it was another weapon of the oppressed and on this basis, it should be supported. He believed that the cultural boycott against South Africa was an avenue for stating the conditions of oppression to the world, to ensure that the world isolated apartheid culture (Serote 1988:48). Tambo's address in London judged culture to be a powerful weapon of the struggle. As a mechanism that seemed to have a life of its own, culture remained unchallenged in its usage. "The call for an academic and cultural boycott was a tactic of struggle by the ANC and the international community; and like all tactics, it had to retain a percentage of flexibility in its operation" (Naledi 1989:54).

The South African government's response to the call for a cultural boycott was to censor 'political' artwork, writing, posters, photographs, records and tapes, declaring them to be weapons of war and an incitement to violence against the state. The response by the ANC and those in sympathy around the world was succinct: "If these are weapons of war, then let's go to war... but using art and culture" (Pearson 1986:11).

This gave rise to the strengthening of the cultural boycott and in Britain, the formation of Artists Against Apartheid. The decision to institute a cultural boycott was a point of no return for the ANC. The boycott was seen as a weapon against apartheid and a shield for people's culture. It was a tool to isolate apartheid culture and at the same time served to promote a democratic people's culture (Cultural boycott is a weapon and shield 1988:10-12). There is no doubt that this cultural mechanism impacted on white academic and artistic endeavours in apartheid South Africa. The immediacy of contact with Europe via exhibitions, travel and visiting academics was regulated and proscribed, causing frustration to the apartheid culture.

The boycott was a strategy adopted by the ANC in order to isolate South Africa totally. The ANC realised that an apartheid culture would remain an oppressive mechanism, as there were few state facilities or gallery spaces for black people to engage in art and art created by black artists and cultural workers remained unrecognised as part of the mainstream in South African art history. This had bred inequality between black and white artists. A boycott would result in progressive cultural organisations in South Africa gaining recognition from international supporters, thus transferring power from government to the masses (ANC 1989).

In 1989, the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the ANC met and reiterated the CASA resolution of 1987. The resolution was that no cultural workers, artists, sports persons or academics should be permitted to travel to South Africa to perform or impart their services and expertise, except where such travel was clearly in furtherance of the national democratic struggle or any of its objectives (Langa 1987; CASA Preamble and resolutions 1987; ANC 1989). In a press release from this NEC meeting, the ANC emphasised that the cultural boycott and the empowering of cultural workers were strategic tools of liberation. The freedom of cultural expression of the black majority was inhibited by restrictions and cultural facilities were not easily available in the townships. The reality was that the experiences and

situation of black people were a direct result of the oppressive apartheid system and the position paper of the ANC outlines the rationale behind the call for a cultural boycott of South Africa:

1. The cultural and academic boycott of apartheid South Africa (that is, those bodies, institutions, cultural workers and their product that promote, defend and give aid and comfort to the system of White minority domination) must consistently and continuously be strengthened as part of our overall strategy for the isolation of the apartheid regime.

No cultural workers, artist, sportspersons or academics should be permitted to travel to South Africa to perform or to impart their services and expertise, save and except in those instances where such travel is clearly in furtherance of the national democratic struggle or any of its objectives.

2. Democratic and anti-racist South African artists, cultural workers, sportspersons and academics – individually or collectively – who seek to perform, work or participate in activities outside South Africa should be permitted to do so without fear of ostracism or boycott.

It would greatly facilitate matters if the Mass Democratic Movement created credible structures for consultation inside South Africa to vet such travel. The National Liberation and Democratic Movement should also be timeously informed of such plans so as to enable it to offer advice and assistance where necessary.

3. The current effort to create broad non-racial governing bodies in every major sports discipline has become an important new arena of struggle of the forces of national liberation and democracy. It deserves the support and assistance of the international community if it is to realise its potential.

4. It is the task of the forces of national liberation to promote and project the liberatory cultural values evolved by our people in and through their struggle. The national liberation movement should foster these democratic values and assist the exponent of this democratic culture to establish contact with democratic cultural workers in other parts of the world.

5. The National Liberation Movement and the Mass Democratic Movement must internationalise the campaign to defend the democratic media and journalists in South Africa. The flow of regular and accurate information about events in South Africa is a weighty factor in mobilising international opinion against apartheid and in support of our struggle.

The National Liberation Movement and all other democratic forces have a duty to assist the fledgling alternative media inside the country by ensuring that the international solidarity movement, non-governmental organisations and international agencies offer financial, technical and other forms of assistance (ANC 1989).

The cultural boycott, in its campaign to isolate the country totally, was supported by the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, the British Artists Against Apartheid and the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement (AABN). In a document titled 'Towards a progressive cultural policy' (1987), the AABN reiterated its support and recognition for both the ANC and the anti-apartheid strategies implemented, including the cultural boycott and the use of culture as a weapon of the struggle. In light of this, the AABN felt that there was a need to re-evaluate policies and strategies to create a single national South African cultural policy. The racial divide that had created a fragmented cultural vision within South Africa had to be destroyed, and replaced with an attitude of recognising and appreciating all people's ideas in cultural creations. This required mass participation. An external strategy would be to support the cultural boycott and allow international support against apartheid.

In its document, The academic and cultural boycott (ANC 1987a), the ANC echoed the AABN in calling for the strengthening of the cultural boycott as tangible evidence of international aversion to apartheid. It stated that support for apartheid was akin to a colonial enforcement of western civilisation on the African continent. The boycott confronted whites, on the basis that they should help in transforming South Africa into a democratic and non-racial country. The ANC, like the AABN, called for the continued support of isolating South Africa by the use of the UN black-list register of artists and athletes who visited the country in breach of the anti-apartheid boycott. The call was also for a rejection of the separate education systems in South Africa, which retained white supremacy in terms of skills, educational content, facilities of learning and funding for education. The document

recognised the value of (and the liberation movement's reliance on) culture as a weapon of the struggle, as it had played a meaningful role in highlighting the plight of the country in a visual format (ANC 1987a:1-5).

There were repeated calls to sustain the cultural boycott against South Africa with greater vigour, as isolation had led to the emergence of a 'people's culture' in the country that had proved beneficial to the liberation struggle (South Africa at the crossroads 1987). In Tambo's address to the Royal Commonwealth Society in 1986, he declared "We have decided to liberate ourselves" and called for "comprehensive and mandatory sanctions", the impact of which would be catastrophic to the apartheid government (Tambo 1986). A total boycott was pushed in the article Cultural boycott: Why it must be total, which stated that selective boycotts should be disregarded, as they would weaken the call for the complete isolation of South Africa (Cultural boycott: why it must be total 1987).

In an evaluation of the cultural boycott, Mike Terry posited that the support from international artists had already made inroads into pressurising apartheid South Africa (Terry 1988). Most importantly, this strategy denied South Africa acceptance to the international cultural platforms, which isolated the country. The refusal of filmmakers to work in South Africa reduced international financial revenue for South Africa and the country was not easily able to buy international television programmes. Minor changes were made to legislation governing the attendance of non-white race groups in theatres and participation in the arts, indicating that by expressing solidarity with anti-apartheid organisations and structures, the boycott enabled a gradual chipping away at the apartheid cultural monolith in the interests of the liberation struggle.

At all of the anti-apartheid conferences, the standing item on the agenda was culture, its benefits to the liberation struggle and how could this position be strengthened. It was evident from the debates at these conferences that the idea of culture as a 'weapon of the struggle' was accepted and defended. Culture served a purpose of uniting people at grass-roots level, showcased apartheid atrocities to the international community, which in turn strengthened this support for the cultural boycott of South Africa. Significantly the apartheid government labelled this 'new wave' culture, as a weapon of war. This turned the understanding of

culture on its head, as culture was always a yardstick that measured an idea of civilisation and had been repackaged as a destructive force that was capable of great destruction.

CHAPTER 4

BLACK WOMEN ARTISTS CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOUTH AFRICAN ART

The presence of black women in the liberation struggle and as participants in national and international exhibitions and conferences has been discussed in chapters two and three. These discussions place women as integral to the liberation movement, as they were more reliable as activists because they were more easily accessible at home. The fact that they were severely undermined by apartheid restrictions made them more militant than men. During the years of abuse under apartheid anger festered within black women, giving rise to the 1956 march against pass laws and the 1957 Public Utility Transport Corporation (PUTCO) bus boycott which began in Alexandra. Women also formed the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW) 1983, The Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW) 1984 and the United Democratic Front Women's Congress (UDFWC) 1987. Women as members of these organisations protested and marched against high rents, increased food prices and demanded the release of incarcerated black leaders. Chapter two provided a snapshot of apartheid's restrictive measures that dehumanised black women. In chapter three, discussions on exhibitions and conferences that transpired between 1980 and 1990 indicated women's level of engagement at these events. It further revealed that these events were sympathetic to black women receiving skills training in the visual arts and highlighted the need to include rural women within these activities. The acknowledgment of women in the liberation struggle should be seen in tandem with women remaining resilient despite their experiences of apartheid atrocities, of violations and violence in the townships. The chapter stresses the importance of registering women's role as both political and cultural activists during apartheid.

The conferences and festivals were platforms for discussion on and about the social position of black women as well as an opportunity to showcase art from South Africa. This was art making that rebuked apartheid, and had been marginalised by the state. It was made by cultural workers who employed a visual vocabulary to communicate their experiences to an audience in South Africa that both understood and sympathised with its content. This

collective response to ‘people’s culture’ contributed to the liberation struggle, as it acted as a collective visual diary recording apartheid atrocities and subsequently raised the ire of the apartheid state that perceived such images as violations against the state. These works were however acknowledged by the international community as representations of what was truly happening in South Africa, reinforcing the call for a cultural and academic boycott of South Africa.

Culture has always been accepted as the heart and mirror of any society; and in western society, additionally, culture is framed as a symbol of a particular lifestyle. The works of black cultural activists throughout this thesis have revealed that black representations subverted the mainstream ideology of white European culture. Subversive practices included literature, theatre, plays, music and visual art that were performed on makeshift stages and in community spaces, and its content remained an indictment of the apartheid government. Art made by black cultural artists disrupted, challenged and threatened the status quo in South Africa. These acts of subverting the state and its cultural arm resulted in state retaliation and the rejection of black cultural activity.

The visual arts, similar to other areas of patriarchal social structures remain male-dominated. This is not peculiar to South Africa; it remains a globally constructed defect of society. Within the complexities of the race and class struggle, black women contested the perceived masculine space of art making. Women are often documented as having assumed the constructed female role of crafters; in South Africa, this meant being a weaver, a needle worker, a ceramicist or a bead worker. These defined roles meant that to enter the domain of ‘fine art’, a woman required determination and confidence in herself, both as an artist and as a woman.

In the following biographies and interviews, I unpack what it meant to be a cultural activist, the circumstances which conscientised these workers and their expressions of culture as a weapon of the struggle.

4.1. CULTURAL ACTIVISTS

4.1.1. Tshide Sefako

Tshide Sefako was born c.1968 in Smithville, near Bloemfontein and attended school in Witsieshoek in KwaKwa. She moved to Cape Town in 1985 to complete her Grade 11 at Cathkin High School, which deregistered her enrolment a few months later as Sefako had not previously enrolled at a 'coloured' school. A racially segregated education system plagued South Africa during apartheid resulting in Sefako's deregisterion (Mahlangu 1989:14). Sefako joined the Community Arts Project (CAP) in Cape Town in the mid-1980s, where she spent two years in training – initially, as the only female trainee. The two mediums of art making that she enjoyed were oil painting and ceramic sculpture. Sefako invested her artistic energy in the Cape Town township of Khayelitsha during the week, teaching 120 schoolchildren. Despite the difficulties of coping with these large numbers and finding a venue, she found a way to teach the children to express themselves in their art making, which she believed was cathartic for them. She encouraged them to consider their immediate environments for inspiration and storytelling. Sefako was aware that there were very few female artists; this she attributed to the idea that making art was a man's occupation and that a woman's place was in the kitchen. However, she believed that if women had more opportunities, more women would make art (Mahlangu 1989:14).

An example of her work, the oil painting, *Untitled* (1986) (Figure 9), attests to her role as a cultural activist. The painting encapsulates the invasion of township life by the army and the police force. A row of army personnel are seen in the background in full military attire accompanied by an army vehicle. The painting also includes two black women that hurry past the 'monument' that Sefako had painted and a young black man in a suit who walks past. A large portion of the painting is dedicated to a book with two specific images: a set of praying hands of a black person that oozes blood on the right page and on the left page a white policeman with a telescopic 'extended eye' that surveys the praying hands. During apartheid, all funerals in the townships included the presence of the army and police force. Often mourners were filmed and kept under surveillance for long periods of time in an attempt to prevent further disruptions to apartheid. Individuals that were recognised on film were often arrested and spent extended periods in jail. The 'extended eye' could also have represented

the barrel of a gun as township residents were often killed in skirmishes between themselves and the police or army.

The hands are depicted as a sculptural three-dimensional form as opposed to the policeman who is two-dimensional. Both images are equally significant in this painting and serve as a memorial to what transpired in the townships. The painted book may be read as a bible ('Amen' is inscribed in the bottom right-hand corner) with the images of the policeman and the praying hands representing a story or chapter in the book. The perspective is unusual as the viewer is positioned at the podium, looking down on this event.



Figure 9: Tshide Sefako, *Untitled*, 1986. Oil painting

Photograph: Patricia Mahlangu

Sefako remained committed to being a cultural activist and the liberation struggle. She played a prominent role at the Culture in Another South Africa conference in Amsterdam in 1987 where she was a panel member on one of the cultural debates. She participated in the Zabalaza Festival, as one of the artists that painted the four murals at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London in 1990. Her participation in these cultural programmes both in South Africa and abroad was made possible as a result of the training she received at CAP, Cape Town and the skills training workshops offered at the Cultural Voice of

Resistance (1982) and the Culture in Another South Africa (1987) conferences, held in Amsterdam.

Unfortunately, Sefako hardly features in South African art history, unlike other cultural workers such as Noria Mabasa and Helen Sebidi.

4.1.2. Noria Mabasa

Noria Mabasa was born in 1938 in the Shigalo village in Limpopo and was forcibly moved in 1968 when the Bantustan⁵⁸ of Gazankulu was formed for Tsonga-Shangaan speaking residents. All residents required a permit to reside in these specific areas and Venda-speakers, like Mabasa, were forcibly relocated to the Tshino village near Vuwani, Thohoyandou (Nolte 2005; Luonde Vhavenda history 2015). She had no formal art training but learned to work with clay, making pots and clay sculptural vessels that included the female form (*domba*).⁵⁹ During the 1980s, she began making her distinctive figurative clay sculptures using the traditional coil technique. Her figures were fired in an open pit and then painted with commercial paint to add finer details. “It is in the subject and surface that Mabasa departed from tradition” (Becker 2006:294). This is an important statement by Becker as it reinforces the idea that Mabasa was ‘radical’ in her approach to traditional conventions and that she was prepared to experiment and reinvent what rural residents experienced as traditional clay vessels. Mabasa also worked in wood, becoming the first black and only Venda woman to carve wooden sculptures. The role of a sculptor is a further indicator of Mabasa’s intention to subvert traditional female roles.

⁵⁸ The Bantustans or homelands, established by the apartheid government, were areas to which the majority of the Black population was moved to prevent them from living in the urban areas of South Africa. The Bantustans were a major administrative mechanism for the removal of Blacks from the South African political system under the many laws and policies created by (The Homelands, 2018). The Bantustans, or “homelands”, as they were renamed in the attempt to foist ethnic nationalities on black South Africans, formally ceased to exist with the first democratic elections of 1994 (Phillips, Lissoni & Chipkin 2014).

⁵⁹ *Domba* is a pre-marital initiation in the Venda culture. Clay or wooden figures are created to reinforce ‘traditional’ mores among young Venda women (Nettleton 1992)



Figure 10: Noria Mabasa, Clay pot, bisque-fired

Photograph: Merwelene van der Merwe, Neillen van Kraayenburg Collection



Figure 11: Noria Mabasa, *White policeman*, bisque-fired clay and paint

Photograph: Proud 2006:295

Mabasa is acclaimed by South African History Online, as a cultural activist during apartheid who rendered artworks that represented the anxiety experienced by black women as well as the effects of apartheid.

Her figures of traditional ceremonies, women with babies and those that capture daily life around her reflect profound expressiveness and mastering of her craft. She conveys the experience of Apartheid from a Venda women's perspective focusing in the exploration of her origins, displacement, race, and sex. Her work contemplates the feeling of social rejection, censure, and disapproval that comes with diverging from the established guidelines of accepted and expected behaviour (Noria Mabasa 2011).

Jacqueline Nolte also argued that Mabasa's works could be read as political as she lived and experienced the atrocities of apartheid, as referenced in her forced relocation to Vuwani and her wood carvings that refer to cultural identity. "Her geography and social location resulted in her work being used to illustrate the category of 'transitional' art as that which does not participate in contemporary international art discourse and is overlooked by curators unless their desire is to 'showcase African difference'" (Nolte 2005).



Figure12: Noria Mabasa, *Ngoma Lungundu* (1995) Wood
Standard Bank Collection (Wits Art Galleries)
Photograph: Arnold & Schmahmann 2005:184

Nolte drew attention to Mabasa's wooden sculpture, *Ngoma Lungundu* (1995) that comprised human forms, a cow's head and a drum. Although the work was carved post-1990, it referenced the impact of apartheid on Venda culture and the importance of memory in dictating content. The work is suggestive of the Venda people crossing the river with their cattle and the disasters that often occur when the river is in flood. In Nolte's reading of the symbolism attached to this work, the drum is representative of Venda culture and the river represents the turmoil that intercepts life. During this turmoil, it is imperative that the drum remained secure (Nolte 2005). "Mabasa not only represents people engaged in customary and more modernized political rituals, but also represents threats to order" (Nolte 2005:185).

Another important reading by Nolte in this work is the idea of collective memory that situated itself in the forced removal experienced in 1968 that required relocation not only physically but a reinvigoration of cultural identity and history in a new space. Apart from this, Nolte posits that within all that had happened to Mabasa "It is possible that she uses this subject matter to discover how she, as woman, is positioned within the historical narrative

and how this coincides with her experience of material and patriarchal structures of control” (Nolte 2005:186). The depiction of life and death was a recurring theme in Mabasa’s work, “as if confirming an understanding of art that attempts to access memory and obliterate traumatic experience by giving it conscious form” (Nolte 2005:187).

Curators Ricky Burnett (*Tributaries* 1985), Steven Sack (*The Neglected Tradition* 1988) and David Elliott (*Art from South Africa* 1990), reflected on the work of Noria Mabasa. However, none of them proclaimed the deviation from the ‘female’ norm of craft (beaded dolls, clay vessels, woven mats) as a political decision referencing gender or political history. Mabasa’s use of wood carving to render her imagined content, a medium reserved for black men was neglected as an anomaly amongst the works exhibited. Mabasa’s initial ‘domba’ vessels that had morphed into painted clay figures of specific, recognisable political figures from her community, infers the political nature of her works, not only in determining content but also in her approach to her new painted clay figures.

4.1.3. Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi

The discussion on Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi articulates the argument that black artists and their cultural vision subverted the mainstream white cultural position in South Africa, with both cultural positions having manifested parallel to each other. Although some black artists adopted the use of western materials and techniques⁶⁰ in their art making, they remained sidelined as artists in South Africa. White South African artists retained their cultural superiority⁶¹ until 1989, when Sebidi received the prestigious Standard Bank Young Artist Award. This was a historic moment for black women in the liberation struggle and the

⁶⁰ Examples of black artists influenced by western techniques and materials were Louis Maqhubela (painter), Sydney Khumalo (sculptor), Lucky Sibiyi (painter and carver), Gladys Mgudlandlu (painter) amongst others.

⁶¹ Until 1990, newspaper and art critics slated and often ignored art making by black untrained artists (refer to Chapter 1.2.). White artists were acknowledged for their commitment and retaining of Eurocentric ideas, methods and techniques. Exhibition spaces, state and public funding and education and training in the visual arts were available to white artists. Minimal funding was available for black education as compared to white education. No funding was allocated to visual arts education at primary or secondary school black learners. The neglect by the state to support art training for black South Africans, perpetuated white dominated cultural practices.

rewriting of South African art history as Sebidi was the first black woman artist to receive national recognition for her painting.

In this study, Sebidi, like Mabasa, is positioned as a revolutionary in her achievements: first, as a black female artist, and secondly, as an artist who gained professional recognition for her approach to painting, content and personal technique in mainstream South African art history. The consideration of her achievements is imperative for assessing the value of the artistic expressions of black women during apartheid, in the rewriting of South African art history. This forced re-reading of the cultural content embedded in the experiences of apartheid gives valuable insight into an aspect of history, which conveys the role of black women as historians and artists in South Africa. A brief history of Sebidi explains the true value of her achievements.

Helen Sebidi was born in 1943 in Marapyane, west of Mpumalanga in the Mmametlhake district and schooled until Grade 8, when she left for Johannesburg to become a domestic worker, dressmaker and self-taught artist who was inspired by her grandmother's soft-pastel decorations on the walls of her home. She was also encouraged by her employer, Heidi Paetsch, an artist herself, to paint. In the early 1970s, she spent three years in training with John Koenakeefe Mohl, in Soweto, Johannesburg developing her skills in painting and drawing. His death greatly affected Sebidi, as Mohl was a mentor and trusted critic of her work. Sebidi finally quit as a domestic worker and joined the Katlehong Art Centre in Johannesburg, where she learned pottery skills and was encouraged by Lucky Sibiya to explore her black urban context (*The art of Helen Sebidi* 1985; *True Love* 1987:75; Nolte 2005; Leeb-du Toit 2009). In 1986, David Koloane encouraged Sebidi to enrol at the Johannesburg Art Foundation, under the guidance of Bill Ainslie and Ilona Anderson. The Thupelo Art Workshop, associated with the Foundation, allowed her to experiment with materials and engage with other artists nationally and internationally (Arnold 2009).

In 1986, Sebidi was the first black woman to hold a solo exhibition at the FUBA Gallery in Johannesburg. Her exhibition was in honour of Mohl and her works consisted of ceramic pots, paintings and sculptures (*True Love* 1987:75; Sebidi 1987). Her works began to enter

public collections for example, UNISA Art Gallery in 1987.⁶² Sebidi's works constantly portray women as a central theme and she attributes this to the idea that:

I would draw pictures of women working in the fields and in their homes with babies on their backs...I have always been concerned about the lot of women, the incredible amount of work they have to do and the little rewards. But I have also always admired the strength and the beauty that they possess. My work is a celebration of all I see in African women (*True Love* 1987:75).

The process used by Sebidi to generate a multitude of forms within a confined space was to fragment and abstract her forms by cutting and tearing them, then relocating and working over them to reinterpret the image. This process became Sebidi's personal form of visual communication (Leeb-du Toit 2009).

Sebidi participated in exhibitions during the 1980s, with artworks steeped in experiences of black African prejudice, but she remained on the periphery even though her works were accepted on the Standard Bank National Drawing Competition (1987) and the Cape Town Triennial in 1988 (*South African Arts Calendar* 1989:1). Sebidi was not recognised within the mainstream of South African artists until she received the 1989 Standard Bank Young Artist Award announced at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival, Grahamstown. Alan Crump introduced Sebidi as an artist whose work transcended all others in the unique manner in which she used her materials to express her subjects with boldness, in both large-and-small scale formats. Her work spoke of the fractured society of apartheid South Africa and she drew inspiration from her family and community. Her message was conveyed through her personal interpretation of the effects and experiences of apartheid (Crump 1989).

The prestige of this award included a countrywide, travelling solo exhibition that allowed a wider white South African audience to engage with her works, which were devoid of western

⁶² On the 10 December 1987, Julia Charlton (UNISA Art Gallery) sent a letter to Sebidi to confirm the purchase of two works: *Free Woman* (charcoal and pastel 1987) that was touring on the Standard Bank National Drawing Competition Exhibition and a drawing that was on exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Foundation (Charlton 1987).

content. This catapulted exposure into another circle, within the white cultural environment, which was important as “many art museums – let alone the South African public – will not know of the artist, Helen Mmakgoba Mmapula Sebidi. In an art world that has long been dominated by the white, male professional artist, acknowledged black women artists are a rarity in South Africa” (South African arts calendar 1989:1). Instead, her art making, apart from being recordings of her personal experiences in black townships as a woman and a black resident, questioned the future of black South Africans placed in these circumstances.

Sebidi maintained the theme of women in her artworks, in which she used materials (such as pastel) in a way that allowed for an expressive, explosive engagement between medium and content. Her subject matter represented the burden carried by black women in an apartheid context of overcrowding, poor life-style experiences, violence and restrictions in townships. She referenced forced removals to alien places of resettlement and the angst of emotional experiences in the context of dislodged societies attempting to stabilise themselves while constantly in a state of flux. Her works reflect on the various laws stemming from the Land Act of 1913, restrictive labour laws, the pass laws, the erosion of family values affecting black people and the struggle to be a free citizen in one’s own country.

Perhaps the most disturbing element in Sebidi’s work for a Eurocentric viewer is the lack of space, the removal of breadth, which simulated the claustrophobic reality of living in the townships: houses close together, people crowded together in trains and taxis and at bus stops, people crammed into small spaces inside vehicles on their way to or from work. Sebidi’s art speaks of the human horror black people embraced in the townships, on a physical, emotional, political and social level (Jacobson 1989; Korber 1989; Claassen 1990).

By sharing individual experiences of the dislocation and marring of the black family, Sebidi created an archetypal Mother Africa with woman as the central image, representing the breakdown and anguish of the homes and families of black South Africans – circumstances common to an entire population of people defined by their race (Oguibe 1997).

Sebidi reflected on the contradictions between African social structures and European influences in Africa. In Gavin Young’s interview with Sebidi, he claimed that she was articulate in explaining all the imagery in her work; for Sebidi, “the personal is the political”. Young cites Marion Arnold’s statement in her Standard bank catalogue essay on Sebidi,

“Not for the first time, references to gender, tradition and ethnicity have entered arts’ vocabulary. As an artist, Sebidi has entered this debate especially as it relates to women’s experiences and, more controversially, to tradition” (Younge 1990:34). Her works represented the value of an African aesthetic, in which content and selected representations of the human form are core to their reading. She displayed an African philosophy of humanity in which animals symbolise traits and associations intrinsic to African culture, referring to misgivings or misfortunes in life (Sebidi 1987). It is in the unpacking of the content of Sebidi’s artworks that one experiences the memory of events, in the same way one does with Picasso’s *Guernica*.



Figure 13: Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, *Modern marriage*, 1988-9
Oil on canvas. Johannesburg Art Gallery

Sebidi’s work *Modern Marriage* (1988-9) emphasised the subjection of women and the erosion (by a colonised lifestyle) of the African values associated with marriage. Women are central to a community and are thus portrayed as powerful protagonists in her work, which is imbued with the importance of gender issues (usually, the position of women). In Nolte’s reading of this painting, she stated that the figures suggest the challenge to survive in a

chaotic space that merges both western and African culture. This merging is denoted in the attire worn by the figures and the half-male and female identities that mask their faces. Nolte claimed that this approach to painting was often repeated in Sebidi's work as an indication of exploitation of both black culture and black individuals, a commentary on the dangers associated with urban environments (Nolte 2005).

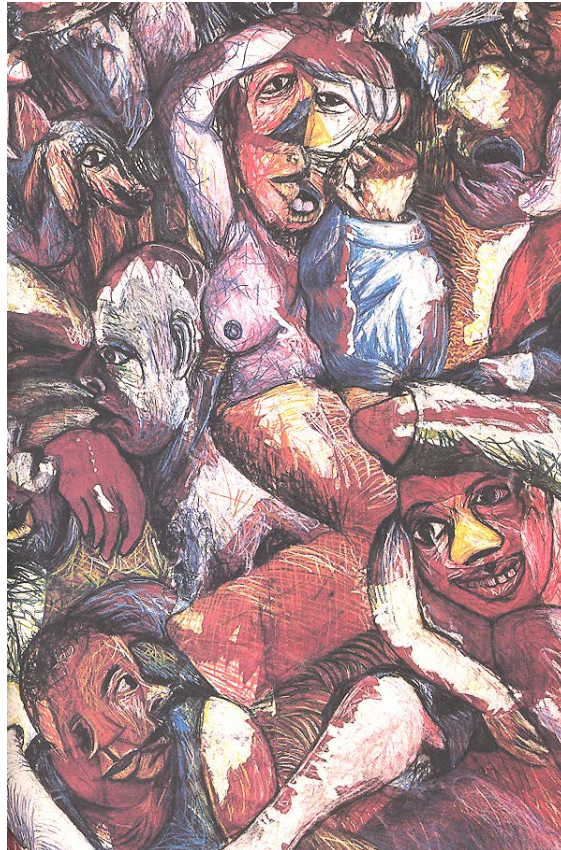


Figure 14: Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi,
Where is my home? The mischief of the townships, 1988
Pastel on paper. Collection of the artist

In *Where Is My Home? The Mischief of the Townships* (1988), Sebidi highlighted two aspects affecting black township residents during apartheid; first the loss of home, due to forced removals or taking refuge from police searches by avoiding familiar spaces; and secondly, accusations against the youth as trouble-makers by the state. African townships often bubble with the sounds of children at play and their playful misbehaviour but apartheid experiences sullied this period of innocence, given children's altercations with security forces in the townships. Sebidi questioned the alienation that black people felt as residents in their own country. The notion of home is always associated with security, stability and family that was

seldom available in the townships. The title of the work recites the social insecurities experienced under apartheid not only by adults but by children as well. Sebidi's statement about herself as an artist defined the meaning in her works: "My works are a reflection of who I am, where I come from and where I am going. They are a statement about my culture" (*True Love* 1987:75).

Tshide Sefako, Noria Mabasa and Helen Sebidi narrate in their works, the memory of personal experiences that included forced removals and the effect of apartheid laws on black women living in either the rural or urban areas. Mabasa and Sebidi initiated their art making practices with traditional forms and images respectively however, they were both encouraged by their circumstances to transform and reshape their image making that resonated with their current circumstances (Nolte 2005).

4.2. Cultural activists: interviews

In order to harvest the art making and experiences of black women during the 1980s, this thesis is based on documented literature as well as memory. Memory is an important factor as it plays to the oral tradition of Africa in sustaining its legacy and in documenting histories of people. Within both CRT and grounded theory, memories serve to 'legitimise' the experiences of events that help construct history. To argue further for black women as cultural activists, six women, five black and one white, from different sectors of society were interviewed.⁶³ In interviewing these cultural activists, a history of a particular period is documented.

The six interviewees were Bulelwa Margaret (Nise) Malange, Judy Seidman, Bongiwe (Bongi) Dhlomo, Sakunthala (Sanna) Naidoo, Thunai Govender and Ujala Sewpersad. They were not all trained at formal institutions but found ways of bestowing their cultural skills to the struggle. Malange is not a visual artist; she was well known as a cultural activist, through

⁶³ Two sessions of interviews took place, three in Durban (Govender, Malange and Sewpersad) and three in Johannesburg (Dhlomo, Naidoo and Seidman). The interviews revealed that the women artists were predominantly from Durban. Bongiwe Dhlomo and Sakunthala Naidoo were both born in Durban and moved to Johannesburg.

her writings, plays and organising of cultural activities in the trade unions and other cultural outlets. The interview with Seidman, who lived in exile in the 1980s, is an example of international support for liberation, particularly with regards to her participation in the 1982 Culture and Resistance conference in Botswana, which precipitated a strategic cultural struggle against apartheid. Dhlomo's extensive career spanned from her artistic training at Rorke's Drift Arts and Crafts Centre to managing arts training facilities in the black townships during apartheid. Naidoo found refuge in being a cultural activist when her husband was arrested and jailed for political reasons and both Govender and Sewpersad were involved in student politics during the 1980s.

4.2.1. Bulelwa Margaret (Nise) Malange



Figure 15: Nise Malange
Photograph by the author

Bulelwa Margaret Malange, better known as Nise Malange, is currently director of the Bartle Arts Trust (BAT) Centre in Durban. She was born on the 19th November 1960 in Cape Town. Her career as a charitable worker started as a young girl; she helped others to write letters to family members. As a teenager, Malange had already written, produced and acted out plays about life's tragedies in the townships, especially that of migration and the fragmented black family due to apartheid legislation and policies. She stated that "women had a limited education and were often unaware of what was really happening in the country" (details throughout are from Malange 2010).

At 16 years old she was sent to the Eastern Cape to learn and retain her cultural roots; with the advice from her liberal mother to befriend people of all races, rich or poor, as her mother believed that Nise might one day need their help. Malange's political education started at school; and further training came via her involvement in the South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU) in East London. The 1976 student uprising, followed by the death of Steve Biko in 1977, ingrained in her a reason to continue in the liberation movement. She read the *Daily Dispatch* to keep abreast of what was happening in the rest of the country. During this time, Malange kept returning to the workers' movement, in the trade unions, as an option for change in the country.

The Reverend Sikolakhe Marawu, Malange's uncle, was a minister who officiated at many apartheid victims' funerals. He joined the General Workers Union (GWU) in 1978 and 'organised' dock workers in Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and Durban. He was detained on many occasions and imprisoned on Robben Island for his involvement in anti-apartheid activities. After his release from Robben Island, he again involved himself in political activities. Malange remembered helping him type pamphlets and other documents when he involved himself in the Fattis and Monis strike in 1979 and the Red Meat Boycott in 1980. Her personal involvement with the GWU, where her uncle worked, further sensitised her to the plight of workers and the liberation movement.

Malange relocated to Durban and involved herself in *Speak* magazine, which published articles on the plight of women in rural and urban areas, the violence affecting lives during apartheid, migrant labour issues and their impact on black women. These issues saturated Malange's poetry. She realised that women were voiceless; through her poems and writings she tried to find a voice and a space where women's voices could be heard. She worked with Alfred Qabula (a respected cultural worker) and in the 1980s (specific date unknown) they wrote a play together on migration and the oppression of women, titled *Why Lord?* Such plays were performed at union meetings, to audiences who associated with the contents of the play. Malange, then only 20 years old, also involved herself in the Natal Organisation of Women (NOW), where she workshopped plays, writing and poetry skills with local women.

Although she retained skills in creative writing, Malange considered other media skills, (specifically video training skills) to be a valuable addition and support to her documented

stories about women's experiences in South Africa. She trained and received her creative writing qualification from the University of Iowa in the USA, which further sharpened her writing skills in creative and free writing. Her combined skills contributed to her being one of the founding members of the workers' theatre in KwaZulu Natal in the 1980s. This was important as this platform allowed workers on the factory floors (especially black women) to meet and collectively share their anguish in the form of songs, plays and dance. It allowed the enactment of anti-apartheid sentiments to be voiced against the restrictions and destruction of black families within a 'safe space'.

In 1987, after the CASA conference in Amsterdam, many meetings and discussions took place in South Africa. Malange unfortunately did not attend CASA but contributed in implementing the resolutions adopted. Malange is recognised for her role in the formation of the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) 1987 and within COSAW, the launch of the Women's Forum on 29 September 1989. "It was important to create an organisation to drive the CASA resolutions relating to culture, women and cultural workers" (Malange, 2010). COSAW was important as it encouraged writing and literature skills at grassroots level for adult men and women, as such skills were not part of apartheid education for black South Africans. Various workshops and classes in the evenings and Saturday mornings were initiated to assist with writing and reading skills.

COSAW facilitated most of the discussions on cultural progress at the CASA conference. Upon the representatives' return to South Africa, COSATU and the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and Locals (cultural units) were set up in communities to create arts and culture programmes for women and the youth. This served to reach masses of people at a single event. COSAW set up Locals, which trained cultural workers and librarians. The idea of 'suitcase' mobile or temporary libraries was developed, to ensure books reached communities in the townships where there were no such facilities. Further to this, COSAW trained people in publishing skills, so that communities could publish their own magazines. COSAW's *Staffrider* magazine printed stories, articles, artwork and current discussions and debates about the struggle so that people had access to information about their own lives.

The imparting of skills started with the workers: it was a workers' culture. The community was alive with those willing to promote their experiences. Magazines were written using typewriters, as computers were not available. One of these magazines, *Speak*, taught women in the community to paint basic banners and design their own brochures. It was also a mouthpiece for female workers and domestic workers, who would meet every Thursday to discuss issues that affected them. This created a sense of solidarity among them that they were living in the South Africa that had been envisaged.

Skills training also included the printing of t-shirts and posters, which became the 'new media' and the voice of the people. Literacy levels in the townships were low and vibrant messages, which spoke of people's concerns, were appreciated. This is the main reason for the creation of plays, poetry and t-shirts that conveyed messages and encouraged interest in learning and the struggle.

Because television and radio were government entities, constricted by apartheid policies, progressive organisations targeted people at venues such as the factory floor or church conventions. At these gatherings, activists had to guard against being photographed, as such records were often kept by the police force's special branch for apprehension purposes of those identified as ringleaders. News of current events was also disseminated in newspapers, such as the *New African*, which were sympathetic towards the liberation struggle.

With reference to the discussions following Albie Sachs' *Preparing ourselves for freedom* (Sachs 1989), in which he called for the banning of 'culture as a weapon of the struggle' for a period of five years, COSAW was in the forefront of this debate together with COSATU. The Universities of the Western Cape, Cape Town, Kwazulu Natal, and Witwatersrand, the Culture and Working Life Project, and Cultural Workers Congress amongst many other cultural organisations rejected Sachs paper (de Kok & Press 1990).

Malange felt that Sachs' discussion should rather have taken place in Crossroads or Gugulethu, where it would have been more meaningful on many levels; instead, it was held at the University of Cape Town. As the COSAW representative, she countered Sachs' notion of a ban on artworks reflecting atrocities experienced by black citizens in South Africa, opting rather to retain such image-making, which had been adopted at the 1982 Culture and

Resistance conference. Malange also presented this as COSAW's position at the Ecumenical Hall in Durban, where the Sachs debate continued to unfold.

The launch of the Women's Forum (September 24, 1989) is equally significant as COSAW realised the importance of highlighting issues specifically experienced by women. These issues ranged from the long hours experienced as domestic workers, farm labourers and factory workers to matters of unions, being single parents, legal assistance and police harassment. Within such forums, leadership amongst black women was recognised, which created structure, unity and confidence in the membership. Malange believed that the Women's Forum would allow black women to address their oppression of being referred to as minors (apartheid policy), thus rendering them unable to make adult decisions about their lives. She argued that the CASA conference resolution was that "women assert themselves in all areas of cultural activity[...]The anger and pain suffered by women in Natal under the State of Emergency and the current violence has made women start writing about the issues that affects them" (Writer's notebook 1990:20-1).

Malange always confronted matters affecting women as cultural workers, in the workplace and as activists. She posited that women are continually challenged when in positions associated with men and it is imperative that women grow in confidence. Women can do this by gravitating towards like-minded women and then involving themselves in cultural matters such as writing, which allows for the sharing of experiences, culture and history. Malange spoke of the patriarchal attitudes of the male trade unionists in KwaZulu Natal, who formed cultural Locals, unfortunately, with very few women as participants. Very little information on cultural activities would filter down to women, whose cultural involvement was further restricted due to the lack of both child-care facilities and self-confidence. However, Malange believed, "it was only women themselves who could promote their own involvement in the liberation struggle through cultural activities and thereby address issues affecting women" (Malange 1989).

Malange's influence in the cultural environment extended into projects housed at tertiary institutions in Durban. She was a facilitator at the Culture and Working Life Project at the University of KwaZulu Natal in Durban during the late 1980s. This unit played a significant role in training cultural workers and factory workers affiliated to COSATU to verbalise and

visualise their apartheid experiences in the forms of art, music, dance, poetry and writing, by registering for either short or long-term programmes (Culture and Working Life Project, n.d.; Malange, 2010). The setting up of such projects was workshopped at the 1987 CASA conference, so that skills transfer in the arts could be fast-tracked. The Culture and Working Life Project initiated *Injula* (a journal for black people), which published reviews on art in isiZulu. The alternative press such as *Injula*, played an important role in voicing the grievances of ordinary people, as a news source and as a platform for awareness and consciousness building of the liberation struggle. Most important was its role in educating the rural population as it was published in their local language (Touwen 2011).

Similar to many other black men and women, Malange faced passport restrictions during apartheid that made travel to meet with people in exile almost impossible. She was therefore not able to attend the 1982 festivals in Gaborone and Amsterdam; however, she did travel to Dakar on a UNESCO mission, where she met Barbara Masekela and Wally Serote in 1988. This meeting between them was to discuss persistent cultural challenges facing South Africans and what support could be offered from the international community and the exiled ANC. Malange believed that the CASA (1987) conference was very important, as delegates were exposed to new experiences and skills and returned re-motivated to address apartheid. Malange attended the Malibongwe Conference in Amsterdam in 1990, where she presented a position paper on arts, culture and tradition that affected many rural black women in Kwazulu Natal.

Malange, in her interview, paid tribute to Bongiwe Dhlomo who represented black women artists at many conferences and exhibitions that promoted the struggle. She also thanked all the women – especially the domestic workers – who participated in various programmes to bring about change in the country (Malange 2010). Malange's driving force during apartheid was to find spaces and opportunities for women to have a voice. It was imperative to her that the voices of black women were heard.

4.2.2. Judy Seidman



Figure 16: Judy Seidman

Photograph: judyseidman.com 2011.

Judy Seidman is included here because of her unique family and cultural ties with Africa and with exiled organisations and individuals. She was closely involved with MEDU art ensemble and the development of culture as a weapon of the struggle.

Judy Seidman was born on the 7th June 1951 in Norwalk, in the United States of America (USA) and introduced to politics and art by her mother and grandmother respectively. At 11 years old, she moved with her parents to Ghana, where she was educated at a mission school, Achimota College (1961-1966). In her reading of articles published in *Drum* magazine, which was available to her, she was fascinated with the Treason Trial of 1956 to 1961 and the subsequent Rivonia Trial of 1963-1964, which were then unfolding in South Africa. Her association with the arts is attributed to practising Ghanaian sculptors in the area in which she lived. In 1966, the family returned to the USA and she enrolled at the University of Wisconsin, studying sociology and art. After completing her Master's degree in Fine Art, she re-joined her parents, who had moved to Zambia. Her sister had already begun work at the ANC office in Lusaka, as a secretary (details throughout are from Seidman 2014).

In 1975, Seidman moved to Swaziland with her husband and taught at the Thokoza School for refugees in Mbabane. There she met the sculptor and political activist Pitika Ntuli. Ntuli was soon arrested and jailed for six months, during which time she visited him; upon his

release, she shared an exhibition with him in Swaziland. In 1980, Seidman and her husband moved to Oxford in the United Kingdom, and then to Botswana at the end of the year. During this time, Seidman wrote two books, *Ba Ye Zwa. The people live. South African daily life under apartheid* (Seidman 1979) and *Face-lift apartheid: South Africa after Soweto* (Seidman 1980). Both these books described the living conditions under which black people lived and the self-sustaining life they had created for themselves under apartheid in South Africa. In *Ba Ye Zwa. The people live. South African daily life under apartheid* Seidman stated, “African people have developed a culture and consciousness of their own. Common roots and experiences have created a common awareness, the people have built new foundations” (Seidman 1979:66).

The Medu Art Ensemble was established in 1979 and played a pivotal role in promoting resistance to apartheid in South Africa. Seidman, at the request of Thami Mnyele, joined the Medu Art Ensemble in 1980. There were six creative units operating under the guidance of the Publications and Research unit: Theatre, Graphic Arts and Design, Publications and Research, Film, Music, and Photography.⁶⁴ Medu’s focus was to train nationals and exiles in the skills offered by the six units. This provided opportunities for cultural engagement and built closer relationships between communities and cultural workers (Kellner & González 2009a:76). Medu fostered a closer relationship with South African activists, particularly through its Culture and Resistance conference (1982).

Seidman worked in the graphics unit at Medu, as she had trained in silkscreen processes in the USA. The unit created various posters, images for leaflets and magazines, paintings on banners and murals on walls. Many posters designed by Seidman, reflecting the apartheid tyranny of South Africa, were in the medium of silkscreening or lithography. She also assisted with publications and served as a secretary at meetings. Seidman set up a silkscreening unit, to train Medu members and township community organisations in the use of this medium to make art. In 1985, the Dutch funded the ‘Studio in a Suitcase’ project, which

⁶⁴ One cannot help recognise the similarity between the skills offerings at the Medu Art Ensemble and those of the Culture and Working Life Project in KwaZulu Natal, where Nise Malange was a facilitator. The focus of the Culture and Working Life Project differed in that the organisation enrolled only local community members affiliated to COSATU to foster cultural activities within communities in South Africa.

was a basic silkscreen tool kit with a silkscreen press, ink, squeegee and stencil material. Unfortunately, only a few pilot suitcases were built, as Medu was destroyed by the South African defence force in the same year.

Apart from skills training, Medu engaged in various in-house debates and discussions: about South African exiles, the use of culture as a weapon, gender and how a person of a different background and race, such as Seidman, could fit into the South African liberation movement and Medu itself. Seidman found her place in Medu and in the struggle, despite being white and not South African, as she had a background in revolutionary knowledge, having lived in Ghana, Zambia, Swaziland and Botswana, and the skill to teach basic graphic techniques that benefitted the struggle.

Seidman found herself in the company of Brigitte Mabandla, Baleka Kgosisile (ANC leadership) and strong theatre performers, who raised the issue of feminist politics at Medu. The ANC played a significant role in directing discussions relating to women at subsequent conferences held in Amsterdam (CASA 1987 and Malibongwe 1990) and London (Zabalaza 1990). In 1987, Seidman was requested by the ANC to present a paper at CASA on visual arts, tracing the history of the cultural liberation strategy after 1982 (Seidman 2014).

Seidman dedicated her life and her art making to the apartheid struggle and her silkscreen posters were highly influential as cultural weapons. These mass-produced works were issued anonymously, but their distinctive style identifies them as Seidman's designs. In her efforts to depict the tyranny experienced in South Africa, Seidman felt that it was part of her duty to reflect also on a new dispensation of peace and progress in a post-apartheid country.



Figure 17: Judy Seidman, *The People Shall Govern*, 1982. Silkscreen

Photograph: judyseidman.com

In Figure 17 Seidman selected two articles from the Freedom Charter (adopted in Kliptown in 1955) that spoke about specific social and political issues, the first being that of work and security and the second that of equality; both national demands by anti-apartheid organisations. The two articles also reference race, class and gender, the triple oppression faced by black women in South Africa. Seidman was astute in the layering of this poster, as these two articles also referenced the vulnerability of black women in the workplace and their demand for equality between men and women. The fact that she depicted only women (many with clenched fists) in this image supports the idea that women were militant and participated in apartheid resistance campaigns.



Figure 18: Judy Seidman, *Don't Entertain Apartheid*, 1982. Lithograph

Photograph: judyseidman.com

Figure 18 reiterated the call to artists and academics to heed the cultural boycott against South Africa in an effort to end apartheid. It is particular in its depiction of the USA's response to the call for a boycott (which often, was choosing to ignore it). Seidman was shrewd in the manner in which she presented her images of the protesting black masses and the large white woman with a USA badge and peace pendant, both singing, in full cry, yet each in direct contrast to the other. The white woman as performer depicts a western idea of culture and the black protesters, an African culture of resistance, equally made up of song and dance. Seidman also plays on the word 'entertain'. The poster urges international artists not to visit South Africa or to entertain white South Africans artists in their countries, as well as appeals to the international community not to support apartheid as an ideology.

In reviewing these two works, one is reminded that these images carried extensive information about black communities in South Africa. The black figures represent defiance against the state, in the call for a cultural boycott as well as the reciting of two articles from the Freedom Charter that read as statements on the banner. These images are statements of a

specific period in our history, the 1980s and the images draw a connection between the context and the content that is depicted. Figure 18 further connected the life of leisure and wealth enjoyed by many white South Africans and the poverty of the black masses. The white American singer is depicted in caricature, as an obese woman who does not seem to know poverty. The three separate images (political rally, white singer and an aeroplane) are sequenced as posters on a wall similar to a publicity advert. The simplicity with which the images are depicted allowed one to read the message immediately and effectively and to connect with them through shared and familiar experiences. This simplicity also revealed larger political and social attitudes that proclaimed black people as only a labour force in the country.

Seidman's work is quietly sophisticated in its concept as it depends on both image and text. It stitches together particular political references as her art speaks to both people in the townships and the more educated and affluent individual as well. Her authorship of *Ba Ye Zwa. The people live. South African daily life under apartheid* (Seidman 1979) and *Face-lift Apartheid: South Africa after Soweto* (Seidman 1980) and the artworks that she made articulate her commitment and contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle.

4.2.3. Bongiwe (Bongi) Dhlomo



Figure 19: Bongiwe (Bongi) Dhlomo-Mautloa

Photograph: South African History Online, 2011

Bongiwe Dhlomo was born on the 25th June 1956 in Vryheid, KwaZulu Natal, in 1956. The initial seeds of her creative energy lay dormant for years. In her youth, living in Bergville,

she witnessed many white male artists drawing and painting the Drakensberg Mountains. Dhlomo's only other artistic reference points were a picture of a Pierneef painting, a calendar on a wall and the smell of ink when she helped her father type and print on an old roneo machine (manual printing press). At an early age Dhlomo was encouraged to read, which gave her a portal into a broader environment than her township home (details throughout are from Dhlomo, 2016).

After completing a National Secretarial Course in 1975 and working for two years at the Tongaat Sugar Company (KwaZulu Natal) as a typist and clerk, Dhlomo applied to the Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre (RDACC) to do a fine art course, submitting a portfolio of a few small drawings and an essay-writing exercise. Dhlomo was accepted as a student at the Centre where she learned to make linocut prints that were immediate and accessible in their simplicity. Dhlomo's Christian upbringing influenced the early images of stories from the Bible that she created at the centre (Dhlomo n.d.; Dhlomo 2016).

In an interview with Michael Godby, Dhlomo stated that her first two political lessons were at the RDACC. She had created an image of Adam and Eve for a project and the criticism she received from her teacher, Jules van der Vyver, was on her technique, not the content; whereas the response she got from her colleague Sam Nhlengethwa was that Adam and Eve need not be white (Godby 2004:65). Dhlomo's second lesson was to watch a few students in her class at the RDACC who had participated in the 1976 student uprising in Soweto and how the students' exposure to the atrocities in the townships became their reservoirs for images they created. Their energy and image-creation impacted on Dhlomo and she began to look at her life and the life of black people with greater criticism of the apartheid state that spurred her to want to be an artist. She completed her two-year Fine Art Diploma at the RDACC in 1979 where she refined her printmaking skills.

Dhlomo returned to Durban from the RDACC and began her career in the arts as an assistant secretary at the African Art Centre, which was attached to the Institute of Race Relations in Durban. Her responsibilities at the Centre included research in areas such as Folweni in Umlazi, near Durban. Here she revisited her memories of forced removals, when communities were relocated from their original homes to tented areas. Her linocut series *Removal Series 1-7* was inspired by her personal experiences of such forced removals and by

Athol Fugard's play *People are living there*, which she read while an assistant secretary at the African Art Centre. Dhlomo felt the need to depict history in the form of a narrative, similar to that of a book, with the different segments representing the chapters (Dhlomo, 2016). The two most important series in her career were the *Removals* and *Women at work*. These series dealt with the effects of apartheid legislation and the social position of women in a patriarchal society (Jephson 1988).

An important focus in Dhlomo's work was the depiction of black people from the position of a black South African woman. Her *Removal Series I-VII* (1982-3) captured the fear of people (women and children) being physically removed into an unknown future. Women at 'home' who were often alone with their children had no direct communication with their menfolk on the mines, thus making women and children the main victims of these apartheid removals (Jephson 1988).



Figure 20: Bongiwe Dhlomo, *Removals 1, The Past...The Future*, 1982-3. Linocut

Photograph: ADA 5, Ronnie Levitan



Figure 21: Bongiwe Dhlomo, *Removals II, Bulldoze the Black Spot*, 1982-3. Linocut

Photograph: ADA 5, Ronnie Levitan



Figure 22: Bongiwe Dhlomo, *Removals III, Resettlement*, 1982-3. Linocut

Photograph: ADA 5, Ronnie Levitan



Figure 23: Bongiwe Dhlomo, *Removals IV, Against our Will*, 1982-3. Linocut

Photograph: ADA 5, Ronnie Levitan

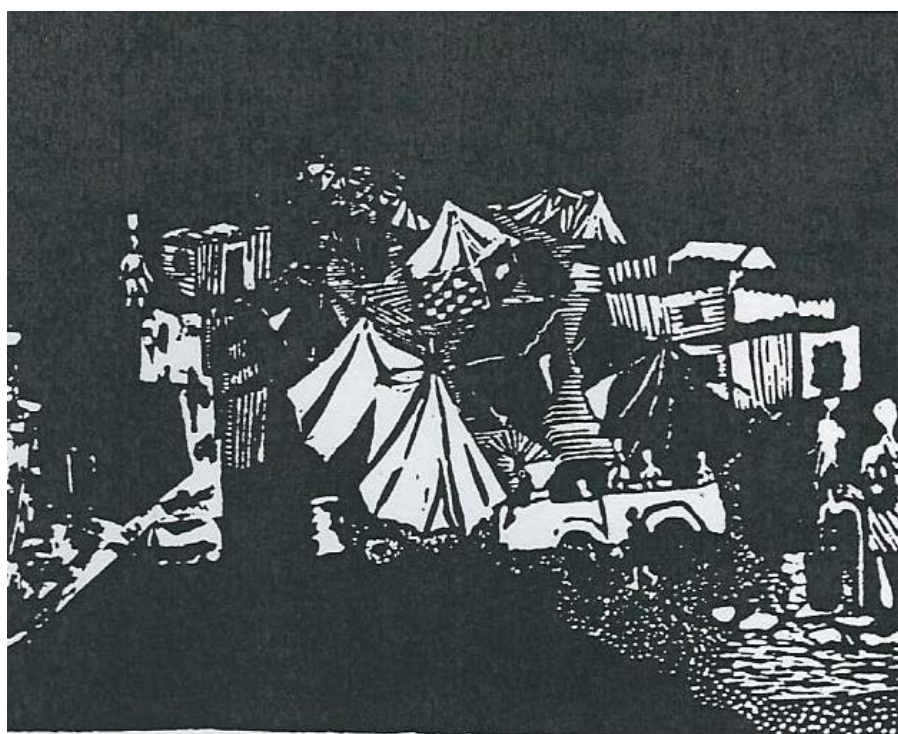


Figure 24: Bongiwe Dhlomo, *Removals V, From Here- Where to?* Linocut (626 x 476)

Photograph: ADA 5, Ronnie Levitan



Figure 25: Bongiwe Dhlomo, *Removals VI, Aftermath*, 1982-3. Linocut

Photograph: ADA 5, Ronnie Levitan

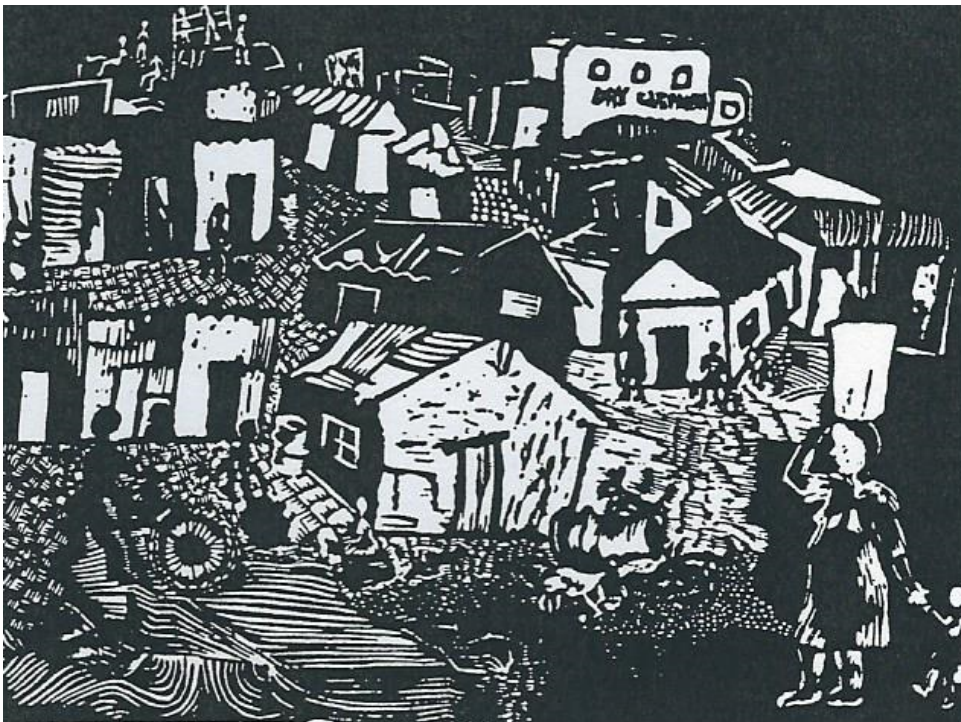


Figure 26: Bongiwe Dhlomo, *Removals VII, People Are Living There*, 1982-3. Linocut

Photograph: ADA 5, Ronnie Levitan

In Arnold's (2011) reading of Dhlomo's *Removal Series*, she referenced 'Blackspots' as areas of black settlements that were in close proximity to white residents. These 'blackspots' were identified by the apartheid government and black residents were removed to more outlying areas that had little or no infrastructure. These scenes form the backdrop to Dhlomo's prints. Within this series of seven prints, Arnold argued that Dhlomo had succinctly captured information about the people, their lives being destroyed and their uncertain future. Arnold read further into symbols that construct this moment in history. In Figure 20, the man who carries a short stick (used as a weapon of defence), is unable to defend himself against the situation within which he finds himself. Figures are anonymous black silhouettes and logical spatial relations are disrupted. The lack of landscape as markers of place is absent and families are left in limbo (Arnold 2011:3).

Dhlomo's snapshots of apartheid fragmenting black lives, especially that of women, when faced with daily human atrocities, found an audience at the Botswana National Museum and Art Gallery in 1985. Thami Mnyeale expressed appreciation (in a posthumous publication in *Staffrider* 6) that a female artist was able to depict the essence of township life; he saw her, through her work, as a spokesperson for the masses. He reiterated that art made by cultural workers reflected life in the townships and it was the people residing in the townships who were the audience for and appreciators of the content of the artworks. He praised Dhlomo as a courageous, assertive black female artist (Mnyeale 1986). Dhlomo's simple but bold images of families, homes and physical possessions fragmented by forced removals were later showcased at the Gertrude Posel Art gallery at Wits University, alongside works by David Goldblatt, Paul Stopforth, Berni Searle, Penny Siopis and Colin Richards (Dhlomo n.d.; Van Rensburg 1999).

In an interview with Brenda Atkinson, Dhlomo stated that "I feel that black people's tenacity and open-mindedness has assured us of a definite place in the reshaping of South Africa and one can only hope that there is reciprocity from our white counterparts" (Dhlomo-Mautloa & Atkinson 1999:119). She believed that art making during the 1980s was about conscientising the community about their experiences of apartheid (Dhlomo-Mautloa & Atkinson 1999). At a seminar on women and the arts held at the Afrika Cultural Centre in Johannesburg in 1982, Dhlomo presented a paper in which she reasoned that the lack of black women artists was essentially due to a lack of art training and infrastructure and that graduates from Funda

Community College in Diepkloof, Soweto and FUBA found difficulty in entering the industry, as they were not trained to negotiate such environments. She was also of the opinion, being an artist herself, that women artists could not be separated from the broader community of society (Dhlomo 1990).

FUBA (established in 1978), the Afrika Cultural Centre (1980) and Funda Community College (1984) were cultural hubs for black artists in Johannesburg. Dhlomo assumed the position of gallery manager at FUBA in 1986. The role of FUBA was to provide a safe haven for artists and their interests. It served to promote an awareness of the arts in black communities and to train black artists. FUBA offered tuition in music, drama, dance and fine art, filling the gap left by the arts not being offered in black schools (FUBA pamphlet, n.d.). The Afrika Cultural Centre was founded on the principle of promoting the artistic and educational development of community members (Afrika Cultural Centre 1990). The Funda Community College offered training in the arts, theatre, visual art and music. Funda was also home to other well-known artists and activists against apartheid, including Bill Ainslie, Sam Nhlengethwa, Azaria Mbatha, Es'kia Mphahlele and Motsumi Makhene (Jason 2015). These three institutions were invaluable spaces for artists engaged in cultural activities.

In 1986 Dhlomo moved from FUBA to the Goodman Gallery as a gallery assistant, but within the same year returned to the African community to which she could relate, becoming the co-ordinator of the Alexandra Art Centre. The violence that she portrayed in her art making returned as her new-found reality. There were unprecedented violent clashes between the army and local black residents during the late 1980s as President of South Africa at this time, P.W. Botha also known as 'the big crocodile' vented unrepentant violence against black people. A state of emergency was imposed by the state in 1986 that allowed for the detention of thousands of black people (Cowell 1986). As co-ordinator of the Alexandra Art Centre, Dhlomo allowed the *Weekly Mail* Film Festival to be screened at the Centre. The *Weekly Mail* newspaper that sponsored this event was recognised as a medium that was sympathetic to anti-apartheid news coverage, which immediately 'invited' the special branch police officials to the Centre and the harassment of Dhlomo at her workplace (Dhlomo 2016).

In an effort to address the paucity of skills and the lack of materials and facilities for black artists, Bill Ainslie and David Koloane founded the Thupelo Art Workshop in 1985. This

workshop provided a teaching and learning environment sensitive to cultural workers' needs, (Koloane 1990:84). The importance and relevance of the Thupelo workshops was that it provided, as did FUBA, an opportunity for (mainly) black artists during apartheid to make art within a 'safe context'. They realised the necessity of encouraging black artists in their art making, if they were to define themselves as artists in South Africa (Martin 1997:137-138).

Dhlomo served as one of the managers of this Workshop from 1988 to 1992 together with David Koloane, Pat Mautloa (her husband), Sam Nhlengethwa and Durant Sihlali. Dhlomo's position was determined by the fact that she had experience in the arts as well as a secretarial and administrative background, which allowed her to write up proposals for funding and projects. The initiative for the workshop grew from a collaboration between Anthony Caro and Robert Loder, founders of the *Gasworks and Triangle Network* in New York. Durant Sihlali bestowed the name 'Thupelo' on the workshop, meaning 'teach by example'. Caro and Loder proposed an art collection of progressive American and British artworks for FUBA as a teaching aid that offered black South African artists a contemporary link to the outside world. Further to this, the most promising artists at the workshop were sponsored to travel to New York to participate in the Triangle Artists Workshop (America, Canada and Britain). The first workshop in Johannesburg featured 17 South Africa artists from different parts of the country, including Sam Nhlengethwa, Pat Mautloa, Kay Hassan, Sfiso Mkame, Thami Jali and Helen Sebidi (Koloane 1999:26).

In these workshops, Dhlomo facilitated the participation of international artists together with South African artists. As manager, an interesting observation that she made regarding the production of artwork was that "men and women interpreted scenes in the townships differently. The content depicted by men reflected an immediate brutality; as opposed to women, who selected images that were of a quieter nature, yet equally descriptive of the townships" (Dhlomo, 2016). Very few women participated in these workshops, or chose a career in the arts. The Thupelo workshops were pivotal in establishing the Fordsburg Artists Studio, which later became known as The Bag Factory. Although it liaised with the ANC Cultural Desk and Barbara Masekela, the Thupelo Art Workshop remained an independent body (Dhlomo 2016).

Throughout this period, Dhlomo continued making art such as her *Series of Images* 1985-1987, which were based on the state of emergency and its impact on people's lives. These were specific to people in the townships, who negotiated their daily journeys despite the presence of roadblocks, soldiers and police, with the anxiety of being arrested in a random police sweep in place (Dhlomo, 2016). In 1987, she contributed to a discussion paper presented at CASA in Amsterdam and lent to the accompanying exhibition her *Women series*. These were tributes to women, both unknown and in leadership roles, such as Winnie Mandela, Sybil Holtz (the first female mayor of Durban) and the Black Sash (Dhlomo 2016; Dhlomo n.d.).

In Michael Godby's interview with Dhlomo he stated, "In the 1980's you, like many other artists, used your art as a weapon of the struggle. But was your art a weapon in the sense that it attacked a repressive regime? Or was it a weapon in the sense that it articulated the concerns of the oppressed majority?" (Godby 2004:65). Godby's statement immediately identified Dhlomo as a cultural activist. Dhlomo's intention in making art was to represent her experiences in the townships, she aimed to record a slice of history; this was appreciated by the community she depicted, as it was their history she had captured. She used her art to raise concerns about the lives of black South Africans especially women (Godby 2004:65). As stated earlier, Dhlomo believed that art making was about conscientising the community about their experiences of apartheid and to look at the life of black people with greater criticism of the apartheid state.

In an interview with Nessa Leibhammer at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) 1996, Dhlomo contextualised her work *Artist Unknown – At The End of The Day*, 1992, a painting of a Tsonga headrest. She explained her reason for using the words 'Artist Unknown' in the title of her work: many black artists, such as the maker of the headrest, are not acknowledged by name. Their works are simply catalogued as objects, thus drawing attention to the neglect of black artists by galleries and art historians. Dhlomo referred to the second part of the title, *At The End Of The Day*, as a reflection on phrases used by politicians in anticipation of liberation. She also referenced her linocut works during the 1980s as a record of events, so that history can be remembered (Leibhammer 1996).

In Jephson's reading of Dhlomo's prints, she recognised first, "the role of women as creators and producers of valid art forms" and secondly, the personal insights that Dhlomo had in relationships between black and white women and the occupation of black women as family breadwinners (Jephson 1988:38-39). These themes are evident in the two prints below that presented women in the market place. *Women and the Law* that provided insight into a white Black Sash⁶⁵ worker providing legal advice to a black woman and *Woman at Work* that showed a black female vendor alongside a white charity bookseller.



Figure 27: Bongiwe Dhlomo, *Women and the Law*, 1982. Linocut

⁶⁵ The Black Sash calling themselves the 'Women's Defence of the Constitution League', organised marches, petitions, overnight vigils, protest meetings and a convoy of cars from Johannesburg to Cape Town. They became known for the symbol of a black sash, worn by members. Black Sash has fought tirelessly against injustice and inequality in South Africa. The Black Sash too became increasingly concerned that African women were being arrested and imprisoned for contravening the pass laws. The Black Sash advice offices acted as a free resource for those who sought paralegal services for issues like housing, unemployment, pensions, influx control, detention without trial and so on (Black Sash 1974; Black Sash ,nd).



Figure 28: Bongiwe Dhlomo, *Woman at Work*, 1983. Linocut

Dhlomo restricted herself to the use of linocut prints, which resulted in an immediate black and white rendition of an image. Figure 27 and Figure 28 both portray the circumstance of black women in apartheid South Africa. Figure 27 demonstrates a black woman receiving free legal advice from a member of the Black Sash. It shows a simple transaction being undertaken in a room cluttered with files, the setting a makeshift office managed by a white legal representative. Figure 28 is dense with visual information, set in an open market place. Dhlomo draws attention to local transport services for township dwellers (Putco bus stop), health matters (apples, 'two-a-day' and a nurse in uniform), post office facilities, education (books) and a woman selling fruit with a child on her back indicated by a white cloth tied above the woman's breasts, the traditional way black women carry their children. Two simple signs on the sides of boxes, 'Women for peaceful change' and 'Drought Relief Fund', refer to greater hardship for black women working the land. These images further highlight white racist attitudes towards black people in the form of limited access to education, restricted movement, poor health care services and informal 'spaza' kiosks that become metaphors for fragmented black families as men worked as migrant labourers. The works described here are

documentations of society as experienced by black communities, specifically women. It is important to highlight the fact that Bongiwe Dhlomo is one of the few black women to have combined the roles of artist and arts manager in the visual arts in the 1980s.

4.2.4. Sakunthala (Sanna) Naidoo



Figure 29: Sanna Naidoo
Photograph by the author

‘Sanna’ Naidoo, as she is known, was born in Morningside, Durban, in 1934. Due to a forced removal when this area was rezoned for white residents only, Naidoo’s family moved to Greyville, Durban. Greyville was considered a ‘grey’ area, as people of all race groups populated it. When this area was also declared for white residents only, Naidoo relocated again, to Overport, an ‘Indian’ area. These constant resettlements caused anger and resentment, strengthening Naidoo’s unhappiness regarding the laws that governed and restricted black South Africans (details throughout are from Naidoo, 2010).

In the 1950s, Naidoo studied towards a teaching qualification and was employed as a teacher by the House of Delegates in 1972. (The House of Delegates was an educational department specifically for Indians – under the apartheid separate education legislation.) While still in her twenties, she came across the Bantu Social Centre in Durban, which was a space for artists, teachers and activists to meet. At the Centre, the state of the country was hotly debated and she often stayed making artworks – initially, still-life and landscape pictures from memory.

In 1959 she married Moorgiah Jayarajapathi (MJ) Naidoo, a practising, politically aware lawyer; who was charged on many occasions by the police for his political activities. MJ's brother Moorgiah Danapathi (MD) Naidoo was imprisoned on Robben Island during the 1950s for crimes against the state. He was married to Phyllis Naidoo, a respected ANC political activist. MJ Naidoo was ultimately charged with treason and imprisoned for two years, followed by house arrest. As MJ's wife, Sanna Naidoo was transferred to schools across Durban, as punishment for her political associations. This instability negatively affected her duties as a mother to her children. Sanna Naidoo eventually lost her job as a teacher, due to her and MJ's political views, her constant need to visit her husband in prison and her association with people who were anti-government lobbyists. Sanna Naidoo was seen as an outsider and a threat, therefore, unfit to hold a state-funded teaching position.

In the 1980s, with no formal art training, Naidoo resorted to making art. She explained that in difficult times, art gave her psychological and emotional strength and returned her to sanity. She joined other female artists and cultural workers in depicting images of apartheid's atrocities and the plight of women in the liberation struggle. Naidoo believed that her art depicted a true South African history.

Naidoo attended trade union meetings and offered her services to the liberation struggle by painting banners and printing posters. As a self-taught artist, she promoted women's rights in her work and helped other self-taught women in her immediate surroundings to make art and express their views in their image-making. Naidoo worked with many women who were self-taught artists and she believed that the art made by these women was "clearly a reflection of life under apartheid South Africa; "Our artists use their art as a way to express the enormity of the struggles in South Africa" (Naidoo 1992:17). She encouraged these women to make art so that they could address the trauma of detentions and depression that they experienced, create visions of social and political realities and change their attitudes towards their position as women.

Naidoo, having spent most of her life in Durban, continued to surround herself with domestic workers, cultural workers, members of various unions and women linked with the University of Natal and University of Durban-Westville campuses (today, combined as UKZN). Naidoo believed that "most women are swamped by matters of family, the home and developing and

providing support for others' careers" (Naidoo 2010). Naidoo argues that making art becomes an avenue for women to speak about themselves, as people and as women. Though she also believed in the equality of men and women, she felt that "women needed to stand up for themselves, that they could change their lives –we will overcome – and that making art was a way of investing in change" (Naidoo 2010).

The works Naidoo created in the 1980s were mainly images of women, their experiences in the townships and their personal lives, with her central theme being 'Every woman can make a difference'. She used soft pencils, pastels and pen and ink on paper as her personal choice of media. Her works were published in various progressive books, COSAW, *Staffrider*, *Agenda*, *Notebook*, *Off Our Backs* and *Speak* magazines, all of which were considered subversive or alternative publications during apartheid. The content of her works is rooted in the position of women, images of injustice and the abnormalities of the apartheid era.

Naidoo invested in her community by organising women to use art as a form of therapy and to showcase these works to a broader audience so that the works became more meaningful not only to the artists, but to the public as well. In 1989, Naidoo curated an exhibition by fourteen women as part of a cultural festival hosted at the University of Durban-Westville campus, Durban. The exhibition was not themed; the artworks were, in the words of Naidoo, "sub-consciousness workings", personal interpretations of life and living: "When politics and personal issues creep into the pictures unconsciously or consciously, we discover new and powerful expressions and statements relevant to our lives" (Naidoo 1989:30-31).

Sanna Naidoo worked with Nise Malange as one of the art teachers on the Culture and Working Life Project. Naidoo taught and assisted students enrolled for fine art, with skills in drawing and painting.

Sanna Naidoo shared her artworks and illustrations in various alternative magazines that were available during the struggle. Her works appeared mostly in magazines that spoke to and about women. Naidoo's images were simple drawings that captured the working environment of black women.

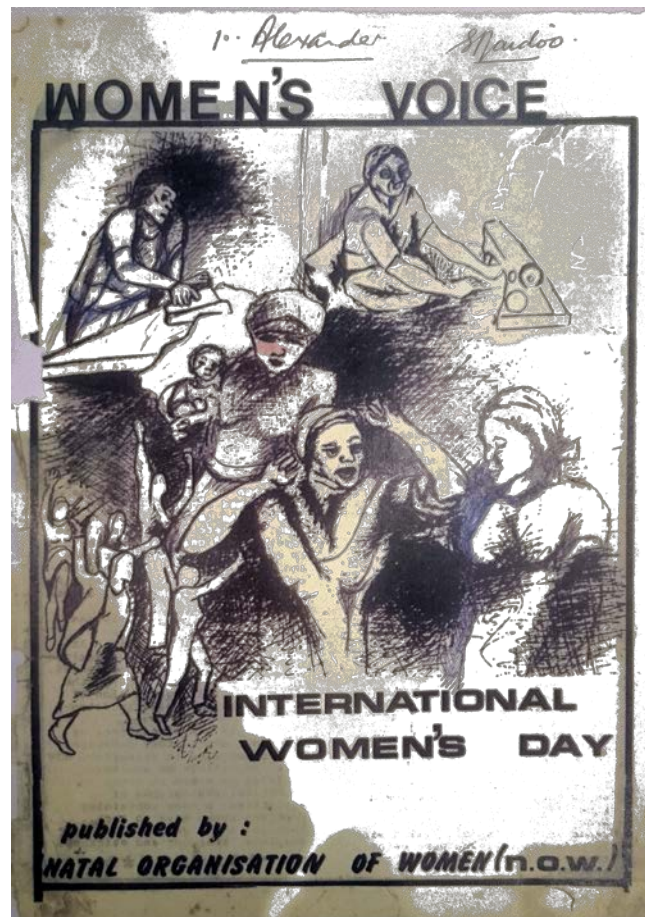


Figure 30: Sanna Naidoo, *Illustrated Cover- Natal Organisation of Women*, 1985

Pen and ink on paper

In Naidoo's illustration for the NOW magazine, *Women's Voices* (Figure 30), she referenced various situations that occupied black women's lives, including domestic work and women's participation in protest marches as militant voices against apartheid and patriarchy. The artwork (and the publication) sought to investigate and contest the constructed role of women in society - especially its relevance to race, class and gender in South Africa.

Naidoo's images of women depicted them as gentle but forceful beings. In the social context of South Africa, singing women is the medium through which protests, celebrations and events are experienced.



Figure 31: Sanna Naidoo, *Women Celebrating Peace*, 1986
Black and blue ballpoint pen on paper



Figure 32: Sanna Naidoo, *Women Dancing*, 1982
Mixed media (coloured ink, felt-tipped pen and ballpoint pen)



Figure 33: Sanna Naidoo, *Every Woman Can Make a Difference*, 1988

Red and blue ballpoint pen on paper

Naidoo's figures are positive depictions. The repeated text 'Every woman can make a difference' (Figure 33) becomes a mantra chanted during the dance, which hopefully resonated with the audience. This work shows confidence-building in a group of women of all race groups. It intimates that 'unity is strength' and that women were capable of making a change. It is a visual reference to Nise Malange's statement reported earlier, that only women can promote their own liberation and address their own issues.



Figure 34: Sanna Naidoo, *Finding Peace*, 1984

Mixed media (coloured pencils and ballpoint pen) on paper

Finding peace (Figure 34) is a self-portrait, at a time when she had to come to terms with her husband's incarceration in 1984. Left abandoned, with four young children, she drew psychological and emotional strength from her art. However, her lyrical depiction of herself, camouflaged by motifs and colour, does not hide her sadness - and not only hers. This work is an image for all women experiencing loss, while the work's title reflects Naidoo's positive attitude in dealing with the situation in which she found herself.



Figure 35: Malibongwe Conference: Artwork of Messages, 1990

Mixed media on white fabric (contributors to the work were untrained cultural workers, domestic workers and students)

The 1990 Malibongwe Conference in Amsterdam was a significant event, in discussing and debating the position of South African women. Naidoo contributed to this conference with a collective artwork made by both men and women. The work was a large white sheet of cloth (approximately 2m x 4m), on which was stuck and stitched a combination of written messages and images, to create a mosaic. This was a collective artwork, a manifestation by cultural workers, domestic workers, gardeners, students, academics and housewives who, by proxy, so to speak, attended and participated in the conference when the work was sent to Amsterdam (Naidoo 2010). It is a gathering of black voices, protesting their unbearable subjection to race, class and gender inequalities. The work contained a wealth of information relating to the complex issues faced by black women and once again, this work recorded a specific time and place in South African art history.

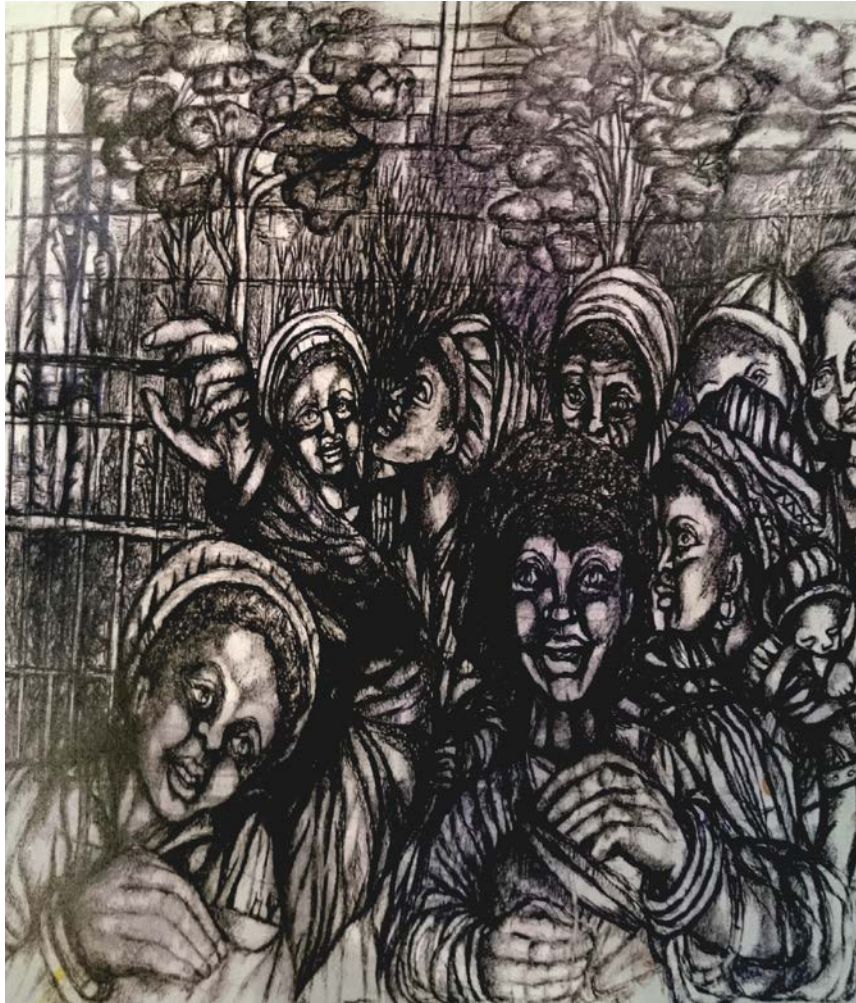


Figure 36: Sanna Naidoo, *Women Together Are Strong*, 1988

Black and blue ballpoint pen on paper

As with *Every Woman Can Make a Difference* (c.1988) (Figure 33) in *Women Together Are Strong* (c.1988) (Figure 36) Naidoo retained her positive message about and to women. Again, her work is filled with images of women, almost always in a jovial spirit. She draws attention to women being mothers, as well as activists. The issue of gender is given priority in Naidoo's work. She reflects on the strength gained when women formed groups, so their experiences may be shared and they do not become or remain isolated.



Figure 37: Sanna Naidoo, *Protest march*, 1987

Mixed media (coloured ink, felt-tipped pen and ballpoint pen)

Protest March (c.1987) (Figure 37), recorded another specific moment in South African political history, a mass protest march demanding peace, the end to bloodshed, equal education and an end to township violence, and a displaying of open allegiance to the ANC. The work spoke of what the liberation movement was about, showing a multitude of people who supported the demand for the end to apartheid. The work immediately drew on an audience's familiarity with such action, the sights and memories. This is a simple image, but incorporates concentrated information which, when translated, questioned larger social issues.

When understanding Naidoo's contribution to the liberation struggle, it is about her encouragement of local art making within the local community, while using this medium to

provide herself with psychological and emotional strength so that she could manage her own trauma of being a single parent.

4.2.5. Thunai Govender



Figure 38: Thunai Govender

Photograph by the author

Thunai Govender was born on the 11th April 1964 in Wentworth, Durban. Her parents were small-scale farmers who relocated to Umhlatuzana (Durban), a town demarcated for the Indian community, to continue farming there. Her family members were active against the apartheid system and her grandmother and her father were both imprisoned for their political activities. The fact that two senior members of her family were imprisoned exposed Govender to the presence of the police in her home and visits to prison with her mother to visit her father and grandmother. This influenced the mind of the young Govender who was already made aware of race and class discrimination and with the imprisonment of her direct family members, the impact of apartheid on her family (details throughout are from Govender 2010).

After the 1976 Soweto uprisings, black schools nationally were unsettled with disruptions and closure. These disruptions continued into the 1980s and Govender was part of these staged protests in her senior years at school (1980 and 1981). Her personal experiences embedded in her the unfairness of the separate education policy for different racial groups

and the inhumanity that apartheid professed. The frustration and anger experienced with apartheid's unfairness towards black people was something that she understood on a personal level, when her father and grandmother were arrested. In 1982, Govender decided to study for a fine art qualification at the University of Durban-Westville, (UDW)), a designated university for the Indian population. UDW was already recognised as a volatile institution as student protests and the presence of the riot police on campus were fairly common during the 1980s. National anti-apartheid organisations such as the Azanian Students Organisation (AZASO) and the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), affiliated with the ANC and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) respectively, as well as the Student Representative Council (SRC) were actively involved in anti-apartheid activities on campus. These activities created a highly politicised environment at UDW that reflected a microcosm of what was happening, nationally.

As a university student, Govender worked at the SRC printing and publications unit, which allowed her the freedom to print posters, inviting students to political meetings and making the student body aware of the current political situation. Her time as a student at UDW exposed her to violence by the state on students, those who participated in boycotts of classes, public protest marches and anti-election campaigns, amongst other political activities. The police brutality experienced by students during the 1980s included the storming of the campus with tear gas canisters and arresting students, and shooting purple dye from water cannons mounted on the back of army vehicles at protesting students, in the process colouring façades of university buildings purple. Students stained with the dye were arrested with 'proof' that they were part of the student protests. This was student life in the 1980s and Govender was fully involved both in student politics and in the completion of her studies.

During Govender's participation in the protests on campus, she was conscious of gender inequality; however, she perceived the women's struggle to be part of a broader political struggle. She was an active participant in the workshops and 'projects' that Sanna Naidoo was involved in and visited the Ecumenical Centre⁶⁶ in St Andrews Street, Durban to attend

⁶⁶ In the 1970s the late Catholic Archbishop Denis Hurley established an ecumenical organisation to work for justice in central Durban. His motivation was that the church should have been doing much more about

workshops on social injustice and on driving the black women's struggle forward. These discussions at the centre impacted on Govender and she used her art to create an awareness of patriarchal domination and the violence inherent in the country. She chose to work with subject matter and content from Chatsworth unit 10, a demarcated township near Durban, housing low-income Indian families. Interacting with these families was part of Govender's daily experiences and she believed that her response to the plight of the Indian community was integral to alerting a wider audience to the poor conditions under which the disenfranchised lived. Govender also realised that black people too were unable to voice their discontent; she decided that the liberation duty-bound her to be a voice, through her art, for all oppressed communities, Coloured, Indian and Black.

These decisions defined the content of Govender's work as an art student and she used every opportunity to showcase her artwork. Tertiary institutions regularly hosted fine art exhibitions, and through them Govender was able to display her work to a broader audience.

As a student at a tertiary institution, Govender was exposed to a variety of traditional printmaking processes and techniques. Her personal technique was to retain large areas of flat colour and very simple forms so that a person of the street was able to access the content of the work. The use of print was also part of the liberation idea as it rendered immediate results that could be mass-produced. Govender preferred the processes of woodcuts, silkscreening and etchings to indicate emotional and physical violence (Figures 39 and 40).

apartheid. Hurley named the Centre, Diakonia (Greek word meaning, to serve the people). The central task of Diakonia was to get involved in issues of injustice and human rights violations. This encouraged the offices of this Centre to be raided many times by the police security forces that resulted in Diakonia staff being detained (The organisation for all the people n.d.). Diakonia established in 1976, later became known as the Ecumenical Centre, a centre to promote community justice (Kearney 2014).



Figure 39: Thunai Govender, *Woman In Prison*, 1984. Colour woodcut

The woman in Figure 39 was not only a physical representation of a woman in jail who may have broken the law, but a visualisation of the place where women found themselves when faced by restrictive apartheid laws. The fact that her face is partially portrayed, merged into the wall space, intensifies the trauma that she is suffering. The work can be likened to Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream* (1893). The sound of the scream in Govender's work seems to echo within the confines of the space rendered in black aggressive marks, using the grain of the wood to accentuate the hopelessness and anger of the situation. The trauma is further highlighted by the anonymous, threatening figure in the background that may have been a 'visitor'. This work was based on Govender's memory of her childhood experience, when her father and grandmother were arrested. She used this memory to create a universal image for women subjected to trauma during apartheid. In *Woman In Prison*, it is not clear if the person

screaming is inside or outside the prison cell. This ambiguity simultaneously depicts the trauma of the prisoner or the visitor.



Figure 40: Thunai Govender, *Burning Building*, 1984. Colour silkscreen

Violence was a major part of the struggle, from the side of the state and from the liberation movement and Figure 40 reflects the violence that played out during apartheid. There were many homes destroyed during the process of forced removals and state structures that were bombed by anti-apartheid activists during the 1980s. The homes of people thought to be ‘spies’ or ‘sell-outs’ as well as government buildings were stoned and often burned and Govender’s building in Figure 40 represents this destruction.

In Figures 41 and 42, the images are narratively simple. Both are black and white etchings that retained the harsh engraved lines of the needle on the plate. There is a level of violence used in creating these images in the aggressive marks that scar the plate, a cathartic process that adds to the eeriness that pervades these works. The repetition of mark and line add

texture to the surfaces so that angst is included in the reading of the work: both of the artist and the work.



Figure 41: Thunai Govender, *Coat*, 1985. Etching on zinc plate

The *Coat* (Figure 41), hung on a simple wooden structure, remains an anonymous garment. There is no way of identifying an owner of, or difference in the coat, suggesting a recurring sameness in the lives of poor people. The garment hangs next to a 'make-shift' curtain that neither reveals nor covers anything of interest. Once again, Govender uses the idea of anonymity not only in the place that she depicts but also in the actual image created. What is it that I am looking at? The clear line that separates the 'cross' from the curtain, seems to invite the spiritual into a physical space. During apartheid many activists were arrested by the police, beaten and tortured either in police cells or abandoned buildings. The coat could belong to either the arrested victim or the 'interrogating' police officer. Often, arrested

victims ‘disappeared’ for undisclosed periods of time and in many cases, never returned. The coat also reads as a carcass on a cross, abandoned.



Figure 42: Thunai Govender, *Car*, 1985, Etching on zinc plate

Figure 42 portrays a similar emptiness to Figure 41; the image is devoid of human forms, dominated by an abandoned, old Volkswagen car with flat tyres that appear buried in the sand. Two other ‘empty’ vehicles are ‘parked’ nearby. The only hints of human existence are the lines of washing between the buildings. Govender’s works are about low-income communities and the dense multi-storeyed buildings reflect this; family homes stacked one above the other. The number ‘5h’ on the wall identifies the building within the cluster of homes depicted. The other buildings would have similar identification numbers. The buildings appear derelict, similar to the lives of the people who occupy them as homes. Both these etchings (Figures 41 and 42) have strong expressive qualities, the qualities of angst in the brutal mark making that scars the walls of the buildings and the human ‘emptiness’ portrayed in the image.

4.2.6. Ujala Sewpersad



Figure 43: Ujala Sewpersad
Photograph: Harry Lock, 2016
(Intellectual Property exhibition)

Ujala Sewpersad was born on the 19th September 1963, in Springvale, Durban, a semi-urban area where Indian and Black African families were allowed to farm together. Today, Springvale's residential area has been absorbed into Sunninghill and is an urban suburb for the affluent. Sewpersad was drawn to art from an early age, though her parents saw no future for her in an artistic career. The secondary school she attended did not offer art as a subject, but her passion for art encouraged her to study towards a fine art degree at the 'Indian' UDW, where she and Govender were classmates (details throughout are from Sewpersad 2010a and Sewpersad 2010b).

Springvale was home to both Indian and Black families, and Sewpersad interacted with all children of her own age. Her initiation into the realities of the political dispensation in South Africa was the call 'the blackjacks⁶⁷ are coming', while playing with the neighbours' children. The word 'blackjack' conjured up fear in local residents as these black policemen searched black individuals for their reference books, often referred to as a '*dompas*'. Failure to produce such a document meant arrest for contravening the law.

⁶⁷ 'Blackjack's is the name used by the township residents to describe the black policemen who patrol the townships (Williams & Hackland, 2016: 34). They were disliked as they extended the arm of apartheid's law into townships.

Sewpersad soon questioned the necessity for carrying such documents and why this law was applied only to black people. As a teenager, her schooling was influenced by the 16 June 1976 Soweto uprising and during the 1980s, the call for a stay-away from schools was heeded by Sewpersad. She argued, “As a teenager, one was often looking for a reason to participate in something meaningful” and her involvement in the liberation struggle was ignited at this time as she realised the injustices that surrounded her.

Sewpersad came from a family who had accepted teaching as a career path and her family did not find it easy to reconcile with her choice to pursue a career in the arts. However, Sewpersad felt at home in the Fine Art department at UDW, as there were many like-minded students and some were activists in their communities. This encouraged her to join the workforce at the SRC printing and publication unit where she worked alongside Thunai Govender. The SRC was made up of individuals who were supporters of the ANC and its ideals. Apart from these commitments at UDW, Sewpersad was also involved in community organisations based in Chatsworth, Phoenix and Sydenham. Chatsworth and Phoenix were both Indian townships and Sydenham was zoned for the Coloured community.

As a member on the publication committee of the SRC, Sewpersad and her assistants designed and printed posters, pamphlets and banners, and sat in as participants on the planning of the annual cultural festival held at the university. These tasks were in addition to her completing her degree. During the 1980s, UDW students were constantly at odds with the riot police. This created an environment where academic space was constantly interrupted, and not only during protests. The SRC offices were also a target for the special branch police to raid and arrest students. The military interventions at UDW were part of Sewpersad’s academic career that influenced her life and her art making. She involved herself in anti-apartheid projects on campus that required her skill in ‘blitz’ printing of posters as well as house-to-house pamphlet distribution that called for residents to boycott the tri-cameral elections that supported separate race-based political parties.

As an art student, Sewpersad trained in oil painting, however, she leaned towards the use of oil pastels in her drawings, which she rendered in an expressionistic rather than a hyper-realistic style. The content of her artworks was consciously political. She believed that

“unveiling societal inequalities in the form of art making, though a small contribution to the liberation struggle, was an honest response to the injustices witnessed”.

It was important for Sewpersad as a woman, to participate in the liberation struggle through her art making. She believed that “women have a different point of view, which is unique. Women are more sensitive to situations than men, whose responses are often aggressive” (Sewpersad 2010a). She supported this statement by adding, “Women were in the frontline of protests such as those of the 1950s but were not prone to acts of violence” (Sewpersad 2010a and Sewpersad, 2010b).

Sewpersad participated in various student exhibitions hosted by UDW, as well as in the SRCs cultural festivals, which were politically motivated in their content delivery. She posited, “a woman’s struggle was as important as a man’s, and it was imperative for women’s triple oppression to be highlighted”. In her opinion, “women were so immersed in their domestic care-giving roles that they often suffered burn-out, and failed to reach their true potential” (Sewpersad 2010b). She recalled a pastel drawing she had done of three burnt matchsticks, representing women who – in a similar way to the matches – offered warmth and light and burned brightly for everyone else and then burned out.

Sewpersad often used metaphors that one could easily associate with to represent the ideas of the struggle, such as a red landscape symbolising anger towards the state, while a bird would reference aspirations of freedom. The content of her works is often literal; such as a painting of a man tied up in ropes, which represented oppression and the inability to move freely due to the group areas and land acts. In her landscapes, Sewpersad explored land issues about ownership and occupation, as well the eviction of families from occupied land under the Native land act (1913). The works are vibrant with colour, but retain the expression of anger against apartheid that literally fragmented black families and alienated people based on racial prejudice. She explained that to those who were politically enlightened, the content of the works were accessible and understandable. “To those individuals who remained ‘unaware’ of what was happening in the country during apartheid, consciously or that they believed in the propaganda of the state, the works were meaningless” (Sewpersad 2010b).

Sewpersad’s work documented places, things, people and events, to fill the need to record and acknowledge history and to share its meaningfulness to South Africans, post-apartheid.

In this way, she hoped to communicate a message to those who might find a connection – whether through awakening memories, or through informing the viewer about a time and a place that they had experienced.

Figures 44, 45 and 46 of Sewpersad's works are similar to the works done by Sanna Naidoo, in both their simplicity and their expressive quality. Sewpersad's works, like Naidoo's, spoke of freedom from apartheid and freedom within the self. The content in both these artists' works are narrative, yet are imbued with a personal response to the liberation movement.



Figure 44: Ujala Sewpersad, *Freedom*, 1983. Acrylic paint on paper

Sewpersad's simple image of a seagull alludes to ideas of freedom from apartheid.

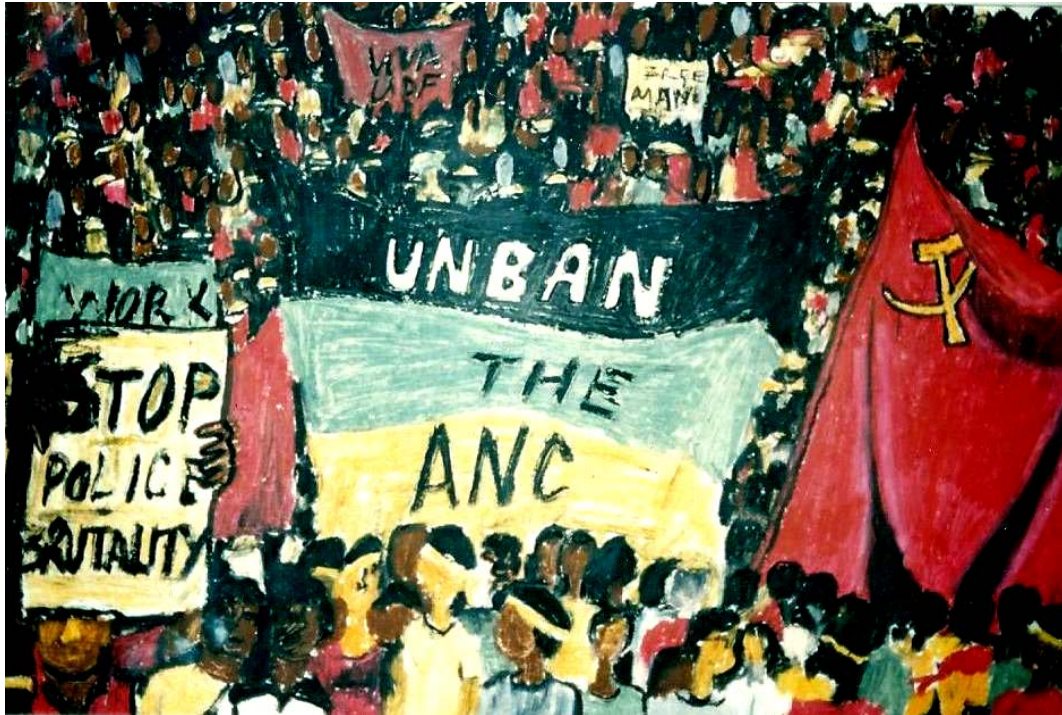


Figure 45: Ujala Sewpersad, *Protest March*, 1987. Oil pastel on paper

In Figure 45, demonstrators parade banners that openly declare their affiliation to the banned ANC, UDF and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Demands inscribed on banners call for a stop police brutality and to release Nelson Mandela. With PW Botha still President of South Africa during the 1980s, there was carnage in the townships and the violence against protesters of apartheid was brutal, and the artwork deals with this.



Figure 46: Ujala Sewpersad, *Welcome Home Comrade*, 1984. Oil pastel on paper

Figure 46 depicts a joyous celebration, a comrade returning home. The simple message to the audience is conveyed by the figures almost filling the frame. The raised fist clearly indicates that these two people were political activists and acknowledges the times they had together.

Sewpersad's *Desolation Series* (Figures 47 and 48) reference the forced removals of families during apartheid. She represents this as 'scorched earth' that was once home to black families and the sounds of their laughter. Trees are often landmarks of a place and people who resided there; here the trees are engulfed by a red 'empty' space that offers no identity. The works speak of devastation not only of the land and the people who once lived there but of a devastation of a nation represented by the trees that are stripped of foliage.



Figure 47: Ujala Sewpersad, *Landscape 1 – Desolation Series*, 1985. Oil paint on canvas



Figure 48: Ujala Sewpersad, *Landscape 2 – Desolation Series*, 1985. Oil paint on canvas

After completing her degree and attaining a teaching qualification, Sewpersad began teaching in 1989 and taught for the next 15 years. She remains adamant that what she did, “mak[ing] art that reflected society, was the right decision – to be politically enlightened to contribute to the struggle” (Sewpersad 2010a and Sewpersad 2010b).

This chapter provided insight on black female cultural workers and their contributions to the liberation struggle. In all of their works, an audience is able to establish meaning – personal and collective – about a particular time in their lives when they were affected by apartheid. They revealed social and political experiences specific to black lives and township communities during the 1980s.

There is a continuous relationship between an artwork and the context in which it was made. This relationship also existed between the content of the work and the mandate of the liberation struggle. In Olu Oguibe’s appreciation of the works created by cultural workers, he was of the opinion that cultural workers felt the need to locate themselves within the liberation struggle and that the content and style of their works were not reliant on western aesthetics. The works were steeped in the lived experiences of the artists in the townships and Oguibe believed that they were filled with a vigour that superseded a formal western preoccupation. He rated Dumile Feni, Cyprian Shilakoe and Helen Sebidi among the great political artists, in the way their works are saturated with the context of the struggle for liberation. Oguibe stated that the strength of the type of art emanating from South Africa in the 1980s was its reflection on the merits of a preconceived idea of democracy, which placed it within the conventions of world culture (Oguibe 1997:124-129).

The art made by cultural workers definitely subverted the mainstream ideologies of white South Africans, their art history and their art making. Such subversion would attack the nerve of any civilisation. Cultural workers in South Africa created their own visual sense in rendering events and their memories of personal experiences. This visual sense is harvested by the artist as the medium of representation; it is the visual that allowed the audience to access a familiar social experience, creating a shared national identity. The representation physically defined and depicted society, establishing the place and context of events during the 1980s.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a refocussed and inclusive art history that considered the 1980s as an important historical period and addressed the art of black women artists of that time. The reason for selecting the 1980s as a period of study was the political strife that marred this period and impacted on the art of black women, who used art as a weapon of the struggle.

Initially, South African art history was believed to have been a reflection of all South African artists, however, this thesis proclaims that the documentation of South African art in the 1980s was prejudiced against black artists, specifically black women. This assertion is based on the literature study undertaken in two parts: publications (including exhibitions, reviews, conferences) in the 1980s, and publications after this period. It profiled a bias on the part of many white artists, art critics, art historians, and gallery and museum directors who participated in prejudicial behaviour and neglect of black women artists during the 1980s. The literature study serves as evidence of racist responses, micro-aggressions and neglect of art making by black female artists. For this reason a new art history has to be constructed that redefines the terms 'art' and 'artists' as well as processes that consider new ways of archiving the art history of the 1980s that add to the current reservoir of information on South African art history

The thesis established the dominance of a South African white culture during the 1980s. The use of CRT as a framework and grounded theory as a method to elicit historical detail proved that apartheid harboured both a private and public archive that remains predominantly lost as a new art history, unless processes are in place to document and write up this history. In rewriting South African art history, it is important to focus on an interpretation of culture within an African environment and its application to black lives. This would realise the disparity in the understandings and practices of culture by black and white South Africans.

The placement of black women within a cultural space, highlighted black women's struggles during the 1980s that continue within a patriarchal democracy. The interviews with cultural activists documented personal moments of history that captured their memories and experiences of the 1980s (private archive). Although memory remains subjective, it has

implications for the rewriting of current art history. This notion was supported by Annie Coombes, who posited that (the subjectivity of memory aside) there is a collective consciousness and shared social process that are crucial to consider when rewriting any historical document (Coombes 2004:8).

Findings

A review of exhibitions during the 1980s, critiqued in national newspapers, revealed a constant negation of black people as artists in South Africa. Black artists made 'art' that was documented as township, transitional or crafts. Further to their alienation was the use of the term 'other', applied to dilute black artist's credibility.

HAU's retained a white staff complement and their presentations at national conferences, academic publications in journals (SAAAH's journal and *de Arte*) and books revealed little or no engagement with any South African social activity that affected the lives of black South Africans. Instead, art historians and critics popularised art seen through a Eurocentric lens, which disabled their perception and appreciation of the type of art made by black artists.

Apart from a few key exhibitions catalogues, publications on South African art history generally provided little critical engagement, debate or new perspectives on the constitution of a new inclusive art history. This is evident in Powell's discussion on *Women Artists in South Africa* (1985), artworks produced by black women "do not fit at all comfortably into western dichotomies" (Powell 1985:7) and Berman who described the Vha Venda artists' exhibition as "empty objects without history" (Berman 1987:8).

Despite the general sidelining of black artists during the 1980s, black artists participated in a number of exhibitions. Two were considered ground-breaking at that time. *Tributaries. A view of contemporary South African art* (1985), and *The Neglected Tradition. Towards a new history of South African art (1930-1988)*. Sack's conundrum, "Does one write about black art as a separate category or does one insert it into the 'mainstream'? Should it be displayed separately or incorporated, without concern for racial categories, simply in terms of artistic categories?" (Sack 1991:7) remains unanswered.

What questions should we ask thirty-eight years later, realising that South African art history is flawed? How should we include the information that: Sebidi's win of the Standard Bank

Young Artist Award in 1989 was a major breakthrough for black female artists? That Ntshalintshali, as the joint winner of the Standard Bank Young Artist Award in 1990, indicates black women as significant art makers. The researched publication by Same Mdluli (2015) also indicates the existing gap in current South African art literature.

How do we include conferences, festivals and exhibitions, notably absent from reviews, research and discussion in mainstream art history of the 1980s, such as *Culture and Resistance* (1982), *Voice of Resistance* (1983) and *CASA* (1987) into a rewritten art history? What part does Amsterdam play in constructing this South African art history, given its central role during apartheid? Most important was the objective of these conferences, to work towards a national South African culture, an objective that should not remain elusive.

Given that today we live in a democracy, how do we write up a women's art history so that it is part of the mainstream in South Africa? The findings relating to women as cultural activists and contributors to South African art history showed that black women were integral to the arts. The Zabalaza Festival hosted various panel discussions on culture and an exhibition at MOMA, Oxford, *Art from South Africa* (Elliott 1990b), that included women. These were clear indicators that black women played an active role in cultural developments during the 1980s. The content of the interviewees is a clear indication of the wealth of history yet to be captured. The intention in analysing the works of the interviewees was to validate my contention that works made by women were imperative to the struggle and that there was value in the subject matter, which spoke to specific issues affecting women and black communities during apartheid. The content (personal narration of their experiences and in their art making) depicting the 1980s as a violent and dehumanising period in South African history (that many white people encourage black people to 'forget and start over'), must be documented. Apartheid remains a trauma that stained the lives of black people through legitimised racism. Throughout this thesis, apartheid is referenced as the whip that beat black people; however it was the racist white hand that held the whip. The issue of racism cannot be side-lined, as it remains an obstacle in the rewriting of South African art history.

This thesis revealed as did Ramgolam (2004) and Becker (2017) that art history journals and conference proceedings were largely silent on South African art made by black artists as well as discussions on an inclusive South African art history. The ANC's Department of Arts and

Culture initiated *Rixaka*, a cultural journal of the ANC. What alternative cultural journals are available apart from those at HAU's that would allow for critical interventions that fast-track a rewriting of South African art history?

Conclusion

This study validated the role of women in and their contribution to the liberation struggle – not only as militant ‘soldiers’, taking to the streets in protest marches, but as participants on a cultural platform defined by black township experiences. The term ‘culture’ was unpacked in terms of the understanding of black artists and cultural workers, so that the content of their artworks as well as their roles in the liberation struggle were validated as different notions from those of their white colleagues. For this reason, the chronology of the chapters reflected the narratives of ‘black’ South African art history, which was displaced under apartheid. This displacement meant that art making by black South Africans had to be drawn from the periphery into the mainstream.

The interviews generated new information about the lives of ‘black’ female resistance artists who supported the liberation movement via their artwork content and about their personal lives, which were subsumed by their personal experiences of apartheid atrocities. Additionally, numerous cultural conferences, festivals and exhibitions were held outside of the country that offered a platform for the discussion of the position of women in South Africa and their role in the struggle. This satisfied the premise that there were two aspects to the struggle of the black female: first, that her position was directly affected by apartheid policies on race, class and gender and secondly, her participation in the liberation movement.

This thesis argues for the need of a new inclusive South African art history in a post-apartheid South Africa. Furthermore, this research provided evidence of black female artists (both trained and untrained) made inroads into South African art history, in the 1980s without being acknowledged as being of importance due to the inherent bias of the closed community of white art historians. Archival documents supported the important role played by art, both as a strategy of the liberation movement and in the making of art by cultural workers. Archival documents also provided evidence of invaluable discussions held regarding a new cultural ideology for a post-apartheid South Africa. The impetus came from discussions and debates facilitated by the ANC towards an unbiased cultural vision. Realising the value of a

single national culture for South Africa, participants at various conferences and festivals in exile presented position papers on this and other areas of research that considered, the role of culture in the struggle for liberation, culture influencing social values, culture within education, women in culture and the arts and the role of culture in a post-apartheid South Africa (Range of research activities in our movement n.d.). In 1988, the ANC began discussions on cultural considerations that would form part of the new South African constitution. Amongst the issues addressed was the need to encompass the broad spectrum of cultural diversity in South Africa and that facilities should be available and accessible to all (ANC 1988).

A Freedom Charter for South African Artists was prepared in 1991, which is presently embedded in the South African Bill of Rights⁶⁸.

Article 4: *Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Information*. There shall be freedom of thought, speech, expression and opinion, including a free press which shall respect the right to reply. This declaration speaks directly to artists within a democracy.

Article 5: *Rights of Association, Religion, Language and Culture*.

Within this article, there is support for Freedom of Association, Freedom of Religion, Language Rights, Creative Rights and the Rights to Sporting, Recreational and Cultural Activities. The latter two declarations support artists in terms of artistic freedom and an encouragement of cultural activities (Sachs 1991:49).

Further to the promotion of this Freedom Charter for South African Artists, the ANC in exile also developed a Research and Development Plan to enshrine the value of culture in a democratic South Africa (ANC n.d.).

⁶⁸ Albie Sachs, who presented this document, stated that “it was not difficult to declare the fundamental rights and freedoms that we felt all South Africans should enjoy” (Sachs 1991:49). The South African Bill of Rights was adopted on 6 May 1996.

Women were part of these conferences, festivals, exhibitions and cultural forums which addressed culture in a democratic South Africa. Most relevant to this study, the ANC in exile continually expressed the importance of women as cultural activists who furthered the fight for freedom, of 'culture as a weapon of the struggle'.

This study adds to the documentation of South African history and art history. The value of this research is that it affects South African history on many levels. It contributes to re-evaluating South African art history, addresses gaps in the existing literature, and tackles the national imperative of gender sensitivity. The history recovered is a partial celebration of women's history, positioned within the larger narratives of South African art and the history of South Africa. South Africans can speak of and understand the African narrative in South African collections when private archives are written and made public.

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