Art as Accessible Knowledge for Challenging Intersectional Gender Binarisms

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A mini thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Arts in the Women and Gender Studies department, University of the Western Cape.

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Declaration

I declare that 'Art as Accessible Knowledge for Challenging Intersectional Gender Binarisms' is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Full name..Thandiwe Msebenzi... Date...4/10/2022.... Signed. ...

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the New Imaginaries for Gender and Sexual Justice Project for supporting this study, Andrew. W. Mellon Foundation in the Women and Gender Studies department, and Magnum Foundation, who funded the project, as well as the National Arts Fund, who partially funded the last mile of my studies, alongside the New imaginaries project.

I would like to acknowledge IQhiya network, made up of: Asemahle Ntlonti, Browyn Katz, Buhlebezwe Siwani,Bonolo Kavula,Charity Kelapile Mathlogonolo,Sisipho Ngodwana, Lungiswa Qgunta,Pinky Mayeng,Sethembile Msezane, Thandiwe Msebenzi and Thuli Gamedze, for their contribution to my confidence as an artist, and for creating a powerful force that shook patriarchy and had the artworld on its toes for a while.

I want to thank my supervisors: Tamara Shefer for being a catalyst of change in the university, through solidly holding a space for creatives and academics who want to do scholarship differently, and for making me feel so held. Kopano Ratele, whose work is the reason why, in talking about challenging gender binaries, I could not leave men behind. I also appreciate his contribution and charisma in my artwork as scholarship. I would like to thank Nomusa Makhubu who wholeheartedly came in half way through my study like a guardian angel. Nomusa's teaching was so gentle and kind, and I was truly blessed to receive that.

I would like to thank the women in my family who have held me in spirit and prayer throughout my thesis. uGogo Nobakaboni Msebenzi, uMakazi Nodida Oyiya, my last aunt Nomakhosazana Ngeshe. Lastly my mother, Maria Msebenzi, 'awudinwa mama, you have been walking this journey with me, for me, since the day I told you I wanted to go to a creative school (Waldorf).'

To the friends and family members who inspired the characters in the visual work and stories in the thesis: Felicity Msebenzi, Owethu Msebenzi,Thuso Msebenzi, Lwandile Nantisi, Vuyisiwe Penxa, Avuya Nzala, Jacquie Baker, Neroli Price (a special thank you, for helping me understand what a thesis was), Bonginkosi Ngeshe, Simphiwe Ndzube, Tata Soyisile Gum, and my late English teacher Mr B and uncles Petros Msebenzi and Khayalethu Msebenzi.

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Lastly ndibulela, aMandungwana, Oomadiba noma Qoma for protecting me, loving me, choosing me and carrying me, camagu!

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Abstract

Arts-based research struggles to find validation within the norms of rigid Eurocentric and androcentric academic norms. The Rhodes Must Fall movement, that started at the University of Cape Town in 2015, and the creative demonstrations/interventions that have occurred since then, as a tool for mass mobilisation and knowledge dissemination, were crucial in illustrating that art is an accessible form of pedagogy and scholarship in engaging with social issues. In this study, I centre creative practice to lead the research on an enquiry into alternative forms of gender, what I term 'soft masculinities' and 'tough femininities,' through memories of my experience, community and family, which I capture as nuanced expressions through photography. For the study, I use the visual body of artwork I created to formulate my research question. To draw out key themes of this work and select specific artworks, I used thematic analysis, while memory work and storytelling were used alongside academic text to analyse and interpret the work. Through this research, I challenge gender binaries by focusing on images of tough black femininities and soft black masculinities. By archiving these, I show how knowledge can be made accessible through visual images and story-telling. The stories and visual images challenge popular discourses of violent black masculinity, while also engaging with the difficulties of being a soft male within contexts where softness is not the most desirable quality of being a man. The women in the visuals and stories portray the complexities of tough femininities, that require strength to survive, taking care of communities and households as breadwinners, while also navigating violence. The stories and images push back against the victimised black woman trope, but also portray the push-and-pull women experience, of accessing their power while being constantly silenced through being fixed into gender norms. The study also illustrates how a variety of creative forms can be applied in academic research, as modes of enquiry, methods of analysis and interpretation, troubling normative forms of colonial scholarship that still prevail in the South African academy and beyond.

Key words: Artistic scholarly practices, Art, storytelling, soft masculinities, tough femininities, pedagogy, knowledge, accessibility.

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Preface: *fragments of memories*

'We are tired of being history's side chicks, it's the girls with the blue hair who said this, she is so fierce', says a young magazine owner and my PGCE classmate, after an interview he conducted with the IQhiya network.

'Patriarchy must fall.' I still remember these words, boldly written on a banner, held up by Rhodes University students doing a topless march, in a post on Facebook. It was the polaroid-like images that drew me to scanning each one, one by one, in their shades of tranquil turquoise, while I also witnessed the reality and rage of these students.

'Rhodes must fall' marches always made me panic, especially being asthmatic. I usually marched at the end with the slow walkers, strolling rather than running, or just being on the sides, but not in the middle where the heat was. I much rather preferred screaming from the back like a cheerleader. The one time I found myself in the middle of a crowd was the day the Rhodes statue was removed from the university, I was there with my fist high, screaming 'Rhodes must fall!' There was something very celebratory about that moment and a sense of ease in the air.

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'My daughters work much harder than my sons, women are strong but you know you can't say that.' I hear my grandmother talking to her neighbour in her kitchen early in the morning, while I am visiting her.

'I told my husband if he wanted to come into my life and live with me, he would be a garden boy at my house,' my grandmother begins, and I know the story she is about to tell is going to be filled with action, arm movements, clapping of hands, and a change of voice as she mentions each character, and I am about to be treated to snippets of my family history in the most illustrative and entertaining of ways.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Research Context

It's sometime early in 2015. I have just finished my undergraduate studies in fine art at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and I am doing my PGCE, post diploma certificate in education (which I did in the hope that, if I could not pursue being an artist, which I always blamed on my meek personality, I could at least revolutionise young kids through art). I am sitting amongst a group of woman artists, students and postgraduate students in fine art. We are in one of the Michaelis studios at UCT fine art school, and for the first time, we are talking about how we feel: that even with our talent we are systematically excluded from being acknowledged as artists. We feel unseen and unheard, while our black male counterparts are held with the highest prestige.

We gathered like this for months, holding a safe space for each other, until we realised that what we were forming was a network, a strong force, of 11 black female artists: Asemahle Ntlonti, Bronwyn Katz, Buhlebezwe Siwani, Bonolo Kavula, Charity Kelapile Mathlogonolo, Sisipho Ngodwana, Lungiswa Qgunta, Sethembile Msezane, Thandiwe Msebenzi, and Thuli Gamedze, who wanted to change the art 'game', assert themselves, make space for themselves, while we also engaging with the generational and post-apartheid traumas of being silenced black women. We called ourselves iQhiya (head wrap), about which Asemahle Ntlonti said: 'You know, it makes me think of struggles, protecting the head to fetch water having to be the man of the house and being a woman at the same time' (Leiman, 2016).

Our first iQhiya performance was at Greatmore studios in Woodstock, at a group show organised by Justin Davy. We titled the performance 'Portrait,' which was influenced by a picture of one of our member's mom with her siblings. In the images, beautiful young women posed gracefully, concealing any form of anguish they may have been going through at the time. It was this sentiment that had us stand barefoot on bottles in the 'Portrait' performance, enduring the pain, while carrying Coke bottles with pieces of cloth in them, symbolic of petrol bombs. I remember hearing a member of the crowd talking to a person next to them, and saying how sexy women looked when they were angry. At that moment, for a second, I

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felt my power taken away, everything I stood for and was resisting against in the performance felt violently squashed.

In the post-apartheid era, it remains difficult to be a woman in South Africa (Williams, 2018). Women remain marginalised from economics, and have the added fear of constant violence and abuse (Williams, 2018). Black women have been historically, institutionally, and culturally marginalised, in their families and societies, and despite transformative legislation, they remain the most marginalised. Policies and programmes geared at addressing the imbalance tend to have loopholes, in that they place white women on par with black women and black men as previously disadvantaged, making them equally entitled to opportunities (Farmer, 2022).

Black women find themselves silenced both for being and woman and for being black. This phenomenon, of the various layers of oppression that a single person can experience based on their identity, race, class etc, was termed intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 2017). Nomxolisi Albert (2020) further illustrates the burden of being a black woman living in the townships, where black women are the breadwinners and heads of households, yet, despite their efforts, find themselves in a subservient position. When black women are care-givers and run street committees in their community, their strength and efforts are seen as care work, which is subordinate to males and not considered significant (Albert, 2020). Albert goes on to speak about how a man may not be present in a child's life simply because it is the woman's duty to look after the child, and again the stress and strength of a single mother is disregarded, reduced to duty and 'insignificant' work. Albert notes that, even though she is the family breadwinner, she does not receive the status of head of the family (Albert, 2020).

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The erasure and silencing of black women can be seen in how women apartheid struggle icons, such as Winnie Mandela and Albertina Sisulu, who were an integral part in the fight for freedom in South Africa, are left out of history, yet we remember male icons like Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu (Kunene, 2017). Winnie Mandela is seen as a pariah, while Nelson Mandela is honoured (Kunene, 2017). This silencing robs black women of the chance to exist within their full potential, immerse themselves in positions of power, be fully whole as people (Lorde, 1984 ; Williams, 2018).

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My interest in women who resist and challenge fixed gender norms, grew exponentially during my time with the iQhiya network. I was also very inspired by my grandmother, who was the symbol of power in my family. I was raised by tough black women who were also breadwinners, like my grandmother, who challenged rigid gender binaries by refusing to be silenced, and constantly pushing back against patriarchy. She did this by being the breadwinner, and in the aggressive ways she moved to ensure her survival and that of her children, doing so with agency, and rejecting the black victimised woman trope. My grandmother, being '*umama owomeleleyo*,' a tough woman, was also someone not taken lightly by my community and family. Against the backdrop of tough women, I was also surrounded by gentler, 'soft men', growing up in New Cross Roads, Nyanga, a township that was notorious for violence, where mothers and families feared losing their young men to gangsterism and violent masculinities. Yet, in this very setting, I had male family members who did not conform to violent masculinities.

In South Africa, the father is considered the head of the household (Dlamini, Sathiparsad & Taylor, 2008). This patriarchal system is entrenched in many parts of the world, and is centred around male dominance and the exclusion of women (Adjoh-Davoh *et al*., 2021). Black men benefit from patriarchy, and they are afforded power, and are entitled to be dominant over black women, whether they have earned it or not (Albert, 2020). Traditional ideas of masculinity also reinforce dominance and power, and culturally celebrated masculinities silence other ways of being a man (Ratele, 2016). Under apartheid and colonial rule, dominant black masculinities were subordinated to white masculinities, which were also the hegemonic masculinities of the time, meaning they set the standard for what masculinity was. Hegemonic masculinities are then cast as the most ideal way of being a man. In cases where there is unemployment and lack of opportunities, for some men, violent masculinities become a form of attaining and exercising their power and manhood (Ratele, 2016; Langa, 2020). There is also a long history of portraying black men solely as violent and dangerous, while peaceful non-violent ways of being a black male are not public discourse (Langa *et al*., 2018).

Within a context of silenced black women, high rates of woman abuse, and the violent ways black masculinity is portrayed, but also coming from a background of tough black women and soft black men, I became very interested in looking at tough femininities and soft

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masculinities, to challenge fixed gender binaries and the various representations of black femininities and masculinities.

I began the journey by creating a photographic body of work, including a video. I titled the work, '*Utata undiphotha inwele*' (my father plaits my hair), and it was exhibited as a solo show at Smith gallery in 2019, and has since appeared in numerous group shows and art fairs. The practice of creating this body of work was also my resistance to academic norms of doing research. I started my process by thinking through creating, as opposed to reading through heaps of academic texts. Doing the artworks became a way of enquiring and drawing out my thesis question. I also use the artworks in the study as my research data.

There is a deep need for more nuanced engagement with the un-silencing of the complex and empowered narratives of black woman femininities in post-apartheid South Africa, which iQhiya highlights in creative ways. There is also a need for more black male stories that are not centred around violence; these do exist, but are subordinated and unpopularised (Segalo, 2015; Langa *et al*., 2018; Langa, 2020). To challenge gender binaries in this study, I use 'tough femininities,' taken from my experiences with my grandmother and her daughters, as well as 'soft masculinities,' which I take from the Xhosa word '*ukuthamba*,' a popular word in my youth, used to identify someone soft/not strong/weak, a term for men who do not enact dominant forms of masculinity. However, the word is not restricted to men, but is rather a word that identifies softness more generally.

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This study aims to find creative and accessible ways of engaging with gender issues, while also centring art as pedagogy, and creative practices as a guiding source of knowledge. Art as pedagogy can be a useful and accessible tool to engage gender issues. Using art-based methods can be challenging, particularly within academia and its conventions, as they challenge the assumption of what constitutes research. Art-based methods may embody knowledge and experiences, such as emotional experiences, which are often ignored and dismissed in the dominant western culture, where rational cognitive ways of knowing are valued (Archibald & Gerber, 2018 ; van der Vaart, van Hoven & Huigen, 2018). However, the ability of art to function through emotions and embodiment is also what makes art accessible and a catalyst for change.

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As a young teacher in 2016, who had been a PGCE student in 2015 at UCT, I had witnessed through Rhodes Must Fall how art played a central role in creating dialogues, sparking debates, and driving discourses towards change. This happened, for example, when a UCT student threw faeces at the Rhodes statue, and this sparked a debate on decolonising the institution that spread to other universities. Part of the decolonial dialogues argued for various ways that pedagogy could be applied and made accessible and inclusive. Part of the inclusivity of decolonial practices was that it allowed for various languages and modes of working. A common and effective language that was used during Rhodes Must Fall was visual art, music, performance, and poetry, as ways of addressing issues and making an embodied kind of knowledge (Gamedze *et al.*, 2018).

2. Study Aims

My study aims to centre art as a form of accessible knowledge, a valuable medium for scholarship and challenging gender binaries, through engaging the disruptive possibilities of alternative gender imaginaries, of soft masculinities and tough femininities. I do this through visual images I have taken that capture the nuanced stories of my upbringing and my experiences with soft masculinities and tough femininities. The photographic work is analysed through storytelling, as a creative method to fully engage with how a variety of creative methods can be employed in research and pedagogical praxis.

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3. Research significance

This research contributes to alternative ways of making and engaging with knowledge through creative practice, while tackling gender justice issues.

4. Structure of the research

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2, a literature review, looks at what has been written about my study topic. It begins by unpacking pedagogy, critical pedagogies, and feminist pedagogies, to draw on the various abstract ways pedagogy can exist, and how knowledge can be expressed beyond rigid eurocentric norms which tend to stifle creativity and emotions in knowledge production. I look at *Intsomi* (Xhosa word for stories) stories or storytelling as an important way to pass on knowledge. The literature review asserts that art is

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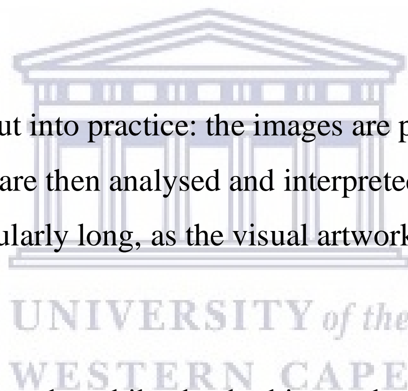
an accessible and alternative mode of knowledge production and scholarship. To trouble gender binaries, the literature unpacks soft masculinities and tough femininities, while also looking at how artists have challenged gender binaries through visual art.

In Chapter 3, I elaborate on feminist theories that underpin my theoretical frameworks, including decolonial feminism, intersectionality, standpoint theory, black feminist thought, and Africana womanism. I also use intersectionality to look at the presentation of black women and men in South African art.

This study draws from a visual body of work, to answer the study question using art-based research methods (ABR). In Chapter 4, my methods chapter, I use various other methods to engage with artworks that speak to soft masculinities and tough femininities. Thematic analysis was used to select themes, while storytelling and memory works were used as analytical tools.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In Chapter 5, the methods are put into practice: the images are put into themes and, through storytelling and memory work, are then analysed and interpreted alongside academic literature. This chapter is particularly long, as the visual artworks are engaged with through a set of 14 long and short stories.

Chapter 6 reflects on the whole study, while also looking at the study's limitations, and proposing recommendations for future research.

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Chapter 2: Literature review

1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the key bodies of scholarship that speak to my study. To get an understanding of what knowledge is and what its forms are, I began by looking at literature on pedagogy. Pedagogy is often discussed as something abstract, and cannot be confined to a book as the only form of engagement (Compayré, 1971; Simon, 1992). This makes knowledge an entity that can exist in multiple and diverse ways; however, traditional western knowledge practice tends to only recognise very rigid, patriarchal and androcentric ways (Compayré 1971; Simon, 1992; Francis & Mills 2012). I also look at critical pedagogy theories and feminist critical theories, which critique traditional knowledge practices. Later in the review, I discuss how these theories also seem to fall short, as they tend to be confined to the classroom space only, instead of mobilising their discourse in and out of the academy for greater access. The Fallist movement,[1] which used a decolonial approach, is discussed, along with the ways they were able to successfully reach a wider audience in critiquing the colonial, patriarchal and rigid knowledge practices at South African education higher institutions, using art, activism and scholarship. I then reflect on art as an accessible medium to pass on knowledge, with its ability to reach a wider audience, both in and outside of the academy, in non-rigid ways. I do this by looking at resistance art in South Africa, which was very intentional about passing on knowledge and bringing about change through art during apartheid. I also look at live art in South Africa as a contemporary practice, where art is used to speak to an audience outside academia and confined gallery spaces. Lastly, I look at both art and literature in their creative engagements with soft masculinities and tough femininities as a way of challenging fixed gender binaries. Literature reveals the importance of diverse forms of knowledge production in making knowledge accessible, and argues that art can make knowledge accessible outside of the academy; in collaborating with academic scholarship, it can also challenge gender binaries beyond normative academic ways.

[1] The Fallist movement arose out of a collective of protests around universities of South Africa, which started with the protest against a colonial statue of Cecil John Rhodes at UCT in 2015, under the hashtag #RhodesMustFall. This resulted in other Fallist movements taking on various forms of activism across South African universities, including #FeesMustFall (Kasembeli 2020).

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2. Alternative forms of pedagogy

Schools and institutions of higher learning are spaces for the production of knowledge and pedagogical practice (Simon, 1992). Pedagogy gives insight to knowledge; it embraces and informs educational theory, informing teaching approaches, and teacher and pupil relationships (Compayré, 1971; Simon, 1992; Evans & Waring, 2014). With this understanding, institutionalised education becomes the outcome of a set pedagogy. The classic traditional form of learning in schools and universities is generally organised around hierarchy, didactics and indoctrination, and is very rigid (Francis & Mills, 2012).

There is a long history of alternative forms of pedagogy that have emerged as a critique of this classical euro-western form of learning, which is also the dominant form of knowledge practice. Alternative forms of pedagogy, such as popular education and critical, feminist and social justice pedagogical practices, tend to step away from traditional ways of learning by being holistic and learner-centred (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1995; Lewis, 2007; Albulescu & Catalano, 2017). The history and practices of education have shifted and changed over time, constantly being shaped by dominant structures in society (Giroux, 2006).

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Education has always been a space that reinforces inequality, prejudice, sexism, classism, and racism, controlled by the dominant structures of the day (Freire, 1970 Giroux, 2006). Examples of this have been evident throughout history, and South Africa is a prime example of the political nature of education, and how politics and ideologies shape pedagogical content and practice. Under the apartheid system, which officially began in 1948, a new philosophy of education was launched, based on the principle of separateness, and the institutionalisation of white supremacy (Christie & Collins, 1982 ; Kallaway, 2002; Ndimande, 2013). The apartheid government used schools to drive the philosophy of apartheid, and their intended social conditioning of the black majority. Under the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the education of black students was intended to produce semi-skilled labourers, and dismantle any form of critical political consciousness amongst the learners, to make them believe that their oppression was natural (Ndimande, 2013; Anderson, 2020). Bantu education in South Africa shows how dominant ideologies have been used to create a pedagogy that plays into the hands of the dominant structures of society, reproducing

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privilege and subjugation. This highlights out some of the key concepts that critical pedagogies speak to and challenge in the post-apartheid South African context.

3. Critical pedagogies

Critical pedagogy stems from the idea that the world is socially unjust, and pedagogy should be used to challenge injustice. Critical pedagogies intend to disturb social forms of oppression and open up spaces for the critique of dominant discourses and conditioning, and for alternative possibilities (McLaren, 1995).

There is a long history of critical pedagogies, particularly among those in subjugated and marginal communities who have suffered classist, racist, gendered and other forms of exploitation and oppression. For example, W.E.B. Du Bois contributed to some of the earliest thoughts around critical pedagogy by making students of colour aware of their oppressors' viewpoint, and how they were positioned in the equation as the oppressed. Du Bois also believed that black schools should be spaces of empowerment, and breeding grounds for transformation in society (Kincheloe, 2004; Du Boise, 2007).

Paulo Freire's work in the book, *The pedagogy of the oppressed*, played a key role in establishing the active ways that critical pedagogy between student and teacher can occur to foster minds that can change society beyond the classroom. Freire spoke about the condition of the oppressed, and challenges in mainstream formal education, and argued for a more humanist approach to education (Freire, 1970). He considered formal education as 'banking education,' where teachers held the authority in the classroom, and learners were viewed as empty vessels into whom subscribed knowledge was meant to be deposited without question. The learners become clueless and passive recipients who are grateful for what they are receiving, and are not involved in directly transforming their own society, as their creative power is stifled. Students are schooled to get jobs and be part of a system they have learnt to never question. This approach reflects the society it is located in, where those in power have full control over the majority of people, and monitor any form of change in education, as that may disturb the world order. Under these limitations in education in a society, the oppressed remain oppressed, and view the oppressor as the measure of life and guide (Freire, 1970 Schugurensky, 1998).

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Freire advocated for humanist revolutionary educators, who would engage in critical thinking, and who trust in the people and their creative power. The banking method of depositing knowledge treats people as objects, making education an act of domination. Freire argued that education should be a practice of freedom, bringing consciousness and reflexivity, and posing problems. The classroom should be a space where teachers learn from students as well, who bring their own knowledge, whilst engaging with the world, making education a space for transformation (Freire, 1970). In essence, both Du Bois and Freire, along with many others, challenged their social structures and how pedagogies were shaped. In identifying authoritarian, or oppressive, power, and its influence in creating a passive nation, they both insisted on a critical pedagogy that empowers people and facilitates their freedom to be active participants in challenging their social conditions.

4. Feminist critical pedagogies and feminist standpoint theory in challenging eurocentric, androcentric and patriarchal knowledge production

Feminist critical pedagogy has also been key in challenging these rigid classical traditional forms of knowledge-making and practice, and is rooted in critical pedagogy theories, feminist scholarship and activism. Before we engage with it, it is important to briefly locate how I am using the term feminist. Throughout patriarchal history, women have been resisting oppression in organised groups, to curb social injustices in society (Moses, 2012). The word 'feminist' was a term originally used in the west by historians for all women's collective activities. In the 19th century, women started writing books about their experiences, and in the 20th century, certain women started calling themselves feminist (Rampton, 2008; Moses, 2012). The 1960s to 80s saw the development of second-wave feminism, which saw claims around the term feminist amongst women in active collectives, who were attempting to raise consciousness among other women, and rigorously fighting for gender equality in all fields (Rampton, 2008; Moses, 2012). bell hooks (2000) describes the beginning of feminism as the time when women got together and began talking about sexism and the oppression of women in society that privileged men. These small groups began theorising their experiences and resistance to patriarchy. This was then made available through newsletters and word of mouth. When the feminist movement made its way into the academy, hooks called it a time of awakening, because it was challenging old rigid patriarchal styles of education that had erased the work of women (hooks, 2000). Feminists were doing the very work that Freire spoke about, as they had recognised their position as the oppressed, and were challenging the system and the academy which produced knowledge that had excluded them.

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The early feminist movements were very much centred around white middle-class women in the west discussing their experiences to challenge patriarchy, yet excluding the works and experiences of black women who had fought alongside them (Collins, 2015). White middle-class feminism has been challenged through discourses created by black women in the west and in the global south,[2] which speak of their lived experiences, and challenge earlier binarist thinking (Sporring Jonsson, 2008; Lugones, 2010; Day *et al*., 2019). I will discuss more woman movements further in my theoretical frameworks chapter. For the purpose of this review, it was necessary to note that the earliest forms of feminism were rooted in white middle-class western women's experiences, and these were used as a set of norms to engage with all women's issues (Sporring Jonsson, 2008). At the centre of feminism, which connects all the other isms, is advocacy against the erasure of women, challenging fixed western norms of what constitutes pure scientific knowledge, and patriarchal practice that oppresses women (Sporring Jonsson, 2008).

4.1 Feminist critical pedagogies

Critical feminist pedagogy was developed as a methodology to challenge dominant educational practices (Kark, Preser & Zion-Waldocks, 2016). It is centred on feminist theories and critical pedagogy principles, emphasising an intersectional gendered viewpoint to look at social structures (Chow *et al*., 2003).

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Feminist pedagogies challenge traditional forms of power, knowledge, authority and the notion of enlightenment reason. They acknowledge emotion, the personal and the individual story, as opposed to the dominant story, which excludes other narratives. These notions move away from western methods of enquiry that rely on objectivity and reason without affect and embodiment. Students in mainstream education are taught that 'truth' is objective, making them sceptical to knowledge outside their norms (Markowitz, 2005; Kark *et al*., 2016).

When euro-western science gained prominence in the 17th century, reason became the dominant feature, and insisted that human emotions could lead to errors in the search for truth. With science as the centre of being, the mind and body were separated. Men were associated with the mind, which represented reason and superiority, while females were

[2] The global south refers to Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania, regions outside Europe and North America, that are often low-income and culturally and politically marginalised (Dados & Connell, 2012).The term is frequently used in websites and in academic papers, but is also challenged and contested as there are no linear relationships between geographical latitudes and human development. Countries are also diverse in their development (Demetriodor, 2018; da Silva, 2021).

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associated with emotion, which was the body and the opposite of good and pure reason. This notion was also used to directly exclude women from knowledge. Men were considered good knowers and intellectuals, and anything outside of that was seen as bad and evil. Order was considered the norm to disorder, masculinity preferred to femininity (Kark *et al*., 2016). This mode of division is also known as the Cartesian method, which has been criticised and challenged by feminists and other critical thinkers. In doing so, they challenged a whole system of social order, as well as a system of knowledge production. Part of the goal of feminist pedagogies is to bring consciousness to women and other subjugated groups, and make people aware of the patriarchy and coloniality (Kark *et al*., 2016).

bell hooks used critical feminist theories to advocate for the importance of emotions, which had been regarded as disruptive and not intellectual. She stated that joy and excitement is something often seen as a disruption in the classroom, which is viewed as a space of seriousness supposedly required for learning. hooks described this seriousness as rigid and dull, and challenged this rigidity in learning, as well as the banking system of learning. hooks suggested that knowledge should be a shared experience of spiritual growth, as well as information. Human beings do not just exist in the mind, but rather they experience the world with their whole being. She also argued that teachers should be healers; before they engage in the work of healing, the healing should start with them (hooks, 2014).

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Feminist pedagogies challenge the idea that the academy is a pure space of knowledge, and highlight that the academy is rooted in androcentric and patriarchal norms. Feminist pedagogies encourage activism and social understanding, creating active learners, shared experiences and an education that engages the mind, body and spirit. It encourages community-building and respect for diversity, and power is shared between the teachers and the learners (Schoeman, 2015; hooks, 2014).

4.2. Feminist standpoint theory

Between 1970 and the 1980s, feminist standpoint theory emerged as a feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and power. It was intended to explain the growing knowledge production of feminism, which was seen only as a political movement, and as unworthy to produce science. It challenged colonial histories of male-dominated perspectives, and took gender justice beyond just ‘women’s issues,’ seeing it as a valuable source of knowledge (Harding, 2004). Women, as the oppressed group in the west, wanted to create knowledge that was for women, by women. Like all oppressed groups,

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women had always been the object of enquiry, by dominant powers, and not the authors of their own stories. Standpoint theory maps out political and social disadvantage that can be turned into epistemology, and its principles were framed within feminist social theories, which were not restricted to women's issues, but could also be used as methods of studying, and applied to other social justice issues. The theory and methodology engage with the politics of the oppressed from the point of being oppressed, contributing to and challenging existing damaging discourse by the 'Androcentric, economically, advantaged, racists, Eurocentric and heterosexist' that have ensured systematic ignorance (Harding, 2004: 5). Feminist standpoint theory also questions the beneficiaries of a discourse that restricts anything outside the standards of 'rationality', and that excludes women, poor people and other oppressed groups. The philosophies that exclude the oppressed have guided mainstream research, and these sexist androcentric ideologies have shaped people's lives. Feminist standpoint theory insists on knowledge being based on different kinds of experiences (Harding, 2004).

Feminist critical pedagogies and standpoint feminism both challenge androcentric, heterosexist and euro-centric production of knowledge, while also viewing the personal and the individual story as valid sources of knowledge. They shift the hierarchy in the teaching and learning experience to one where knowledge is shared, rather than deposited by the teacher into the learner (Schoeman, 2015; hooks, 2014). Feminist pedagogies, Freire's work in pedagogy for the oppressed, and Du Bois' work with critical pedagogies amongst black students, all criticised traditional knowledge practices from various perspectives. Du Bois spoke of knowledge that empowers black students to be aware of their position as the oppressed, while Freire spoke of the marginalised working class, and creating education that empowers students to be agents of change, as opposed to passive learners. Feminist critical pedagogies also advocates for an education that breaks down hierarchies and encourages shared learning that encompasses emotion, positioning a catalyst of thinking with the mind, the body and spirit. These theories are useful in inspiring different ways of approaching knowledge-making, sharing and creating. They are also useful in challenging the rigid euro-centric and androcentric modes of creating and discerning knowledge.

These critical theories also all seem to recognise that the authoritative powers of society, or governing structures, have a big influence on how pedagogy is formed. In challenging rigid teaching norms, they are also challenging oppressive societal norms.

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5. Fallism and decolonial pedagogy in South African higher education

The decolonial education project motivates for diversity of epistemology. It recreates and develops knowledge and knowledge systems that have been silenced and suppressed, and strives for the creation of a world beyond colonialism and capitalism. The aim of colonialism was to control people's wealth and culture, and how people perceive themselves and their relationship to the world (wa Thiong'o, 1992). There are three characteristics of the decolonial project I find relevant to feminist critical pedagogies: storytelling, healing and reclaiming. Storytelling involves naming and remembering, which serves to challenge eurocentrism and the colonial metanarrative. The remembering process is an important decolonial strategy, and is about reclaiming language spaces and identities, as colonialism was an imposition into language and knowledge systems. The healing element of decolonial education is centred around the colonised people who have been stripped of their language, practice and land, and challenges western notions of education as only cognitive. Healing is about coming together through ceremony and education in the community to rebuild people's sense of self. Colonialism was embedded and invasive in people's bodies and languages, making this self-healing element important. The reclaiming strategy in decolonial education includes recovering the sense of who people are, their practices and their relation to place. It brings ancestral knowledge with indigenous knowledge, allowing colonised people to rethink their relation to land and nature in the process of reclaiming who they are (Zavala, 2016). Decolonial pedagogies, like other forms of critical pedagogies including feminist pedagogies, place their focus on the oppressed groups, but also challenge dominant oppressive structures. What stands out with decolonial pedagogies is their attention to collective healing of the oppressed, and clear-cut strategies to reclaim a lost history, practices and the deconstruction of non-diverse colonial dominant pedagogies.

In 2015, South African students from institutions of higher learning drove the urgent call for the decolonisation of higher education institutions. There had previously been academics who had critiqued the colonial nature of African universities, but right up to 2015, South Africa still maintained western traditions of teaching. After 1994, South Africa focused on transforming higher education with regards to access for black students, and the demographics of staff members, but paid little attention to changing the colonial cultures of institutions. These euro-centric colonial cultures, which are visible in buildings, knowledge production and symbolism of these institutions, made for a very alienating experience for many black students. The 2015 student protests, which called for the decolonisation of the

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universities and removal of old symbols, brought these issues to the forefront. For years, these institutions had disregarded other forms of knowledge, and students called for a rethink of knowledge is, and whose knowledge is important (Vorster & Quinn, 2017). Higher education, and its hegemonic notion of knowledge, makes it difficult to think outside the box, as it is formed on rigid scientific practices that set up fixed methods of learning and knowledge production (Mbembe, 2015).

It is interesting to note that the challenges of rigid education that Freire speaks, some of which are foregrounded in feminist pedagogies, still rang true in institutions of higher learning in South Africa, until students took these issues on. The first protest was the Rhodes Must Fall movement (RMF), which erupted after a student threw faeces on the bronze Cecil Rhodes sculpture on UCT campus. The RMF movement conducted a series of interventions, protests and seminars, where they sought to construct their own decolonial framework. They were ambitious, aiming to challenge institutional racism, and demand the Africanisation of the curriculum (Ahmed, 2019a).The movement was also vocal in challenging patriarchy. Historically, women had been considered nurturers of movements and supporters, but not active participants. However, women and queer people's voices became important in shaping RMF (Ramaru, 2017). Critical pedagogy became a very popular term in seminars during the protest period; students were thinking about critical education, and used the decolonial framework, which they centred on black consciousness, pan-Africanism, and black radical feminism (Ahmed, 2019a). RMF draws our attention to how contemporary South African knowledge is produced in higher institutions, and how it has remained colonial, exclusive and euro-centric, with very little room for different epistemologies that speak and cater to black students (Vorster & Quinn, 2017).

The mass mobilisation of the Fallist movement, and their creative interventions, made it and its ideas accessible to the ordinary public, even outside academia (Xaba, 2017). Xaba (2017) notes that decolonial ideology had existed for a very long time in academia, but for many South Africans, it was a new concept. The Fallist movement popularised the term and transferred its use from academic spaces into wider popular discourse (Xaba, 2017).

The decolonial winter school, organised by UCT students in 2018, is an example of the approaches students were taking in imagining and creating a decolonised learning space through art-based methods. The idea was to emphasise healing, the use of indigenous knowledge, and art (body movement, visual art and music). It also sought to break out from

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the colonial authority structure imposed on students, who are seen as empty vessels (Gamedze *et al*., 2018).

The student movements are an important contemporary example of critique of the unchanging colonial notions of the academy. The student movements also influenced other universities to start having conversations about decolonisation across South Africa and abroad, to universities like Oxford (Ahmed, 2019b). The decolonial school at UCT emerged as an important example of what an inclusive, critical, accessible pedagogy looked like. Through the merging of academia with personal politics, students translated this decolonial, feminist and queer challenge to the university and society into activism and art that speaks to a larger public, as a way of bringing about social change (Shefer, 2019).

6. Art as an accessible pedagogy and useful medium for people-centred knowledge

In the book, *Teaching to transgress*, hooks (2014) talks about teaching feminist theories beyond the confined academic framework and the written word. Academic knowledge is highly specialised and not easily accessible, but creative outputs which deal with gender and other social justice issues are accessible to the masses (hooks, 2014). Art as pedagogy falls outside of traditional forms of learning, as art functions through feelings and emotions, which contradicts traditional rigid ways of learning which base knowledge solely on the 'intellect' (Wickiser, 1952).

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In an interview by the Tate museum with a group of artists, the artists spoke about learning through doing, and knowledge coming from practise (Pringle, 2009).The process of doing becomes important. They spoke of knowledge within art-making as something that is embodied and that resists unambiguous institutionalised ways of being and knowing. The knowledge is revealed to the viewers through the artworks (Pringle, 2009).

There is a common idea that art is created solely for aesthetic appreciation. Artists stereotypically are placed in isolation from society, making their practice seemingly self-focused. Artists are also represented as individuals who live in their own worlds, and are seldom associated with social change (Resch & Heindenriech, 2019). The art world itself, which supports many artists, is centred around collectors who are the elite, which makes art extremely exclusionary for those who cannot afford it. Art then seemingly only benefits those who invest in it. This further reproduces the idea that art is an individual practice, which ends

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up in exclusive spaces, far from the majority of people and their needs (Resch & Heindenriech, 2019). Art has also been criticised as a medium that is not committed enough to political change, but is rather seen as an instrument that aestheticises real issues that need real action (Groys, 2014).

These ideas of art as just dead imagery, of 'no thinking', with no voice, are also rooted in the history of museums, where objects from the past were dug up and put on display, and dead leaders were displayed as proof of their death, further developing the notion that art is merely non-functional objects put on display (Groys, 2014). 'This narrative and that of white cubes and price tags in galleries may limit how art can fully exist in itself, but that does not mean art is dead and can't evoke anything valuable' (S Ngodwana,[Stevenson Gallery] 2020,personal communication).

Art functions through emotions which, as argued above, are generally considered outside of the traditional education structure, which bases knowledge solely on the 'intellect' (Wickiser, 1952). There has always been a hierarchy between emotions, thoughts and reason, with emotions seen as a sign of weakness, and controlling emotions seen as an achievement. Emotions, however, are shaped by contact with something, or objects. Our relation to feeling differs based on our internalised baggage (Ahmed, 2015). One can thus view emotion as an enabler of different perspectives, as opposed to one monotonous view. Emotions are also knowledge, as they function as 'that which lets us know;' through emotions, knowledge becomes a bodily experience (Ahmed, 2017).

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In African knowledge systems, art has always been at the centre of existence. African knowledge systems tend to challenge Western thought by providing space for mind, body and spirit to coexist in shaping knowledge, and are predominantly embedded in oral culture, performance, music, craft and ceremonies etc (Kaya & Seleti, 2013).

In African knowledge systems, you find that art is not separate from who people are; it is the carrier of wisdom and knowledge, and helps guide communities. (Khunwane, 2018). *Iintsomi*, for instance, is an isiXhosa term for fables/fairytales, which are stories told to young children by their grandmothers and mothers for the purpose of transmitting wisdom. *Iintsomi* are far from the ideas of 'truth and facts', (Markowitz, 2005; Masilela, 2009; Mbembe, 2015; Kark *et al.,* 2016), but rather are mythical and spontaneous stories existing between the imagination, reality, and history. They are told through gestures and singing, and the audience is taken on the journey through participation in the story, where needed. *Intsomi*

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forms part of the foundation of raising children and passing on knowledge through creative means (Vansina, 1971; Masilela, 2009). Art does not exist in confinement, but rather exists for the people and communities. Through such artistic, creative forms of learning, knowledge also then becomes something that is embodied and experienced by the whole being (Masilela, 2009). This indigenous creative form of knowledge production is also being taken forward by the decolonial school at UCT as a method to decolonise western education.

7. South African live art, art activism and feminist art

Art gives space for contemplation and engagement in ways that break down the norms of logic and linguistics (Pather & Boulle, 2019), and has been used for community development. We see this in activist art, which has also been used primarily as a political tool. Art activism uses art as a medium of change, often tackling social political issues, allowing art to lead the process of change (Dewhurst, 2014).

Feminist art by British and northern American artists in the 1960s and 70s grew out of the need to correct misguided gender inequalities within their context (Broude & Garrard, 2005). Feminist artists wanted to recover women's history and challenge sexist culture, and did this across a variety of mediums, challenging traditional art forms of painting and sculpture. They criticised art for being separate from society, and challenged these norms through installations, public interventions, working with performance, video, making works deliberately geared towards ending sexism and oppression against women. They wanted to create a dialogue between the work and the viewer, critiquing the historical nature of art as just a mute object, using it to open space for questions about the political landscape, in the hope of bringing about change. Feminist art paved the way for activist art in the 1980s, which used art as a tool for change in society (Broude & Garrrard, 2005; The Art Story, n.d.; Milner, Moore & Cole, 2015; Museum of Modern Art [MOMA], 2021). From the 1970s to 1990s, South African feminist artists were doing similar activist work, translating feminist thinking for the broader community, directing it at a non-academic audience, while also critiquing existing gender theories of the time, and asserting gender as a social issue, against the backdrop of the political struggle in South Africa (Kemp *et al.*, 2018).

In South Africa, live art, which draws from art activism, was born from the need to express contemporary social contexts, colonial imposition, cultural disintegration and political turmoil. They are expressed to the public through live performance, and this seems to speak to the very sentiments of African folklore and ways of storytelling and knowledge-making

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embedded in African ways of knowing, where art exists outside the gallery and is created for the people. Live artworks outside the gallery space of commerce; it cannot be bought, and allows the ambiguous emotions that are rendered from the changing social climate (Pather & Boulle, 2019). Live art asks questions, engages with social happenings drawing the audience towards social fragmentation. Live art does not fix but rather allows the audience to put together the pieces and make their own interpretations (Makhubu, 2019).

8. Art as a tool for education: resistance art, CAP and art during RMF

> *During apartheid we got the same whip as politicians because we were conscientising the people… a community with no artist falls apart and no one is there to bring consciousness* (Mafafo 2020).

Using art to inform, educate and articulate political themes to the masses has a long history in South Africa. During apartheid, many artists, especially after 1976, challenged the idea of art for leisure and for the elite, recognising the importance of using art to articulate their conditions, and as a form resistance of apartheid (Williamson, 2010).

Art as a tool for education is deeply rooted in South African history. It was prominent in the 1970s – 1980s, when many black South African artists started making work about how the system of apartheid marginalised, criminalised and excluded them (Gamedze *et al*., 2018). What was pivotal about this period, known in formal art history as 'resistance art', was the use of art as an important pedagogical tool. Art was used as tool for education, liberation and resistance against the apartheid system (Gamedze *et al*., 2018).

The Community Arts Project (CAP) played an important role in ensuring that the public became politically conscious. CAP was founded in 1977 in Cape Town as a space for community culture and politics. It was an institution which resisted apartheid through the artworks it produced, and their goal of heightening political awareness was manifested through posters, murals, T-shirts and graffiti (Lochner, 2011). Peace parks were also part of resistance art, popularised in 1985, with the youth responding to oppression by bringing back traditions of beauty and cleanliness in their communities. Peace parks also functioned as a form of healing, and were created in open spaces that were often used as dumping areas in the township. The creativity of these peace parks inspired community members to take pride in beautifying their own yards (Sack, 1989).

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In current times, art activism continues to be used as a public pedagogical medium to call attention to social injustice, to both the public and its gatekeepers (Shefer, 2019 Pather & Boulle, 2019). The ability of art to conjure emotions makes it capable of spreading a collective sentiment (Adams, 2002), and the affect evoked by the Rhodes statue at UCT, and what followed after, was a clear example of the power which art has to spark action towards social justice and change. In conversation with a gallery associate director Sisipho Ngodwana (2021) she describes art as a body that sits between the artists and the viewer, which carries its own spirit that, when in discourse with the viewer, can result in negative or positive outcomes.

Throughout the Fallist movements, beginning in early 2015, we saw students taking down colonial symbols that enforced their oppression. As they took down, they created new visual symbols that called into attention their struggles (Xaba, 2017). On the day Rhodes 'fell', right opposite the statue about a few metres away, a living female sculpture on stilettoes rose high. It was a performance piece by Sethembile Msezane, an eminent South African artist. The piece spoke directly to the colonial legacy, bringing into awareness *Chapungu,* the great Zimbabwean bird, and the soap sculptures representing the bird that were bought by Rhodes. As a viewer, this piece was clearly starting a new era and shifting the white male colonial narrative prevalent in the institution. The figure Msezane embodied was in conversation with the lifeless statue of Rhodes. When Rhodes was removed from his pedestal, Msezane remained standing in his place for an hour (Msezane, 2017), replacing the colonial legacy that he represented with a new story.

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In the struggle to decolonise academic institutions, there was a sense of the coming of something new, a new form of education, As a student at that time, there was anticipation of what this new inclusive education would look like. It was interesting to see the students taking on creative forms of protest, using performance art and their bodies to have that conversation. Whether you were walking past the performance or watching online via social media, the ideas underpinning the Fallist movement were made accessible through art (Makhubu, 2020).

Artworks as a knowledge system that falls outside of the rigid ways in which 'knowing' is expected. Art as a knowledge system assumes a practical engagement in both teaching and learning, and exists as a 'body' of knowledge with no measures to validate its truth, but rather

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it gives space to the viewer to embody the knowledge they receive, which results in multiple impressions. The creative ways of protesting, activism and intellectual inputs used by the RMF movement were explaining valuable sources of knowledge to masses within and beyond the academy. Art, as a medium to produce and pass on knowledge, appears to have a solid history in South Africa, from resistance art in the 70s, to continued use of creative intervention during protests as a form of critical questioning of unjust issues and mass mobilisation (Becker, 2018).

9. Challenging intersectional gender binaries with art

In my own work, I see art as a useful pedagogy and scholarship for addressing gender justice issues, because of its practical ability to engage and make an impact outside of the academy, touching the viewers boldly, which challenges the cartesian dualism which insists on pedagogical practices as separation of the mind from the body. These are ways of learning which still persist in the academy (Lelwica, 2009). My own artistic work and research stems from a feminist approach. Gender has been at the core of feminist practice. Cooper (2016) describes gender as a social construct, a set of norms and behaviours that are put together and prescribed to individuals based on the biological sex they are assigned at birth, creating a binary system of male and female and, in a patriarchal society such as ours, the male is given precedence over female.

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Decolonial feminists take the idea of gender further by interrogating the roots of oppression, which have affected the perception and formation of gender binaries (Smith, Tuck & Yang, 2018). Gender was an important part of colonisation, and it was constructed and imposed on black bodies in a way that dehumanised them, distancing them from what was considered 'normal', and painting them as animalistic, and something to be controlled. This was a useful concept at the time that was used to justify subjugation and enslavement (Mendez, 2015).The enforcing of gender roles on colonised people was also a useful in securing and maintaining imperial power (McClintock, 1995). This understanding of gender, which goes beyond western terms, gestures to its intersectionality, and how its performance is not fixed, but rather historically and culturally constructed and layered.

The gender theme in art aligns itself closely with changing attitudes in the world with regards to gender. The constant resistance from feminist scholars has played a big role in changing narratives of representation. From the renaissance until the late 19th century, women

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experienced many constraints in creating art, and getting access into art education. They also struggled to make work in various genres considered 'high art,' such as the nude genre. There were female artists in the renaissance that were painting and challenging this, and also challenging the ways that women were being represented in paintings, critiquing the sexualised female bodies and their disempowerment (Broude & Garrard, 2005). Despite that, it was still the men in the academy who decided which pictures were produced (Pollock 1987). Men were seen as worthy of being art geniuses and always represented in artworks as strong and dominant. Women were always represented as passive sexual beings with no agency but rather as objects of consumption (Charhon, 2016; Nochlin, 1988; Sobopha, 2005). Many images of women produced during the Renaissance in Europe cemented the social position of the woman staying at home. Often the images created also regulated woman behaviour and they enforced male dominance (Broude, 1995).

The black female has been further subjugated in art history and positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy, as primitive, exotic, worthy of abuse, violent and also voiceless victims of their circumstances (Sobopha, 2005). While white bodies have always occupied a position of purity and civilisation, black bodies were represented as uncivil (Sobopha, 2005), and this has shaped dominant narratives in visual art history. The representation of black people within visual art continues to be a space of contestation, due to the dominance of colonial western narratives. Within contemporary South African art culture, there is a move towards alternative representation, challenging misrepresentation, and creating new images (Sobopha, 2005).

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Through representation, art has the power to question heteronormative gender binaries. The LGBTQIA+ community have contributed immensely to complicating gender and questioning binaries within creative arts, and reimaging gender representation within visual narratives, even though heteronormative discourses remain dominant (Pather & Boulle, 2019; Shefer, 2016). Ana Mendieta's 1972 *untitled* (facial hair transplants) photographic series is one early example that speaks directly to the unsettling of gender binaries, and the questioning of identity (January, 2007). Her work calls into discussion traditional views of gender. In this performance, she transitions from male to female, through a process of taking her friends' freshly shaved beard and gluing it on herself. When speaking about this piece, she mentioned how, in just altering her body and her surface appearance, she immediately occupied a male identity. In this, she exposes that gender is not fixed . In the *Glass on body* series in 1972, she

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continued to explore the blurring of gender binaries, pressing glass on her body to a point where her upper body is completely distorted and one cannot tell whether they are looking at a female body or a male body. The constant questioning of gender binaries in Mendieta's work also speaks to how, in her own personal life, she struggled to fit into the dominant gender norms that were created by society (Blocker, 1998).

A 2020 exhibition held in London at the Barbican, titled *Masculinities: Liberation through Photography*, questioned gender binaries by exploring masculinities, using art as a tool for a critical discourse on masculinities. The curated photographs were centred around the theme of liberating masculinities, and the exhibited work challenged traditional masculinities by openly deconstructing dominant masculine narratives, and unveiling masculinity through its vulnerability and sensitivity. The exhibition also highlighted the impact of photography in shaping representation of gender (Windsor, 2020).

10. Tough femininities and soft masculinities

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Femininity, according to western scholarship, is centred on the representation of women as emotional, fearful and falling out of the prescribed rules of success (Brownmiller, 2013). Femininities are a set of ideas that are imposed and limiting, and which exist for the approval of men, built around the desires of men. In failing to be feminine, a woman risks losing the approval of men and may be seen to be imitating men (Brownmiller, 2013). However, Ogunyemi's works challenges notions such as Brownmiller's, as western-conceived thought that is based on the rigid picture of powerless women who have always been controlled by men (Ogunyemi, 1985; Arndt, 2000). Some West African cultures, such as the Asante in Ghana, have a rich history of women as figures of authority and law (Achebe, 2020).

Tough femininities

Eriksen (1999) argues that women possess tough femininities without having to mimic any forms of masculinity. To be tough is usually a trait associated with masculinity; when girls become aggressive, their aggression is usually attached to their social class or ethnicity, and not their gender. Girls who are brave or defiant are often not seen as naturally tough, but rather as refusing to be feminine (Eriksen, 1999). Young (1980), inspired by the work of de Beauvoir (1974), writes that there is no external feminine essence that binds all woman

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together by virtue of being biologically women, but rather it is structures and conditions that define femininity. We can link tough femininities, which transcend expectations of femininity, to Achebe's point on the positions that black women held in some areas of West Africa, where women held power and agency, economically and spiritually (Bádéjọ 1998; Achebe 2020). We can also link tough femininities to South African woman during the struggle against colonisation and apartheid, many of whom broke out of the stereotypical roles imposed on them, and took on leadership roles (Gasa, 2007). Often, women had to take care of their families while their husbands had to work in cities as migrant labourers (Mazibuko, 2000; Nkonko, 2001). In these cases, they had to take on the position of being the protector and provider, thereby taking on positions that are considered masculine.

South African women were at the forefront of the struggle during apartheid, through women's defiance organisations (Gasa, 2007). In 1980, Peter Magubane took a photograph of two women activists, Joyce Seroke and Emama Mashinini, who were at a rally in Soweto. In this image, we see the two women fearlessly standing in a provocative manner in front of soldiers and their dogs, encapsulating the very notion of defiant, brave and tough. This image also challenges the fixed binary of the position of women as only passive, underlining the slogans used in women's a struggle posters, such as: 'our position is in the struggle,' a poster done in 1982 on silk screen by J.A Seidman; and 'Now that you have touched women, you have struck a rock; you have dislodged a boulder: you will be crushed', done in 1981 on silkscreen by J.A Seidman, with Medu Art Ensemble. The first slogan places a new spin on the idea that a woman's place is in the home, which was commonly used in the 19th century to justify the exclusion of women from education, social and political issues, and confining them to domestic work and looking after children (Kerber, 1988).

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Senzeni Marasela also challenges these fixed gender binaries in her artworks, through a series of performances with the character of Theodorah, based on her mother and other women, who not only challenge gender binaries but also can be said to assert a form of tough femininity (Das, 2021). Her mother had an obsession with wearing the same dresses for long periods of time, and then burning them in the end or getting rid of them through hiding them away. This act can be translated to how Senzeni's mother was constantly questioning her position as a woman and a wife, and resisting being a 'good wife' and a 'good mother'. She constantly challenged how femininity confined her to one position of being. In her own work, Marasela questions and challenges the positions of black women, and she is also part of the

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group of black female artists who are reshaping the representation of black female bodies post-apartheid (Das, 2021). In a durational performance that lasted six years, Marasela wears the same red dress made out of shweshwe (Das, 2021), which resembles a newlywed, and is also tied to cultural tradition and events. She wore it with a *doek* (head wrap), and sometimes carried a china bag. With this attire, she went about her daily life as an artist, attending meetings and travelling to prestigious events, and navigating spaces. In the dress, she faced discrimination from people who assumed she was a worker or cleaner, not worthy of the spaces she wanted to access. This piece challenges the intersectionality of gender binaries by questioning the position of black women in society and the spaces they occupy. With the use of the red dress over and over again, in various spaces that women of her appearance are not allowed, she seems to be breaking the chain that bound her mother and other women like her to the submissive position and limited forms of being. At the same time, she also employs the very same tactics of resistance her mother used, by burning the dress that oppressed her. Marasela resists in similar ways, by pushing through boundaries that undermine black women of her appearance in the spaces she enters (Schmahmann, 2021).

In this study, I use tough femininities, within the context of South African women, in ways that I have discussed in this section. My use of tough femininities is also inspired by the black women who raised me, who were constantly pushing the boundaries of what is considered woman behaviour. These are also the women I speak about in my early photographic work, *Awundiboni*,[3] which explores agency in black women at the site of violence; this challenges ideas of the black woman as always being a victim of black male violence (Arora, 2022).

Soft masculinity

I use the term 'soft' masculinity as an alternative to violent masculinity, and as a form of being masculine which challenges gender binaries. I also use the word soft (*Ukuthamba*) directly from my context of growing up. The term 'soft' was used for boys who opted out of violent masculinities, who played with girls, who could not or chose not to do manly things.

[3] https://ctsp.co.za/artist-in-residence-thandiwe-msebenzi-exhibition-launch-copy/

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Critical masculinity studies, which strongly draws on feminist thinking, argues that there are no fixed attributes of masculinity, since it is complex and ever-changing (Connell, 1995). Ratele (2016) argues that masculinity is learned from community, family and relationships, rather than being innate to boys on the basis of their assigned biology. In both these instances, masculinity is displayed as fluid and complex, yet is still shaped by social and cultural norms. In a patriarchal society, men are groomed to dominate, and masculinity becomes the promise for power (Connell, 1995). Men hold the highest positions within a society, although masculinity also intersects with other forms of inequality to undermine male power for many groups of men. Becoming a man then privileges men to occupy the highest part of humanity (Connell, 1995). Masculinity becomes a trait associated with men, because it represents being driven, and which suit the high position society grooms them for. These structures in society also become structures that bind men, through social pressure and expectations (Connell, 1995).

As we have established, masculinity is socially constructed. Furthermore, black masculinity in South Africa is also shaped by colonisation, racism and mass unemployment (Connell, 1995; Ratele, 2016; Langa, 2020). Capitalism believes that money is power; thus, with massive unemployment within black communities, money and power are found in the streets, often through violence (Noah, 2016). In South African townships, *tsotsi* life (thug life), becomes a form of hegemonic masculinity, as it promotes stereotypical traits of masculinity, such as power (Walker, 2005; Ratele 2016; Langa 2020). Butler (2020) says that masculinity has been placed and centred in men, when in actual fact it could be looked at conceptually, as an expression of gender formed by society (Salih & Butler, 2004) . This implies that masculinity is not innate to men, but rather that society shapes masculinities (Ratele, 2016). Social norms constrain the existence of people to fixed traits, which takes away their choice to exist outside these traits (Salih & Butler, 2004; Butler, 2020).

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There is a shaming that comes with being a boy who does not show masculine traits; they are considered weak, and given names such as 'sissy' and 'mother's boy' (Connell, 1995). They become subordinate and are associated with femininity (Gunner, 2014; Langa, 2020). Since masculinity is based on dominance, femininity becomes suppressed, and the subordinate and soft masculinity becomes a threat to hegemonic masculinity (MacInnes, 1998). It is evident in the literature that these gender binaries and fixed notions of masculinity also become problematic and oppressive for non-heterosexual men, and other non-heteronormative men. If

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we go back to tough femininities, the same sentiments appear there too: women who show tough femininities are often seen to be trying to be like men; there is a disgrace element attached to showing behaviour that challenges the binaries.

'You don't even see men holding hands anymore.' This is a comment that Sabelo Mlangeni makes while speaking about the stigma and marginalisation that men receive for showing affection to one another. Mlangeni's *Men only* series documents the men's hostels in Johannesburg.[4] Men's hostels are known for being stereotypically violent, and abusive to women. They were built in 1961 for migrant mineworkers working in the city, and are now home to taxi drivers, security guards, and other men who come looking for work in the city. Mlangeni captures the men's intimate moments with one another, doing domestic jobs such as cooking and ironing; the images are quiet and tender. In one of the images, Mlangeni shows a man wearing a skirt, something not uncommon at the hostel. Mlangeni mentions that wearing skirts does not mean the men are gay; at the hostel, they are not bothered about such strict binaries in behaviour. The men in the hostels are described to be so free, there is still a sense that they have not lost their sensitivity and softness (Angelucci, 2009; Mlangeni, 2019). Mlangeni chose to focus his lens particularly at alternative forms of masculinity that disrupt the gender binary, by looking at the tender moments men have and share with one another, in an environment that only houses men, but which is stereotypically known by outsiders to be violent (Angelucci, 2009; Mlangeni, 2019). The literature on masculinity, and Mlangeni's work, both speak of the disgrace that men who cross the gender binaries face. The same can be said for women who challenge feminine norms. This study understands gender and fixed binaries as social constructions which sustain the division of men and women. These binaries are oppressive to both women and men who challenge them. It is here that the thesis seeks to explore and document the experiences of 'tough women' and 'soft men,' who have challenged these binarisms, through the analysis of existing artworks.

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11. Conclusion

In this literature review, I have gathered different sources of knowledge, varying from literature to visual artworks, in order to gauge what has been written and created around my thesis questions. The literature reveals that there is a long history of alternative forms of pedagogy which have strongly critiqued classic western pedagogy and dominant knowledge

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[4] *Men only*: https://www.stevenson.info/publication/sabelo-mlangeni/men-only

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practices. The literature also shows how a change in ideologies can affect education, with the example of Bantu education, which was part of the apartheid government's ways of keeping black learners as unskilled labours. Critical pedagogy, seen in the works of Du Bois and Freire, seeks to challenge social forms of oppression, through a pedagogy that is critical of the social world, making learners aware of their oppression, and fostering a space of learning that empowers, as opposed to creating a 'banking' system, where knowledge is deposited into learners like they are empty vessels. A common pattern between Freire and Du Bois is that their work is focused in the classroom, in the hopes of fostering learners who will change their society and themselves.

Feminist critical pedagogies and feminist standpoint theory take the critique of traditional education further, by challenging patriarchal ideas that exclude women, such as the cartesian method, which enforced societal binaries, such as men as intelligent and woman as emotional and non-thinking. These critical pedagogies challenged the emphasis on reason and no emotion in the classroom, which aligned with the enlightenment period. The importance of emotions in the classroom space is further emphasised by bell hooks, who used critical feminist pedagogies to argue that learning should be experienced with the whole body, mind and spirit. As much as feminist critical pedagogies push things up a notch by bringing a focus to the individual and emotions as important elements of teaching and learning, feminist critical pedagogies remain within the academic space and classroom space, similar to earlier theorists in critical pedagogy .

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The Fallist movement contradicts the pattern of challenging pedagogy solely within the confines of the classroom, through mass mobilisation both in and outside of the institution. It brought to the forefront the big gap in South African higher education institutions, by pointing out institutional racism and, most importantly for this research, the colonial non-diverse modes of pedagogy and teaching. To critique the university, they use a combination of decolonial pedagogies, feminist critical methods, black consciousness and critical pedagogy to challenge rigid university norms. What makes this movement and its theoretical frameworks effective is their method of practice, which merges academic interventions, activism, and various creative arts interventions, to challenge the patriarchal western and rigid form of pedagogy used in institutions of higher learning. Through mass mobilisation, they are also able to highlight their concerns to the public outside academia, allowing the public to become part of the discourse and transformation.

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Art is effective as a method for dialogue and engagement, as is visible in the Fallist movement, and the long history of art as a medium for mass mobilisation and education in South Africa. From the1970s – 80s, in the era of resistance art, many black South African artists started making work about how the system of apartheid marginalised them. In contemporary times, with live art born from the need to express contemporary social contexts, colonial imposition, cultural disintegration and political turmoil, art continues to play a role in social change. The literature shows how art has been an effective tool to pass knowledge, and the power of diversifying modes of teaching in order to reach a wider audience outside the academic space. Traditional western modes of knowledge practice tend to be rigid, and have been challenged through the works of Freire and Du Bois, yet it seems even these theorists' work only became effective in South Africa through mass mobilisation and different forms of creatives interventions.

The thesis question also probes creative ways of disturbing gender binaries. The literature introduces us to feminist theories, which define gender as socially constructed, where men are regarded as tough and dominant, and women as soft and subordinate. Ongunyemi pushes back against these feminist theories, and encourages us to look at the African context, where one finds histories of varied femininities existing, which were not necessarily subordinated. The history of South African woman in the struggle against colonisation and apartheid also shows women as a force to be reckoned with. Even in instances where tough femininities exist, women are seen as wanting to be men, which reinforces rigid gender binaries. Soft masculinities face the same fate, where boys who display soft masculine traits are marginalised. The artworks of Senzeni Marasela challenge these binaries by complicating the position of a subordinate woman, while Sabelo Mlangeni's photographic work also disturbs rigid binaries by capturing tender moments of men living in stereotypically violent hostels. Both the literature and visual artworks discussed highlight that gender is not fixed, but what we do not get from literature is intimate personal and intersectional experiences of soft black men and tough black women. We are able to draw these from art works, which allude to the complexities and flexibility of gender. This then leaves a gap in the literature, where the intersectional, personal and intimate stories of tough black femininities and soft black masculinities can be explored, which is what this thesis seeks to archive. This will contribute to the ongoing work, both in art and in feminist scholarship, towards challenging rigid gender binaries, and bringing diversity into how scholarship is presented, by merging it with art.

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Chapter 3: Black, decolonial feminist and womanist theories, and intersectionality in art

This chapter is a discussion of feminist theories and their significance to my research. In my literature review, I wrote about feminism and standpoint theory. In this section, I will look at black feminist thought, womanism, Africana womanism, decolonial feminism, and intersectionality in the representation of black male and female bodies in art, as a conceptual framework for the thesis research.

While reading and learning about all these 'isms,' I found myself struggling to decide which 'ism' to use, and felt the challenges of drawing on a single theoretical framework. Ultimately, what draws me to all of the various womanist theorists is that black women's scholarship is placed at the centre of analysis. Black women have created tools inside and outside the academy to navigate social problems of marginalisation and exclusion (Phillips & McCaskil, 1995). Feminist, Africana womanist, womanist, decolonial feminist and black feminist thought are conceptual frameworks that are relevant in my research, even though some of them are mostly contextualised within the western context. African American women, black women in the diaspora, and African women share similar experiences of subjugation and continued control by western ideas (Norwood, 2013; Ogunyemi, 2020). These different theoretical frameworks weave into one another, and are useful for my research. They also make space for me to locate my research exactly within the complexities of South African women, drawing from their knowledges without denying their agency.

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On the African continent, feminism functions through its own specificities. Thus, some Africans prefer to use womanism to remove themselves from feminism completely, which is seen as rooted in western ideologies (Atanga *et al*., 2013). Since the 1970s, African writers have been showing that African women's bodies have been the site of multiple struggles, which do not entirely fit into western white feminist views, nor with western black feminist ideas (Biwa, 2021). Most western feminist scholarship has created stereotypical images of black women as victims of the violent black male, which takes away the agency of black African women and dismisses their power and their diversity, but African feminism acknowledges the role of African women as agents of social change (Cruz, 2015). African feminism creates space for an investigation of the different dynamics of African women and

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their lived experiences, taking into consideration local realities, and the historical, cultural, race, class, and gender issues that intersect in black women's lives. It advocates for economic, political and social freedom for woman, while remaining aware of their resistance (Biwa, 2021. African feminism uses the resilience of black African women as a source for understanding how marginalised groups challenge oppressive systems. African proverbs and folklore inform African feminism, as learning is imbedded in folklore. The southern African proverb, *umntu ngumntu ngabantu*, meaning 'we are because of others,' challenges the western notion of 'I think therefore I am', and draws us to dualist and collaborative ways of coexisting, as opposed to focusing on binaries, which separate communities. It is that spirit of togetherness which is an essential part of African feminism, and which does not seek to alienate men, but rather work alongside them (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). These different framings speak and weave into one another, and are useful for my research. They also make space for me to locate my research within the complexities of South African women's lives, without denying their agency.

1. Black feminist thought and Africana womanism

Feminist theories, while diverse and contested, have for the most part been viewed as founded on women's lived experiences, which are multiple and cut through by other social differences, and have historically been ignored within the intellectual realm (Sporring Jonsson, 2008). The common goal for feminists has always been more than just scratching the surface of equality and women's emancipation, but rather seeking to articulate gender inequalities, while also bringing strategies to do so (Sporring Jonsson, 2008). Feminism has never been a single body of thought and ideas, but rather has various streams and ways of manifesting, which I will look at below (Applerouth & Edles, 2011).

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Black feminist thought is strongly linked with second-wave feminism, which had been slowly brewing over the years, and ruptured unapologetically in the 1970s (Collins, 2015). However, black feminist thought roots itself further back, to black women's abolitionism of the 1830s – 1860. These women were not only fighting for the end of slavery, but also the end of gendered abuse towards black women slaves (Ula, 1998; Neal & Dunn, 2020).

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Black feminist consciousness also marked itself as visible during women suffragist movements in North and South America (Terborg-Penn, 1998). Sojourner Truth, an African American woman who was an abolitionist and a women's rights activist, was one of the first women to publicly point out the differences between black and white women's experiences, yet they fought in the same movement (Terborg-Penn, 1998). Black women fought alongside white women for social justice, but they had always been aware of the multiple layers of oppression they faced, that white feminists ignored or reinforced (Collins, 2015).

Even though women of colour fought alongside white feminists, they experienced constant neglect and racism (hooks, 1995; Ula, 1998). These experiences in the feminist movement led women of colour to shape and take ownership of their own gender politics, through black feminist thought (hooks, 1995; Ula, 1998), which included the empowerment of black women by themselves, and challenging negative black female stereotypes. Black feminist thought also sought to intertwine activism with academic thought, to challenge dominant forms of oppression, such as race, class and gender (Ula, 1998). Black feminist thought situates itself on the experiences of black women, and is aware of the multiple forms of oppression they experience (King, 1988). It also thought transforms feminist politics by bringing an inclusive and intersectional understanding to social issues (Ula, 1998).

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Womanism delves deeper into black women's experiences by distancing itself from white feminism and its methodologies, seeking guidance from the very complex experiences of black women and the black community as a whole. The idea of womanism first appeared in Alice Walker's writings (2012), and was informed by both feminism and Afrocentric ideas. Womanism is concerned about the wholeness of all people, male and female, with a methodology that is centred around black women's experiences in North America (Rahatt, 2020). While Walker's early womanist ideas seemed to be centred around African-American women in North America, Hudson and Onguyemi put forward a more Afrocentric notion of womanism, Africana womanism, which was created for every woman of African lineage, in Africa and the diaspora, and is founded on African culture (Walker, 1983; Ogunyemi, 1985; Norwood, 2013; Hudson-Weems, 2019). Africana womanism questions euro-centric ideas and asserts that Africans should identify themselves separately to feminism, which has a racist history, has historically erased black women, and has no real connection to African affairs. Africana womanism is designed to meet African women's needs (Sofola, cited in Hudson-Weems, 2019).

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Africana womanism creates space for African women who have been excluded from feminism and African-American womanism, which have theories that have not catered for Africans and their belief systems (Arndt, 2000). At its core, Africana womanism is about restoring balance, and maintaining human spiritual life. It incorporates African perspectives on human society, African traditions and values, sisterhood and community, respect, matriarchy etc. Africana womanism seeks to end all forms of discrimination and oppression, of both black women and men, who are encouraged to work hand-in-hand to end oppression (Alexander-Floyd & Simien, 2006). In an interview, Ongunyemi notes that African men are also oppressed, and when they come home, they oppress their women; for these reasons, Africana womanism does not only stand for women, but also allows both men and women to come together to create theories to resist all forms of oppression and colonialism (Arndt, 2000).

Feminist consciousness in South Africa can be seen in organised women's movements that resisted and fought gender inequality and racial discrimination, protesting for the survival of their children, from the 1913 anti-pass law movements and formation of the Bantu Women's league (BWL), to the big anti-pass march of 1956, in which 20 000 women gathered together to defy the apartheid pass laws that restricted women's movements and broke many families apart (Ramantswana, 2019). This movement also saw women using the phrase, 'you strike a woman, you strike a rock;' in this song, women expressed that they had to prepare themselves for the struggle, using the 'rock' for the danger the government would meet should it dare to startle them (Ramantswana, 2019). In this song, there is another element of the feminist consciousness, with women being fully conscious of their strength, and challenging notions of women as victims (Chilsa & Nteane, 2010). These black women organisations also manifested in collectives of women who prayed together on Thursdays, and did *stokvels,* where they took charge of their own money (SAHO, 2011). Feminist thought in South Africa has always existed in action and in poetry, performance, art and literature (Baderoon & Lewis, 2021).

Lwenyi Nkonko writes that it was the politics of survival that gave rise to feminist consciousness amongst black South African woman. This was rooted in the liberation of women from discrimination, and also deeply invested in liberation for all people. Nkonko also notes the South African migrant labour systems, and women's vulnerability to poverty,

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have been influential in the rise of feminist consciousness and womanism amongst black women in South Africa (Nkonko, 2001).

I will focus briefly here on the South African labour system, before bringing it back to Nkonko's point on its effects on feminist consciousness in South African black women. The migrant labour system in South Africa required men to work in cities, leaving their partners and children behind. This was to avoid an influx of black South Africans into the cities, which were preserved for white South Africans. Many of these men came from native reserves, which is where they had been relocated to after their land was taken. In many cases, these reserves had little land for farming, forcing many men to become migrant workers. These migrant labour systems were established during colonisation, and before the finding of minerals (Mazibuko, 2000). The women left behind had to fend, feed and care for their children, and many had to take on the role of being both father and mother at the same time. Women started making household decisions that would traditionally have been reserved for men, which produced feminist consciousness, where woman could go against traditional roles in their fight for survival in the circumstances they found themselves in. This also fostered methods of survival for women, and strong bonds with other women. Some women moved to cities in search for work, which also brought about feminist consciousness, due to the independence that women were finding economically, and becoming freed from traditional ideas of dependence on men (Nkonko, 2001).

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Feminist consciousness may take its own shape in South Africa, but shares similarities with African-American feminisms, and their struggles with patriarchy and racism, making their theoretical frameworks useful for unpacking, understanding, and theorising South African gender politics, and my research (Ongunyemi, 1985; Hudson-Weems, 2019).

2. Standpoint Theory

My research stems from my personal stories and observations of gender practices that disrupt normative gender binary thinking, which I have called tough femininities and soft masculinities (*ukomelela, noku thamba*). These are personal experiences, stories from others, and emotions that were manifested into artworks.

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Standpoint theory becomes an important theoretical lens as, from conception, it has always challenged what is measured as 'scientifically proven' research. Standpoint theory insists that every day personal stories of the marginalised are important sources of knowledge (Harding, 2004), and is also very aware of the historically sexist and racist forms of scholarship that have barred the oppressed from participating in knowledge production. Thus, the theory becomes crucial in facilitating the voice of the oppressed to be narrators and subjects of their own stories (Harding, 2004). Standpoint theory is important in my conceptual framework as it validates my personal stories, which are interwoven in the artworks. It also allows for the artworks to hold precedence as valuable sources of knowledge, and worthy as sources of learning.

3. Decolonial feminism

Decolonial feminism was developed in the global south (Vergès & Bohrer, 2021). It challenges western feminism, which is seen as catering only to middle-class white women, with its universalised gender stories that are used to measure gender equality in western ways that result in rigid gender knowledge (Day *et al*., 2019). Decolonial feminism also grounds itself in global southern women's lived experiences, built on the works of women of colour activists, engaging in women's work (Manning, 2021). It does not give set methods to follow, but rather opens up space for different ways of seeing and doing gender, that come from the knowledge of marginalised women of the global south (Manning, 2021), many of whom live between their indigenous world views and a contemporary life with colonial influences. Decolonial feminism is a great tool to engage these very complex ways of existing for indigenous and also colonised people (Manning, 2021).

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Decolonial feminism challenges coloniality, at the centre of which is the hierarchy between humans and non-humans. This is accompanied by hierarchies between men and women. The European man is positioned as fit to rule, and of sound mind and reason, while the European woman is passive and sexually pure, and homebound in service to the white man (Lugones, 2010). Coloniality, capitalism and modernity collectively become tools to control gender, sexuality, economy, authority and knowledge. Western ontology was spread through the displacement of the history of the 'other,' i.e. those who are not western and not modern (Quijano, 2007). Through sustained dominance by means of colonisation, the history of marginalised and alternative knowledge systems and ways of working were silenced.

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Coloniality dominated all models of thinking, making and creating the world in line with western norms (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Tlostanova, Thapar-Björkert & Knobblock, 2019). Decoloniality aims for emancipation from the limitations of coloniality, which are centred around racism, hetero-patriarchy, and exploitation and discrimination of non-European knowledge system (Tlostanova *et al*., 2019). Decolonial feminism critiques colonial gender and race binaries, and the dehumanisation of indigenous people (Tlostanova *et al*., 2019).

Decolonial feminism embraces knowledge as a plurality, as opposed to fixed western methods (Bhambra, 2014 Manning, 2021). It also acknowledges that knowledge is imbedded within social cultural and historical contexts, and reflects peoples' lived experiences. All knowledge and lived experiences are seen as equal, providing an open space for making knowledge (Paludi, Helms Mills & Mills, 2019). Decolonial feminism recognises the voices of the marginalised women of the global south, understanding that the violence against women have not only been from men, but also from capitalism and colonisation (Vergès & Bohrer, 2021). Decolonial feminism is important in my research as it gives voice to the context of the lives of people whose stories I tell. It allows me to acknowledge alternative femininities and masculinities that exist within the photographs and stories I engage with, that do not conform to western feminism, and do not have to. It also creates space for the documentation of new knowledge, giving me freedom to produce my research in non-normative ways, by acknowledging various ways of making knowledge that do not need to conform to the institutional classroom space.

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4. Intersectionality

Intersectionality can be traced back to black feminists in the 70s, who were pivotal in highlighting that black women's experiences could not be measured against white liberal feminist theories about women's lives, which assumed all woman were facing the same problems, and completely disregarded racism, class issues, and many other factors that affected women of colour (Maj, 2013). In 1989, Crenshaw started using the idea of intersectionality as a metaphor to speak about the various layers of oppression that one person could embody, which anchored their marginalisation and oppression in society (Caratahis, 2014). Intersectionality acknowledges that we are socially placed into different categories, such as class, race, gender and others, which construct our different realities (Maj,

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2013). It has also been used in many other fields, such as history, sociology, literature and feminism. It can act as a method and an analytical tool (Maj, 2013; Carbado *et al*., 2013). In feminist theory, intersectionality has been useful in looking at the various systems of oppression that women experience due to their multiple overlapping identities. Intersectionality becomes a tool not only to unpack various systems of oppression, such as class, race and gender, but is also a useful tool in identifying the various layers that constantly interact with society that individuals can embody and perform (Moolman, 2013).

In this thesis, I look at both the women and men in my family, making intersectionality extremely important, as it helps in acknowledging the history that comes into play when discussing black male and female experiences, which I will unpack further when looking at black male and female representation in art. Black men and women in South African share a common history of being casualties of colonisation and apartheid, which shaped the gender norms and social structures of both (South African History Online [SAHO], 2011; Moolman, 2013; Ratele, 2016). Colonisation and apartheid are known to have reduced black men to 'animals,' dangerous and violent beings, which is important when discussing soft black masculinities in the post-apartheid era (Moolman, 2013). Simultaneously, history has portrayed black women as victims of their own circumstances, as hypersexual and worthy of being abused, while also occupying a position right at the bottom of society (Gqola, 2015).

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Intersectionality is useful in my work, as it acknowledges the history of black women in South Africa, which is not solely identified by their suffering, but also points to an existing history of resistance, and what I have termed 'tough femininities,' which protected and cared for homes when husbands were gone. The very same women also took on the apartheid government through striking and organised resistance (SAHO, 2011).

Intersectionality is useful in my thesis as a method and analytical tool to unpack the experiences of men and women in my own family, who have not conformed to normative ideas of what their gender means, and have also resisted racial and class stereotypes. The soft men and tough women in my family are part of a South African narrative, in which social identities were constantly shaped by social changes (Moolman, 2013). Thus, I could identify how the tough women and soft men in my artwork challenge fixed the binary categories that black women and men are put in, both historically and within popular discourse

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5. Intersectionality and the representation of black female and male bodies in art

Intersectionality is key in thinking about art and presentation. An intersectional approach to the representation of black people, through the presentation of black gendered bodies in art, is crucial for this research, as it helps to understand the current ways that black male and female bodies are represented and reimagined in art. Race and gender in South Africa are very much intertwined. Colonisation and apartheid not only divided people along colour lines; gender was also a key determining factor in how one was treated and positioned in society (Hassim, 2014). The outcomes of these colonial ideas and thinking are exposed and archived in colonial presentations of black bodies.

In western[5] art history, you can trace the hierarchical, patriarchal, and binary ways that male and female bodies have been represented. The female body was objectified and treated as inferior to the male body, and women artists were also marginalised. It was only in the 20th century that a shift in representation of women's bodies began (Sobopha, 2005). With the rise of the feminism in the late 1960s and 70s, as discussed in the literature review, women artists resisted the demeaning ways that female bodies were represented, making provocative work, challenging sexism within art institutions, and the social norms that confined women (Moore, 1989; Sobopha, 2005; Sandell, 2015).

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An iconic painting by Edouard Manet is representative of the slow shift in the representation of the female body. The painting *Olympia,* done in 1863, depicts a white female who is nude, with her hand covering her pubic area, while she stares directly at the viewer. There have been many readings of this painting as radical for its time, by representing a female figure that seems to be claiming her body and sexuality, while confronting those who are looking at her (Collins, 1996; Moore, 1989). This is one of the first European paintings I was introduced to in high school art classes that had a woman of colour in it. While I admired the strength in which the white nude was positioned, I was always troubled by how the black woman in the painting, who is identified as the servant, was represented (Moore, 1989). One saw the flowers she carried first, before seeing her; She also lacked the agency of the white woman. This famous painting vividly expresses the social order between the black female bodies and

[5] Western art is art from northern and southern Europe, including art produced in America (Kemp, 2000).

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white female bodies, as well as the intersectionality of race and gender. While they both are female, they are not treated the same in the image; hence, their experiences of being a woman are not the same. Black female bodies alongside white female bodies in western art have always further imposed the stereotype of the black jezebel next to the pure white woman. In this painting, the white woman is a sex worker while the black woman acts as a marker of the white prostitute's 'filth,' reinforcing the notion of the sexually deviant black woman (Nelson, 2000). The representation of black bodies in western art was carefully curated to maintain the colonial order, and to further engrain their fabricated and dehumanised position in society (Nelson, 2000).

This western influence in representation is very evident in colonial South African art. In the early South African art scene, there were more white male artists than there were females, and the few white females that were able to make art were the privileged (Sobopha, 2005). There were also very few spaces that offered art to black creatives (Magaziner, 2016). Thus, black bodies were represented by white artists through the colonial and patriarchal lens. Black women in artworks were often represented as objects that lacked agency, voiceless victims, with no history, who could be treated as the master pleased, or as savages that needed saving, as seen in ethnographic images and photographs taken by European missionaries in colonial South Africa (Sobopha, 2005; SAHO, 2011; Amkpa, 2012; Schmahmann, 2021). Black women were portrayed as exotic, primitive, savage and hypersexual (Sobopha, 2005). Such dominant discourses, enforced by the apartheid government, positioned black women as inferior, servile and subjugated to white women, a sentiment which the European painting *Olympia* seems to confirm (Sobopha, 2005).

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To further understand the intersectionality of black women's representation in South Africa, we can look at the story of Sarah Baartman, a South African Khoi woman (Magubane, 2001). Her experience is a poignant example of the ways in which the black female body was viewed and represented by the colonisers as inhuman, and therefore deemed to be violable (Abrahams, 1996; Sobopha, 2005). Sarah Baartman was taken from South Africa as a young woman, and was 'exhibited' in France and the UK in the early 19th century. Her body was of scientific interest as a site of objectification, and public fascination. There was a strong fascination with her buttocks and genitals, and she was exhibited in public for profit throughout her years in exile. Her body was also portrayed in paintings and cartoons. After

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her death in 1815, possibly due to pneumonia, parts of her body were preserved and placed on display for the public to see (Schmahmann, 2021; Magubane, 2001).

The representation of Sarah, and its reception among white women in Europe, who also engaged as viewers, exposes the complex hierarchies between white women and black women, and the various layers that create these hierarchies. This is seen in the artwork by an unknown artist, done in 1814, where a white woman is seen kneeling down to look at Sarah's private parts, as Sarah is on display on a small plinth-like structure. The white woman curiously looks at Sarah's private parts as if she was anything but human, engaging with her as an objectified other. The way Sarah was represented in Europe, and the way the white woman in the image engages with Sarah, give us a prime example of intersectionality, where a black woman's experience of racism is shaped by her gender, and vice versa (Crenshaw, 1992). Here, racism and gender intersect, indicated both by the subordinate treatment Sarah is portrayed to receive from the white woman, who clearly perceives Sarah as less than her, and by the sexism and racisms she is portrayed to receive from the males in the image (Crenshaw, 1992; Schmahmann, 2021).

Feminist consciousness was slow to take off in South African art, as the focus was on overcoming apartheid and racism. Only in the 1980s did feminist art practice become popular, with artists such as Sue Williamson and Penny Siopis, who started showing signs of feminist consciousness in their work. In an exhibition at the Norval foundation art museum in Cape Town, titled *When Rain Clouds Gather: Black South African Women Artists, 1940 – 2000*, curated by Nontobeko Ntombela and Portia Malatjie, we are introduced to early feminist work by black female artists, dating from 1940 to the 2000s, which also challenges the trope of centring white female artists for doing feminist work (Norval Foundation, 2022; Shefer, 2022). The exhibition is a celebration of the works of black female artists, while at the same challenging the erasure of their art and their contribution to South African art history of the 20th century (Noval Foundation, 2022). Ruth Soepedi Motau is one of the 40 female black artists represented in the show. She started doing photography because she did not like how black people were represented in mainstream media (Makatile, 2022). The representation of the black body was important in establishing colonial control, and images and descriptions of the barbaric black body were key to confirming the necessity of European intervention (Hallman, 2018). Motau's work centres everyday black experiences, celebrating the black skin and respectfully portraying the people in her work (Makatile, 2022). The work

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of Helen Makgabo Sebidi is also important in looking at the representation of black women by a black woman artist in the post-colonial era. It challenges colonial representation, and shows black women with agency. This is visible in the work titled *Mangwane O'Tshwara Thipa Kabohaleng* (the woman holds the sharp side of the knife), done in 1988. The title is taken from a proverb, which speaks to the idea of women handling their own affairs (Schmahmann, 2015).

In the early years of the post-apartheid era, many black female artists started re-representing themselves (Sobopha, 2005; Schmahmann, 2015), and recreating a new representation of black female bodies to undo colonial representations. Many black female artists used their own bodies to confront past negative representations, including Berni Searle, Tracey Rose, Nandipha Mntambo and Senzeni Marasela, to name a few (Davids & Simba, 2020; Schmahmann, 2021). It has been a continuous project for black female artists to create new and oppositional kinds of images (Sobopha, 2005).

In the *Beyond The Booty*, a solo exhibition in 2010 by Marasela, we see her directly challenging the colonial past and its representation of black women. In the works, she portrays herself covering and trying to protect Sarah Bartmaan's body, using what looks like cloth or a blanket. These artworks are rendered on cloth, using stitching to draw the nude figure of Sarah, and of Marasela,. This work seems to speak directly to ways in which black female artists have been re-representing black female bodies by engaging their intersectionality, while also trying to correct the past (Schmahmann, 2021; Coly, 2019).

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Another turning point in South Africa in terms of gender and representation was 2015. During the Fallist movement, there was a strong push towards intersectional feminist methodologies, which students used as they fought for the decolonisation of the university. It was black female students and LGBTQIA+ students who were at the forefront of this. This was accompanied by a strong art activism, which also grew out of the need to destabilise colonial teaching norms, through creative participatory methodologies (Shefer, 2019). As described above, on the day the Rhodes statue fell at UCT, the performance piece, *Chapungu – The day Rhodes fell* took place. In it, Msezane channelled the spirit of the Zimbabwean bird, the chapungu. This performance also alluded to the soapstone sculptures of the bird that were stolen from Great Zimbabwe and sold, with Rhodes being one of the men who purchased them (Hubbard, 2009; Shefer, 2019). The toppling of the Rhodes statue

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symbolically marked the end of a pervasive era of colonialism. In this performance, Msezane also stressed the agency of the black female body, which has historically been viewed as both passive victim, and as hypersexualised, by the colonial gaze. The piece also asserted the importance of the black female body in revolutions, in the wake of a history in which women have been left out. The objectification and sexualisation of women have always been ways of subordinating them; in this work, Msezane used those stereotypes to own her power. Her use of her femininity and sexuality show us how patriarchy has created structures that control and bind women (Njami & O'Toole, 2020).

2015 also saw the emergence of the iQhiya collective, which was unapologetic about creating space and visibility for black women's bodies to be seen and recognised for their work and efforts in shaping history (Leiman, 2016). One of our slogans at the time was that, 'we refuse to be history's side chicks,' which spoke directly to how black women had been, and continue to be, silenced in the contemporary art world, while black male artists were being elevated and celebrated in the name of all black artists. This speaks back to Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectionality, where she makes observations around how black women's experiences and pains are unseen and silenced. In her Ted talk, she makes examples of how, too often, black women will not get a job because there are 'enough' black people; what is not disclosed is that those black people are men (Crenshaw, 2016).

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This leads us to the representation of black men. Black male bodies, like black female bodies, have been very vulnerable to colonial violence; however, the difference is that black men were placed above black women (Bradach, 2017). The construction of masculinity in South Africa was an essential element of European conquest. White masculinities were constructed as dominant, with black masculinities as subordinate, while white women were also positioned as vulnerable to the black violent, dangerous and hypersexual male bodies, constructions which were imposed on black bodies (Bradach, 2017).

The film *King Kong*, a classic American movie of 1933, encapsulated the perceived threat of dangerous black male bodies to white women. In the movie, a big, black, dangerous beast falls in love with a white woman (Frazer, 2007), but he is killed at the end. This linked to real-world treatment of black men in the US, and specifically to lynchings, where the first thing to be mutilated would often be their penis. The white men doing the lynching would

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also take photographs next to the black bodies as their trophies. This violence, and conquest of the black male body, was recorded in photographs (Marriat, 1996).

This violation of black male bodies is also very present in South African history. In 1968, Peter Magubane photographed black men during an invasive health inspection, which was done before the men were employed in mines or on farms. The image shows black men standing in a row with their hands up, naked, while they are being inspected; outside the inspection room, there is a warning sign for people passing by that says natives were being inspected. This image speaks of the sexualisation of black bodies, the stripping of their dignity and civility, and how normalised it was to subject black masculinity to such conditions of dehumanisation (Mngadi, 1998). It is also interesting that black men's sexual organs are an obsession, or seen as the instigator of violence, resulting in lynchings to 'protect' white women from black men (Patton & Snyder-Yuly, 2007).

The painting titled, *The Spear* (2012) by Brett Murray, a South African white male artist, raised discussion around the presentation of black males' genitals in South Africa, in the post-apartheid, post-colonial period. This work showed former president Jacob Zuma, naked except for a blazer, showing off his genitals. *The Guardian* stated that this painting caused an outcry, as Jacob Zuma felt violated, and that his dignity had been lost (Smith, 2012). There were also arguments of the artist's rights and exercise of his freedom of speech (Smith, 2012). Despite it being well into the post-apartheid period, the painting still seemed to perpetuate the stereotype of the hypersexualised black man, who is once again reduced to this violent penis. In an interview, Thembinkosi Goniwe comments on white artists representing black bodies, such as Piet Pienaar, who appropriated the Xhosa culture of initiation in his *untitled* (2000) video work, where his foreskin was removed and then sold as an artwork online (Williamson, 2000; Gqola & Goniwe, 2005). Goniwe questions why white artists who represent black male bodies cannot be self-reflexive and interrogate their own subjectivity, rather than othering black masculinity. He goes on to mention that black male artists have been making work about various forms of masculinities that are alternative to colonial and media representations of the savage, dangerous black male (Gqola & Goniwe, 2005). Black male artists from the 20th century in South Africa, such as George Pemba, Gerard Sekoto, and Durrant Sihlali, engaged with everyday life experience of black people, challenging the stereotypical representation of the black body as solely savage (Eloff & Sevenhuysen, 2011). I am particularly drawn to Pemba's work and how he portrays masculinity, in *Unemployed*

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(1986), *The Preacher* (1990), and *The wedding* (1973).[6] The works show black men as caregivers, lovers, and spiritual leaders, while also engaging with patriarchy and male dominance in overt ways, especially in *Unemployed*. These works challenge the dominant narrative of black masculinity, especially as they were created at a time where black people had little to no control over the portrayal of their bodies (Gqola & Goniwe, 2005).

In my first year of undergrad, I came across photographs that were part of the *Qhatha* series, by South African male artist Mohau Modasikeng, that were presented at the Michaelis gallery. In these photographs, the artist performed using his body. He was wearing a leopard print vest, an apron and his face was covered with a floating hat. These images immediately reminded me of mineworkers, or South African black men who were forced to part with their families to go and work in the cities, through the migrant labour system. These were stories I grew up hearing, about our grandfathers who worked on the mines and only come back on holidays, bearing gifts and wearing the latest men's fashion. We were also told these stories to justify the absence of our grandfathers and male family members (Cox, Hemson & Todes, 2004). This work was created after apartheid ended, but it gives us access to the various layers of oppression experienced by black men during apartheid.

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In the fictional book, *Shades,* by Marguerite Poland, we are drawn deeper into the experiences of black men who left their homes to work in mines, leaving behind broken families with no male figures. The book paints a vivid image of black men's treatment at the mines, and the forced hierarchy between white and black men in the working space. We are also exposed in the book to the changing behaviours of men, and the toxic environment that brews amongst men who are forced to live together in compounds for months, without their partners or families. In the end, one of the characters working in the mines is taken to jail for sodomy, when in fact he is a victim of excruciating abuse from his fellow mineworkers (Poland, 1993). In the fictional book, *Iqunga* by Dudu Busani-Dube, we are introduced to black masculinity in the home, during the early years of apartheid. In one of the short stories in the book, a woman named Nomafu begs her husband for them to leave the townships and go back to the homelands. She describes the men around her as drowning their sorrows with alcohol and abusing their wives after being treated like dogs by their employers. Nomafu also speaks about a certain man in the neighbourhood who has lost his job after being accused of

[6] https://www.mutualart.com/Artist/George-Pemba/EE5FEFB0D1D7CC74/Artworks

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raping his boss's wife; the man had also been known for doing demeaning work such as hanging the madam's panties. In the end, Nomafu asks that they leave before her own husband dies inside, like the rest of the men around her (Busani-Dube, 2020). Both these books, and the work by Modisakeng, seem to speak of black men as held captive by dominant systems, which force them to serve or labour in demeaning circumstances that strip them of their manhood (Bradach, 2017). Again, we are introduced to black men as sexual abusers towards white women, and Busani-Dube also shows us the aftermath, of the black man who comes home to his wife to abuse her as a way of reclaiming his masculinity after it has been stripped away from him (Busani-Dube, 2020).

These narratives by Busani-Dube and Poland, and visual works by Magubane and Modesikeng, allow us to locate, visually and through fiction, the intersectionalities of the black male body within the colonial and apartheid period. The post-apartheid period offered black artists a space to define their selfhood, and much of the work that black male artists are doing is also part of regaining their 'historical disposition' (Gqola & Giniwe, 2005). Neo Matloga is a young black South African artist whose works seems to engage both past and present black masculinities. He creates characters and scenarios in familiar environments and in intimate spaces. He references photo albums and soap operas, and looks at love, loss and joy (Valentine, 2020). I am drawn to how some of his male characters seem to exist both in the present and in the past, while challenging the hegemonic binaries of masculinity. Some of them wear dresses, or have female heads, blurring the fixed binaries of masculine and feminine, while frozen in black and white images that are nostalgic of a particular era in the South African past. These figures also perform non-stereotypical presentations of black masculinity, as some are portrayed caring for black women. The work *Modjadji o stout* (2022) shows men gathering around drinking tea, challenging colonial presentation of black males, whilst also bringing forth alternative and expressive black masculinity, that exists both in the past and the present.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, race and gender in South Africa are intertwined, as they were used as key components of colonisation, to foster stereotypes of black bodies, to validate their control over land and the people. However, the representation of black masculinity surprised me. I was expecting the normative discourse around violent black masculinities, which have largely been curated by colonial thinking, stereotyping black man as a danger and an animal of some sort. This is seen in the classic movie, *King Kong*. The same sentiments are evident in the work by Magubane, where the passers-by are warned about the 'naked natives' being stripped for a health check. One is taken aback by what seems like a forced narrative of the black male as the rapist, with their masculinity being reduced to their genitals. Busani-Dube's fictional work alludes to this idea of black masculinity as perpetuator of sexual violence and danger to white women during apartheid. The history of black female representation is very similar to that of black males: they were both hypersexualised, victimised, and represented as animalistic. This is seen in the life of Sarah Baartman, whose body was paraded in inhuman ways. We also get to see the difference between black and white women's representation in the early work of Manet, where the black woman is barely visible, and is seen as secondary to a white woman. This power imbalance is further seen in a print of a white woman looking at Sarah Baartman's genitals with curiosity, like she was animal and not a woman. New visual language from black female artists challenges these old colonial notions, but also draws attention to silenced black female bodies and voices.

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Black female artists are representing black female bodies in art as assertive and strong, and not as victimised or hypersexualised. Coly (2019) speaks of the 'colonial ghost,' which initially unclothed black women, and which continues to haunt them as they use that same unclothed body to reclaim themselves. In reimagining new representation of black women, the iQhiya collective highlights the slow change and continued silencing of black female bodies, which are still largely marginalised.

There is no doubt that a lot more work still needs to be done in reimagining black male and female bodies, to add to the great work that already exists and challenges the colonial gaze, bringing forth images that disrupt the fixed ways black and female bodies have been represented. Previous images were largely centred on black women being victims and sites of

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abuse, and black men as the violators in need of punishment or surveillance. This understanding of the representation of black men and women in art is important in my research towards engaging soft black masculinities and tough black femininities. It is also evidence of the work that still needs to be done to challenge troubling colonial representations. This section also highlighted the importance of visual language for creating new narratives to counter the colonial construction of black male and female bodies.

In this chapter, I elaborated on the key strands of feminist thinking that have informed my study. I unpacked black feminist consciousness within the western perspective, looking at its influences, similarities and relationship to South Africa, as South African woman have shared similar struggles of slavery, colonisation, patriarchy and racism. I examined how black South African women, within their organised movements, have always challenged and resisted notions of the passive woman, embodying their tough femininities, expressed in slogans such as, 'you have touched the women, you have struck a rock'. I discussed the importance of intersectionality in my research, as it speaks to the experiences of both men and women in my family, who are black and part of South Africa's history and present, whose identities have been shaped immensely by South African social and historical changes. Through visual representation, my work seeks to challenge historical and current discourse that places black men and women into problematic binaries. Decolonial feminist theories, located in anti-racist, anti-colonial and intersectional thinking, are essential for unpacking the gender dynamics that influence tough femininities and soft masculinities within the context of the people whose stories I relate. Decolonial feminism gives the space to draw on new knowledges that do not need to measure according to western gender norms.

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Chapter 4 : A combination of methods to suit my study

This is a feminist study, located in decolonial feminism, feminist standpoint theory, Africana feminism, womanism, and intersectionality. It is through a feminist lens that I will engage with my research, employing various methods to work through, unpack and analyse the data.

In doing my research differently, and challenging normative methodologies that use fixed and rigid norms of knowledge production, I used a combination of methods, starting with art-based research (ABR), which I employed right at the beginning as a mode of inquiry to find my research question. I did this by taking photographs aligned with my interest and experiences of soft masculinities and tough femininities, which were accompanied by a video.

When the photographs were finished, the body of work, including the video, informed my thesis question and acted as my visual data. I processed this through a combination of methods, rather than a single method, and chose to engage with the work through unpacking its nuance, rather than its formal elements. This section will outline the methods that I used, how they function and their use in my study, while in the following chapter, I will actively engage with the methods in relation to my visual data, in order to draw out my conclusion.

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1. Art-based research

I used a combination of methods to engage, analyse and interpret my data. I chose ABR to draw out my research question, due to the nature of my research, which uses art as a mode of inquiry, and as an alternative accessible mode of knowledge-production, to challenge normative ways of conducting research. I will be unpacking how useful ABR was to meet my key goals, and how it served as a mode of inquiry in my thesis.

ABR emerged around the 1970s and is based on the idea that art has the ability to be impactful and contribute meaningfully to research (Leavy, 2013; O'Donoghue, 2015). Art draws on various ways of knowing, which are sensory, emotional and embodied, and reaches people in sensory ways, which do not require specialised education (Leavy, 2013). In doing so, it disrupts institutionalised colonial ways of unpacking the human experience, and the

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notion of truth as solely objective (Cole & Knowles, 2008). Scholarly practice is usually separate from artistic engagement, but new scholars are slowly breaking the wall, and mixing and blending social science and art opening up for more innovative and decolonial ways of producing knowledge (Cahmann & Siegesmund, 2018).

ABR can be used by researchers across disciplines and at different phases of the research, from problem-solving, to data-gathering, analysis and interpretation (Leavy, 2016). In this thesis, I used ABR during the early stages of my research, which involved taking photographs and one video, remembering experiences and stories in my upbringing that centred around soft masculinity and tough femininity. During this process, I knew that my interests were in black masculinity and femininity, but had been struggling to hone in on what I wanted to question. Through art-making, and collecting the final images, the question shaped itself through the themes of tough femininities and soft masculinities that were recurring in my images. This is one of the benefits of ABR, which worked effectively in the early stages of trying to figure out what the research was about. Using ABR as a methodology allows one to create/make as a way of knowing, and is based on the idea that art can facilitate social scientific goals (Leavy, 2016).

Key to my research is making knowledge accessible beyond the normative academic means, while engaging in social issues. This is also one of the key elements of ABR, which challenges the strict control over the dissemination of knowledge (Cole & Knowles, 2008). This is not to say that the arts in itself does not fall under an elitist and at times exclusive environment, as discussed in the literature review. What ABR does is offer an alternative way of knowing, of sharing knowledge, that challenges current dominant norms of knowledge-making (Cole & Knowles, 2008).

ABR incorporates all art forms, such as music, dance, theatre, storytelling, and visual arts. It creates space for a more dynamic way of engaging with research (O'Donoghue, 2015), which was useful for me, as my research uses visual art and storytelling. I will expand further on the storytelling in the next section. The outcome of my art-based enquiry using ABR was visual images that I used as 'visual data' which I draw my analysis from in the form of storytelling.

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2. Artistic methods of analysis

There are classic visual art theories of analysis, which use looking observantly and critically as key methods in understanding and interpreting visual art (Howells & Negreiros, 2012). The looking process of visual art analysis is usually solely based on what one sees, which includes a full description of artworks, looking at its compositional elements, such as the colours, line work, forms etc. These formal elements are used along with critical analysis, which also includes the era in which the works were made, the medium, and key social issues the work speaks of, which help the viewer draw out and interpret the artist's intentions. The benefits of this method are that the viewer spends time looking, and the art is able to speak for itself, as opposed to the work being translated (Norman, 1970; Belk, 2006; Negreiros & Howells, 2012; Gale, 2021).

For this research, using traditional formal or critical art analysis would not be enough, as the images I created are informed by multiple stories that at times amalgamate in one image. These stories are personal, of family members, my observations growing up, and stories that have been shared with me. I needed a much more flexible method, that would accommodate and interpret the stories that the aesthetics staged, which would be accompanied by academic literature. Through storytelling, I was also able to draw out the nuances of meaning embedded in the artworks, while also being extremely sensitive to the people whose stories I shared in the images. The stories are rendered through fiction and myth-making, although they retain some truth.

In the analysis process, I drew my inspiration from Henk Borgdoff, who made paintings and had conversations with each of them, where he reflected on the images and allowed what came out of the engagement to be the interpretation. These conversations or engagements were recorded. He encourages this process, of responding to one's own work, to not be limited to words, but can also be through movement. What is appealing about this approach is that it is free from any set step-by-step method; rather, the artist chooses to engage with their own work through conversation with the work, instead of analysing and breaking it down into its compositional elements. My process was quite an intuitive one, similar to Borgdorff (Borgdorff & Scwab, 2014). I did not want to break the work down compositionally, but

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rather reflect on the artworks and their nuances, and respond with creative writing or short stories about some of the main themes that came up.

3. Memory Work

For the first process of analysis, I used the visual data, which is a collection of photographs and a video, which are the result of the art-based inquiry into my thesis question. I then drew out memories which already existed in the images, many of which were memories that were not particularly portrayed in the images, but which had influenced the works. This was crucial in getting to some of the nuances in the artworks, that were informed by my personal experiences. Memory work facilitated the discourse between me and my works, and helped me to dig deep and be vulnerable about my stories verbally. However, in order to be completely vulnerable, I also needed to protect myself and the people whose stories I wrote. The memories were written as fiction, through the narrative/story telling method, which was great for protecting the people in the stories.

Memory work as a method traces its origins to the 1980s. It is a feminist method that was developed by Frigga Haug, along with a group of feminists in Germany (Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014). The method was born from a collective enquiry, to bridge the gap between theory and experience. Memory work is a feminist methodology that challenges what constitutes knowledge by exploring uncertainty, and being open to ambiguities, through looking at memories (Onyx & Small, 2001). Memory work operates as a learning space for both the present and the future, connecting academic ways of knowing with autobiographical personal and social experiences. It is commonly used in groups where the collective writes individual stories, which are then analysed (Mitchell & Pithouse-Morgan, 2014).

Memory work can also be done individually through an autobiographical journey, where one looks through objects and photos, and remembers things seen, to reflect, and it allows insight into how individuals construct themselves based on their past memories (Onyx & Small, 2001). This aspect of memory work was relevant to my process of engaging with the artworks. In the case of my research, the artworks became a body that carried the past, personal and the future, which were constructed by experiences and memories, which I then

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drew out through memory work. Through reflecting and engaging with the artworks through memory work, I was able to unpack the artworks' nuances.

Memory is always changing. It is not fixed, therefore memory work itself does not seek to tell the truth as it happened. Rather, it complicates the linear idea of truth (Haug, 2008). Memories are not judged as true or false, but rather are a way of telling and remembering the past. They break the spell of the unspoken past by telling. In this thesis, memory work is used to engage the artwork through memory, as opposed to analysing the work and stripping it of its essence. Art can evoke non-linguistic body memory, and offer insights into the senses (Till, 2008). In this thesis, it was mainly used to facilitate the conversation between myself and the works. The 'truth' of the memories is complicated, as they were written using fiction, myth and real experiences. I particularly wanted to articulate the memories through this form, as a way of protecting my vulnerability, and that of the people whose stories I share.

The memory work analysis process involves three phases, which can be done collectively or individually. The first process is writing down the memory or experience, writing it again in the third-person, then lastly, writing in detail (Small, 2007). The second phase is sharing the memories, if in a group. In the group, patterns and similarities in the stories are identified. The group then discusses relevant theories that coincide with the general themes from the stories. The third phase is further theorisation of the collective ideas provided by the memories that were shared (Small, 2007). This is the formal step-by-step structure of the analysis process, which I did not follow entirely in my study, but rather I have taken parts of it. Instead of writing down the memories, I reflect on them while engaging with the artworks. The writing process is facilitated by the narrative/storytelling method.

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Memory work as a method was beneficial as it offered a place to reflect on my artworks, using memory as an act of engagement to draw out the nuances. It also facilitated and drew out conversations of past and present memories that are imbedded in the artworks.

4. Storytelling and narratives

Storytelling and narratives were useful for transcribing the memories evoked by the artworks into fictional narratives, while also protecting the people in them, and my own vulnerability.

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The fictional stories I wrote were told from a personal perspective of my observations and experiences; some may be true, some are mythical, but they hold the essence of the raw memories, and some elements of truth. This way of storytelling echoes what Audre Lorde terms biomythography, which is a mixture of autobiography, fact, myth and fiction. It is centred around the struggle to find agency and self-identity in the context of social oppression. In the process, one gets space to understand themselves beyond how the world sees them, and to what oppresses them, finding the power to challenge that instead of giving into the oppression (Lorde, 1982 Floyd-Thomas & Gillman, 2005). Elements of these were effective for my research as they granted me the space to play with and challenge 'truth', and what is expected as academic research. It allowed me to communicate my experiences in a safe, emotional way, without feeling like the stories needed to be justified.

In the 1970s, scholars became interested in narratives, as they noticed their role in all aspects of human social life. The stories that people tell are told from personal perspectives, with an outcome that may be different from person to person. The stories people tell are rarely coherent or logical narratives (Prokkola, 2014), and are told for different purposes, to fulfil a range of reasons. The story teller speaks from their own point of view, providing their own commentaries (Feldman *et al*., 2004). For the purpose of my research, the stories I wrote were a reflection of events that were speaking directly to my questions around soft masculinities and tough femininities, and in dialogue with the artworks.

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People make sense of the world through stories. They are used to communicate ideas, and can be defined as an event, or action, that has a plot, which ties everything into meaning (Feldman *et al*., 2004). Narrative and storytelling are commonly used interchangeably, as they possess the same characteristics of chronology and ordering of events (Feldman *et al*., 2004). Narratives are descriptive, can also be fictional, and have story-like elements (Abbot, 2011). Stories describe actions, can be real or imaginary, and have a beginning point and an end point. They are an interpretation of what has happened (Alasuutari, Bickman & Brannen, 2008). Narratives do not necessarily have to have a beginning and an end point like a story, and can be described as an aspect of text, experience and action, which is less of a direct narrative response (Alasuutari *et al*., 2008). What was useful about this element of the method was that it gave me the freedom to write in no particular fixed way, and not all the stories took on a fictional or story-like approach. Some narratives are short and read like

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dairy entries and text messages. Different writing styles are used to communicate not only the content, but the space in which the content is written and carries affect.

As a methodology, storytelling can act as tool to release and allow the unspoken (Ghallagher, 2011), as it allows for multiple view points and contradictions. What is useful in narratives and storytelling is the sequence and structure, as they reveal what is significant about the people, their practices, ideas, places and symbols (Feldman *et al*., 2004). Through storytelling and narratives, one not only gets a sense of what the text is providing them, but also of where the person writing is coming from (Feldman *et al*., 2004).

Fictional narratives are a particular kind of sense-making. Reading a fictional narrative allows access to exchanges between the author and the reader, and the meaning making process becomes participatory. The reader becomes a co-author (Popova, 2015). The narrator shares experience with the reader, but still remains the key holder of the story's secrets, as 'The narrator knows something, the reader does not know' (Popova, 2015, p. 183). However, the reader still contributes to the story. The outcome is tension that results in some sort of meaning (Popova, 2015). The best part about this method for my research was that it allowed for things to be hidden, so that the viewers could make sense of things on their own. This was important for me, as it meant I could hide and protect my raw memories through fictional characters and events.

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In the process of story analysis, it is not important to know whether or not the story is true, but rather to understand what the story is communicating (Feldman *et al*., 2004). A narrative researcher will look at the meaning of the story and why it was told, through looking at the structure and content, as well as what was included and excluded (Feldman *et al*., 2004). What is important in the stories is the idea of truth being challenged in the stories, which speak of memories and experiences told through fiction. This is also an overarching idea of my thesis, which seeks to use art as an accessible way of knowing and engaging knowledge to challenge fixed normative ways of knowing, and the notion of an objective truth. In essence, it is not important if the stories I have written are true or not; what is important are the themes they communicate, which are in alignment with my research questions.

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5. Thematic analysis

Once I had engaged with the artworks through memory work and storytelling, I used thematic analysis to select a few images from the broader body of work, which offered me space to work on a smaller and more focused scale. The works chosen were applicable to the recurring themes that came up. This method has been in use since the 20th century, and is used to identify themes in qualitative data (Terry *et al.*, 2017). Thematic analysis is flexible: it can be used in the early stages of the research as a method to process the research data, as well as at the end as an analysis tool (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Identifying codes is an important part of the thematic research, to help create patterns which make up the themes that are useful for meaning making. Thematic analysis allows for the observations made in the data, through the process of coding and making themes, to be translated. This gives clarity to research, and offers access to new findings (Boyatzis, 1998).

6. The analysis processes

The first step in the analysis process is familiarising yourself with the data, and getting a sense of the themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second step is choosing codes, which must be defining factors of the research. Codes can be picked up in text or images, if the research is visual, and allows you to phrase what you are picking up from the data in writing (Gibbs, 2018). The third step is searching for themes, which are repetitive patterns in the data that lead to possible meanings. Themes are an essential part of the analysis process, as they capture the essential elements of the research questions (Boyatzis, 1998). The final step is interpretation; the knowledge generated from the themes has to be interpreted. The final write-up must make an argument in relation to the research question (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once I had chosen my codes from the images, and identified the themes, I was able to select the relevant stories, which had sprung from my engagement with the body of artwork and selected images. The stories function as interpretation of the work, as the nuances and memories evoked by the images are unpacked and analysed through storytelling, with the support of academic literature. I have only touched on the elements of the analysis process that are relevant to my research; a more detailed explanation of the analysis process is provided by Braun & Clarke (2006).

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7. Reflexivity

This journey began in 2017, when I was working as a full-time artist. My work at the time was very much based on violence against women's bodies, and how women are not solely victims, but carry agency too. I took a series of photographs of weapons that were underneath the beds of the women in my family, including my grandmother. They all kept these weapons as a form of self-defence, should someone ever come in to violate them. I also grew up to my grandmother carrying weapons where ever she went as a form of self-defence; she also encouraged me to carry weapons for the same reason. In the search for ways to curb violence against women in my own artistic practice, I became interested in images that showed masculinity differently, as a way of fostering alternative ways masculinities. I did not know what those non-violent masculinities looked like or could look like. With these questions, I figured acquiring more knowledge on masculinity via academia would answer my questions.

Arriving in academia in 2018, I found myself drawing in a deep and dark spiral of trying to search for my research question, in what felt like a very violent academic space. There were times where I would read a feminist reading and ask myself, why are these writers fighting all the time. I would literally say to myself, 'I am not like this, I am not trying to problematise everything, in general as a person I am a softy, I am not cut out to be doing work in such a vile space where I have to argue rigorously to be heard.' As a softy, I found myself feeling deeply wounded by many insomniac nights and haunting dreams about what my question was and what I wanted to do research on. The many readings I was asked to read lead me nowhere. While sharing my frustrations with another artist friend, she simply said, 'make the work, Thandi, create the art and let the art tell what it is you need to do, you can then theorise everything after.' In the process of working on the art, which is the basis of this thesis, I realised that I was doing scholarship differently, in a way that made me feel safe. I was exploring family histories and stories of my upbringing in ways that were not harmful to me and the people whose stories I remembered. The people in the works and stories cannot be identified, but one gets to bodily connect to the art and the stories I share. I have read some of the stories in seminars, and shared the art, and it has left people feeling warm and wanting more. That for me is learning; it should not be harmful.

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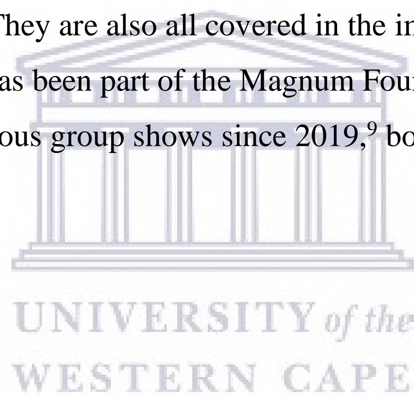
My study comes from a space of having experienced academic violence and wanting to do things differently, as well as from a space of great memories of the tough women and soft men in my family, who were challenging binaries while I was growing up. However, the agency of black woman and alternative forms of black masculinity, in ways that I remember them and know them, are barely reflected in academia, and I wanted to contribute these personal narratives to the growing conversations on challenging gender binaries to bring about social justice.

8. Ethics

I did not need ethical clearance for the project, as the photographs that inform the study were also part of a public exhibition in 2019 at Smith Gallery, called *Utata undiphotha inwele*.[7] The family members in the photographs articulate the ideas I speak of, rather than the stories necessarily being about them. They are also all covered in the images, and cannot be identified. This body of work has been part of the Magnum Foundation project in New York,[8] and has been featured in numerous group shows since 2019,[9] both nationally and internationally.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[7] Dee, C. 2019. Thandiwe Msebenzi's 'Utata undiphotha inwele' – twisting gender norms in the midst of violence. *Bubble gum Magazine*: https://bubblegumclub.co.za/photography/thandiwe-msebenzis-utata-undiphotha-inwele-twisting-gender-norms-in-the-midst-of-violence/

[8] Announcing the 2018 photography and social justice fellows: https://www.magnumfoundation.org/news/2018/5/29/announcing-the-2018-photography-and-social-justice-fellows

[9] Galerie Eiegen + Art: https://eigen-art.com/en/exhibitions/archive/space-place/?from=archive

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Chapter 5: Working with visual images to make meaning through storytelling

Section A

1. Introduction

This chapter presents notes from selected images that I made at the beginning of the research, to attain the research question. In the process of my creative inquiry with the thesis question, I took 24 photographs, which include 1 diptych, 1 polyptich, and a set of six images making up one work. At the core of this thesis is the use of art as an active tool to challenge gender binaries. In this section, visual images are used to draw out themes that engage with soft masculinities and tough femininities. To interpret and analyse the images within their respective themes, I used memory work, which is translated into storytelling/narratives accompanied by academic text. I use the storytelling element purposefully as a creative analytical tool, to further stretch the ways art can be used in the analysis process.

In the process of writing up the thesis, I was constantly engaging with the full body of work in presentations, lectures and talks. These presentations would be accompanied by the stories behind the works, and tales my grandmother used to tell me, which inspired many of the photographs. Parallel to my thesis-writing processes, I also started writing these stories down as a way of reflecting on the images, drawing out the context and nuances of the work as whole. These stories were about multiple memories from my upbringing; some were fictional narratives, but strongly linked to the images, my personal life and experiences. In the process of writing the stories, I realised that I was already doing the analysis process through narrative and memory work, as I was gently stripping the photographs to their core, and revealing deep-seated meanings. The stories play a significant role in the analysis process, as they sit equally with academic text, unpacking the images and their meaning without one having precedence over the other; rather, the storytelling works hand-in-hand with the academic text in the interpretation of meanings.

When I finally got to this chapter of the thesis, I had already finished writing the stories and narratives. To continue the analysis process, I grouped the photographs into three, using thematic analysis, after which the main themes were drawn out. Once I had the main themes, I was able to put the different stories into the themes that fit the context.

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2. Content analysis of the photographs

My research engages with soft masculinities and tough femininities. Thus, to begin the thematic analysis, the photographs were first divided into two groups: those with male bodies were separated from those with female bodies. The photos were then grouped under three main themes: performed power/Phuma Silwe; putting the body on the line; and soft masculinity in private. This selection process saw some works being left out, resulting in a total of 14 images (the full body of work is provided in the appendix). I made notes and observations on the similarities that I got from the images, I will display the process of getting to the main themes below.

2.1. Exhibit 1:

Main theme: Performed power/Phuma Silwe

Notes made and observations while grouping images

- Fearless
- physical
- Phuma silwe (ready to fight)
- Not afraid
- In control of body/unapologetic

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2.2. Exhibit 2:

Main theme: putting the body on the line

Notes and observations:

- putting the body on the line
- Taking the blows
- No tears

2.3. Exhibit 3:

Main theme: Soft Masculinity in Private

Notes:

- Tenderness
- Play
- Caregiving

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Section B

3. Images and themes unpacked and analysed

3.1 Introduction

There are 14 stories, and nine works, made up of 14 single images. There are more stories than there are selected visual works, because the stories are an engagement of the body of work as a whole, and not necessarily with individual images. Some images come with short captions that speak directly to the moment they were captured and what was happening around them. In other cases, one image can be multi-layered, with a variety of stories coming from it. The images are weaved into the stories in no fixed manner. The following section presents the images and themes unpacked and analysed through memory work and narrative in the form of storytelling. This will be accompanied by academic literature.

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3.2. Phuma Silwe /Performed power

Thandiwe Msebenzi, *Qula* (2019)

(to Qula is to stick fight, a sport often preserved for males. These are my grandmother's sticks, used solely for fighting when it is absolutely necessary for her to defend herself).

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Story 1: Pangas blazing and my sister standing

My sister tells this story with such charisma. It was the weekend of our uncle's wedding, and our cousin had come home with a friend.

It was not long after they came in that my sister realised something was going on. She stepped outside and there were a group of boys standing at the front small broken gate with pangas in their hands. Some had climbed to the rooftop of my grandmother's house. The neighbours were looking at this scene through their widows, too afraid to come out. My sister went right to them and asked them what they wanted. They randomly shouted that they wanted the boy who was hiding in our house. One boy standing at the back of the pack shouted, 'he killed my brother, we are here for revenge.' My sister stood still and denied that there was anyone in the house. One boy screamed, 'let's just stab this lady and be done with her.' It was at that moment that a short man came towards them and commanded that they leave my sister alone, saying, '*lisisteri lam elo*' (that's my sister). My sister did not know him but he was from the neighbourhood, and the boys obviously feared him. They scattered like rats and disappeared.

My sister remembers walking back into the house and seeing the 'men of the house' (our older male cousins) hiding under tables. The boy who was being hunted was hiding in the back room under the bed. It was only then that my sister realised that she could have gotten herself killed.

Notes, observations and emerging meanings:

In story 1, there is a portrayal of strength by the sister in the face of danger, in contrast to the men, who are afraid for their lives. We also see young boys carrying arms and ready to kill. This scene plays into different narratives: one is a common trope, where the black woman is possibly in danger from violent black men. We see this in the way one of the boys is ready to kill the sister, like it is a normal thing to just kill a woman. South Africa is known to have high rates of gender-based violence, with woman being the main victims of these crimes by men (Gqola, 2015 Banda, 2020). Black women are often framed as defenceless victims of violence, without any agency (Boonzaier & Zway, 2015; Shefer, 2016). This is a popular discourse, in which black working-class women, in particular, are constantly portrayed as suffering at the hands of black men (Bhana & Pillay, 2011). In story 1, we get a glimpse of the possible violence that might occur between the sister and the boys with weapons. What the sister does, however, is challenge these popular narratives, by standing her ground fearlessly. The sister also challenges the normalised ideal of passive, soft femininity (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). The men who are hiding in the house, fearing for their lives, also act in a transgressive manner, by showing vulnerability and fearfulness, challenging the colonial notion of black masculinity as solely violent (Bhana & Pillay, 2011). The above

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artwork, *Qula*, which I am pictured in, embodies my grandmother, who was notorious for carrying weapons for self-defence, even fighting men through stick fighting, and winning her battles. The image challenges the viewer, and draws a solid line that, should it be crossed, the woman in the image will strike, challenging the very notion of woman as passive.

Story 2: Phuma Silwe[10]

Once a fight broke out on the streets. I was at my grandmother's house; the boy next door on the left side of our wall was arguing with his friends, involving the name of my friend, Vuziwe, who lived next door on our right side. The house where the boy came from was known for drama; we were not allowed to play with the kids from that house either. They also never came out much. They stayed in the yard and played together. Their grandmother was called many names by my grandmother, including a witch. Our house even had a big wall on their side, dividing us completely from seeing one another. This was built intentionally to avoid any further drama with the family.

The argument was happening in the streets and there were already other kids gathered around. It was a typical New Cross Roads[11] type of scenario, where someone would tell someone that there is a fight happening *yi-Veg,*[12] and everyone goes to just watch and not stop the fight. This argument had my friend Vuziwe's name in it. The boy next door was in a rumble with his friends about Vuziwe, my female friend. I don't know how the news got to Vuziwe. She was in her house taking a bath when she heard that her name was floating in the streets. She came out of that bath wearing a towel wrapped around her little naked body. She was holding that towel tight with her one hand, and screaming and waving with the other hand. She headed straight to the group of boys who were talking about her; she was unstoppable and fearless. I don't remember much after that, we were all very young, but I have a stark image of Vuziwe in that towel, screaming furiously, headed to people who were talking about her, with that notion of *rhaaaaa andinoyiki,* I am not afraid of any of you.

Notes, observations and finding meanings:

The courage shown by Vuziwe in story 2 is very similar to that of the sister in story 1: the ability to walk fearlessly into a fight, not knowing what lies ahead. There is a phrase in isiXhosa, *phuma silwe* (also the tittle of the story), which speaks to the exact actions of Vuziwe and the sister in story 1. The difference with Vuziwe is that she is standing up for herself and confronting boys, and she is also doing so wearing just a towel to cover her small body. There is something quite significant about Vuziwe's choice of leaving the house barely

[10] A Xhosa term which translates to 'get out and let's fight,' a term often thrown at people who are always ready to fight.
[11] A neighbourhood in Nyanga, Cape Town.
[12] An Afrikaans word meaning 'fight'.

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dressed to confront the boys. South Africa has a long history of black women using their bodies and sexuality as sites of protests, such as during apartheid (Bhana & Pillay, 2011).The naked or half-dressed body has also been used by protesters to embody both power and vulnerability (Sutton, 2003). There is certainly a power and vulnerability that Vuziwe possess; in the confrontation, she also challenges feminine norms. Bhana and Pillay (2011), in their work on femininities in a single-sex school, suggest that South Africa's history of struggle created a platform for black women to disrupt gender norms, through their involvement in the armed struggle. They go on to argue that it is the political, social and economic circumstances that have created space for alternative forms of femininity to flourish. What Vuziwe and the sister in story 1 display is a challenge of feminine norms, and a disruption of the representation of black girls as always victims of violence, following a rich history of black female resistance in the face of violence in South Africa.

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Thandiwe Msebenzi, *Egwaveni* (2019)
Egwaveni is a game I played with my friends when I was young. We would sing egwaveni, meaning guava, while touching our vaginas. We did this particularly when we saw boys, who would shy away every time.

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Looking back now, this act made us feel very empowered and in control, while it left the males feeling uncomfortable.

Story 3: The Queen of gossip

I have this friend of mine, gosh, she is a bit of a bully. She is bigger in size than me, three times bigger. I am as tiny as a stick and short. I hate being skinny, I wish I was bigger. People think I am sick, you know, with the big four letters (AIDS). At my white school, one of my friend's mom's said I had a nice body and that I should be a model. I told my aunt because my mother would never allow me, my aunt said she would find an agency for me. At school, being thin is like the epitome (yes, I learnt that word in a book I was reading) of beauty. Some girls at school are even bulimic in primary school. They vomit out after they eat just so they can lose weight, it's very strange for me. Where I am from, to be a real girl you have to be *ufohloza* (nice and thick), it's a sign of being a well-nourished person who is cute and not sick. The girls in the neighbourhood tease me a lot, especially my chubby bully friend. She always has stories (lies) about people. Last week, she and the other girls ganged up on me and told me I was sleeping with sis Vovo's friend, and that's why I am sick now with the big four letters (AIDS). They even went as far as to say that my body rash was the first sign of the big four letters. I have chicken pox on my whole body, I tried to tell them, but they said I was lying. I wanted to cry so badly, but I stood there with them surrounding me and said nothing. When they were done, I went in the house. Since then, I have not left the house, even when my mom is at work. I feel ashamed, embarrassed and scared. My father has always warned me about girls from the township, saying that they are a bad influence, just like the township streets, and that he preferred me locked up in the house.

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Nqo Nqo Nqo, there is a knock at the door. Oh gosh, I can hear by the voice that it's that chubby child who I no longer consider my friend. I am still hurt by her insults. She even made a song about me and made her group of friends sing it while laughing at me. I open the barn door just the top part and I don't say anything, I just look at her.

'Athule chomie,[13] open' she says, excited, like she did not just insult me last week
'Oh no, it's locked. My dad left with the burglar keys so I can't open, sorry.'
'Okay then, just go out the window. Yoooh friend I have news for you.' Oh hell no, I am not doing that. It's the reason my mother banned me from my township friends. They convinced me to jump out the window so we could go to Bridge street where all the boys play street soccer. My mother has never beaten me, but shoo, that day I thought I would get a beating.

'Oh no, we have burglar bars in the whole house now,' I say with a fake smile.
'Well, have you heard about Punkie, that girl … Errh, that girl who was raped,' she says, sounding like she is about to lie.
'Um Punkie ... what street does she stay in?' I ask, confused.

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[13] A slang word for friend

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'uPunkie man … That ougat naar[14] girl who likes boys too much,' she says, annoyed like Punkie has taken her man.
'Oh, I see. Punkie, from Mlonji street, the one with the mushroom haircut. Yes, I remember the rape case. It was a long time ago though, she was like nine. She is the one who likes to wear her uniform short with those shiny stockings,' I say, now more interested to hear this lie.

'Ebetakile[15], she slept away from home for a whole weekend and come back on Monday. Her father has chased her out of the house.'
Now I am leaning on the burglar bars, totally mesmerised by this girl's skills of storytelling, and the juiciness of these news. Punkie is only thirteen; what does she know about *ukutaka* (sleeping out), I think to myself.

'So, I went to her chomie, you know me, *mos*, I am a people's person *yaqonda mos* (you know),' she says, proudly and smiling.
'So, I asked her where she was, she told me that her boyfriend invited her over to his house in Gugs, he locked her in his shack the whole weekend.'

'Oh my gosh, that's kidnapping! Shame, uPunkie, now she is homeless because her father thought *utakile*,' I say, concerned.

'Oh, Athule Mother Teresa. This is why I don't like telling you things, you always feel sorry for people. She deserved to be kicked out. She is obviously lying about her boyfriend locking her in the shack. She was busy enjoying sex with him the whole weekend.'

'*Yey ntombazana ndini phuma eyadini yam,* get out of my yard young lady.'
Oh gosh, that is my mother screaming from the gate. She is not even in the house yet, and she is ordering my chubby friend to get out. I don't even waste time. I close the top door and run to my room, while leaving my chubby friend to deal with my roaring lion mother.

Notes, observations and finding meanings:

Story 3 introduces Athule, who is also the main narrator of all the stories. She is thin, short, and prone to being bullied. Athule is called Mother Theresa[16] by her friend, which insinuates that she is the 'good girl,' and she represents the ideal qualities of normalised femininity, which are passive and nurturing (Ringrose & Renold 2010). She is not confrontational, and

[14] Afrikaans word we used to describe a child who liked boys and engaged in sexual activities. We would then add the word 'Naar', an Afrikaans word that means nauseous. We used this word to emphasis the disgustingness of any matter.
[15] A Xhosa word commonly used by the youth to refer to someone visiting their partner and sleeping over at their house, without their parents being informed. The direct translation of *Ukutaka* is to jump.
[16] Mother Theresa. 2013.
https://books.google.co.za/books?id=a_FbAgAAQBAJ&pg=PT65&dq=mother+teresa&hl=xh&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjByoTsxb73AhUGCsAKHQHbDxYQ6AF6BAgJEAI#v=onepage&q=mother%20teresa&f=false

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not a *phuma silwe* either, and is protected by her parents from 'township life,' Athule's father dislikes the township environment, and the kind of influences it might have on his child.

Townships were historically created to distance black people from white residential areas and economic activity. When they were built, they lacked infrastructure, basic services, roads, water, among others things (Mahajan, 2014), and are commonly known for crime and violence. Violence is rooted in unequal socioeconomic status, unequal accesses to services, and education (Makanga, Schuurman, & Randall, 2017). Athule's parents do not specify what the negative influence is that Athule may get from her friends and township streets, but their house has burglar bars, which could be a response to crime in the area. Athule is always locked in the house, and previously her friends have influenced her to leave the house through the window.

Athule's friend is more of a bully than she is a *phuma silwe.* this is seen on her attack on Athule's body. Bullying is also a form of aggressive behaviour that is repeated with a clear imbalance of power, with the intention to hurt the person at the receiving end. Bullying has often been centred around boys, reinforcing the stereotype of boys as aggressive, whilst aggressive behaviours are out of the norm for girls, who are expected to perform niceness (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). Bullying is often solely seen as a psychological problem, which can limit the ways in which gendered violence can be engaged with amongst young girls. In seeing Athule's friend's act of bullying as also an act of violence, we are able to see the complex ways that femininity exists outside of its confines of passivity. It may also be violent to others, given other inequalities that gender might intersect with (Bhana & Pillay, 2011).

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Story 4: Miniskirts and crop tops

I was raised by a very religious and strict mom who dictated what I wore, what I ate, and when I went out. I was one of those young children in the township who could easily be described as backwards, in that I never followed trends, and I dressed conservatively. I was not allowed to wear sleeveless tops, miniskirts or clothing that was too tight and revealing. The worst was not being allowed to wear brands like Nike and Adidas, or to watch TV and eat sweets. I resented my mother for years for this upbringing, but she always told me she was trying to protect me, and that I was not old enough to make my own decisions. On the other hand, my cousins were wearing G-strings and cha-cha skirts (these were skirts that blew with the wind, taking all sorts of directions when one walked), wearing high heels and doing lavish hairstyles in primary school. I

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was known as grandmother's child, because I wore tops that covered me from the neck to my arms, and my dresses were always below the knees with flat shoes.

I was always home alone, being the only child at home, with my big sister having left home years ago. Both my parents worked till late, and my mom had church duties Saturday and Sunday. Due to this, my cousins always came over on weekends and on school holidays. One school holiday, my cousin from the Eastern Cape came to visit. She was older than me, about three years older, I was about eleven years old at the time. She was the complete opposite of me. She already had a boyfriend, and she always liked looking nice. Once, we went to visit a family friend, Sis' Vovo, who was renting a house just a couple of blocks away from my house. She stayed alone, so I visited her a lot. I enjoyed her company, as she was very warm, and entertained all my stories about how I hated the new private school I attended, and was happier at the township school I attended in Nyanga.

When we arrived at Sisi Vovo's place, she had company. A male friend of hers was visiting. Sis Vovo only had one plastic chair in her house, and her double bed. Naturally, my cousin and I went to sit on the bed. I think Sisi Vovo was cooking that day, and chatting to her friend at the same time. So, my cousin and I ended up being comfortable and laying on the bed. We were wearing miniskirts that went above our knees. This was my cousin's idea, and I was very uncomfortable, but we wore them. These were my miniskirts, which had been given to me by my white friend at school, along with other clothes in a bag. I never wore half of those clothes because my mother would never allow me. She said they were 'too much' for kids. When my cousin saw the clothes, she went crazy, and demanded we wore them. She wore a Roxy top that had Roxy on the boobs; it was a V-neck and cut to show off cleavage. She also chose the white tight miniskirt from Billabong. I wore the corduroy pink and baggy miniskirt, and put on a Levi crop top above a long vest, that covered my belly and my bum. Yes, I had signed up for the miniskirt, but I had to at least cover the essential parts. So, there we were in our miniskirts on the bed, with sis' Vovo's friend sitting on a plastic chair next to the bed. I tried very hard not to move too much, because I was aware of the male presence. My cousin, on the other hand, tossed and turned. She killed me when she had her legs up in the air with her thighs bare, dangling in the air. She also started brushing her legs up and down like she was putting Vaseline on them. I tried to give her looks to stop dangling her legs, but she was so oblivious. I was worried about this man sitting next to us, and what he was thinking, because he kept on giving us looks. When it got late and we had to go home, I was so glad. I never told my cousin about this, but the man who was sitting on the plastic chair was out on parole for a raping a minor who, according to him, was an *ougat* girl who seduced him.

Notes, observations and finding meanings:

Athule is hyper-vigilant, aware of her body and uncomfortable to reveal it, rather wanting to be safe. Her cousin could not be bothered; she is confident in her body and does not have any fears. The *ougat* theme comes back in this story, with Vovo's friend saying he was seduced by a young *ougut* girl, which does not justify his actions, but makes him look innocent, and the act not violent, because the child was acting like a adult (Clark & Duschinsky, 2020).

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Athule is also afraid that her cousin's freeness with her body might seem like an act of seduction to sis Vovo's friend. The *ougat* theme is a recurring theme from story 3, where a girl is considered *ougat* because of how she dresses and carries herself. A common trope in the sexualisation of girls is that the categories of child and adult are fixed, and that children should remain sexually innocent. Girls are also socialised to regulate each other's sexuality (Clark & Duschinsky, 2020). We see in both story 3 and 4 how clothing is an important topic that is very much connected to a girl either being innocent or seductive/*ougat*. Young girls wearing sexualised clothing are associated with loss of childhood innocence (Clark & Duschinsky, 2020). The *ougat* girls attract stigma as they wear sexualised clothes, and are seen to be already engaging in 'adult behaviour.' They are not seen as children, making them vulnerable to violence, as they no longer carry an innocence, which is an absence of sexuality (Clark & Duschinsky, 2020). Athule, with the protection of her mother, is very aware of the discourse of her body and clothing, as well as the sexual connotations of revealing clothes, as seen in how she reacts to her cousin's behaviour around sis Vovo's friend. Harassment for short clothing is a common narrative in South Africa; there are stories of violence towards women that are 'under-dressed' (Eagle & Kwele, 2021). Woman have to be self-monitoring and self-policing in how they dress to reduce the violence they receive, or live in fear, reinforcing the 'female fear factory' (Gqola, 2015).

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In the work *Egwaveni*, a young girl is jumping in the streets and touching her private parts, playing a game called a '*egwaveni*,' where one sings the word 'egwaveni,' while touching their vagina. This was usually strategically played to scare boys off, and it very much speaks to young girls owning their bodies unapologetically and being confrontational. It shifts the narrative of *ougat* girl, drawing our attention to how young girls can use their sexuality as a means of empowerment and ownership of their own bodies, and to humiliate and shame boys as a strategy of resistance (Bhana, 2008).This act of owning one's sexuality and using it as empowerment is also one of the ways in which young girls are constantly navigating violence, and are not solely helpless victims (Bhana, 2008). Punkie in story 3, and the cousin in story 4, both own their sexuality and their power, but because the narrative of sexual girls is predominantly that of an *ougat* girl, their powers are removed through being outcast by society, leaving them vulnerable to expected sexual abuse. The work *Egwaveni* puts emphasis on young women owning their sexuality as a form of power, to challenge dominant notions of girls as objectified beings without agency.

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Thandiwe Msebenzi, *Igwava ehlabayo*, (2019)
(the direct translation of this tittle is: a spiky guava, or stabbing guava)

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Story 5: Sweet Fifteen

Fifteen feels great, and my academics have improved. I can finally speak English without feeling insecure and, apparently, I have developed a bit of an accent. I have given up on my breasts ever going to a B cup. What has grown, though, are my hips, and I can't help but feel old, like I am not a child anymore. I like looking good. I stopped buying from Ackermans. I buy clothes from Legit and I wear tight jeans, yes! and spaghetti tops, yes! My mother has eased up on me and, as usual, she is way too busy with work and playing breadwinner to discipline me as harshly as she used too. My afro is so long, it can touch the sky. I genuinely feel much more comfortable in my body. There was a time I wished I was coloured so my schoolmates could stop teasing me about my blackness and finding everything wrong about me and the ANC, and the 'lazy blacks'. I am as solid as a rock now. I am still very quiet in class, I don't talk. I am the complete opposite of my new black friend who has joined the class, Nuri; she is quite something. She beat up a boy in class who called her a monkey on her first day of school. She got up from her seat and went straight to the boy and punched him. He fell off his chair, and she left him lying there and walked to the classroom door with her bag. When at the door, she screamed at him even angrier, '*voetsek*,[17] you freak,' with the whole class just staring at her, including the teacher. The teacher did not even throw her out. She saw herself out and banged the door behind her. After that, I knew I wanted to be her friend. That was also the last day I would experience racism in class, until she left the school, of course, and it started all over again (sigh).

Nuri has inspired me to grow my afro. She was raised by her father who never relaxed her hair, but just let it be. She is a force to be reckoned with, and a real daddy's girl. She speaks about him all the time, and is the first person I have ever met who was raised single-handedly by a father. My mother can barely leave me with my father for a week when she has to go on business trips, because my father just drinks all the time; he can barely take care of himself when he goes on his drinking sprees. We both have similar backgrounds of growing up. She come from the townships, but recently her family moved to Noordhoek, so she has levelled up. She does not act like she is from the burbs, though; there is nothing snobbish or coconut about her at all (there are more coconuts at school who live in the hood). She still keeps it real always; in fact, she is the ultimate hood rat, her Xhosa is as fluent as a girl from the rural areas, and her English is just as excellent, but she prefers Xhosa, and she snatches all the As in Xhosa class. When she walks, she walks with certainty, like she knows where she is going, with her masculine arms never close to her body, but far away for her to choke anyone trying to get to her. She is never down; she is always happy and bubbly, but don't mess with her.

Once we were In English class, and Nuri put her legs on the table and crossed them while taking school notes. The English teacher told her to put her legs down and sit properly. Nuri challenged him on what was considered 'proper,' and my gosh, did she not win that fight. Our English teacher was defeated after that, and allowed her to be. I am also scared of her sometimes; she is loud and fierce and most of the popular girls want to befriend her simply

[17] Offensive word taken from Afrikaans, meaning 'go away'.

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because they fear her. They invite her to all the sleepovers, but not me. Through all her wildness, she is a caregiver. She is always trying to protect me, she will *klap* (slap) anyone who dares to tease me. She has a boyfriend who had to work really hard to get her. The poor guy, he is Dylan's adopted brother, his name is Jabu, in grade 12. He is black and plays rugby, so he's fairly big, but even he tiptoes around Nuri. On valentine's, day he bought her roses. We were sitting on the school field with Nuri, Tatum and Phoebe (the ultimate squad). He came with his roses. Nuri took them and hit him on the face, screaming '*rhaaaa* (she out bursts a lot in isiXhosa when she is angry, and does not care whether you understand or not) you know I have sinus, dude, I don't even want those chocolates, you can keep them.' I don't know how he survives her, but I guess it's for the same reasons that we love her and can't get enough of her bubbly personality, but God she is tough. She has no match. Even the teachers respect her; she just has that power about her.

Notes, observations and finding meanings:

Nuri protects herself: she is bold, she is seen, she makes a statement, and she is feared. Often, people make friends with her because they either fear her, or are drawn to her bold character and feel protected by her. She is also very intentional about being Athule's protector. In story 1, Athule's sister is also a protector in the way she hides the hunted boy. Nuri's boldness, fearlessness and her ability to stand up for herself gives her the independence to exist how she pleases, without being bound to a particular way of being. Nuri is physically strong, and commands authority. Schippers (2007), in her work, 'Recovering the feminine other', notes that physical strength and authority are characteristics that supposedly differentiate men and women. These characteristics remain unavailable to women, to retain the image of the superior male who dominates the woman. Nuri challenges this binary through her boldness. Koskela (1997) associates boldness with freedom, equality and a sense of control and possession of space. Bold women, such as Nuri, do not enter spaces from a place of constant fear; they are not passively occupying space, but rather take part in reproducing it. They occupy space as a form of resistance (Koskela 1997). Through Nuri's boldness and fearlessness, she challenges gender binaries and is able to attain her freedom with ease.

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Story 6: The woman gang

My mother is a natural-born leader. Grace is her name. In my neighbourhood, she is called Sis Grace. She is a very soft-spoken lady, but very sharp and practical in her leadership. She is the quieter and calmer version of her sister, Mandlakazi. She works for an NGO in Green Point, where she started as a receptionist in the 90s, working her way up in the early 2000s to being the director of the NGO. This was also about the time that we moved out of my grandmother's house to our new home in a community that was built and run by women. My mother had been part of the project for years before the houses were built. The women had gone to train in brick-

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laying, and many other useful skills for building. My fondest memory was making trenches with my mom and dad, and witnessing women with their daughters coming to put in windows once the structure of the house had been built. My mother, being a natural leader, was given many roles in the community, and was also the go-to person when someone was in trouble and needed help.

Despite her calm demeanour, when she is pushed, she strikes very sharply. Once, my mother and I came back from church and my father was drinking with his friends in our yard. They had their beers on the floor and were sitting comfortably. My mother walked through them and did not greet. She walked silently to her room and she came back with a *sjambok*. She beat them one by one; screaming, they left her house. Although my mother is a very soft-spoken women, that day, she breathed fire through her mouth. They have been scared of her since. When my mom speaks to any of my dad's friends, they can barely meet her eyes. When they want my dad, they shout from the gate, as they don't dare enter the yard. That's how scared they are of her.

There have also been times though when my mother has not been able to use her powers, where she has felt completely powerless. When I was in varsity, a young nurse moved into a house just opposite mine. The house had once belonged to her aunt who had died. The aunt had been looking after the nurse's kids with her husband. When the aunt passed away, the kids were left with the uncle who had a drinking problem. The nurse moved to Cape Town to look after her aunt, and look after her kids and husband. When the young nurse arrived, she renovated the house, painted it on the outside, and she bought herself a car. She was a quiet lady who barely spoke, but worked hard and was extremely independent. One day, the 'women' (a group of women bullies) started speaking ill of her in the community, saying things like, 'she does not greet', 'she has too much pride', 'she thinks she has made it in life', 'she thinks she is better than us'. This behaviour was not uncommon in my neighbourhood. When I started at UCT, I got my fair share of 'you think you are better than us now.' But with me being young at the time, I was not a real threat and the insults did die down. With the nurse, however, things got so bad that the 'women' started to harass her, and started to influence other residents, the majority of whom are women. It got to a point where they wanted her out of her aunt's house, and made a petition to get her out. I remember that evening very well. They chased her out in the middle of the night, with her kids. I watched from the window with my mother. I wished she could do something. Even my mother did not have the strength to stop them, even with her power as a natural leader, who people fear and respect. We watched them shout at the lady as she placed all the belongings on the back of a bakkie. Her double bed, her luggage, in big heaps in the back of the car, while masses of people outside her house watched, shouted, laughed and tormented her.

Notes, observations and finding meanings

Sis Grace is a strong leader, who strikes hard when it is necessary, but she is not a *phuma silwe*; she just believes in justice. The men in the community are afraid of her, and her force gives her the liberty to escape the subordinate position in which she could easily be put by men. Instead, her tough nature has gained her respect.

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The women gang has to form an alliance in order to activate their power in numbers. Sis Grace, similar to Nuri, strikes when she is pushed. She strikes for justice and to protect others, and she does that alone without needing the strength of a group. The women gang shows a group of women who use their power in a very bullying manner, much like Athule's friend who bullied her in story 3. The gang of women exercise their power in performative ways, from tormenting in public, to mobilising people, where masses of women bully one woman in a public space. The context of this community is that it was built by women; there is a strong sense of unity amongst them, and they do things in unity. South African black women have always organised themselves towards seeing through their visions as a unit. We see this in anti-apartheid campaigns, *stokvels*, anti-rape campaigns, etc. (Meer, 2005).

Solidarity amongst women, and sisterhood, are also expected stereotypes for women (Williams & Grandy, 2014). The behaviour shown to the nurse by the women gang shows both overt and indirect aggression. Overt aggression includes physical and verbal threats (Moretti & Odgers, 2002). The women gang may have not physically hurt the young nurse, but their act of throwing her out of her home while tormenting her is a very overtly aggressive and violent action. This moment of eviction happens after a build-up of rumours, conspiring and gathering people against the nurse, which can be seen as indirect aggression, which is behaviour commonly associated more with woman then with men. Indirect aggression is associated with criticising, spreading rumours and social exclusion (Lagerspetz & Björkqvist, 1994). Some research suggests that males are more overtly aggressive in violent ways than females, who are seen as more indirectly aggressive (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz & Kaukiainen, 1992). This also plays into the gendered lens, where women cannot dominate, but rather are dominated by men (Shefer, 2016).Woman can be violent and aggressive, in ways that challenge fixed binaries that subordinate them, rendering them powerless (Shefer, 2016). Shefer (2016) also cautions us not to romanticise powerful women. In this story, the woman gang use their power in counterproductive ways to violate, rather than empower, one another. This story does not romanticise women's strength; it shows that women can be violent and violate one another. However, it also challenges the notion of the powerless woman who is not a threat. The women in this story are threatening, dominating and very capable of violence. This story takes as back to the work *Qula*, where the woman I perform/portray embodies danger. Should the lines be crossed, the work almost warns that violence will take place.

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3.3. Putting the body on the line

Thandiwe Msebenzi, *Ivaselina engaka*? (2019)

(*This was a game once played with my friends when I was young. It was about pain and endurance. Your opponent was meant to smear Vaseline on your face, and you would have a chance for vengeance when they were done, with your own big slap of Vaseline back in their face. The title translates to 'so much Vaseline?').*

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Story 7: My Grandmother's tales

'Doctor, please help, me I don't want to have kids anymore' - Ms Dumile (my grandmother).
'Ms Dumile, this is rare, what you are asking of me, many black women don't opt for that, they have multiple children non-stop' – Doctor.

My grandmother recalls this day as the day she made the biggest decision of her life. This is the day she chose herself and her children over everything, the day she devoted her life to her five children, the day she left her husband mentally and emotionally. She was only present physically to keep up with custom, and to avoid being called '*umabuya kwendeni*' (the one who has left her marriage). She never once told her husband that she would no longer have kids. But for years after, her mother-in-law tormented her for being barren and being unable to make more babies.

My grandmother lived and worked on a farm with her parents. Her duty was to wash dishes at the dairy of the farm. She was in her mid-teens, a prime time for a girl to have men coming to ask for her hand. She had already rejected four men, and absolutely refused to get married, until one day, her uncle advised her that she had to accept the next man who came to ask for her hand, otherwise she would end up having a child out of wedlock and never get married. Plus, she was at the prime of her youth and beauty, and eventually that would fade away. Indeed, the next group of men to come knocking at my grandmother's home were the uncles of the man that would be my grandfather. My grandfather had not picked my grandmother, but his uncles had seen her and they wanted her to marry into their family. When my grandmother got married, she was the second makoti[18] of the family. My grandmother describes my grandfather as a good-looking and sweet-talking man who did not like to hurt people, but he was also dishonest.

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After my grandmother's first child, she started hearing rumours that her husband was cheating with another woman on the same farm. There were also rumours that he had a child outside of the marriage that was being looked after by his mother, while my grandmother went to work with her child on her back. My grandmother says, 'So after I heard the rumours, the following morning, I took my baby, put her on my back as usual. I walked out like I was going to work, but I stopped two houses down, hid by a tree and waited, waited to see if this rumour was true. Indeed, I saw this woman walking to my in-laws house with a baby, leaving without it, then walking to work. Just to confirm, I went back to the house and there they were, my mother-in-law with the baby on her lap. I asked her whose baby it was. With all the rage in my voice, she could not deny anything. I had always been afraid of my in-laws, but things changed that day. At that very moment, my mother-in-law was afraid of me. I had become the demon they had been brewing for months, and at that very moment, we both knew it. I walked back to work, and when I got there, the old lady my husband had a child with was washing dishes. I had not decided what to do with her but I had this fire ball in my throat that was burning to come out.

[18] A newlywed woman.

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She triggered me when she said it was too hot to carry a baby on my back and that I should find it a nanny. I dropped the plates I was drying on the floor and screamed '*uthini mfazi ndini*, what are you saying, lady?' I was young and I had a baby on my back but that, day I told myself I was going to brave it up and beat this woman, and I did with a tiny body and baby on my back, I knocked her down.'

My grandmother stayed with her husband, and had four more kids with him. Her husband took on a second young wife, which was a hard for her to accept, but she knew she could not go back home, as she would be called names such as '*umabuya kwendeni*.'

The new young wife was married only a year and she left; she could not take their husband. My grandmother recalls how they were made to wash clothes for all the family members in the river and how, as the young makoti's, the old makoti, being the first wife of the family, bullied them into washing her husband's clothes while she sat and smoked her long pipe by the river. One day, my grandmother got tired of this and only washed her husband's clothes. When they got to the house, the old makoti told on them. My grandmother stood firm, saying she refused to wash anyone's clothes except her own husband's. A meeting was called at the house. My grandmother stood firm throughout, until her wish was granted and new rules about the washing were done. My grandmother recalls many other attempts by her in-laws to try and silence her big presence. Once, she was sleeping with her first-born in her arms, when she smelt smoke coming from over her head. She realised immediately that it was her head wrap. There was no way she could have caught fire in her room, and knew immediately that it was her in-laws trying to burn her in her sleep. She says she just took the headwrap off her head, put the little flame out, and went back to sleep.

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Notes, observations and finding meanings:

Much of Ms Dumile's strength comes from her being a very independent individual who stands up for herself. We see this right at the beginning, when she keeps turning down men's offers of marriage. She is then asked by her uncles - they do not tell her what to do, they ask and reason with her, which again makes us aware that she is not a pushover, even as a teenager. She embodies what Dr Khanyisile Litchfield-Tshabalala, and many other African authors, speak of when talking about precolonial African women, who were leaders ad equals, as opposed to being beneath men. However, once colonial/Christian ideas were assimilated into African values, women were placed in subservient positions (Litchfield Tshabala, 2022). Litchfield Tshbalala centres her argument of powerful black women away from the popular discourse of Asente woman, but brings in South African examples of powerful and respected pre-colonial women, and asserts that patriarchy did not exist in pre-colonial South Africa. Rather, patriarchy was assimilated into culture during colonisation and through Christian values, and this was further entrenched during apartheid, an ideology that

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was also centred around strong Christian values (Litchfield Tshabalala, 2022). We also get to see how some of her strength comes from enduring abuse from her husband and in-laws, which brews a lot of anger in her, but she continues to resist, pushing back against everything her in-laws and husband throw at her. There is a sense that she refuses to back down, refuses to be seen as one who has failed her marriage by walking out, but she is also afraid of the humiliation. Survival requires Ms Dumile to constantly push back with force. Her in-laws are afraid of her, and try to sabotage her stay as a wife on multiple occasions, and silence her big presence. Even though Ms Dumile portrays a strong front in her marriage, her in-laws, the patriarchal oppression, custom and the '*mabuya kwendeni*' proverb does silences her.

Ms Dumile is seen as a strong black woman, a term popularly used for African-American women. Strong black women are often a result of multiple layers of oppression, from patriarchy, sexism and racism. They constantly push back against violence, and have to be resilient without showing vulnerability. As a result of this, they become very good at portraying strength without weakness. The strength is needed for the upkeep of their families, to care and provide for them, while also being caretakers of their communities, but they often neglect themselves (Abrams, Hill & Maxwell, 2019). In Elaine Salo's (2018) work, *Respectable Mothers, Tough men and Good Daughters*, she speaks of *moeders*, who are respectable mothers in Mannenberg, a coloured township in Cape Town, where her research is based. These women are the backbone of their communities, ensure the survival of their households financially, and are at the forefront of housing. They are resilient, endure suffering, are patient and knowledgeable, and therefore qualify for the *moeder* title, which is a respected position in the community. The discourse of strong black women which is popular in America, and Salo's *moeders* in the context of coloured women living in Mannenberg, both share similar qualities to Ms Dumile. Ms Dumile is resilient, she works, is the protector of her children, and endures a lot of suffering.

The black woman who suffers in silence and is the caretaker of her children was a popular narrative for black women during the struggle. During apartheid, black women protested as militant mothers, who ensured the survival and political rights of their children, not for themselves (Mohali, 2017). Women were not seen as individuals, but rather as mothers whose suffering was silenced, as the black male struggle against the state was pushed to the forefront (Daniel, 2011). There is a self-silencing and silencing that Ms Dumile endures, both personally and externally. Strong black women are known to suffer from self-silencing,

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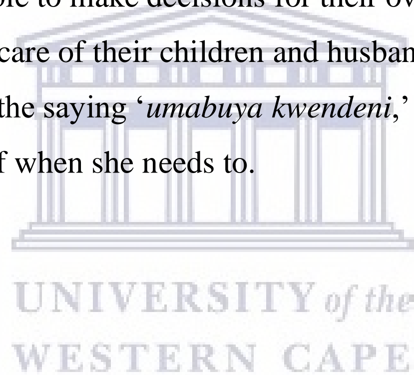
which often leads to various forms of mental distress. Self-silencing involves putting others' needs before their own, and avoiding conflict to maintain relationships. Ms Dumile is self-sacrificial in her endurance in the difficult marriage. However, I also cannot deny her agency. She is constantly pushing back against the oppression, whether it is through confronting her in-laws, who try to silence her bold presence, or preventing herself from having more children. The main binder that keeps Ms Dumile in her marriage is the proverb '*umabuya kwendeni*.' Within the African context, proverbs are used as a guide to navigate ways of life, and are passed from one generation to the next. Some proverbs can be very oppressive towards women (Malaudzi *et al*., 2015), such as '*umabuya kwendini*,' which insinuates that one has failed in their marriage when they leave. This saying only targets women, which then seems to put the burden on women to make the marriage work, or they are responsible for the consequences of its failure. This can be very oppressive for women, as it forces them to persevere and not leave, even when things are bad. Such sayings and proverbs put women in a position where they are not able to make decisions for their own lives. They are also not expected to complain, but take care of their children and husband first (Phiri *et al*., 2015). Ms Dumile is strongly silenced by the saying '*umabuya kwendeni*,' yet she continues to fight for herself and stands up for herself when she needs to.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Thandiwe Msebenzi, *Ndilindile* (2019)
(I am waiting)

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Story 8: The bottle fight

It was not unusual in my upbringing to see boys in the family looking after the small ones. Changing their nappies, washing them, and putting them on their backs to take them to kindergarten. In my grandmother's house, there were no boys' and girls' chores. Boys cooked and went on their knees to clean the floor and polish the stoep.

My grandmother had done well with all her children and grandchildren in terms of discipline, but with my older sister Sharon, she struggled. She was the unruly child. She never followed, she led and was outspoken, and said things as they were and she did as she pleased. I remember, one morning, I was getting ready to go to school. My mother was abroad, and it was the late 1990s. I must have been in grade two. I had overslept and everyone at home had gone to work. Nonetheless, I quickly got dressed because luckily my grandmother used to wash us before we went to bed. The time was 7:45, school was a 30-minute walk, but I was going to take the scary shortcuts and run to school (the scary shortcuts have gang signs and one is almost always having to tiptoe and jump over blood trails and broken glass). As I stepped out the door, I saw my sister walking through the gate topless with just a bra on, with her top soaking with blood covering her arm. I asked her if she was okay, she pushed me aside and violently said 'move.' (I don't

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remember a day when my sister did not respond violently to anything). She then said she wanted to find her clinic card so she could go and get stiches. I wanted to tell her I was late for school, but she barely let me finish my sentences as she dragged me to the house again. I looked for the clinic card with tears rolling down my cheeks, while she got dressed in her high-school uniform. When we found the card, she ordered me to go to the clinic with her because she said she was feeling dizzy. The whole way to the clinic, I ran behind her, holding her heavy school blazer (she went to a model C catholic school in town, which my uncle always blamed for her carefree bad behaviour). She strutted in front of me with her long model-like legs. I could never keep up with her. When we got to the clinic, we were attended to quite quickly. She was taken straight to get stiches, while I sat in the waiting area. When we were done, she walked me to school. I was scared to death at how late I was, but she said she would handle it, and I knew she could.

Years later, she told me about that day, how she had been coming back from a party in the wee hours of the morning with her friends, when they got attacked. Luckily, she had picked up a beer bottle and attacked the people back, hitting one of them on the head. She and her friends were then able to escape. As she was running, she had kept the broken bottle in case the attackers came back for them, but then she tripped and fell on it, and that's how she got hurt.

Notes, observations and finding meanings:

Sharon is described as unruly, independent, bossy and outspoken. She is also very courageous and does not flinch in the face of pain, similar to her grandmother. Both Sharon and Ms Dumile have strong personalities; they resist and fight back to ensure their survival. Sharon, however, is of a different generation to her grandmother; she is a teenager in the 90s. Part of her survival is to navigate a violent neighbourhood, which she does by being a physical fighter. Bernard and Carlile (2021) argue that such young girls learn to navigate violence through various strategies, which proves their immense agency.

Sharon is outspoken, courageous and independent, seen as bad behaviour by her uncle, which points to a form of silencing. The silencing of girls ranges from social pressure to gender role socialisation, with expectations of what good girls should be (Simmons, 2009). Good girls are not meant to speak out, be confrontational, be goal-driven or hone their strength. This limits a girl's full expression of who they can be, as they are seen as rejecting their femininity (Simmons, 2009). Sharon is not limited by feminine norms: she is confrontational and makes her own rules. Much like Ms Dumile, she deploys physical aggression and is not afraid to fight, which challenges the notion of what constitutes a 'good girl' (Simmons, 2009).

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Thandiwe Msebenzi, *Imbewu* (2019)
(a seed)

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Story 9: We don't display vulnerability here

I always admired how well my cousins washed their white school shirts, vests and socks, and made them so clean, they would glow on the washing line like pearls. They did this with no bleach, just green Sunlight soap and handwash. I made many attempts to try do this with my own clothes by hand, but always failed. It also did not help that my dad preferred doing the washing himself. Each week, he would request all the clothes, then pile them next to him in the garden, and would spend the whole day washing clothes by hand, while engaging in conversation with neighbours and passers-by. For those reasons, in my defence, I never really got a chance to learn. My aunt always told me that my hands were not firm. She would lightly tap on my hands and say, 'Athule, how are you going to work with those soft princess hands, but I guess these days woman are educated and don't work hard, they just press computers.' To my aunt, I was the soft child she always worried about, and I stood out like a sore thumb in everything, always the first one to cry.

My aunt, on the other hand, never showed any vulnerability. When her first-born daughter passed away, she was at the forefront of making sure she had a grand funeral. She coordinated all her young nieces, and made us practice her daughter's favourite hymn for the part in the funeral where we gave a tribute. She bought us all matching dresses and headbands with black roses. Throughout the whole process, she did not shed a tear. Even my cousins were keeping it together, while I bawled my eyes out on the church pulpit. I could not take it anymore, I had been keeping it in all along. When we got to the cemetery, I was standing right behind my aunt, with my ten-year-old body stuffed in heels, sweating and exhausted (my mother was not happy with the heels, but no one argues with my aunt Mandlakazi). I heard my aunt let out a sound; she was not crying, there were no tears. It sounded like a hand had dug deep into her throat and her stomach, pulling out her intestines; it sounded like her whole being was uprooting violently and she was fighting for dear life. The sound was unbearable. I saw family members coming to console her, but she just raised her hands, signalling them to leave her alone, and because they knew better, they did.

Notes, observations and finding meanings:

Aunt Mandlakazi, much like Ms Dumile, her mother, takes pain and carries it in in her body without even flinching. At the cemetery, is she is unable to cry, but her body gives in and the pain is unleashed through an 'unbearable sound.' This part of the story draws our attention to how aunt Mandlakazi does feel pain, as much she presents as tough. In this instance, she has tried to keep it together while proceeding with her duties, as she has to organise her daughter's funeral, carrying herself with strength.

In this story, much like the other stories that include Athule, we learn that Athule is the soft child of the family.

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Athule is also not physically strong, and also lacks the stamina that her cousins have when it comes to physical work. Her aunt Mandlakazi also alludes to this when she asks Athule where she will work, as her soft hands would disable her from getting a job one day. This comment could also be a radical act by her aunt, fostering a strength which is often stifled in girls. On the other hand, it could also be reinforcing the strong black woman trope, which does not allow black women to show weakness. She also uses the words ‘princess hands’ to refer to Athule’s delicate nature; a princess is also of a particular class that would not be required to do hard labour. She also says woman of today do not work hard, which seems to speak again to the physically taxing work of being a black woman of her generation, who acted as providers, doing intense physical and manual labour, while also being caretakers, requiring both physical and emotional strength.

Athule and her aunt’s interaction shines a spotlight on South African black women’s and girls’ intersectional femininities. Intersectionality helps us identify the various layers that a person’s identity can have, which determines how society treats them (Crenshaw, 2017). The history of South Africa required black women to exercise their strength in both emotional and physical ways, and this challenges euro-centric hegemonic constructions of femininity, which have been contested by black feminists as not applicable to the unique experiences of black women (Healy-Clancy, 2017). Athule, the quiet gentle girl, who shows signs of ideal western femininity, falls short of the tough femininities that are expected of her by her aunt. Throughout the stories, when comparing Athule to the other females, she sticks out as the least strong one. Despite her upbringing in a violent neighbourhood, living amongst physically and verbally strong women, and being encouraged to be more tough, she remains the same. Despite this, there is an undeniable agency within Athule, which is shown in how she navigates her violent neighbourhood, and the choices she makes to keep herself safe, such as running to school while taking the scary routes. This story points to the complexities of black femininities, which can be soft with agency in harsh circumstances, but are required to also be hard and tough to ensure survival.

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3.4. Softness in private

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Thandiwe Msebenzi, *Utata undiphotha inwele* (2019)
(my father plaits my hair)
When I was young, my father used to plait my hair every evening

Story 10: The beautiful carpet

'*Vuka ta'ka*[19] *Athule Vuka*! (wake up)', my mother screams at my dad. It's 5am, and dad is not having it. We are all sleeping on the same bed, my mother in the middle, me on her right, with my dad on the left, facing the door. My dad is not budging; instead, he's moaning. My mother pulls the blankets away from him and pushes him of the bed. 'Wake up and go find a job, I can't take this anymore. Wake up and take a bath and do what other men are doing and go wait at the robots on Duinefontein road. Go!' I hear my father wake up, still moaning, but not too loud to upset my mother. A few minutes later, he is done, and making porridge. My mother wakes me up at about 5:25 to get me ready for school. I am already awake, though. I take a bath and get dressed while my mother makes me lunch. At 6:00 am, my father is ready to leave and I am having breakfast in the kitchen.

[19] Short for *Tata ka*, *Tata* means Dad. In this case, *Ta'ka Athule* directly translates to 'Athule's Dad.'

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My mother screams at him at the door, 'Ta'ka Athule, how are you going to walk out of here empty-handed, you need to take something, a working tool.' My mother goes to fetch a painting roller and hands it to him. He takes it, says nothing, and leaves.

6:25am, I am ready to leave. My bus is at 6:45am; there is another one at 7am if I miss that one. 'Have a good day, my baby, mama loves you,' my mother tells me in English. I respond back in English, 'see you later, mom.' My teachers at my new school told my mother that I was very bright, I just needed to practice English at home. My mom says I am lucky that I went straight to grade five and was not taken back to grade four, because model C schools make kids from townships school repeat one year.

When I get to the bus stop at 6:40am, I see my father on the other side of the road still waiting with a long line of other men, who are carrying building tools. I watch as all the men rush like bees every time a car or a bakkie stops by them. My dad is not used to this, and something tells me he is not fast enough to get to the bakkies and be one of the lucky men in. My grandmother used to always say that my daddy was weak, and he could not do basic manly things, but these men are aggressive and my father is not like that. Another car stops; it's a small car, I see him running, yes, he will get in. As he is about to open the door, he is pushed by two men who jump in the car and close the door in his face. I want to run to him and hug him. He looks defeated, and like he wants to walk back home, which is just fifteen minutes away. My bus arrives, and I hop in. It's full, as usual. I walk through the bodies and stand in the aisle. As we drive off, I keep looking at my dad through the window. He is sitting down now on the curb, with three other men with tools. There is a woman in the bus who is preaching, '*Ungamlahli uthixo*, never lose hope in God.' I wish my daddy could hear this.

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I arrive back at home late, as I had tennis practice after school. My mother greets me in English and asks about my day. I tell her I want to change sports and maybe play soccer, because I can't relate to tennis. It strikes 6pm and my father is still not back. At around 8, during supper, my father arrives with white dust and paint all over him. He's carrying a long carpet on his shoulders. He walks in like he is defeated, but has the biggest shy smile on his face. He hands my mother money, which he is not very excited about, but he is really excited about the carpet. He lays the carpet on our kitchen floor/living room of our new home. The carpet is big, and almost fills the whole room. It's beautiful and intricate, and looks like someone spent their time making it with love. It's ours, he says. He does not tell us how he struggled to hop on the cars, but he tells us he was helping a Muslim man who was painting his house and throwing away things from his storage. Through the job, he got the carpet.

Notes, observations and finding meanings:

In story 10, we get to know Athule's father as a soft man, who is unemployed and is considered unable to do 'manly work' by his mother-in-law. Athule's mother is the breadwinner who takes her child to a private school, and financially looks after the whole family. Masculinity and hard work are almost synonymous with one another (Donaldson, 1993), and being the breadwinner is traditionally a male role, making money and providing

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for his whole family; thus, money is a symbol of power, which makes it important for men to be the breadwinners. A shift in this position, where the woman becomes the breadwinner, can cause men who cannot provide to feel powerless (Janssens, 1993; Meisenbach, 2010; April & Soomar, 2013). The other side of women being breadwinners is that it can create an egalitarian space in the home, where men take on other more feminine roles, shifting the binaries. The photograph, *utata undiphotha inwele*, shows an egalitarian space that challenges norms, as I lay on my father's lap while he plaits my hair, a ritual he did to prepare me for school. However, when that is not the case, and the woman has to continue doing duties at home, it can be overwhelming (Chinyakata, Raselekoane & Gwatimba, 2019). Hence, Athule's mother, who seems to be tired of Athule's father not getting a job, abruptly demands that he go find a job.

Athule's dad struggles with the aggression and competitiveness to get into the cars that seek helpers. We also know from Athule that, 'he is not that kind of man.' In Langa's work on masculinities, he elaborates on how men tend to compete with one another, as they see each other as suitable opponents to show off their dominance (Langa, 2020). In the case of Athule's dad trying to get into the cars, we can see that he is not able to compete in the manner that other men do. In not being able to compete, he is marginalised, and potentially misses out on attaining a job and accessing a form of power. Hegemonic masculinities tend to silence or subordinate other masculinities, making them invisible even though they also exist (Connell, 1995; Ratele, 2016). There is a mode of being a man that Athule's dad does not fit into, and will be punished for: his lack of aggression, and apparent lack of competence, easily makes him subordinate to hegemonic masculinities.

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Story 11: WhatsApp message

Hi, Sharon

I am actually so disappointed in you.
Drinking and being a drunkard, bully
In front of your daughter, really
REALLY NOW, SISI!

How could you subject her to that?
She called me crying yesterday
That you were drunk and that I
Needed to fetch her at 11:30pm
At night.

How could you subject her
To the very same thing that
Tata subjected us to, do
You understand how much
You are traumatising your
Daughter.

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Do you remember the times
I used to call you crying
Because dad was drunk and bullying
Everyone in the house and
Literally almost drove
Mama to a stroke.

Do you remember the day he
Died, I called you to come over
To the house, mama had fainted
From all the blood tata was vomiting out.
He died in your hands with his body arching
Over the toilet seat.

At his funeral, I never cried tears of pain
You did but I never, I cried tears of anger.
I wanted him dead.
He had caused too much pain to all of
Us, and worst of all to mama.
At the funeral, people spoke about
How kind he was, soft-spoken
Good-hearted he was,
How he could never hurt a fly.

Indeed, we were lucky to be raised
By such a man but I refused to mull
Over those memories because the
Pain he caused us surpasses
All of that.

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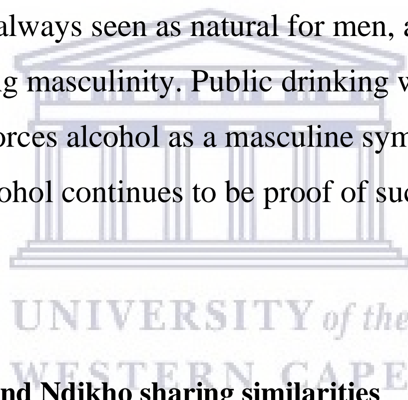
Sis, do you know that your daughter
Wrote me a letter last year

In her letter, she wrote that she
Wants you to die, so she can
Live her life in peace,
with a new mother.

Notes, observations and finding meanings:

Story 9 introduces us to a different side of Athule's father, who sounds like a good man in the way that people speak about him, yet his actions have left damaging effects on Athule and her family. Athule's father may have been a soft man, but that did not stop him from exercising his masculinity through drinking. Writing within the western context, Eriksen (1999) notes that drinking was always seen as natural for men, and young boys would partake in drinking as a form of attaining masculinity. Public drinking was also acceptable and preserved for men, which reinforces alcohol as a masculine symbol (Eriksen, 1999). Tolerating large amounts of alcohol continues to be proof of successful manhood (Zamboanga *et al*., 2017).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Story 12: Bra Ncesh and my friend Ndikho sharing similarities

He's always sitting with his body almost curled up, like someone who's trying to protect something. Sometimes, he sits cross-legged and he speaks with his arms and hands moving in very lax gestures. He has a voice so soft, it's like there is cotton stuck on his throat. He also likes to laugh. That's my aunt Mandlakazi's husband, Ncoshe. Aunt Mandlakazi is my mother's youngest sister, a force to be reckoned with. She only speaks once, and she is very sharp. But uncle Ncoshe is the opposite. Before he married my aunt, and they were still boyfriend and girlfriend, he used to park his car outside my grandmother's house, and ask one of us to call my aunt to meet him. My grandmother was very strict, there was no dating under her roof. People don't date, they just get married. That was, and still is, the standard in my family. Getting out of the house was always a mission for my aunt to meet with her boyfriend, so as children, we were always messengers to and from the car. Every time we came back to the car to tell brah Ncesh (uncle Ncoshe's nickname we used at the time) that usisi, my aunt, just needed time, she was cleaning, brah Ncesh would tell us beautiful stories that came with songs, which over time we learnt and would sing with him.

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One of the stories was about a fish and the sun, and how the sun would always try to get the fish out of the water by sweet talking it through song. Now that I look back, it's fitting that we were told this story every time brah Ncesh tried to get my aunt out the house. My aunt being strong, and tired of sneaking out, she put a door in her room, which faced outside, and through that door, she would sneak brah Ncesh into her room. My aunt had built this, following in the footsteps of her younger brother, who had built himself a room attached to the house with an outside door to bring his girlfriends in and out, which my grandmother somehow turned a blind eye to.

When my aunt had a baby, I guess my grandmother became more lenient. We saw bra Ncesh coming inside the house more often to see the baby, and also sleeping over for long periods of time. As kids, we would always hog my aunt's room. When bra Ncesh was there, he would take photos of us and tell us stories. On other days, we stayed far from my aunt's room; she was very fierce, with a permanent angry look on her face. One day, I saw brah Ncesh's work uniform. All this time, I never knew brah Ncesh was in the army. This shocked me, as he was a tiny man, not short, but of moderate height. He spoke so softly and had these arms that dangled like spaghetti and were so fragile-looking. Later in his life, he drove excavators and broke mountains for a living, again so out of character. In family funerals, he dug the graves and made the men bigger than him stand still and watch him raise and drop the hand digger tool effortlessly.

Later in my late teens, I had a close guy friend called Ndikho. Very similar to Uncle Ncoshe, he was much shorter, with a bigger body structure; he also liked sitting with his legs crossed close to his body. Soft-spoken, seemingly fragile arms when in motion, and soft gestures when he spoke. He used to tell me stories about his upbringing and how he was short in body size but respected, because he could do things that ordinary boys his age could not do. He said he was only good because he practised and he always pushed himself to be the best at whatever games he participated in. He always wanted to prove to his friends that he was good at something, because he was short and prone to being teased and bullied.

I remember my friend Vuziwe asking if he was gay. I asked why she said that. She responded that his mannerisms were very feminine. I had never really thought of him as gay. We were young, in our late teens and trying to figure ourselves out. I do remember him, though, before he went to the mountain, he said he wanted to be macho and not be so soft. He also told me about an incident where another boy had hit on him and even tried to kiss him at a party. He seemed spooked by this experience. I never responded. I suspected his best friend, Zipho, was gay though; he had a very feminine voice and was a very warm soul, very content with who he was, always with a concerned look on his face. I patiently waited for him to come out but he never did. Girls chased after him but he did not really seem to keep them for long.

When Ndikho came back from the mountain, he had really changed. His voice was deeper and he had also become a don't-mess-with-me kind of guy. He had cut all ties with his male best friend, Zipho. I don't know how going to the mountain changed him, but I know he made those decisions before he went. The only thing that had not changed was his sweet laugh. His soft personality came through when he laughed. He would cage into his body like a small mouse, then squeaky laugh. When we finished high school, Ndikho went to Europe on a soccer

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scholarship. Zipho and I both got accepted to UCT; he studied dance and I fine art (the first ones in our neighbourhood to study at UCT). In our years at uni, I watched Zipho flourish, rocking bum, hitting cornrows and killing that androgynous look. We were never close, although we shared a bond because we came from the same community and that could never be shaken. We went out partying together from time to time. One night, we were in the shuttle on our way to res, coming from Jug night in Newlands, he asked me if I was seeing someone. I told him I was seeing a Zulu boy named Vusi and I was smitten. I asked him if he had found love yet in uni. He told me about his first love who never loved him back. He didn't mention the name, but said they had been best friends in high school and one night he professed his love and tried to kiss them, but they refused and never spoke to him again. At that moment, I knew he was talking about Ndikho. I laid my head on his shoulder as a comfort gesture, he rested his head on mine and said slowly, and a little teary, 'It was Ndikho, Athule it will al ways be him.'

Notes, observations and finding meanings:

Brah Ncoshe and Ndikho are similar in mannerism, soft-looking men who are seemingly very soft in persona. Ndikho struggles with his soft nature, and to combat it, he is always trying to prove himself. We do not get to know if brah Ncoshe struggles with his soft side, but we see him taking on very masculine work, which makes him highly respected. Brah Ncoshe exercises his masculinity, while still being gentle with his nieces. He is very comfortable in his body and how he presents himself, and seems to be able to balance his soft side and masculine side. Ndikho is very aware of his soft side, and it is not a trait that he likes. He constantly tries to remove it from himself. Brah Ncesh and Ndikho portray traditional masculine norms in public spaces; we see this is their competitiveness when amongst other men. In being competitive, men are able to establish themselves as dominant and masculine (Bird, 1996). Their soft sides, on the other hand, are not so pronounced; in Ndikhos's case, he wants to remove his soft side. From a young age, boys are told to remove any sign of weakness or vulnerability, even in everyday play. Feminine emotions are suppressed in boys, and emotional detachment is seen as strength. Those who are in touch with their emotions are excluded from masculinity (Bird, 1996).

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Story 13: A giant tree has fallen

I have vivid memories of the last *umthandazo*. It is an event that happens for a week at the home of the deceased. The church people, neighbours, family and friends congregate every evening to read the bible and offer words of comfort to the family of the deceased.

I remember seeing only four people in the full dining room. My cousin was sitting on my right, Sinazo, the one whose father we were burying. Opposite me, with the priest, was my grandmother's brother, who was mourning his nephew, who is my uncle and Sinazo's father. On my far right, my grandmother was sitting on her couch, wearing slippers and a blue blanket over her shoulders, in deep pain, mourning for her son, my uncle Sinazo's father, and nephew to my grandmothers' brother. The death hit all of us like a hurricane, and we are all caught up in a vicious cycle of mourning. I am not one for pets, but I allowed Blacky the puppy to curl up on my tummy after *umthandazo*, and I sat with him, feeling as vulnerable as he was. It was a strange short-lived moment, because I am really not a dog lover, I chase them away, but I just let Blacky sit there.

My uncle loved dogs. He treated them with care and bought them dog food, which he dished out in special plates. His dogs had beautiful shelters that he built. His dogs never became stray township dogs, but ate and stayed in our yard.
This is when we all stayed with my grandmother under one roof, before everyone slowly started moving out. Those were also my uncle's glory years. He was a young engineer, a Wits graduate. My grandmother was very proud of him; his certificates graced our dining room walls, some on my grandmother's room divider next to her ornaments, alongside his graduation pictures. He was the first to buy a car. It was a blue hatchback Ford, brand new from the box, as he would always boast. He also loved music and was a collector of vinyls, which he would blast on his hi-fi, which used vinyl at the top and had a section for cassettes at the bottom. I remember him for his generosity, almost too good-hearted at times, but that was also coupled with deep anger and … I don't want to use the word violence. He was a very strong man, and was never afraid to use his strength. We were afraid of him, but we also loved him. He was always playing Hulk, or some monster from a movie, and we would jump on him and karate him, and of course he would karate us back, and God knows we were not allowed to cry when he returned the beating back. When we cried, he would be upset and tell us we are weaklings, and chase us out of his room. We would run off to our parents crying, but go back to him the following day, and jump on him and karate him, and leave his room crying again. I swear, sometimes he treated us like we were his kid soldiers; he would make us break bricks with our hands and, when we failed, he would make us line up, facing the wall, and one by one, he would hit our heads on the walls and call us stupid *kaffirtjies*.[20] I remember one particular day, this is the day I stopped playing with him, he strangled me, I thought I was going to die. I screamed and cried. My father had to come to the rescue, thank God he was visiting that day. He called my father and I weak, and he said he would never play with me again.

[20] Small kaffir. Kaffir was a racist slur used for South African blacks during apartheid.

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One could never really be angry with my uncle forever, it was impossible. He was a peacemaker and had a contagious laugh. He could choke slam you, like Big Show in the famous WWE Raw wrestling show on Etv, and then laugh. There you would be, curled up in the corner after the choke slam, laughing through your pain with him. Every morning, he drove me to school. He did this until he got married and moved to Wetton with his wife. I went to school in the Southern Suburbs, and he worked in Newlands. On our rides to school, I got to learn about his intellectual side, how he got distinctions for matric. He told me how he was the clown of the class, but was smart because he was always studying and working hard. He told me about Biko house, a name they gave to a house he occupied with his friends while he was still a student, where they smoked weed and had group study sessions and spoke about politics. On our rides, he always preached resilience and hardening up, and encouraged me to learn karate so I could learn to defend myself because I was too soft. The car rides from Nyanga to school, and sitting in traffic at 6:30am, were also my homework sessions with him. He was a very fast and impatient teacher, so I had to always be on the same pace as him. His intelligence and hard work also paid off at his job, where he received a promotion and he had coloured assistants, who he called his boys (in a very undermining, apartheid style kind of way). He would proudly tell me every day, 'Today, I made my boys work hard, yes, they must work hard, they are my boys, I am their boss.' When December came that year, he took all the children in the house and bought us Christmas clothes. He took us to the hair salon to get our braids done. I remember this day. I had never been to the hair salon before, my hair was always done at home, and braids were too expensive. I got cornrows with red and black beads at the ends. He bought us the latest clothes, and sealed our outfits with sunglasses. 'Money is nothing to me,' that's what he always said.

He got married the following year to a coloured woman named Chaulaine, who we had known for years. They had met when my uncle was a cleaner in the same company he became an engineer in. Chaulaine was the cleaning supervisor and slightly older than my uncle, and my uncle's job was to sweep the offices of the main engineers. How my uncle became the legendary engineer from being a cleaner is a story we were told over and over by our proud grandmother. In my grandmother's voice, 'Your uncle was brilliant from birth, a very clever child. You know, when he passed his grade 12 with flying colours, distinctions, I told him "well, my boy, you are in Cape Town now, your grade 12 is nothing if you are black, your job is to be a labour boy. Please don't act smart when you get to your job because chances are you will be working for people who don't even have a grade 12. Just be quiet and do your job, don't open up about your grade 12, clever blacks get fired." You know he used to walk to Wynberg on foot and door-to-door, he would walk in the white people's homes and ask for gardening jobs. Shame, one day, my son called me saying he was in hospital. I went to see him, he had bandages all over him. He told me, while he was doing his rounds looking for a job, one of the home owners let his dogs at him and they chased him and ate him, but he managed to escape. My son did not give up, he continued looking for a job with all the pains on his body. After months of looking, he got a job as an office sweeper, and one day, those big guys at the top had a maths problem. My son was there in the office cleaning. When they left to take a smoke break, my clever son solved the maths problem and left the office. The following day, they called him and asked him to help them. When the news came that they were going to take my child to Wits to study engineering, and all his tuition and needs would be paid for, I said, "THIXO YAPHELA INDLALA" (oh Lord, no more poverty).'

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I had nothing to say, when we were told to go say our last words at the funeral. But I spoke to him when we had to view his body at the morgue. He had fresh scars on his face; yep, that was him, always fighting. He fought tirelessly through his entire life; he fought at work and stood up for himself. He fought boldly for respect at work, was fired many times in different jobs, and fought with the many wives he married through his journey. He was resilient and never one to ask for help, even when life and loan sharks stripped him to his last penny and spat him out to the streets, he still fought. When I saw him sleeping peacefully in that wooden coffin, his face pale and fresh scars on his face, I wished him a good rest.

Notes, observations and finding meanings:

In story 13, Athule reflects on her uncle, who is the complete opposite of all the male interactions in her family so far. This uncle is strong, physically fit, a fighter, and encourages Athule to be a fighter too. The uncle also strongly portrays perfection through his mother's eyes, and his strength and harshness are never questioned as wrong. The uncle exercises his power in very performative ways, and is celebrated, not silenced. Masculinity is associated with making one's power public (Langa, 2020). We see this in Athule's uncle, as well as Ndikho in story 12, who hides his soft side and is constantly thriving to be competitive, and brah Ncoshe, who in public displays his strength in his career and in family ceremonies.

In his teenage years, Athules's uncle played the class clown, while studying in private at night. Masculinity is often constructed as being disruptive at school. When young men follow school rules, behave and obey their teacher, they may be subordinated by other boys. Hegemonic masculinity prescribes set ways of existing for boys at school, which regulates their behaviour (Phoenix & Frosh, 2001). In the research that Phoenix and Frosh (2001) did, they found that, at school, boys did not associate being smart with masculinity. In Malose Langa's book on black Masculinity in a South African township, he observes that academic boys have to be aligned with some form of violent masculinity to gain protection at school (2020). While one can be publicly violent and display dominant forms of masculinity in public, the men in the stories so far, including Athule's uncle, express alternative masculinities or softness in their private spaces.

Athule's uncle is always trying to prove his dominance and power, not only at home, but in the work space too. In his work space, he calls his co-workers, coloured men who assist him, his boys, and himself the boss.

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Earlier in the story, Athule’s grandmother explains how she asked him to always be submissive in the Cape Town working environment, even though he could potentially be smarter than those who hired him. This speaks very much to how colonialism and apartheid constructed black masculinities as subordinate to white, and savage, rather than intelligent (Mngadi, 1998; Frazer, 2007; Bradach, 2017). This also speaks to how hierarchies were created between coloured and black people, with coloured people above black people (Adhikari, 2009). Athule’s uncle’s story brings us to the intersectionality of a black man during apartheid, who was beneath white and coloured men, and forced into subordination. While being subordinated and systematically stripped of manhood, he still has to play breadwinner, while upholding some sort of masculinity. To assert his dominance post-apartheid, the uncle subordinates his co-workers by calling them boys, even though they are his equals democratically. For violent masculinities to exist and attain power, it has to subordinate another, often a weaker person (Langa, 2020). In Athule’s uncle’s case, he subordinated his co-workers, who are at lower rank at work than he is.

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Thandiwe Msebenzi, *Asimboni amakhwenkweni* (2019)

"Asimboni amakhwenkweni" is childhood song that was often sang to boys or girls who are seen playing with the opposite gender. In this work, "Asimboni amakhwekweni" refers to boys who plays with girls, or girls' games, who is teased and called names such as sissy boy, which leads to him playing his games in private.

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Story 14: Sweet Toto

'It happened in a blink. I was on Vanguard Drive, on my way to drop some groceries for mama, when I heard a tap on my window. It was a young boy, I still remember his face, tapping my window with a gun, signalling me to open the car. I just pressed the accelerator, I must have lost control of the car from shock, because I went straight for the robots ahead of me. Please come fetch me, the towing company is here, they are impatient, they want to take the car. I tried calling sis, and everyone else who is close by, but no one is picking up their phones.'

'Okay I will be there.'

'Thanks, Toto.'

When Toto arrived, my car had already been towed, and the robot I hit was bending over. I hit my car in the middle and it was written off, but I survived. When Toto arrived, he did not say anything, he just gave me a long hug and I cried on his shoulders. The hug felt like an hour, but he would not let me go until he felt my breathing calm down. We got in the car, and he asked me if I needed to be dropped off at my house in Pinelands or my mother's home. I did not want to startle my mother on a Sunday morning, especially after she had been to church, so Toto drove me home. On the way, we were both quiet; it was very common for us not to say much to one another. We have always been the quietest in the family, but when we did talk, we could talk for days.

He drove in my yard and parked his car. We went into the house and he offered to bake me scones while I took a bath. In the bath, I remember weeping again, this time not from shock, but for my car. Yes, it was getting old, but it was my first car, and I had been through the most with it. From the streets of Mitchells Plain, as a young teacher, to living in KZN with Vusi for my first lecturing job that lasted years, to my recent separation from Vusi and moving back to Cape Town at age 35 and purchasing a house in Pinelands. My car was always there with me, being the most constant and loyal part of my life.

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When I was done bathing and dressing, the sweet warm smell of vanilla essence and warm fluffy dough had filled my whole house. Toto used to make scones for me when I was young after school, this was our secret. I was not allowed to tell anyone because, if I did, he would have probably gotten a hiding from my grandmother for wasting flour. When I got to the kitchen, Toto was smiling. When I asked him why he was smiling, he said, 'so you sold off your car to those towing scammers for R1000. No man, Athule man, no man, cousin, those people took advantage of you.' We both laughed about it. I teased him about how, even if he was there, he would not have argued with those big guys because he was a man of God now. The joke was on him now. We laughed again, and he served me my tea and scones. We had not really seen each other since I came back from KZN, so we had a lot to catch up on, from our childhood to his transformation as a changed man. He really had changed, or maybe not changed, he just came back to his true self. Toto had always been the sweet one, but it's a jungle out there for black young boys growing up in the townships. A child needs one hell of a backbone.

When Toto was in his third year of his studies in Commerce, his ex-girlfriend accused him of attempted murder after an argument they had, where she said he had pointed a gun at her. His ex-girlfriend was a law student, following a family line of lawyers. Toto missed his last exams and spent those days in jail. He got bail, but the case hung over his life for years after that, and even though there was little evidence, he had a criminal record that he could not remove. The ex-girlfriend had also vowed to make his life miserable. We always thought he would marry Nwabi,

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the ex-girlfriend, they were all the hashtags, #blackexcellence #couplegoals. They were both young and driven, and Toto had managed to pull himself up and exist beyond the township boys gangster stereotype. He was drug-free, a bookworm with an obsession for gadgets. He was making and breaking computers before I even knew what those big TV-looking white monitors were used for.

After this experience, we saw Toto change right before our eyes. He started drinking a lot, and his crowd changed. He always had money, but we never knew where he made it and how, because he could not work, and he was a dropout with a criminal record. We also heard he had gotten a girl pregnant, and he was an absent father. I was in high school at the time, and we were still very close. I would often confront him about his reckless life, and he would tell me that he is doing what he can to survive. He once came to the house with a bandage on his shoulder. He hid it from my mother, but I saw it and asked him about it. He told me he had been in a fight at Dinagwe, which was a famous big tavern in my neighbourhood. He said it was his rivals coming for revenge, but he handled them. I will forever have vivid memories of these fights he had. He always told me about them with excitement. It was always so odd for me to see him this way. It was so different to the sweet Toto that we knew. He got the name, 'sweet Toto,' because he always played with girls and he knew all the female games. The girls would come and fetch him at our house for big game tournaments that they would organise. He was already in his teens by then. His mother, my aunt Mandlakazi, fought all his fights when the other boys beat him.

This Toto was different, though. He would brag about how he knocked people out with punches and then stabbed them and twisted the knives. He told me once that he stabbed a rival seven times. I remember asking him why he was so angry because to me, every time he stabbed yet another rival, I just saw a really angry person, and not an innocent man getting his revenge. When I asked him this question, I remember it took him aback. I remember that day: he had a hangover, he looked terrible, he was thin, and had really stopped looking after himself. He responded a minute later by saying, 'people, people have made me like this. I am angry because all my life I was weak, what good did that do me. I was teased for playing with girls, teased for being meek. Growing up, that made me angry. Even when I went to church, I was teased and called pastor. When I could not defend myself, or did not want to fight, I was beaten by other boys. I was even weak to Nwabi. Too weak. If I had shown Nwabi who I was and been more assertive, she would have never done that nonsense. She took advantage of me because she knew I was weak.'

It's crazy how all of this is a distant memory now. We laugh about his life and his messy 20s all the time. He's 40 now, drives a Mercedes, runs his own IT business, and is that sweet humble Toto that he always was. When the scones were done, he offered to lend me one of his cars until I got back on my feet. I would have turned him down, but Pinelands is not for public transport commuters. When he leaves, I tell him that I am proud of him, even though he's older than me. I then say to him, ' Yazi Bhuti[21] (I use bhuti when I am going to be very sincere), we were all so happy when you started changing your ways, but I never asked you what made you change your old ways to become the person that you are right now.' He responded by saying, 'I realised my purpose. I think I was 23, I was at your house after a rough night, and you asked me why I was so angry, something along those lines. That question stayed with me for a long time. I continued with my ways and hung with the boys, and at the time, we made our money through tampering with ATMS, and of course, I was the brains behind creating the tech systems for the crew. When we got our money, we blew it on alcohol and expensive clothes. We made lots of money but we never did anything meaningful with it.

[21] Bhuti a respectful way to refer to a young man.

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At age 25, I had mastered a better system: we could hit people's accounts just sitting at home and on my laptop, but I was still making poor life decisions. I got Phumla pregnant and did not even love her. It was a one-night stand. We were always surrounded by girls because we had money. One week, we hit R200k and split it amongst the three of us. I bought myself a car, while the other guys blew their money as usual, in irresponsible ways. I had no idea what I would do with the car, but I knew I had to use it to generate income for the dry days, and we had many dry seasons in the job, especially after the R200k, we had to lie low. I started fetching kids from school using my car as a lift-club. But I had such terrible drinking habits that it was difficult to keep the job up. I was always borrowing petrol money from the kid's parents, and they would deduct it from the monthly fee they were paying me. I did not want to quit, though, because I was making honest money. The kids I took from their homes to school in the suburbs, they woke up at 4am in the morning and they would sleep in the car. They did this every day. I admired their drive and sense of purpose. They all wanted to be doctors and lawyers, they were so sure.

When the business started to pick up, I had to start drinking less, and my friends were starting to act funny, unhappy with my new business. I realised that to really grow, I needed to move away from the life I was living, and the company I kept. The only way I could do that was to go to church. It's cliché, I know, but I never went there to be saved. I needed to find a set of rules that would bind me. Churches have a lot of rules. I needed to follow a different pattern and rhythm in my life that was less self-destructive. At church, I did not find God, but I found me. It gave me peace of mind, and helped me get back to myself. I stopped drinking completely, which was one of the rules of the church. To my pleasant surprise, I also started gaining a lot of respect from people. My friends started moving themselves away from me, for they knew I was no longer part of them. There is a strange respect that one gets when you go to church, it's so fulfilling. Again, it's cliché, I know, but people just leave you alone. It's the kind of respect that I had been looking for all my life, especially as a timid child. At church, they wanted me to be a priest, but that was not my journey, I knew that. Church was just a guide I needed to learn about spirituality, get back to myself and align myself. I then decided to go back to uni and study Computer Science.

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He was silent after that, we both were. I was leaning over my stable door. I have always loved stable doors, they reminded me of home, and I had to have one in my new home. Toto was leaning with his back to his car with his arms folded. He looked up and said, 'and you, Miss Perfect, never hurt a fly in your life, why are you divorcing Vusi, mmmh cousin.' I remember looking at him and smiling while rolling my eyes, because goodness, I had skeletons in my closets too, especially with Vusi. He then continued, 'No, it's life, cousin. I know, you don't have to answer that. I remember him at your wedding; you were so in love with him. I remember feeling like there was something sinister about him. He looked like he hid his sinister side well, with his education and accolades, but you know, Athule, people like that always erupt eventually. Their traumas start to show themselves in various ways. He had a lot of charm about him, but he also seemed like the kind of dude who would kill you without you even realising that you were dying slowly. Unfortunately for you, Athule, you are the type that accepts things without fighting back, but this is life, cousin, you have to toughen up. This life is not for the faint-hearted. Anyway *cuz cuz,* keep well, okay, and good luck with your art, I am happy you are finally following your passion. If you need anything else just shout, okay.' He got in his car, I opened the gate, and he drove off.

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Notes, observations and finding meanings:

In the work, *Asimboni amakhwenkweni,* we see a boy playing a common female game, which he is playing indoors intentionally, to be unseen. The text beneath the work is a song that was sung when I was growing up, to boys or girls who play with the opposite gender. These songs were sung to discourage it, while also being discriminatory in the way name-calling is used, such as '*mantombini'* (the one who plays with girls, closely linked to sissy). Sweet Toto is different to all the boys and men throughout the stories, who tend to hide or suppress their softness. Sweet Toto plays with girls and openly rejects violent masculinity, opting for his books. Throughout his childhood, Sweet Toto has the protection of his mother, who fights for him, and the protection of his academics. Langa describes academic boys, who conform to school rules and do well, as mature, responsible and non-violent individuals. The desire to do well academically gives academic boys purpose, a sense of aspiration, and it also protects them from falling into risky behaviours and violence (Langa, 2020). Athule describes the township as a jungle for black boys growing up and still looking to find themselves. The economic inequalities, unemployment, violent neighbourhoods, lack of hope for the future, and the dominant culture of violent masculinities does not make it easy for young boys to enact alternative forms of masculinity (Ratele, 2016; Langa, 2020). Sweet Toto manages to pull himself out and exist beyond the township boys gangster stereotype, by staying in school and out of trouble, while also having the support of his mother, who fends for him.

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A turning point in Sweet Toto's life is when he is accused of attempted murder while in varsity, which leads him to dropping out, and he finds himself back in the townships, unemployed, with no qualification. He blames the reckless life he lives on his weakness, which he starts to reject by being involved in physical fights and risky behaviour. Sweet Toto's downfall is similar to one of Langa's participants in his book (2020), who does not fully succumb to violent masculinity, focusing on schoolwork instead. His financial difficulties make it hard for him to further his studies, he loses purpose, and finds himself swallowed by the dominant 'tsotsi' masculinities of the townships, where he attains some sort of power but ends up in jail (Langa, 2020). Unlike Langa's participant, who ends up in jail, Sweet Toto changes his ways by going to church. Religion can be a common act of desperation to change one's life around (Anderson, 2009). Church also offers socially acceptable behaviours, which the congregation is meant to participate in (Anderson, 2009). It is these socially acceptable rules that gain Sweet Toto his respect back from his community,

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and that give him a less self-destructive trajectory to get his life in order. Religion also protects him from participating in violent masculinities (Anderson, 2009; Langa 2020).

Sweet Toto's story reflects how masculinity is always changing, but hegemonic masculinities, such as the tsotsi violent masculinities in Sweet Toto's case, make it difficult for subordinated masculinities to flourish. Sweet Toto had protection from his mother, who fought his battles. Being academic at school, and later with religion, he was able to hone his soft nature again. Sweet Toto, much like Ndikho, Brah Ncesh and Athule's dad and uncle, is constantly straddling between different types of masculinity. Brah Ncosh is able to find a balance between his soft side and performing his strong side. Ndikho tries to bury his soft side by resisting it completely, while Sweet Toto turns to violent tsosti life, suppressing his soft side and calling it weak. Athule's father drowns himself in alcohol and, through that, is able to perform his macho side. Athule's uncle, as much as he is seemingly very aggressive, uses his tough masculinity as a survival tool. In high school, he plays the joker in the classroom, and in private he is a bookworm. The men in these stories move between soft masculinities and violent/tough masculinities, straddling the two, while suppressing their soft sides. What stands out in these stories, and in Langa's work, is that violent masculinities will not simply change because soft masculinities are being enacted. Violent masculinities need to change to make space for soft masculinities to flourish (Langa, 2020). Through Athule's dad, we also learn that soft masculinities do not necessarily exempt men from exercising violent masculinities, because violent masculinities are endorsed (Gqola, 2015).

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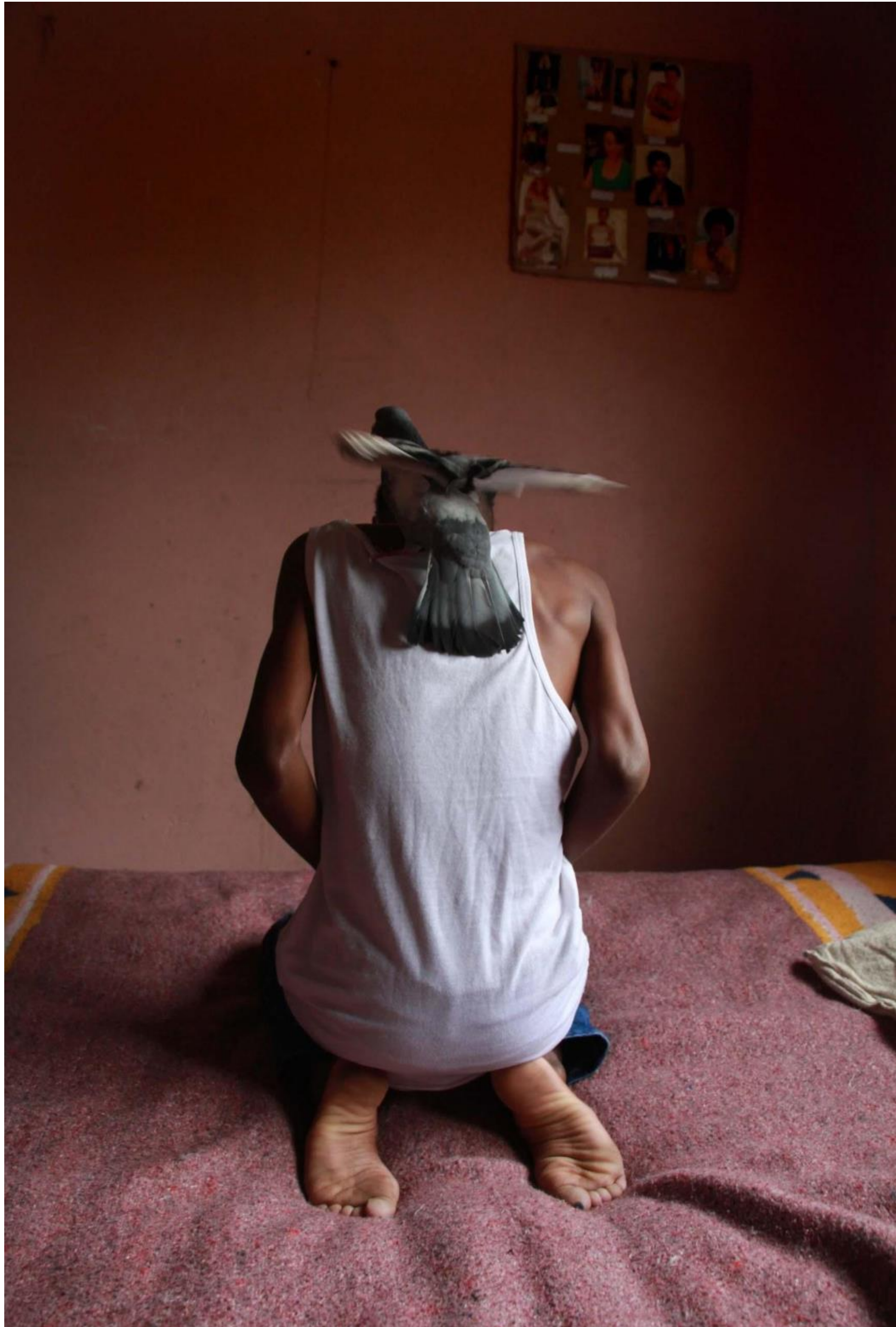

Thandiwe Msebenzi, *Usiya nehobe lakhe* (2019)

He's been keeping birds since he was a little child. He is gentle and kind to them, and in return, they are gentle and kind to him too. My grandmother always says that he taught her to be kinder and less loud when talking to him. This is difficult for her to do, because she raised all her children with a harsh hand.
'But he's not that kind of child, he's sensitive,' my grandmother says.

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In the work *Usiya nehobe lakhe* (2019), my grandmother adds her views on how to foster soft masculinities. In her comment, she is learning to change her own behaviour to support the person that my nephew is. In doing so, she has to change how she would typically engage with masculinity and be a bit gentler, as she raised all her children with a firm hand. This statement is a reminder that violent masculinities are also fostered by the society at large (Gqola, 2015). Thus, perpetuating images of soft masculinities might not eradicate violent masculinities entirely, but they upset existing gender binaries, and challenge old and fixed notions of what masculinity should be, making people like my grandmother question how they engage with masculinity, and how they can better engage with masculinity in its complexities by shifting their own behaviours towards boys and men.

4. Conclusion

This chapter draws its main themes, Phuma silwe/get out and fight, Putting the body on the line, and Softness in Private from visual images. These images are then unpacked and analysed through storytelling and academic text. This chapter shows how a combination of creative methods, such as visual art and storytelling, can be useful in engaging with gender justice issues.

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The first theme, Phuma silwe/get out and fight, is drawn from images that mostly display women and girls performing some sort of fearlessness, unapologetic in their bodies and sexuality, with a touch of aggression. This section disrupts the fixed western notion of young femininity as pure and good. The women and girls in this section navigate violence with agency, in some instances using their sexualities as a means of power, removing it from the oppressive male gaze and subordination.

The second theme looks at Putting the body on the line. The images are of females who show endurance, strength and resilience. The section explores different generations of black women living in South Africa. Their lives are shaped by apartheid, economic and social structures which required black women to be working mothers, caregivers, community leaders and revolutionists, who fought bare breasted. These women embodied the feminine power that existed in pre-colonial South Africa. The women discussed in this section are tough, and do not show vulnerability, because they cannot afford to, with all the weight on

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their shoulders. Athule born post-apartheid she is a soft girl child raised by strong women and in a harsh neighbourhood, yet, even in her softness, she carries immense agency. These women and girls show the complexities of femininities and black femininities, beyond fixed binaries of the helpless women in need of protection, or the helpless black female victim in the hands of a violent black man.

The third theme, softness in private, is drawn from images that show male figures taking on alternative forms of masculinity, showing vulnerability, and playing a feminine game, but they are confined to private spaces. This section looks at how black men in Athule's family navigate their soft sides, starting with her father, who is a soft man but unemployed, and due to his softness and lack of aggression, he finds himself subordinated. He asserts his violent masculinity through being a drunk bully; thus, being a soft man does not exempt him from being violent. For some of the men in the stories, it is a constant push and pull between being soft in their private spaces, and trying hard to show off their masculine attributes in public to not be subordinated by other men. Even in the case where Athule's uncle is an aggressive man, and physically fit, he too is constantly trying to show off his masculinity, while also being subordinated by white masculinity during apartheid. This chapter also shows us that economic inequalities, unemployment, violent neighbourhoods, no hope for the future (Langa, 2020) and a dominant culture of violent masculinities does not make it easy for young black boys to navigate alternative masculinities.

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When I made this visual body of work, I did not have the language to articulate these ideas. Only once the work was done could I reflect on the stories that informed the artworks. These stories, alongside academic texts, have been crucial in unpacking the various ways the artworks serve as a tool to challenge gender norms. The artworks are representative of various kinds of ways of doing femininity and masculinity, which is expressed in the stories which act as the analysis. These visual images may not change violent masculinities, but they disrupt fixed gender norms through archiving, both visually and through stories, different kinds of femininities and masculinities that disrupt gender binaries.

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Chapter 6: Reflecting on the study and concluding

While I was writing this study, my 12-year-old niece in grade 6 wrote me a short story. Before she wrote the story, which was written on a piece of paper torn out of my note book, she said, ‘Thandi, I have been wanting to write this story for a very long time.’ She wrote that story in less than 10 minutes, writing as though it was a learned script. When I read the story, I suddenly felt this big weight on my shoulders to do something about it, because I felt it was her way of asking for help and being vulnerable, without exposing herself to shame. I took the story to my mother, who was equally shocked at how vivid and illustrative it was, but we both could not quite decipher if the story was just written for the pleasure of writing, or if the fictional characters were representative of what was going on in the life of a 12-year-old. We both decided to hide the story and keep it safe amongst my mother’s private documents, while we remained alert to any potential signs of what we had read, and, of course, my 12-year-old little niece happily floated around the house with her contagious warm and innocent energy, like she had not just written a story that left my mom and I so shaken. What is in the story, you may ask? Well, it remains between my niece, my mother and I … What this experience reinstates is the power of storytelling, and its ability to make embodied knowledge, which can incite action. It also highlights how creative expressions can be used to communicate lived experiences, and be a medium that is useful and accessible for passing on knowledge. This challenges normative ways in the academy of making and producing knowledge. It also breaks down the hierarchy that exists in academia, of who can make knowledge. In this story, a 12-year-old leaves two adults shaken with her words.

This study centres creative practice as scholarship, as a rich and useful methodology to conduct research, and an accessible medium that finds alternative ways to express what often lies in very rigid, inaccessible, while also helpful, academic research. It is also a practice of scholarship that challenges normative research, which tends to value particular knowledges above others. Creative practice makes accessible what is hidden behind academic language and institutions of learning, which require one to have epistemological, physical and financial access to knowledge. This study attempts to bring back humanness, affect and embodiment, which is often concealed in research through cartesian ways of thinking that remove emotion in exchange for logic, translating human experiences into inaccessible jargon.

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I found decolonial pedagogies, decolonial feminist theories and standpoint theory very valuable in this research journey as they challenged the academy, and its exclusive, androcentric, patriarchal, colonial and euro-centric ways. These theories gave me the freedom of a naked toddler running through a sprinkler. By positioning my study in these theories, and centring art and storytelling as scholarship, I show the importance of alternative approaches in the ongoing advocacy for accessible education.

How art methods function in the study

For this study, I began by creating photographs, drawing from memories and experiences that were in line with my interest in alternative gender positions and performances, what I have termed soft masculinities and tough femininities. The practice of creating, as opposed to reading academic texts on my interests, became my mode of enquiry. When I had completed the body of artwork, I was able to draw out my core questions for the study; this mode of working not only helped me draw out ideas that I struggled to articulate, it was also my resistance to normative forms of research question enquiry. The limitation of this process was that it took me months of creating work before the questions started to surface. Creative practice helped me think, but it required trusting that the process and the work would lead me in the right direction.

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When the questions had been formed, I used my artwork to ask how alternative pedagogical approaches engage with conceptions of gender. The challenge in the analysis part of my research was to unpack my work without stripping it down compositionally, as one would when doing a classical art analysis. I wanted to be able to fully express some of the experiences that inform the work in order to deepen the knowledge making.

Memory work and storytelling became very valuable during this process. Through memory work, I was able to recall the experiences which the work brought up, and I illustrated these thought storytelling. The stories in this study offer a lens through which the artworks can be viewed. The multiple stories also breathe various narratives into single images, which shows how complex and layered artworks are, and how they cannot be analysed solely through their formal and compositional elements. Storytelling allowed me to be vulnerable in sharing my experiences, but also feel safe behind the fictional characters and scenarios that I created. The

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most valuable part of my analysis process was to articulate the nuances in my images, where I reveal, conceal and distort sensitive parts of my experiences. Through this process, I reveal that art and other forms of creativity speak, that art is layered and that art is scholarship, yet also a safe space to articulate what we cannot always express in words.

Using art as a method of research enquiry, and storytelling as a tool for analysis and interpretation, worked effectively to articulate the layers of knowledge that the artworks carried, while also collaborating and thinking with academic text. My experience with the academic text was that it was more a rigid form of writing, that theorised and gave names to experiences, with the urge to find solutions. This was different to creative writing, which leaves the reader with questions. Yet, the collaboration between these two forms of writing was equally important in answering the thesis questions, as they were able to share a space without one dominating the other.

Engaging with soft masculinities and tough femininities through images and stories

Three main themes emerged from my thematic analysis and engagement with the images: performed power/*phuma silwe*, putting the body on the line, and soft masculinity in private, which came from looking at key recurring elements in the images that spoke to my research questions.

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The theme of performed power/*Phuma silwe* spoke to the way that young black women and girls disrupt stereotypic representations of victimhood by being unapologetic about their bodies and sexualities, with a touch of aggression and fearlessness. The images and stories challenge ways black women have been predominantly represented and contextualised, in both academic and popular terrains, as victims with no agency, and as sites of violation. Under this theme, the stories and images unpack the ways that black girls navigate sexual violence and their awareness of it, and how they resist it.

In the theme, putting the body on the line, there are stories of black women across three different generations: grandmother, aunt, sister and the main character, the narrator of the stories, young Athule. The first three women are presented as resilient, strong and tough in the face of oppression.

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Despite that, these women are still silenced, through colonial western feminine norms of how to be feminine; further, they are silenced through traditional customs that expect them to be submissive. Yet, these women embody the spirit of the defiant women of the apartheid struggles, especially in their command and fearlessness. They also embody the pre-colonial respectable feminine power identified by Dr Khanyisile Litschfield-Tshabalala in South African cultures (2022). They exist in this push and pull, where they must fit into colonial western feminine norms and traditional customs, yet also navigate being breadwinners and performing physical labour, while ensuring their survival in violent communities. Through Athule's character, this section also highlights that black women living in difficult marginalised communities can also be soft without losing their agency or falling into the victim trope.

The third theme, softness in private, is drawn from images of male figures taking on alternative forms of masculinity, displaying vulnerability through playing feminine games in private, and occupying spaces in gentle ways. This section looks at how black men in Athule's family navigate their 'soft sides,' starting with her father, who has to navigate between being a man of the house while being soft and unemployed. He finds himself subordinated and devalued due to his softness and lack of aggression. He asserts his violent masculinity and dominance through drinking. This illustrates how being a soft man does not exempt him from being a violent man. Some men in the stories are constantly struggling between being soft in their private spaces and trying hard to show off their masculine attributes in public so as not be subordinated by other men, and devalued by women. This chapter also shows us that economic inequalities, unemployment, violent neighbourhoods, and dominant culture of violent masculinities does not make it easy for young black boys to navigate alternative pro-feminist masculinities (Langa, 2020; Ratele, 2016).

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How the study contributes to the field

This study uses a combination of art-based research methods, while engaging with gender justice issues, for both research and scholarly practice. I used art to generate the thesis question, construct the themes, and interpret and analyse the work through storytelling. I allowed the creative way of working to lead the process, but accompanied it with academic methods and literature. This method of working contributes to the ongoing work that is

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advocated by decolonial and other social justice pedagogies, and decolonial feminist studies in general, which strive for various voices and ways of working that challenge the rigid, hierarchical and cartesian logic and norms of the academy. This study combines visual art, storytelling and academic text, allowing them an equal footing in the research to 'sing together,' instead of keeping them apart. This study also contributes to the development of art-based methods, which tend to be overlooked as valid research and scholarship, especially since art challenges rationality and the notion of truth that the academy hones (Leavy, 2016).

To challenge gender binaries, the study contributes to the discourse of alternative black masculinities and femininities by producing a visual archive, accompanied by accessible short stories, which speak with the images, and challenge the binary representations of the victimised black female body, and the violent black male body.

Limitations

The study is limited by a lack of participants, other than myself, to engage with the stories and images. It had initially been my intention to work with young people with the artworks in a participatory and creative way, in a school or community context, to document the possibilities of the work for shifting knowledge and understandings. It was, however, unfeasible for an MA level study to engage in this 'testing'. I was thus unable to gauge how effective the work was in challenging gender binaries for others who engage with it. The study only illustrates some possibilities to deploy and apply creative methods to engage with gender issues, through accessible forms of expression, such as art and storytelling. The other limitation of the study was that, although I was trying to do scholarship differently by centring art as scholarship, I still had to stay within the broad confines of academic fixed norms of, for example, writing a text for a research report. I also, however, understand the value of learning normative academic structure and traditions in order to deconstruct this, and in the study, I try to balance creative scholarship and academic scholarship.

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Future recommendations

The study offers a creative method that can be applied as a tool in academic research, particularly for those wishing to work creatively across modalities, and resist academic traditions that exploit 'subjects' of research, and reproduce a range of violences. These methods may also be useful pedagogies for educational work outside the institution, such as in schools, where art and storytelling can be used to engage social issues and elicit narratives from students that can be part of decolonial, feminist and social justice learning. The particularly useful part about this creative method of enquiry, which was evident in my own practice, is that it allows for vulnerability, while offering protection to the narrator. This method can be useful in museums and other public forums that engage with art and education, to break down the classical approaches to visual analysis, and allow young viewers to engage with art through storytelling. In this way, art is not an object removed from the viewers' experiences.

In Closing

This study draws on creative and academic methodologies to engage with art to challenge intersectional gender binarisms. The study has experimented with a method that can be applied in research and pedagogies which merge academic literature and creative methodologies in ways that do not allow one medium to overpower the other. The study is not able to measure the impact of its content without participation of others, but it arguably forges new ways of engaging with gender justice issues and academic rigid structures, by allowing art and creative expression to lead research. Further, the study archives a representation of black femininity and masculinity in story form and images, to challenge gender binaries. Hopefully, such a resource contributes to the growing body of scholarship that seeks to make engaging with academic scholarship and art more accessible.

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