

**MICHAEL ZONDI:  
CREATING MODERNITY**

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## DECLARATION

This dissertation, **MICHAEL ZONDI: CREATING MODERNITY** is based on my original research unless otherwise stated and acknowledged, and has not been submitted in any form to any other institution.

Kirsten Nieser

March 2010

# MICHAEL ZONDI

1926 - 2008

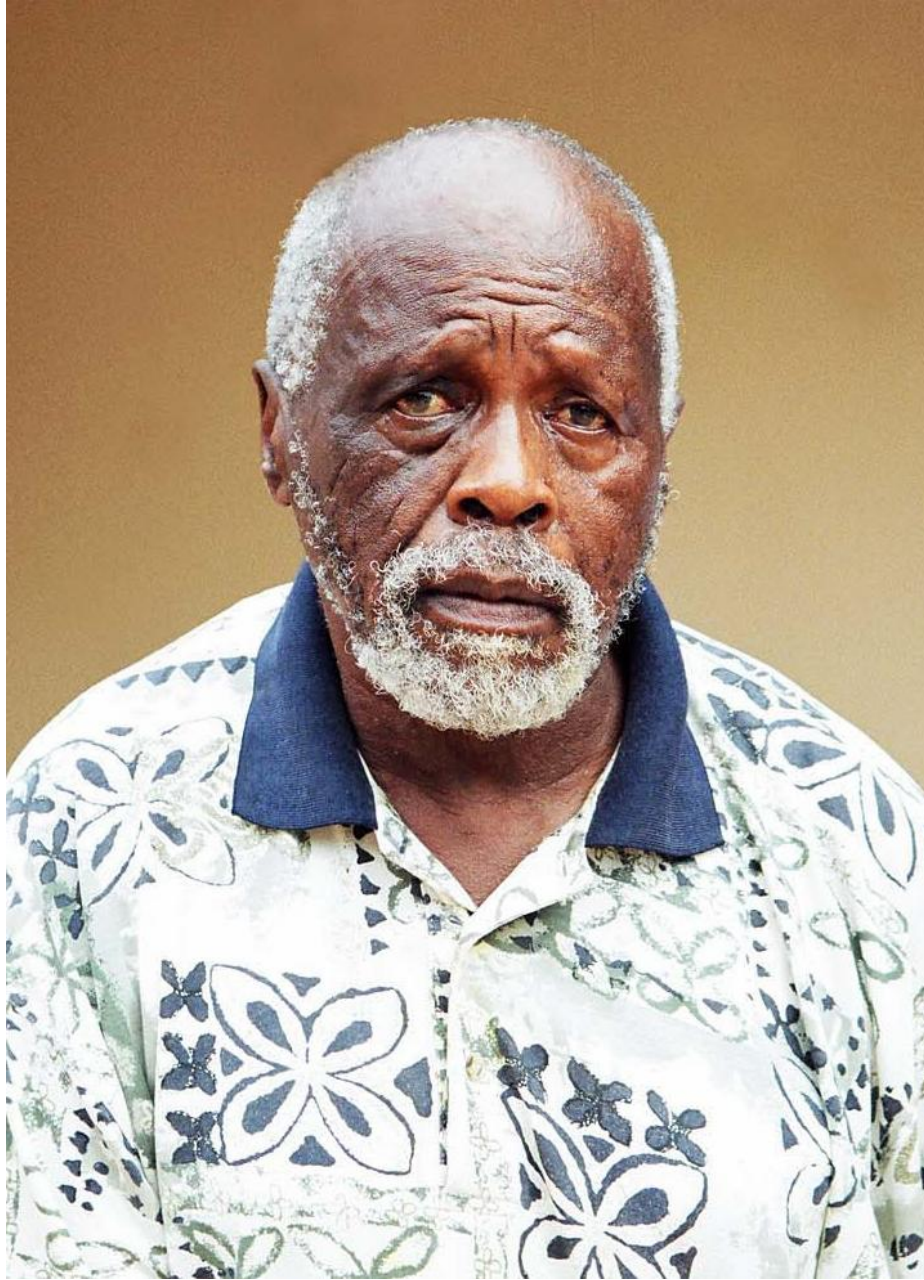


PHOTO: KIRSTEN NIESER - HOWICK, 2003

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers the creativity of Michael Zondi as one of South Africa's so-called pioneer artists and the manner in which he used his art to contribute and create modernity. His creative skills initially locate him outside the classical designations of any one artistic discipline. From cabinet-making and building construction, which included an engagement as an architect and interior designer, ultimately Zondi became the proficient originator of a comparatively very large body of work in three-dimensional figurative wood sculpture. This study is largely confined to the latter body of work.

The wood sculptor is located within the ambit of the black intelligentsia who, with their western mission education, was seeking to define and shape African modernity for themselves beyond descriptions mired in Eurocentric expression. Zondi's early work emerged from crafting skills in woodwork, with thematic narratives that reflect regional sourcing among the *amaZulu*. Conceptually these represent a continuity of the creative practice of the generation before his own, particularly that of the black literary elite, who inspired him. He drew on the humanist values of the African communalism in which he was nurtured. As an *ikholwa*, he further drew on his Christian faith for guidance, using biblical inspiration for a few of his figurative works of art.

Apart from participation in various group exhibitions from the early 1960s, unusual exhibition opportunities included two solo exhibitions, in 1965 and 1974, and an exhibition of his work in a group show in Paris, in 1977, which he attended personally. In the South African environment of black disempowerment and marginalization he secured his position outside party-political activism by using his art as his voice, especially among white patrons. As he found predominantly private patronage for his expressive human portraits, his philosophical exchange with enlightened friends, especially the medical practitioner Dr. Wolfgang Bodenstein, became the backdrop for his creative experience.

Sensitive mentorship and informal tuition by white patrons provided Zondi with some knowledge of European modernist art. Drawing on it as an inspirational resource, the artist made discerning selections from this aesthetic in order to develop his own personal style. At the same time he ensured that his art remained accessible for a broad audience that included the rural people of his home environment, who were the source of his inspiration.

Zondi's thematic move beyond the confines of his Zuluness was the decisive factor which enabled the artist to engage in a very personal reconciliatory quest with white South Africans across the racial divide. In an endeavour which spanned the four decades of his active career as a sculptor, his self-representation through art was simultaneously an immersion in the human condition which became the expression of a shared humanity. By becoming the facilitator of reciprocity between people, it stood in defiance of the long-canonized fetish of race and segregation. By proffering his art as a means of communication, it thereby became an original and formative tool in shaping African modernity.

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I am deeply grateful to Michael Zondi for taking me on this journey. His patience and generosity were unfailing as he welcomed me into his home on many occasions from November 2002 until his death in March 2008. His memories augmented the messages of his sculptures and revealed how a life may be well lived.

Many other people have contributed to making this research possible.

My thanks go to

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My late husband, whose encouragement I have felt

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**Heinrich Schlaudraff**

whose artistic photographs of Michael Zondi's works, taken during the 1960s, nurtured the idea to begin this research.

**Hildegard Schlaudraff**

my mother, whose profound love has cheered me on and encouraged me to round off

**Agnes and Wolfgang Bodenstein**

Michael Zondi's mentors and friends from the 1950s, who became the most dedicated custodians of his legacy of art for all South Africans.

**Nomfundo Zondi-Molefe**

who has become a friend and companion on my journey with her father

**Fiona and Richard Bell**

who were close to me on the plot, let me believe that I could do this, and who have remained generous with their encouragement.

**Sue Davies**

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my friends in South Africa and Germany who have watched this research grow

**I dedicate this dissertation to my parents**

**Hildegard and Heinrich Schlaudraff**



## CITATION

Various members of the Bodenstein family have contributed information to this study. As Zondi's main patron, mentor and friend, Dr. Wolfgang Bodenstein's Christian name is used quite frequently, to avoid any error of confusion with other members of his family. Agnes Bodenstein has given me written information, and is quoted from a number of interviews I have had with her. Other personal meetings include the children of Agnes and Wolfgang Bodenstein, Dr. Johannes Bodenstein and Dr. Christel Bodenstein. Wolfgang Bodenstein's brother Hans, and Hans's wife Christel have been a source of information, as also Eckhard Bodenstein's wife, Hanna, and her son, Joachim Bodenstein.

## IMAGES

Unless otherwise stated, all the images I have included are by Michael Zondi. Sources of photographs and digital images are acknowledged in each instance.

The images of figures mentioned in the text appear as close as possible to the text which considers them in the greatest detail. The figure number in the text therefore includes the reference of the page in closest proximity to it, e.g. *Invisible Bonds* (1960)(Fig.198 opp.p 226). In the titles of the images a \* indicates that the title was given to the piece by Michael Zondi e.g. *Invisible Bonds\** (1960).

### Dimensions:

Measurements are metric in millimetres.

Where only one measurement is available, the height is standard; otherwise height is followed by width then depth.

Medium: Unless otherwise stated, works discussed are wood sculptures; where this is established the type of wood is stated when it is known, eg. *umThombothi*

### Provenance:

Most pieces are in private collections. For reasons of security, only public ownership is acknowledged.

## REFERENCES

There are two sections of references.

*References - I* is a bibliography of published sources of information for this study. These include books, journals, magazine and newspaper articles, World Wide Web (www).

*References - II* lists unpublished sources of information which include unpublished academic dissertations, handwritten references in the form of scripts or annotations, archival material, letters, e-mails, and personal interviews by telephonic or personal communication. The latter is indicated in the text e.g. (Zondi, 2003, pers.com.)

## LETTERS

Agnes Bodenstein's archival material was transferred to me in October 2003. These files contain mainly the letter and telegram correspondence between Michael Zondi and Wolfgang Bodenstein. After Wolfgang's death Zondi corresponded with Agnes Bodenstein. There are also other letters related to Zondi, as well as notes, newspaper cuttings, exhibition invitations etc.

## PREFACE

Writing on Michael Zondi has been largely restricted to biographical data, some generalising mention of the sources of his inspiration, and comments on stylistic aspects of his figurative works. Given the dearth of biographies on black artists in general, and the emphasis on two-dimensional media, a more discerning positioning of Zondi's creativity was undertaken by me in 2004. I sought to reposition the artist's three-dimensional work in the context of creativity occurring within the educational and economic constraints of a segregated South Africa. This dissertation seeks to augment that endeavour.

Art-historical writing is seen as a powerful medium employed in the construction of modernity. As a tool in processes of authorial Othering, in the South African context it is thought to have contributed to maintaining the racial hierarchies bolstering the white nation state (van Robbroeck, 2006:2). Knowledge about cultural production by black South Africans has become available through the mediatory discourses and texts written predominantly by white scholars. Lize van Robbroeck asserts that some of the fundamental assumptions that are inscribed in most critical texts which consider the work of black artists emerge as binary oppositions. These stereotypical inscriptions that include rural/urban, tradition/modernity, self-taught/educated, past/present, all belong to the complex configuration of descriptive, categorical and rhetorical operations that produce knowledge about modern 'black' art (van Robbroeck, 2006:1). The focus of my consideration of Michael Zondi's art-making may be construed as an endeavour to temper some of these binary oppositions that are used to qualify assumptions about 'black' art in past and current texts (van Robbroeck, 2006: Preface).

The motivation for this research on the creativity of Michael Zondi is located in a personal acquaintance between the artist and my parents during the decade of the 1960s. In early 1963 my father, Heinrich Schlaudraff, met Zondi's patron and friend, Dr. Wolfgang Bodenstein, who introduced him to the artist. The photographic record of Zondi's work by my father is a representative selection of the artist's oeuvre which became the portfolio that initiated this study. Research was significantly enhanced by the extensive and meticulous archiving conducted by Bodenstein's wife, Agnes, over a period of more than three decades. Her record of newspaper cuttings, exhibition records and written personal communication between the artist and her husband have been an invaluable source of information. Both

Schlaudraff's creative photography and the Bodensteins' exemplary consciousness of custodianship have been inspirational.

In an ongoing process of research, around 340 wood sculptures have been physically sourced thus far. Augmenting these are 94 photographic, and 13 published, images of figurative sculptures that have not been located. Three pieces of furniture have been digitally recorded, as well as two kists and 11 small utilitarian pieces like embellished jewellery boxes. Three of the churches built by Zondi as a contractor include the chapel at the Appelsbosch Church of Sweden Mission. His own architectural and interior design in this church are studied in some depth. In conjunction with his building activity, two large cement sgraffito works have been located. Linocut images of the 1970s include two biblical scenes and six small Christmas cards. A few sketches by Zondi, drawn on the back of letters around 1959 and 1960 have helped to indicate the artist's thematic intention at the time. Various published articles in journals and newspapers were written predominantly in conjunction with the two major exhibitions of Zondi's works, in 1965 and 1974, and his participation in an international show in Paris in 1977. These texts by white authors serve to position the artist in the public eye during his active career over four decades.

## INTRODUCTION

This study traces Michael Zondi's emergence from skills in cabinet-making and building construction to three-dimensional sculpture. By drawing on diverse sources of information besides my own interpretation of Zondi's figurative sculptures, I endeavour to create a dialogical text which describes this artist as a pro-active agent in the shaping of a specifically African modernity. It will be argued that his creativity became an original and formative tool in this process. His creative abilities gave him the means to transcend his initial career as an educator in industrial schooling in order to redefine himself as an artist. As he used his extensive body of work for the purpose of self-representation, he was simultaneously able to give expression to his own profound humanism. Eschewing the political stage, he employed his figurative art to cast a firm line of communication across the iniquitously effective racial divide which kept South Africans apart throughout the four decades of his career.

The initial presentation of an historical and personal background to Zondi's art-making in Chapter One serves to locate his family history in the region of KwaZulu-Natal, along the south-eastern seaboard of South Africa. A superficial outline of mission education available to a small minority of learners making up the black Christian or *amakholwa* elite, and the leadership that emerged from the intelligentsia, is the preamble for considering the artist's world view. In this his strong emphasis on communal values will be outlined, as well as aspects of Christianity and its witness, which required critical scrutiny under the realities of segregation. Chapter Two considers Zondi's interface with the literary artists of his time, and his emergence from the woodworking skills, that were acquired in vocational training, to artistic creativity. The regional design aesthetics that formed Zondi's visual foundation will be juxtaposed with the modernist design to which he was introduced, both in his vocational school and through individual educators and mentors. His artistic development which emerged from woodworking skills is traced, as he created early motifs in low-relief sculpture on furniture. These mirror the kind of the regional sourcing among the *amaZulu*, which was used as an inspirational resource by the black intelligentsia. In considering patronage, Chapter Three provides an outline of opportunities Zondi was able to seize to exhibit his work. More significant was the manner in which he chose to interact with patrons. A study of the philosophical exchange between the artist and Dr. Wolfgang Bodenstern, in particular, serves to reveal their deep humanist foundation as the two men sought to overcome

racism in their daily lives. Perspectives on modernist sculpture and Zondi's stylistic development is the focus of Chapter Four, as Zondi's creative experience is considered in terms of embodiment and the capacity of art to become a facilitator of reciprocity. The final chapter traces specific themes in Zondi's oeuvre spanning four decades.

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Pre-colonial regional social upheavals and European colonial intervention form a backdrop for the economic marginalization of the *amaZondi* living in KwaZulu-Natal at the time of the artist's birth in the 1920s. Despite extensive periods of absence as he pursued his career as an educator and artist, he would remain firmly attached to the people of his rural home base. An exploration of Zondi's genealogical ties to his predecessors in the region, particularly the nationally celebrated Zondi chief Bambatha kaMancinza, provides a framework for the artist's initial inspiration for his work. His early regionally specific utopian imagery and the poignant portraits of people in his later work became testimony to the artist's conscious immersion in the human condition. Zondi's profound humanism therefore emerged directly from his own rootedness among rural people. It precluded the social distance historically experienced by the mission-educated, mostly urban, black elite vis-à-vis the majority of the population.

Zondi's mission education provided him with the opportunity to undergo career training as a cabinet-maker in an industrial school and to gain his initial qualification as a teacher of woodworking. More significantly, his literary and crafting skills later provided the impetus for being able to free himself from the confines of the discriminatory system of *Bantu Education*, in order to redefine himself as an artist. His initial regional inspiration, and the notion that artistic creativity is able to act as an ideological voice, was gained among the so-called 'New Africans' who sought to wrest ownership of their future from the colonial voice. While the foundation of Zondi's world view was laid in African communality, his embrace of modernity was initiated among this black Christian intelligentsia, the *amakholwa*. Literary figures such as Herbert Dhlomo and Benedict Vilakazi became friends and role models for the young Zondi in the late 1940s and were thus seminal for his own creative development. Their imaginaries of past communal integrity among the *amaZulu* were being used as a literary device for mental respite, employed to counter the *Angst* of the escalating social dystopia in South Africa in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their nationalism mirrored the regional distinctiveness that was used to define political landscapes in Europe during and

after the upheavals of World War II. At the same time, by co-opting the masses, and endeavouring to become the oppositional voice on behalf of South Africa's black majority, they sought to counter the state ideology of segregation. As a Christian, Zondi shared the educational and spiritual ethos of this generation before his own. Equally, Zondi's cross-cultural interface from the late 1950s, and the will to find mutual solutions for all South African citizens, reflects their non-violent and reconciliatory manner up to the 1940s.

A contextualization of Zondi's early relief sculpture and three-dimensional imagery sourced in Zulu culture serves to locate his apparently utopian scenes at the cusp of inscriptions of modernity by the black literary elite. Scrutiny of artistic intention, juxtaposed with audience reading of his work, reveal the profound relevance of these 'romantic utopias' in times of accelerating marginalisation of blacks during the rise of Afrikaner nationalism from the late 1940s. Significantly, Zondi's deep interest in the politics of his day was matched by his distinct abhorrence of political ambition. This fact lies at the core of understanding the nature of his humanism and his artistic expressiveness. His intellectual and ethical foundation was further augmented and consolidated in his discussions with his own patrons and friends from the end of the 1950s, especially Dr. Wolfgang Bodenstein and the prominent regional politician into the present, Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

Zondi used his art and his personal engagement in speaking for the plight, aspirations, and integrity of fellow black South Africans with whom he identified. In the face of abject poverty and disenfranchisement that was largely visited upon them by white governance, Zondi's articulation of their social and political needs was authentic. His fostering of artistic and crafting skills, and his urge to introduce new technology into rural communities, are revealed to have been consistent with his urge to do something for others (Zondi, 1965:2 letter). His awareness of responsibility and obligation towards the poor, and to provide them with guidance and leadership, is reflected in the themes of his art. Early portrayals of prominent political figures from the regional past are developed into themes of prophetic leadership. Zondi's individualistic portrayal of the Shaka Senzangakhona will be juxtaposed with modes describing the manner in which the Zulu king has been appropriated in South African historical writing, and by the media, into the present.

Zondi affirmed the redemptive ideals of his Christian faith. His personal integrity as a Christian relied on biblical citation. The Gospel thus represented the source of shared moral

principles and values with both the literary elite and with his most esteemed white mentors and friends. Zondi's reading of the Bible challenged the enforced physical, emotional and spiritual rupture between black and white South Africans throughout his career. This schism was underpinned by various socio-economic and political interests within the white state that included ideological re-enforcement sourced in the biblical hermeneutics of the Dutch Reformed Church. Because biblical hermeneutics were the legitimizing foundation of legislated segregation, it will be argued that their flagrant defiance of the law in associating and periodically living together, was a means of upholding their integrity as Christians. Rather than to engage with conservative, even racist, Lutheran Church leaders, it was significant that Zondi engaged with prominent enlightened individuals within this institution, who were seeking to ensure that Christian teaching became instrumental in actively opposing state intransigence. By proffering his strongly spiritual figurative sculptures to his predominantly white audience, these became agents of reflection, or, in his words, ða gospelö in their homes (Zondi in Deane, 1978: 201). In this way he was foregrounding himself as a humanist, while simultaneously communicating an indictment of the flawed ideology of the white state.

Zondi's vocational training is framed historically within the system of industrial schooling for black South Africans. This involved Nordic philanthropy in the ambit of the Church of Sweden Mission. With regard to his art-making, Zondi was proud of being largely self-taught. Yet various opportunities arose for him to receive informal individual guidance and tuition, to which he was very receptive. The consideration of modernism in this dissertation is motivated by Zondi's apprenticeship and work within the ambit of the Church of Sweden Mission and the tenets of Nordic design. It is further considered with regard to Zondi's sculptural oeuvre which he developed among mentors and educators familiar with the European modernist aesthetic. Through informal tuition and close friendships with white mentors and patrons who belonged to the European Diaspora in Africa, Zondi became familiar with aspects of the creative exchange that marked modernism in the arts. Its consideration is here restricted to a concern with those of its tenets represented in the medium of sculpture. Zondi responded selectively to the pervasive and insidious traces of 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural colonialism in southern Africa. By judiciously absorbing aspects of western cultural practice and values he endeavoured to construct his personal vision of African modernity.

Zondi made use of a number of public spaces in which to show his work, ranging from -Bantu showsø in the 1950s, to an exhibition of his work which he personally attended in Paris in 1977. Zondiø opportunity to show his work in the hallowed halls formerly reserved for white artists was an exceptional event in 1965. It concurred with the growing interest in the art of black South Africans by a select white elite versed in modernism. The paternalistic responses with which the work of the early pioneer artists had been received were informed by a Eurocentric ethnographic gaze mired in Victorian romanticism. Yet the exoticist fascination is described as having survived into the present, as contemporary African visual cultures and modernity are still subject to powerful and authoritative western discourses (Oguibe, 1999:19). The reception of Zondiø art will be considered with a view to the dominant self/other binary which is still seen to frame the western master narrative in the current reception of art from Africa. A number of small, and two larger, exhibitions of his work were linked to private initiatives. Nevertheless, his art-making occurred frequently in a context of very personal relationships of mentorship and patronage. This personalized approach to patronage is crucial in understanding the way in which he pursued goals of liberation in the context of state-sanctioned segregation. His oeuvre is inevitably situated in the milieu of discrimination, manifest in every-day experiences of marginalization, both structural and emotional. While his creativity became a means for self-representation and self-fulfilment, by presenting his work to his patrons, he was simultaneously staking his claim as a spokesperson for the poor. His figurative sculptures became a vehicle for communicating with, and eliciting a response from, his audience. The artistø engagement with the state as patron and employer demands a discerning scrutiny of his participation in its development programme, as also its propagandistic promotional programme overseas. Zondi will be positioned in his role as both educator and pro-active artist employing his creativity to voice his dissent. His strategy of involvement with the state, as a mode of achieving humanitarian goals, is given credibility by the absence of ulterior motives of enrichment or power politicking.

This dissertation places a particular emphasis on the nature of patronage, not in its commercial sense, but primarily in terms of Zondiø response to mentorship and informal tuition. It will be argued that the encouragement which the artist received from specific patrons, coupled with the vibrant intellectual reciprocity and friendship he enjoyed with the medical practitioner, Wolfgang Bodenstein, became the main impetus for the artist to turn his back on the teaching profession by the early 1960s and begin to define



himself as an artist. The mode of his social contact with patrons will be examined, as Zondi gravitated between his rural home and the inspirational metropolitan environment of his white patrons, where he was able to seize exhibition opportunities. Zondi's strategy in contributing to African modernity was to consciously position himself in a cross-cultural amalgam. This facet of his art-making becomes significant in two ways. Initially it serves to challenge many pejorative assumptions regarding the apartheid environment that are linked both to notions of superiority and domination, on the one hand, and disempowering victimhood on the other. Subsequently the personal nature of Zondi's interface with his white patrons, which clearly transcended economic considerations, will be shown to have been of his own purposeful choosing to foster what he termed bridge-building across the artificial racial divide (1974). The 'forbidden friendship' between Zondi and Wolfgang Bodenstein, in particular, will be outlined with a view to revealing their common language of humanism and reconciliation. It provides the basis for the assertion that each man defined himself through the other. The consideration in this study, of Bodenstein's understanding of 'cultural objectivity' and communality, serves to underpin the motivation for Zondi's confidence in this white friend. The medical practitioner's affirmation of his Africanness, and his ethos of 'human care' in its role to facilitate communication, will provide a backdrop for the brotherhood the two men conducted, based on mutual trust. It will be argued that from their intellectual platform, Zondi and Bodenstein were together practising a form of 'moral insurrection' as their spiritual fortitude bolstered their solidarity against extant racial chauvinism. Their pursuit to identify humanitarian means for a harmonious co-existence reveals how imagining self as other was able to prevail over the muteness of the colour-bar. The inherent message of Zondi's art, therefore, presented in the context of an oppressive political system, becomes a call for mutual esteem and respect for basic human dignity, regardless of peoples' religious, political or social affiliations (Zondi, 1974 and undated, c. mid-1960s).

Zondi discerningly measured criticism of his work against his own aims in art-making. The pronounced physical nature of his medium allows a conceptual link to some of the pragmatic and humanist tenets of modernism to which Zondi was introduced informally under the mentorship of educators and friends. The artist's preferred process of carving, as a technique in art-making, was foundational for European modernist sculpture. His development in stylistic and conceptual ability, from a strictly representational mode, to a free, expressive use of his medium will be traced in relation to his aspirations to retain the accessibility of his

art for the people on whose behalf he was using his art as a transformational tool. This locates Zondi among the proponents of a social component in art. The concomitant concern for 'sculptural form' relevant for conceptualism in art, creates a link between his artistic aspirations and those of early modernists. His humanitarian aims, engendered within his own African communality, will be linked to the sculptural and ideological integrity, the *Gestalt*, in the work of Henry Moore, Auguste Rodin and Ernst Barlach, with whose work he became familiar early in his career.

The strongly inter-active nature of Zondi's art will be explored, in its capacity to augment the artist's personal engagement with patrons. It will be argued that he understood, and consciously employed, characteristics of the aesthetic domain as a means of conscientizing people. The connection between creativity and artifice in Paul Crowther's considerations on art and creativity (1993) will serve as an appropriate tool for exploring aspects of Zondi's individual creativity, the physicality of his work, and its originality. Zondi's emphasis on the physicality of his medium, and his notion that his work represented his 'whole being' may be reflected in some aspects of Crowther's theory regarding definitions of art and artefact. Foremost among these is the idea of the creative act as a form of physical embodiment of very personal human experience, which may serve as a message between the originator and his audience. This is significant in that Zondi's creativity was premised on a foundation of very personal relationships from which he drew inspiration.

Zondi's ability to work wood as a sensuous medium was informed by empathy and transcendence, making his figurative sculpture strongly self-expressive. An interpretation of his work according to the concept of embodiment and relational reciprocity is facilitated by the idea that art conserves and articulates human experience into symbolic form, which lends itself to being shared with others (Crowther, 1993:7,150). The artist's intentionality will be foregrounded, as he used the aesthetic domain to facilitate inter-human commonality. Considering aspects of audience reception, as both sensual and cognitive, will further substantiate the role of the artist as a mediator.

Central to the way in which Zondi represented and asserted his voice through his art was his consciousness outside a cult of victimhood. Achille Mbembe's 'historicist' framing in *African Modes of Self-Writing* (2002) alludes to the construction of cultural identities as a rhetoric of mutilation and loss that re-inscribe autochthony and alterity. It will be argued that Zondi's self-affirmation as an artist and his refusal to engage in the language of loss enabled

him to resist coercion into such a historicist rhetoric of persecution. In this way he was able to transcend both the pejorative connotations of race and its pervasiveness.

By using Kwame Gyekye's contestation of the alleged polarity between 'tradition' and 'modernity' (1997), Zondi's early Romantic utopias will be revealed as pictorial inscriptions of the past that were not re-inscriptions of autochthony. In defiance of the nativist understanding of history, it will be shown how he used scenes from the Zulu past merely as an inspirational device. His was a discerning and critical re-interpretation and evaluation of received forms which he was employing as the foundation for revitalising cultural tradition and making it relevant for modern life. Transcending the particularist mode of focusing on ethnicity and Zuluness after the 1950s, Zondi subsequently adopted a more universalist mode in his figurative sculptures. This became an unburdening of his work from potential readings of alterity and 'nativist' thinking.

The themes or narratives of Zondi's sculpture will be considered for the manner in which they embody particular human experience and how they become mediators of the artist's voice in conveying particular messages in his overall communication of humanism.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative historical analysis of Zondi's work is an amplification of the research undertaken for my Masters dissertation. My reading has depended on the artist's large body of mainly figurative sculptures which are a representative overview of his creativity up to 1990, when ill health prevented his continued creativity. I have limited the scope of this research by omitting familial biographical facts which have no immediate relevance to his work. As I describe the manner in which Zondi foregrounded himself as a humanist, I have been mindful of emphasising his own voice and position, drawing on information and perceptions obtained directly from the artist until his death in March 2008. These conversations underscored the transformative intent of his work. In my ongoing inquiry, I am able to draw on the valuable insights of Zondi's youngest daughter, Nomfundo Zondi-Molefe, as well as various former mentors and patrons. Further sources of information include anecdotal documentation in the form of historical photographs, letters, and informal notes. These have been augmented by various published citations. The resultant synthesis of information, as a contextualisation and re-evaluation of the artist's work, aims to generate tentative new knowledge about Zondi and the mode of his art-making. By locating his work in the discourse of his time among the New African elite, I aim to outline his significant contribution to African modernity.

### **Empirical Method: Sourcing, and Visual and Audio Recording**

Until now, in an ongoing process, Zondi's work has been sourced mainly in private collections, predominantly in South Africa. Pieces have also been located in Germany, Sweden, England, Scotland, the USA and Canada. Using an empirical method of research, I have been able to trace examples of his figurative sculptures by identifying and visiting the private homes of former patrons of the artist, or by finding commissioned works and those in public collections. By means of personal communication I have been directed to further patrons and collectors, and located works which have changed hands by bequest or sale. The serendipitous nature of finding single pieces or collections has resulted in physical circumstances for photographic or digital recording, that were not always optimal. My own recording of imagery of the artist and his sculptures includes 35mm film, digital stills, and video recording. In addition, this research has made use of a variety of photographic material

for purposes of interpretation, documentation, and for eliciting further information from the artist during the course of interviews for the study. This includes the abovementioned foundational collection of Schlaudraff's photographs of Zondi's sculptures of the 1960s, images from the personal collections of patrons which include 35mm negative and slide (positive) film of the artist and his work, and digitalised 8mm film material that was made available to me.

### **Ethnographic Writing and Othering**

The legitimacy of research which arises out of other social histories, has been challenged (Scheurich, 1997:141). One aspect of this study locates Zondi in an inter-cultural exchange. He will be positioned between his cultural roots in rural KwaZulu-Natal, and his life in an urban and western context where he interacted with both the black intelligentsia and white mentors. My research thus embraces aspects of anthropology i.e. the 'comparative study of societies and cultures' (SA COD, 2002:45). Given the history of cultural imperialism, and the significance and power of discourse constituting fields of knowledge about black artistic practice, a process of 'anthropologising' one's own discourses is thought essential for dismantling the normativity of western practices (van Robbroeck 2006:1). Othering, which in post-colonial discourse describes the authoritative identification, deciphering and inscription of difference, becomes a central feature to be considered in the authorship of this study. James Scheurich contends that as scholars construct knowledge, the ideas, assumptions, and norms of the cultures in which they were socialized influence that knowledge (1997:140). As a theoretical construct in the study of the Other, such knowledge, in his opinion, culminates in a reformation or reshaping of that Other, effecting a form of 'culture domination' (Scheurich, 1997: 85,141). James Clifford suggests that contextual, rhetorical, institutional, and political conventions influence the representation of cultural realities (1986:6,7). The endeavour of conducting research, deemed to lie at heart of the 'western knowledge project', is thus given pejorative connotations linked to arrogance, an inadvertent exercising of power, and even 'cultural violence' (Scheurich, 1997:2,4,85). While much of Scheurich's discourse concerning the idea of conquest and domination refers to an exclusionary 'modernist bias' (1997:88), he asserts that post modernism is western civilization's best attempt to date, to critique its own fundamental assumptions, particularly those that constitute reality, subjectivity, research and knowledge (1997:2). He calls for 'elitist powerbrokers' who

determine individual subjectivity, to retain an awareness of philosophical or civilizational assumptions that structure everything about the act of researching. This ranges from the manner in which we think about, and do, research, and what we think it is, to considering what the value of the outcome might be.

Lize van Robbroeck's extensive contribution to the deconstruction of thought and metaphor, used in processes of authorial othering, is centred on South African writings, mostly by Whites, on modern art by black South Africans. Her indictment of mostly 'white' writing on 'black' art is directed at the interpretations of the work of black artists as 'a mirror of a collective pan-African identity' and the re-production of Africa as trope (2006, Preface). In her call for a more pro-active endeavour to decentre the monolithic stereotype of black subjectivity and art, she suggests researching individual artists. In her view this should serve to undo, what she terms, an endemic tendency to view black artists as 'faceless representatives of a collective' (van Robbroeck, 2006:218).

### **Linguistic Access**

Zondi was a Zulu speaker who was highly proficient in English which written form he perceived as being generally 'more acceptable' (Zondi, 2002:19). In his hand-written communication with various patrons, he used the English language far beyond a perfunctory exchange of messages. Much rather, he employed it as a tool to express ideas, thoughts and emotions. Communication with the artist in his own language would no doubt have enhanced my understanding of him and given him a much broader and differentiated means of expression. Yet for my purposes there was no cause to consider the route of using translation, which has been used in this study only for gaining insight into the implications of titles in the Zulu language, given to particular sculptures by the artist.

### **Interviews**

My method of acquiring qualitative data involved interviewing the artist, members of his family, fellow artists, and his patrons and friends from the time of his active career. Rather than using structured questionnaires, I drew on personal communication with individuals in the form of a 'purposeful conversation' (Scheurich, 1997: 61). When circumstances enabled me to do so, I recorded most of these conversations. These have been archived as tapes or,

more recently, as digital files. Information gained in this manner contributed to my deductive analysis of the content of Zondi's work with regard to specific themes he employed.

Concerns of evaluation validity and interviewer bias voiced in the 1960s (Kerlinger, 1964: 468) has remained pertinent in the post-modern discourse regarding research techniques and procedures of research interviewing, where imbalance in power-relationships between the interviewer and the interviewee are described (Scheurich, 1997:3). In his call to moderate paternalism, Scheurich speaks of a so-called dominance-resistance binary in which the dominance of the interviewer/ researcher may be disrupted by a certain resistance on the part of the interviewee (1997:70, 71,72). Mindful of this, I conducted the process of interaction with the artist and other informants on the basis of a certain indeterminacy, as described by Scheurich (1997:3,74)<sup>1</sup>. Implicit in this procedure is an exchange which, while originally prompted by the interviewer, relies on pursuing information and points of discussion proffered by the interviewee. A welcome resistance was relevant in the process of interviewing Zondi, as he was quick to contradict or correct misinterpretation or false assumptions on my part. Given the artist's advanced age and his having suffered more than one stroke, which left him physically impaired, this challenge of my suppositions was a reassuring confirmation of his full engagement in our conversations. Advice I received from Zondi's friend, the Lutheran theologian, Professor Axel-Ivar Berglund, has been valuable. Berglund emphasized the necessity for researchers to overcome "own understandings and assumptions", and replace these with "efforts to see how the artist/himself/herself/ themselves see their cultural logical details and how these are expressed in art" (2003:2).

By transcribing the spoken word from taped interviews, and making interpretive use of that information within my own texts, James Clifford's notion becomes relevant, that writing is a way not only of storing, but also of manipulating knowledge. While he asserts that writing is an empowering process, he ascribes to it a corruptive element, due to the loss of immediacy and intimacy that is experienced in speech (Clifford, 1986:118). At the same time he acknowledges the modes of authority within discursive strategies, which name and quote informants more fully and introduce personal elements into the text (1986:109). Despite inevitable subjectivity, I have attempted to reduce the adulteration of oral information to a minimum, by frequently quoting directly from interviews, as well as original letters. This is a

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<sup>1</sup> See "Postmodernist Critique of Research Interviewing" in Scheurich (1997:61ff).

mode of reflecting moments of cross-cultural representation, which becomes, in Clifford's words, the creation of "a story among other stories" (1986:109).

### **Photographic Material**

During interviews with the artist, sometimes "photo-elicitation" was used. The camera and photographic material, as "flexible tools" in data collecting, were involved in a process termed "backward mapping" (Prosser and Schwartz, 1998: 123). Photographs of artworks and individuals going back to 1950s were used, that were taken by people outside the immediate study. Given the theory that "all images, despite their relationship to the world, are socially and technically constructed", a post modern "new ethnography" challenges the idea of analysis by means of historical material (Harper,1998:29). Issues of validity are emphasised, linked to knowledge about the manner in which the photograph came into existence. An analysis, and interpretations, of old photographs as well as movie-film clips have therefore prompted my consideration not only of the source of the image and reasons for its survival, but also the relationship between the photographer and the subject, as well as the photographer's intention in making the image (Prosser and Schwartz, 1998:123). The process becomes a "visual anthropology", in which historical images that embraced the human experience were contextualised (Banks,1998:9,11). Analysis from the photographic material as a part of the research process, in Jon Prosser's view, facilitates the exploitation of new inferences (Prosser, 1998:125).



## MICHAEL ZONDI: BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS

- 1926 Born at Keateø Drift in the Umvoti Division of Natal as the first of five children of parents, Eva and David Zondi.
- 1932-1935 Mtulwa Primary School (Lutheran Mission).
- 1936 Hermannsburg Primary School (Lutheran Mission).
- 1937-1938 Henryville school in Edendale near Pietermaritzburg (Catholic Mission).
- 1939 Calusa Higher Primary School in Edendale near Pietermaritzburg.
- 1940 Ntunjambili High School in Kranskop (year nine).
- c1941-1943 Vocational training at the *Dundee Industrial Bantu School* (DIBS) run by the Church of Sweden Mission (CSM). Zondi learns carpentry, joinery and cabinet work, as well as building skills from the principal and educator, Einar Magni.
- Mid- to late-1940s Entrepreneur with a carpentry workshop in Edendale.  
First low-relief carving done on kists.
- Late 1940s Marriage with Catherine Nomsombuluko Mathonso with whom Zondi had two children, Lindiwe Juliet Sizile and a son, Thami.  
Divorce from Catherine after a few years.
- c1950 Return to DIBS for teacher training.
- From 1952-1963 Zondi joins staff of the DIBS as teacher of carpentry, joinery and cabinet-making.
- 1952-1960 Sports Organiser at the DIBS and the Vocational School in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg.
- Early-1950s Zondi meets the educator and Organiser in the Department of Bantu Education, John Nixon, and the Inspector for Native Schools in Natal, Jack Grossert.  
First three-dimensional figurative sculptures.
- 1955 Marriage with Mavis Ntombizodwa Ndebele, with whom Zondi had 5 children.
- 1956 Birth of son Thabani Lincoln (died 1998).
- 1956 Move with the DIBS staff from Dundee to the new Edendale Vocational School in Pietermaritzburg.
- 1956 Zondi meets Dr. Wolfgang Bodenstein at the Swedish mission at Ceza.
- 1956 *Junior Certificate* (private study).
- 1957 Death of David Zondi.
- Late 1950s Zondi meets the British sculptor and lecturer at the University of Natal Fine Art Department in Pietermaritzburg, John Hooper.
- 1958 Birth of daughter Khanya (died 1988).
- 1960 *National Technical Certificate* (Matric equivalent) with Building Construction as a major subject and English Senior as an additional subject.  
*Bantu Builder's Certificate*.
- 1961 Birth of daughter Nomfundo Sibusisiwe Fidelia Elisabeth.
- 1961 First pieces are shown in public at the Arts Festival in Bloemfontein.  
Bronze medal award for *Fluitspeler* (Flute Player) (1960) which becomes Zondi's first piece in a public collection.
- 1962 *Matriculation Certificate* (private study).

- 1962-1964 Design and construction of the Hospital Chapel at the CSM at Appelsbosch near Dalton in Natal, where Bodenstein had become medical superintendent from 1959.
- 1963 Birth of son Zama Wolfgang (died 2000).
- 1963 Zondi meets the photographer Heinrich Schlaudraff.
- 1963-1965 Manager at the Appelsbosch Mission.
- 1965 Birth of son Zabelo (died 1983).
- 1965 First solo exhibition in the Durban Art Gallery (DAG), followed by participation in the *Interfaith Bantu Art Exhibition* in the DAG.
- Mid-1960s Zondi meets the Rev. Axel-Ivar Berglund.
- 1966 *Calabash* (1963) is shown at the *Venice Biennale* in Italy.
- 1966-1972 Building construction as a main source of income, working for the Lutheran Mission and a private enterprise company.  
Participation in various art exhibitions.
- 1967 Move to stay with the Bodenstein family in Montclair, Durban.
- c1970-1974 Zondi resides at Umlazi, Durban, for schooling of two sons.
- 1974 Second solo exhibition in Pretoria under the auspices of UNISA.  
Participation in various exhibitions during the decade of the 1970s.
- c1974-1978 Has studio and resides periodically with the Bodenstein family in Pretoria.
- From mid-1970s Has his studio and resides periodically with the Veldsman family on a farm near Nylstroom.
- until end-1980s
- 1977 Zondi is one of two South African representatives at the exposition *L'Homme et le Bois*, held at the Orly Airport in Paris, France.
- 1983 Death of son Zabelo.
- 1988 Participation in exhibition *The Neglected Tradition*, held in Johannesburg.
- 1988 Death of daughter Khanya.
- c1992 Zondi and Mavis move from the family home at Mtulwa to Edendale, Pietermaritzburg.
- 1997 Death of Zondi's wife, Mavis.
- 1997 Death of son, Thabani Lincoln.
- 2000 Death of son, Zama Wolfgang.
- 2004 Retrospective exhibition *Michael Zondi: Sculptor*, held at the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg.
- 2008 6 March Zondi dies in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg.

## CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL AND PERSONAL BACKGROUND

### 1.1 'ZULUNESS' – ETHNICITIES, IDENTITY, AND POLITICS

Zondi lived according to the moral values with which he had been raised in his rural home, both in terms of communality and Christianity. He went beyond identifying himself as African. With a keen awareness and knowledge of his own kinship ties, he defined his regional identity as specifically *-Zuluø* (Zondi, 2006a pers.com.). His early low-relief sculpture reflects his ethnic consciousness, because he depicted scenes from an imagined collective past of the *amaZulu* (Zulu people). The notion of Zuluism<sup>1</sup>, or a propagation of *-Zulunessø*, is relevant to both the thematic progression of Zondiø work and the manner in which it has been appropriated for political manoeuvring in the region into the present. An exploration of his personal identity in relation to ethnicity is the foundation on which further concerns of his art-making will be constructed.

The political landscape of KwaZulu-Natal, shaped by historical processes involving economic and cultural contexts, forms the platform from which Zondi and his predecessors questioned and challenged foreign as well as indigenous structures of authority affecting their lives. The artistø ties locate him among Nguni people, whose historical past was moulded by internal politics under kingship, as well as foreign politics of conquest, that effected their collective naming as *-Zuluø*. The Zuluness reflected in Zondiø work of the first decade of his art-making was, as in politics, a means of self-representation. His earliest artistic work in low-relief makes allusions to a geographically identifiable Zulu landscape and its people. He used dress encoding to reinforce the Zulu origins of his figures, emblems like Zulu traditionalist attire, body adornment, and militarist trappings in the form of shields and spears. With these specific symbols that made visual reference to aspects of life in the Zulu kingdom, he was reinforcing concerns with tradition and origin, as well as cultural continuities in the present. Initially, Zondiø purpose was a reflection of his own rootedness among the *amaZulu*, and, as will be shown, an attempt to invoke values and mores from the received culture. In this context too, he created three-dimensional works in the 1960s, portraying very specific founding members of the royal house of Zulu<sup>2</sup>. While his work

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<sup>1</sup> John Wright uses the term *-Zuluismø* as øthe self-conscious notion that the black people of the Natal-Zululand region were all Zulus by virtue of the fact that their forebears had once been ruled by the Zulu kingsø (2008:38).

<sup>2</sup> See 5.2. NARRATIVES OF POWER ø ZULU ROYALTY p 214.

developed stylistically to become more modernist and conceptual, in some of his last works he would return to genre figures sourced in the rural context of his childhood in Natal.

Subtle interpretation is required to distinguish between Zondi's early expression of Zuluness and similar manifestations of such ethnic affiliation appropriated for political purposes in Natal. This is possible by means of a careful exploration of the context into which he was born, where he was able to work, and the opportunities Zondi seized to employ his art and make it meaningful in the context of modernity, as he understood it. The artist's perceptions of belonging and aspects of identity serve to reveal how reflections of self impacted on Zondi's positioning in relation to the milieu from which he originated. Once he began to realize the potential of art-making to convey messages pertaining to social and political injustice, this determined both the way in which he presented himself to his audience and the selection of imagery he presented to specific patrons. Given the artist's unusual interaction with his white patrons for extended periods of time, the question of his own identity, of the person who he saw himself to be in relation to others, becomes essential for understanding the nature of his work.

A world of increasing mobility has made personal and group identity highly evasive (Filatova, 1996:13) and at the same time 'provisional and flexible' (Arnold, 2000:55). Not surprisingly, after the apartheid era, designations of identity and belonging, as well as ethnic affiliation have remained pertinent into the present, forming the subject of extensive scholarly interest. Zondi's reference to his place of birth, his orientation within common descent groups<sup>3</sup>, and their location within the region's history, are characteristic of factors which impact on definitions of ethnicity (Hobsbawm, 1990:16). During Zondi's career and into the present, the appropriation of ethnicity effected limitations and constraints and defined exclusion. Historians currently locate the potential for the political landscape to encompass ethnicity within relatively recent rivalries between genealogically unrelated chiefdoms in the region (Wright and Hamilton, 1996:21). This included the one small late 18<sup>th</sup> century *amaZulu* chiefdom among many. With significant internal dissent, a major reshaping of its regional power-base occurred under the rule of Shaka kaSenzangakhona. As a conquest state of amalgamated 'discrete, previously independent chiefdoms', the Zulu kingdom initially lacked cohesion and unity (Wright, 2008a:36), given that its rulers 'sought

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<sup>3</sup> German *Geschlecht*, Dutch *stam*.

to maintain clear class distinctions between a mainly Zulu aristocracy and a non-Zulu subject population (Morrell, Wright, and Meintjies, 1996:56).

As a construct of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European ethnographic enterprise, paradigmatic ethnic and racial identities in colonial Africa became strategic political tools. Settler perceptions of heterogeneity among regional peoples informed the construct of the collective term -Zuluø that was indiscriminately used for peoples living in the Zulu kingdom and Natal. This generic western categorization of people, therefore, did not reflect the õcomplex and contestedö process involved in the building of identities among African people (Wright and Hamilton, 1996:30). Yet, the conflation of ethnic and racial identities would dominate South African politics during the artistø's childhood and his productive, creative years, as Zulu traditionalism was used to further the modernist goals of the white settler state (McClendon, 2008:285) and subsequent governments.

Segregation by ethnic or any other criteria in social, political, and cultural spheres, as proposed under the ideology of the colonial state and legislated by the white apartheid regime, had no place in the kind of communality which Zondi sought to shape. As will be shown, nor could the artist reconcile the exploitation of exclusive Zulu ethnicity in the form of Zuluness with his own wider aims. Rather than expressing exclusion by means of narrowly defining ethnic parameters, his art spoke of belonging. From his initial sourcing of motifs in his own Zulu past, his creativity shifted to a broader embrace of modernity and concomitant visions for South Africa, free from the degrading fetters of segregation that were to shape most of his life. Throughout his career, Zondi understood his art-making as a means for fostering understanding among all South Africans, as he propagated reciprocal õtrue love, respect and sincerityí regardless of race or originö (Zondi, c. mid-1960s:2:script). His Zuluness was merely employed as a point of departure for acknowledging others and finding ways to create unity under conditions that supported enriching diversity. With his art, he sought to re-establish the basis for recognizing what it means to be human, in order to nurture respect and impart dignity to relationships with all peoples. It became a vehicle to foster insight into realities of, and solutions for, õracial misunderstandingö, as he termed it (Zondi, c. mid-1960s, script).

More recent scholarship conducted in the region confirms and elaborates on differentiated clan histories under Zulu kingship. As the evolution of ethnic identities is acknowledged, a plethora of individual and collective ways in which Zuluness is imagined and expressed

becomes evident. Rather than being regarded as endemic, theoretical postulates of modernist writing of the 1980s claimed ethnicities to be multi-dimensional conceptual constructs which are situational and consciously created (Filatova, 1996:8,9). Significantly, at the time of the division of Zululand into chiefdoms under British colonial rule in the 1880s, there was still no collective Zulu identity (Morrell, Wright, and Meintjies, 1996:56). At the turn of the century, a clear distinction was still being made between the Zondi tribe and the Zulu tribe (Thompson, 2004:94). This was the time when the artist's ancestor, the Zondi chief, Bambatha kaMancinza, ruled over Zondi people based in two distinct regions. The emergence of Zulu ethnicity, or an ethnic consciousness, has been attributed to the growth of African resistance surrounding the Zulu rebellion of 1906 under his leadership (Lambert and Morrell, 1996:85). In the face of white domination and of poverty among indigenous peoples, a common Zulu past was collectively imagined, as divisions between people north and south of the Thukela, the former boundary between the Zulu Kingdom and British Colony of Natal, diminished. The Zulu past was looked upon for inspiration (Lambert and Morrell, 1996:90).

Zondi shared pride in his regional Zulu roots with *iNkosi* (chief) Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who became his friend and patron from the mid 1960s. Both men, almost of the same age<sup>4</sup>, were raised as Christians, and they both had the rare privilege among black people, to gain a western education, albeit from two very disparate educational springboards and economic perspectives<sup>5</sup>. The most prominent Zulu politician during the height of Zondi's career, Dr. Buthelezi was from the royal house of Zulu through his maternal lineage and was raised among royal children. Zondi's family, on the other hand, was associated with a petty colonial chief and raised in rural poverty. Being Christian and educated, they belonged to the black intelligentsia, a tiny elitist group described misleadingly as *amakholwa* (believers)<sup>6</sup>, whose education and faith instilled in them the hope of being assimilated into white civil society. Their members formed the leadership of *Inkatha ka Zulu*<sup>7</sup> during the decade of their birth. Economic activity and class consciousness still divided Zulu society during the 1920s (Cope, 1993:95). Yet, by soliciting the monarchy in the role of mediator between educated leaders of

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<sup>4</sup> Zondi was born in 1926, Buthelezi in 1928.

<sup>5</sup> For Buthelezi's elitist schooling reserved for royalty at the new royal residence of Solomon *KwaDlamahlaha* at Mahashini, see (Cope, 1993:130-31) and <http://uqconnect.net/~zzhsoszy/states/southafrica/buthelezi.html> URL, 7 August 2006).

<sup>6</sup> See 1.2.2 The *amaKholwa* Intelligentsia p23.

<sup>7</sup> *Inkatha* is the magical coil in Zulu mythology. See Cope (1993: Glossary; 108 citing evidence of Baleni kaSilwana in 1914, from *Stuart archive* Vol 1, pp. 40-41).

*Inkatha* and tribal chiefs, formerly despised by the elite as heathen, the class of *-amarespectables*<sup>8</sup> began speaking for Zulu people in the region. The kingship of Solomon kaDinuzulu awakened expectations of leadership concomitant with western modernity. At the same time he became the central figure in the world of Zulu traditionalism (Cope, 1993:48,53). Insignia and symbols of Zuluness were invoked in the region to foster the notion of Zulu nationhood, ostensibly for the purpose of imagining a unified collective in the political struggle against oppression. As new claims of Zulu identity were made, Zuluism resulted from the juggling between an ethnic alliance with Zulu royalists and nationalist alliances in other regions of South Africa (Wright, 2008a:38). Kingship remained a symbol of leadership for Zulu people. Social fragmentation through economic pressures was severe, precipitated under the 1913 Land Act, and still, under apartheid, when two million people in the region were moved from black spots into reserves (Bonner and Ndima, 2008:378). Under such conditions, kingship could become a surrogate for people who lacked a head (Cope, 1993:33). This places the Zulu royal family in the seminal role of being able to instil in people a sense of continuity, identity and unity at a time when social realities did not (Cope, 1993:34).

The desire to work within the law predominated amongst the *amakholwa*, but their hopes of a liberal-democratic solution to the South African native question were dashed. Prime Minister Hertzog's Native Bills finally entrenched the division between white and African political and cultural systems (Cope, 1993:192). Natal's *amakholwa* reneged on their vision of assimilation into white civil society as a political illusion. In seeking to co-operate with well-meaning white progressive thinkers, they sought to solve the native question with their brand of Zulu nationalism. This was now aimed at political and cultural separateness and concurred with white governance to foster development among Blacks along their own lines. What had begun as a politics of protest at the turn of the century, under the Zondi chief Bambatha, evolved into compromise and accommodating policies of separateness. The demise of *Inkatha ka Zulu* of the 1920s, whose ambitions were regional rather than national (Cope, 1993:xvi), was precipitated by unitary politics which persisted over ethnic nationalism. *Inkatha* continued as a cultural movement, representing nationalist sentiment and Zuluness. Political manipulation of cultural allegiance, under the complexity of ethnic

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<sup>8</sup> Shula Marks (1986:53) cites this Zuluisation of the term, which refers in western parlance to the *amakholwa* as respectable people in civil society.

identity in the region, perpetuated ethnic contestations throughout the decades of Zondi's career, and into the post-apartheid period.

Zondi was in his mid-twenties, just beginning his career as a sculptor, when African ethnicity was once again targeted by the white state. The project of the National Party after 1948 was to elevate its version of primordial ethnic identity<sup>9</sup>. The system of homelands, or Bantustans, was implemented, which recognized indigenous hierarchies of clan and regional and territorial authority, as Blacks were made into custodians of apartheid<sup>10</sup> (Waetjen and Maré, 2008:356). Government restrictions on the black population were amplified. In pursuing the ultimate aim of creating geographically distinct *Bantustan* territories for occupation by black South Africans, the white state cemented ethnic designations into legislation. Informed by the segregationist gaze, the classification of all South Africans according to race, in the Population Registration Act of 1950, intensified the language of alterity as a black-white oppositional binary. This was augmented by the Group Areas Act, designating specific areas for habitation according to the same criteria. The black intelligentsia foresaw the era of political underground activity (Couzens, 1985:311).

Once the new Nationalist dispensation was in place, the black population placed its hopes for a strong black leadership on the Zulu Chief Albert Luthuli (Couzens, 1985:312)<sup>10</sup>. This was a move away from conservative, old-fashioned, Zuluist idealism espoused by the President of the Natal ANC (African National Congress), A.W.G. Champion, who was allegedly also sceptical of intellectualism (Couzens, 1985:289, 312,313). The passive resistance movement culminated in the Defiance Campaign of 1952, followed by government bannings in 1953. By the time Zondi was sculpting his first works around 1960 that addressed subjugation, the ANC had been banned. Over the years, state repression increased substantially.

In the course of challenging Zulu identity in more recent scholarship, *Zuluness* as propagated by, and legitimizing, the resuscitated National Cultural Liberation Movement, *Inkatha* has come under scrutiny. Ostensibly cultural, the organization resuscitated the political tools of its earlier namesake, Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who became its leader in 1975. When visualizing political solutions for the segregated country during the height of the

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<sup>9</sup> See also Waetjen (2004).

<sup>10</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, "Busy Bee" Letter to Chief A.J. Luthuli in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 1 April 1950 and 29 March 1952 cited in Couzens (1985: 312).



artist's career in the 1970s, inevitably cognisance had to be taken of the manner in which Buthelezi used Zuluism in his regional politics to foster his political ambitions. With the aim of promoting social cohesion, he employed a rhetoric of Zuluness which consisted of exploiting a nostalgic, cultural discourse of Zulu history, laden with symbols. The politician sought legitimization for his claims to leadership in his maternal royal Zulu genealogy, which was linked to the ideology behind the initial *Inkatha ka Zulu* of the 1920s. The new organization revived a similar ethnic rhetoric for political mobilization of the masses under the banner of nationalism, doing so, once again, under royal patronage.

Buthelezi thus used elements of perceived historic continuity such as ethnicity and language in the politics of nation-forming. These elements are factors deemed irrelevant to statehood as sovereign people make political choices in their quest for renewal and revolution (Hobsbawm, 1990:87). Emphasizing continuity linked to ideas of fixity, the *Inkatha* rhetoric may be related to the apartheid discourse in its ideological construction of otherness (Bhabha, 1995:66) that was expressed in the Bantustan policy of white governance. As *Inkatha* structured Zulu nationalist sentiments, it simultaneously gleaned its legitimacy on the broadly based South African rejection of apartheid, as Buthelezi refused separatist independence for KwaZulu (Freund, 1996:180). For a while, the newly formed organization was perceived as a partner-in-struggle within a broad activist coalition (Waetjen and Maré, 2008:353,354). While rejecting separatist independence from the apartheid state, then, Buthelezi's blend of resistance and adaptation consisted of mobilization through a nostalgic, cultural discourse immersed in history (laden with symbols) (Freund, 1996:180). Despite Buthelezi's strongly oppositional stance towards apartheid and the success of pragmatic economic policies in the KwaZulu homeland, he was increasingly discredited for working within the homeland structures imposed by the white Nationalist government. During the 1970s, politically prominent voices such as that of Steve Biko questioned processes of black emancipation within policies of 'loyal resistance' (Maré and Hamilton, 1987).

Zondi's critique of apartheid was implicitly a challenge to the politics of exclusion. Buthelezi's claims of Zulu exclusivity unavoidably provoked the kind of power-political opposition which ultimately led to violence. Discussions among the artist, Buthelezi, and Vincent Mseleku<sup>11</sup> are remembered as being challenging and heated contestations that

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<sup>11</sup> Mseleku was the principal of a Dundee Secondary School, and is the brother-in-law of Zondi's wife (Zondi-Molefe, 2008a pers.com.).

revolved predominantly around forms of governance and the issue of an armed conflict (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com.). In Buthelezi's Zuluist rhetoric, Zondi will have found an echo of his own sentiments on a number of issues related to cultural heritage, that he deemed valuable for shaping modernity<sup>12</sup>. Zondi recalled how, during the 1970s, *Inkatha* had been a prompt for people to become politically aware. This he regarded as vital, commenting 'It was never political but that's the time politics woke up among our people' (Zondi, 2006c pers.com.) Also, as an educationalist, Zondi regarded Buthelezi's rhetoric of self-help and progress in a positive light<sup>13</sup>. Apart from their agreement on opposing white rule, these include the nurturing of values linked to family and communal life sourced in past communalism of peoples in the region. Linked to this they will have agreed on the need for social development, particularly in the context of rural areas experiencing increased destitution. Under this same banner of progressive development in rural areas, Zondi took up employment with the Department of Information in the late 1960s. Ironically, these communal virtues suited the mould of the apartheid state's policies, which fostered ethnic nationalism. It could be argued therefore, that Zondi's employment in a state Department of Information, soon after meeting Buthelezi, was a form of rapprochement similar to *Inkatha's* ambiguous political blend. Zondi also agreed with Buthelezi's objection to school boycotts, which the white state also tried to prevent.

Zondi's reverence for the Zondi leader, Bambatha, and for his historical role in struggle politics, does not preclude his disapproval of the indigenous system of chiefly authority and the monarchy (Zondi, 2006b pers.com.). On the one hand, he became acutely aware of the nature of white rule as being ruthless, commenting, 'the Afrikaans government was white, I mean strong and cruel' (Zondi, 2004:7 pers.com.). Yet Zondi's indictment of these former social hierarchies within a modern system of government was founded in the potential, as he saw it, for abuse of such positions of power (Zondi, 2006b pers.com.). His critical stance is arguably related to histories of social and political distinctions of which Zondi was aware. These became manifest through the aforementioned increasingly unequal distribution of wealth in the region from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wright and Hamilton, 1996:22,23). Yet, the artist's perspectives were formed in his own reality during his career, when he witnessed not

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<sup>12</sup> See 5.1 CULTURE AS SELF-NARRATIVE p209.

<sup>13</sup> See *development southern africa*, Third Quarter, 1974. A full-page portrait of Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi makes up an advert garnering investment for the KwaZulu homeland, with the chief minister's personal appeal as a word-play on self-help, alluding to the opportunity of economic gain for investors. Buthelezi's poster for the 2009 parliamentary election reiterated the party slogan of the IFP 'real development now'.

only obvious inequality based on racial segregation in South Africa but also a regional inequality among black people in KwaZulu. Other historically founded factors may be explored in his distrust of chiefly authority. Woven into his own family history, there was the abovementioned vassalage of his clan to indigenous power structures. This was knowledge handed down to Zondi in oral histories through his grandfather. Here it became apparent that families of wealthier men, especially chiefs and *izinduna* (headmen), were able to mobilize communal resources more effectively than commoners – sharpening the cleft between rich and poor (Morrell, Wright, and Meintjies, 1996:42). A further link may be explored in the fact that Zondi was a member of the *amakholwa* elite. Historically this locates him in a position of reciprocal mistrust between this educated minority and the chiefly structures of authority. As noted, these structures were embedded in pre-colonial times, particularly the *izinduna*, whose chieftaincies were hereditary. This was the basis for Buthelezi's legitimation for his leadership of the *amaZulu* in modern times.

In the tragic years of the *udlame* (internecine violence) of the 1980s, during which Zondi's family was severely affected, the artist became a mediator between hostile clans in his home region of Mtulwa. As a positive memory, Zondi recalled Buthelezi's role in quelling rioting (Zondi, 2004:7 pers.com.). On the other hand, political manipulation and concomitant acts of violence that ultimately erupted, in Zondi's view, were propagated by some tribal chiefs. In this indictment he included Buthelezi (Zondi, 1987, letter). Such civil turbulence ran contrary to the artist's quest for conciliatory and integrative politics across all barriers of race and ethnicity, which, at the time, no doubt contributed to his challenge of Buthelezi's politics. His unequivocal rejection of violence at the time, had led to his receiving death threats, forcing him to leave Mtulwa (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com.). Increasingly, Buthelezi's appeal to Zuluness for the purpose of political mobilization lost its kudos in the struggle against apartheid, in favour of more unifying politics. Ultimately, Zulu nationalism was eclipsed by mobilizations around black solidarity (Waetjen and Maré, 2008:353).

The question arises, then, of how far Zondi's expression of 'being Zulu' in his art-making, differed from the very similar metaphorical signage and concomitant rhetoric, in propounding Zulu nationalism. Ethnic nationalist tribalism invoking Zulu unity under royal patronage, from the time of Zondi's birth, survived into the politics of the 1970s. From 1948, it was condoned under the state's blatant and all-pervasive apartheid ideology of ethnic segregation. This was just as Zondi began sculpting, inspired by his own Zuluness, landscape

reliefs and three-dimensional figures of old and young Zulu warriors; buxom girls dancing, and traditionalist women performing *umuzi* (household) duties. As will be shown, Zondi's appeal to the Zulu past embraced a selective process of cultural evaluation, as invoked by black intellectuals like the poet and scholar, Benedict Vilakazi and the renowned playwright Herbert I.E. Dhlomo. His relatively abrupt artistic shift, from reflecting on regionally specific ethnicity into a much broader universalist mode, implies the renunciation of limiting and exclusionary perspectives inherent to nationalisms. Zondi's was not a political mission, but a humanitarian one. Zondi's Zuluness was distinct from the ostensibly similar language conveyed under political leadership in the region because his motive for using Zulu symbols as instruments of self representation and identity differed from the political. Zulu nationalist ideology required an invocation of the past for the purpose of imagining a homogenous collective based on birthright and exclusivity. Through heroic tales of the past, their Zuluness was to give them a feeling of belonging and continuity. Thus armed with illusions of elitism and superiority, the Zulu people hoped that from the bleakness of their rural poverty, they would find some measure of strength to face their insecure future. While *Inkatha* excluded non-Zulu people from its vision, Zondi saw in this strength a solid launching pad for a unifying embrace of all South Africans.

Despite their disputes, by having Buthelezi as a trusted friend, Zondi had the opportunity to become familiar with the pragmatism of politics and the need, everywhere, for compromise. This was in contrast to ideological tenets developed in the business of oppositional rhetoric or through art-making. Politics was an unsuitable companion for a man who was essentially unfrontational. The voice of the artist, narrated through his artwork, required no electoral endorsement. Without personal political ambitions, Zondi found the notion of communal integrity, even the particular integrity inherent in Zuluness, into which he had been born and nurtured, did not require attachment to notions of nationhood based on ethnic ties. Zondi had the privilege to perform on his own, proffering his art as a means to foster conciliation, wherever he chose to become engaged with patrons.

Within the project of societal transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, contemporary constructs of a perceived coherence in Zulu ethnic identity are still being contested, not only in the context of museum displays. Narratives describing an historical continuity from the Zulu kingdom to a contemporary Zulu nation are acknowledged to be as a limiting simplification (Dlamini, 2001:1; 2008). Nsizwa Dlamini calls for public spaces like museums

to focus on and visualize academic research, taking into account the histories of regional diversity and pre-colonial identities of Nguni peoples, and their significance for Zulu identity and stereotypes (2001,1-5; 2008). It will be shown how, in fulfilment of Dlamini's call for a more inclusive approach to historical evidence, Zondi was ahead of his time by three decades. His highly individualistic and emotive depictions of the paramount chief of the *amaZulu* represented the kind of 'post-apartheid' vision of the past, which is being demanded of current museum displays, for audiences of the so-called rainbow nation (Dlamini, 2008:477,478).

In just one decade from starting to sculpt, the artist had understood how Zuluness could be depicted through various filters of modernity. The iconic Shaka had always served to exemplify Zuluness, with both laudatory and pejorative connotations. In venturing to depict the leader, Zondi distanced himself from the stereotype. His art was not informed by the reiteration of such a typecast, appropriated for the irresponsible mobilisation of voters. Given the luxury of the personal approach which his art afforded Zondi, his creativity was informed by concomitantly discerning perspectives, sourced in imagining, and by then selecting empathetic moments from the large pool of collective memory. As Albert Luthuli noted, it was just this capacity for imagination which seemed so sorely lacking on the part of the white regime vis-à-vis black people (2006[1962]:148). Imagination evokes empathy. It would be this human trait which Zondi demonstrated. By proffering his artwork he was eliciting his audience's responses to his figurative sculpture depicting being human, as black and African.

#### 1.1.1 Historical ties to KwaZulu-Natal

Zondi's forebears belong to the *abeNguni* (Nguni peoples). A regional classificatory system of relationships going back over centuries locates Zondi's family within structures of patriarchal authority of the African social system from pre-colonial times.

Zondi's early low-relief sculpture on kists during the 1950s allude romantically to the indigenous homestead, the *umuzi* or *kraal*, the smallest political unit under tribal government of groups of people living under a male head. His three-dimensional male and female figures of that decade reiterate this traditionalist context of social hierarchies and family bonds<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> See 2.5 ROMANTIC UTOPIAS? CONTEXTUALIZING EARLY RELIEFS AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL WORK p85.

The *amaZondi* (or Abasengome people) are mentioned in the work of A.T. Bryant (1929:72, 517; [1911, 1913] 1964: 59,60)<sup>15</sup>. As the eNadi people, with kin among Swazi-Nguni people, they settled along the Thukela river, falling into vassalage under Shaka kaSenzangakhona in the Zulu kingdom. This implicitly suggests that they opposed his expansionist policies. James Bird locates the *amaZondi* as tenant inhabitants of the Colony of Natal (1965:134,135), a status which existed from the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the childhood of Zondi's grandfather.

While colonial authorities' social life experience was rooted in a metropolitan and modernist world view, their acknowledgement of African group and political identities was manifest in the construction of tribes as rigid units of administration (Morrell, Wright, and Meintjies, 1996:36). Theophilus Shepstone<sup>16</sup>, from 1846, as intermediary between the colonial government and indigenous people, catered for locations of allotted land for black occupation, against the claims to most of the land by white settlers (Etherington, 1971:17,18). The territories were administered by chiefs, initially with unchanged authority, but later as indirect rule under a designated Supreme Chief in the person of the Lieutenant-Governor under the British Crown. This initial alien colonial rule generated antagonistic identities but also alliances, as it represented an alternative to oppression by the Zulu state (Morrell, Wright, and Meintjies, 1996:36,37). The tribal system under colonial rule signalled the beginning of segregationist policies, or apartheid that was critiqued in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century by literary figures such as H.I.E. Dhlomo, with whom Zondi shared a common family history going back to Bambatha's *kraal*. In the context of the re-tribalisation policies of the Hertzog government in the 1920s, Dhlomo astutely deemed Shepstone's peace to have been more disastrous than war (Couzens, 1985:144). Substantial curtailment and modification of an originally African social order under white governance impacted directly on the socio-political climate in which Zondi produced his oeuvre. This was the beginning of the kind of efficacious segregation which resulted in social and political estrangement between black and white South Africans, of the kind that Zondi would endeavour to bridge over a century later. During the artist's lifetime, the system of governance was manipulated and revalidated under the auspices both of Zulu nationalism and the segregationist politics of white nationalist ideology. Jan Smuts proposed that contact with Whites should be reduced to the workplace, while labour should be drawn from allocated location lands for Blacks, where family life should continue on the traditional lines (Smuts,

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>16</sup> Theophilus Shepstone was diplomatic agent to the Native Tribes and secretary for Native Affairs in Natal from 1846 to 1876 (Morrell, Wright and Meintjies, 1996:35 citing Etherington 1989).

1930:99). The move, such as that made by the Zondiø family, to become tenants on white farmland, was regarded by Smuts as a sign of social and cultural decay<sup>17</sup>.

The artist made frequent reference to his paternal ancestral link with the indigenous chief, Bambatha kaMancinza<sup>18</sup>. Zondiø grandfather, Maneta Bambisi, was a cousin and childhood companion to Bambatha and became involved in the uprising in 1906 (Zondi, 2006c:4 pers.com; 2007b pers.com.). Their *kraal* was situated on the left bank of the Loza stream, at Ngome in the Umvoti Division, which river Zondi mentioned in connection with the place at which his mother stayed (Zondi, 2004 pers.com.). This is indicative of the artistø intimate knowledge of, and interest in, physical and geographical features of his surroundings and also their historical significance. By the time of Zondiø birth, the *amaZondi* people were living on the agriculturally barren land belonging to white farmers, which land was at times destitute and at best meagre (Thompson, 2004:13-15). Settlers had called it øthe Thornsø due to its unsuitability for profitable agriculture (Thompson, 2004:2,11). Apart from working the land as tenants, some of Zondi elders were also labourers in the small town of Greytown (Zondi, 2007a pers.com). Zondi received first hand information from his grandfather, who recounted the severe conditions of poverty from his boyhood. By the turn of the century, under Bambathaø chieftainship, land squatting and the concomitant levying of taxes were held accountable for poverty (Webb and Wright, 1976: 250: evidence Lazarus Mxaba, 1900). Recent scholarship locates the Zulu (or Bambatha) Rebellion in the context of the severe economic hardship in the aftermath of the South African War (Thompson, 2004:27). This last concerted stand against white rule was brutally crushed. The rebellion and roles of defiance, such as Bambathaø, have been absorbed into a mythical South African collective memory of heroism, especially by politicians with partiality towards Zulu nationalist sentiment. After the rebellion, the Zulu past was looked upon for inspiration<sup>19</sup>. African resistance to oppression and injustice grew, as did the concept of Zulu ethnicity (Lambert and Morrell, 1996:85,90). Implicit in Zondiø reverence for his ancestorø historical role is Bambathaø active involvement in the history of the struggle against foreign domination, something which Zondi pursued in his own pacifist way through his creativity. Perhaps more significant than the genealogical link with Bambatha *per se*, is Zondiø affiliation with the historical figure as an untiring spokesperson for his people (Thompson,

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<sup>17</sup> For full text, see Smuts (1930:99,100).

<sup>18</sup> Mention of Bambatha was made in personal communication between Michael Zondi and the author at various junctures, including the recorded interviews on 6 November 2006; 1 December 2006; 8 May and 30 Oct. 2007.

<sup>19</sup> See H.I.E. Dhlomo, øBambatha O Bambatha! Arise! And be our leaderø ø in Couzens (1985: 310).

2004:14,42). This is a self-appointed role which Zondi adopted throughout his own life. He employed his art-making in speaking on behalf of people whose living conditions, if anything, had only worsened from the desperate economic need experienced during Bambatha's time.

## 1.2 EDUCATION AND CAREER TRAINING: CONTEXTUALIZING THE MISSION ENTERPRISE

Zondi had no formal art training. His artistic career evolved from his initial mission schooling and vocational training. After his primary and secondary schooling in a predominantly Lutheran mission context, Zondi acquired woodworking and teaching skills in *Dundee Industrial Bantu School* (DIBS), a trade school for Blacks, run by the Lutheran Church of Sweden Mission (CSM).

Zondi's learning opportunities require an exploration into the nature of his education, given that under the auspices of 'Native' policies, a curriculum was devised specifically for black South Africans. This affected art tuition in particular. He belonged to a class whose individual and collective aspirations, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, were rooted in western education. Expressed through art and literature, pioneer artists<sup>20</sup> of the 20<sup>th</sup> century asserted their ambitions, objectives, and hopes within the context of the social and economic climate of the burgeoning South African economy.

Until the mid 1950s, education for Blacks was offered predominantly in the context of the European mission enterprise of various denominations. From primary and secondary schooling, to practical skills taught at tertiary level, Christian values of the late Victorian era were transmitted. These were formulated within a rhetoric of 'development' and 'progress' that is ascribed to the colonial discourse (Marks, 1989:221), which in turn is linked to the new identity of *amakholwa*.

For Zondi, education meant the accumulation of intellectual and practical skills, and also life-long learning. It became a guiding principle in the artist's life and work, during a career that spanned the four decades of white rule. He understood that his art could enable him to make choices and gain a voice and that it afforded him the kind of freedom which articulation and

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<sup>20</sup> The term 'pioneers' is often used by South African art historians in reference to black artists born before the end of the 1920s (Sack, 1988 and Miles, 1997).



communication through art effects. The artist was thus able to imbue his sculptural oeuvre with the power of agency, which he employed for the purpose of speaking to his predominantly white patrons. In this way, implicitly, he was also addressing the centre of white power on behalf of marginalized people. Concurrently with his purposeful art-making he had to earn a living. In his own capacity as a teacher he fostered creative talent where he could, envisaging the creation of an art training facility for Blacks, who were being denied art tuition at high school level. As a father, he encouraged his children to learn, inculcating in them high career aspirations.

Zondi's schooling and career training, therefore, took place under the auspices of schools at mission stations. In the context of white rule, a liberal paternalistic concept of the 'civilizing mission' which aimed at educating indigenous Africans, came into conflict with political imperatives of maintaining white political supremacy. Segregationist legislation was therefore implemented before 1920<sup>21</sup>, including pass laws. This was not a 'unified ideological package' (Dubow, 1989:39). It was applied as a means of socio-political and economic control over the black population, as institutions of white governance attempted to secure political domination. As much as the theories of pseudo-scientific doctrines of social Darwinism and the language of scientific racism from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century became an important element of the ideology of segregation, so also the language of 'cultural adaptation' was used to lend them credibility (Dubow, 1989:39). As 'biological adaptation' became the metaphor for separate development, the fostering of 'an indigenous native culture or system of cultures' was propagated under the guise of ceasing 'to force the African into alien European moulds'<sup>22</sup>. Such socially divisive theories sourced in the discourse of 'culture' prompted ideas about the development of different peoples 'along the lines of their 'natural advance' ' (Dubow, 1989:8). This included a separate system of education for black children and thus impacted directly on the nature of art training, to be considered below<sup>23</sup>.

From the 1920s, then, constructed racial affiliations informed divisive legislation that engendered the ambiguities of both consent and opposition from the ranks of the black intelligentsia who formed the leadership. By the time Zondi entered his primary schooling in

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<sup>21</sup> 1911 Mines and Works Act; 1911 Native Labour Regulation Act; 1913 Native Land Act; 1920 Native Affairs Act (Dubow, 1989:39).

<sup>22</sup> Jan Smuts (1930) p. 84 - cited in Dubow (1989: 36).

<sup>23</sup> See 1.2.1 Creativity for Other: 'Native' and 'Bantu' Education p16.

the early 1930s, the subject of mission-education for Blacks had been incorporated into the politicized focus on the 'Native question'. It was regarded in the light of the 'assimilationist' school of thought, which substituted 'class' for 'race'. The 'adaptationists' viewed the formation of an educated black proletariat in terms of implicit class conflict. Therefore, influential policy-makers like G.P. Lestrade and later, W. Eiselen<sup>24</sup>, proffered a pejorative critique of black mission-education, speaking against making of the black man, 'a black European' (Dubow, 1989: 36,37). Taking the stance that the 'culturally assimilated and missionary-educated native was somehow fraudulent', Lestrade's 'cultural adaptationism' was appropriated for politics. Implicit in this was a vision of building 'a good Bantu future on the basis of their own culture' i.e. the recreation of 'tribally based culture' (Dubow, 1989: 36, 37). Much later Eiselen, like Lestrade, encouraged *Bantu* cultural development, stating that it was 'the duty of the native' to become a better native, with ideals and a culture of his own (Eiselen in Dubow, 1989:37,188). Dubow asserts that by linking compromises of segregationist policies to the discourse of culture, culture came to transcend the Victorian theories of upward social mobility of 'primitive' peoples linked to the 'civilizing' mission, and the assumed existence of an 'innate and immutable racial hierarchy' described in Darwinism (1989:7,8). Diverse connotations pinned to concepts of culture in the 1920s and 1930s included its use as a synonym for 'civilization', that is, an element able to be universally transmitted. Then again it became a synonym for 'race', a biological determinant used as a static concept, but allowing for the idea of 'a gradual process of racial 'upliftment'' (Dubow, 1989: 35). Paternalistic notions of 'protecting' black Africans from industrialization were also expressed in policies attempting to direct and contain Africans' aspirations to agricultural self-sufficiency in a rural existence (Dubow, 1989:7). This becomes relevant in view of Zondi's activity in rural service learning, to be considered below.

### 1.2.1 Creativity for Other: 'Native' and 'Bantu' Education

Zondi remained consistently proud of his autodidactic path in becoming a professional sculptor. His creativity was given its foundation of skills in his own home, in rudimentary crafting exercises and drawing, taught at primary school level, and in 'industrial training' at school and during his vocational tuition. Apart from the creative impetus within the system of Bantu Education, various educators and patrons, *inter alia* from within the ranks of the

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<sup>24</sup> Werner Eiselen was the Secretary of Native Affairs under Minister Hendrik Verwoerd in the formulation of 'Native policy' during the 1950s.

state's Department of Education, made influential interventions during his early career as a vocational teacher, giving him authoritative guidelines for his work.

Then, as now, pejorative associations were linked to vocational training. During Zondi's schooling this was not in isolation, but in the context of the discriminatory exclusion of cultural and liberal learning for Blacks at high school and tertiary level. The segregationist policies that determined the curriculum mitigated against an acceptance of training in the crafts. Zondi had personal financial reasons for having to leave school and follow this educational route: 'It was the thing to do to study to be a teacher, and the industrial school was looked down on. But as a teacher's training was twice as expensive as industrial school fees, and my father was a working type so I learnt to build instead of teach' (Tilley, 1965).

John W. (Jack) Grossert's Ph.D. dissertation (1968) elucidates aspects of Bantu Education. This is significant in two ways. Firstly, the specific curriculum devised for black learners will reveal how Zondi was affected, both as a learner and a teacher, by the Bantu Education system, which was tailored for indigenous children from earliest colonial times in the region. Secondly, a personal friendship connected Zondi with the white educator. In Grossert, who was Inspector for Native Schools in Natal from 1948 to 1962, Zondi met a man with a high sensibility to the art aesthetics of indigenous people (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:6,7). Grossert's perceptions were absorbed into the curricular programme of schools and art teacher training, as e.g. the Ndaleni Teachers' Training College. His own pictorial imagery, in which he addressed aspects of black subjugation, becomes significant in terms of both his stance as an educator and the fact of his personal friendship with Zondi, whom he encouraged in his art-making. In reciprocity, the artist was able to make a meaningful contribution to Grossert's academic work, by transmitting to him important aspects of indigenous perceptions concerning the creation of art (Grossert, 1968:41)<sup>25</sup>. Grossert's analysis of the content of the art and crafts syllabus and the teaching methodology in schools for Blacks was that this education was governed by an awareness of the European Hellenistic legacy which discriminated between free citizens enjoying a liberal and cultural education, and slaves and the servile, who practised the arts and manual skills, and who were given vocational training (Grossert, 1968:9-11).

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<sup>25</sup> See 2.3 ZULU DESIGN AESTHETICS - *UCHWEPHESHA* p66.

Zondi's grandfather initiated the artist's education in natural surroundings and the customary social order of respect and veneration for the life experiences and wisdom of elders. This reverence had been diluted from colonial times, as children gained a status with western learning skills, which was formerly alien within rural communal living (Agthe, 1999:18). Grossert notes that rather than fostering indigenous civilization skills, western values and ideologies of the "dominating, superior cultures of the colonial powers" were transmitted in schools (1968:53). "Literacy and mental skills" were provided, which should "enable the Bantu adolescent to adjust himself to the psychological, if not social, integration with the white" (Grossert, 1968:74). Ultimately, in the absence of social integration, the "civilizing" mission of the colonial government aimed to train a black workforce able to be absorbed into the economy (Grossert, 1968:57), especially after the discovery of mineral wealth in South Africa. Political and educational bodies, and individual religions, perceived from the outset a "need" for providing "industrial or trade instruction" as vocational training. Ostensibly this was "a method of drawing the Native from his barbarous habits and customs, and giving him a real and permanent elevation in the social scale" (Grossert, 1968:56). The intention, then, was conversion of the "pagan" to Christianity, while breaking down "Native nationality and clanship" (Grossert, 1968:56,57). "Industrial training" was fraught with ambiguities, linked to the pragmatic intentions of the colonial government, versus ideological expectations of parents, who anticipated the socio-economic elevation of their children through western education. Grossert asserted that through legislative measures colonial governance aimed to prevent the upliftment of indigenous people beyond the level of "hewers of wood and drawers of water", seeing, as it did, a competitive threat in the expanding productivity of mission industrial schooling (Grossert, 1968:67,68). The role of black people remained one of service at the lowest wage levels (Morrell, Wright, and Meintjies, 1996:42).

The first attempts to include any artistic creativity into the classrooms of the Natal provincial Native schools was in 1912, with the introduction of drawing, taught from Sub A to year 7, while industrial work was included in the syllabus of school years 7 and 8<sup>26</sup>. Grossert lauds the inclusion of object drawing as a change in official curriculum policy, and a first means of "self-expression". The English-speaking intellectual C.T. Loram, Chief inspector of Native Education from 1918, was deemed an enlightened educator who introduced "native crafts" and music into the school curriculum. He further revised staff structures to include

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<sup>26</sup> For C.T. Loram's *Curriculum for Native Schools* proposals see Grossert (1968:70).

Organisers who provided guidance for teachers (Grossert, 1968:71,72). On the other hand, placing educational value on traditional crafts within Bantu Education, in Grossert's view, exemplified differentiation from the curriculum for white children (Grossert, 1968:71,72). Taking a pragmatic stance on education for Blacks, the liberal educationalist, Edgar Brookes<sup>27</sup>, summarized and classified three aspects which influenced Bantu Education, namely identity, subordination and differentiation (Grossert, 1968:83,84)<sup>28</sup>. Loram's *The Education of the South African Native* was published in 1917. The inclusion of anthropological, ethnological and psychological opinions in relation to the native question gave the work a positivist scientific approach influenced by the American South (Dubow, 1989:27). Loram is therefore acknowledged as one of the principal advocates of 20<sup>th</sup> century segregation.

Craft teaching at primary school level in the 1930s and drawing, was the extent of creative skills in which Zondi would have had instruction during his elementary schooling. Perhaps tuition in drawing at an early age created the foundation for Zondi's skill, as an adult, of being able to draw, in quick sketches, likenesses of people which he executed while he was socializing with them (Zondi-Molefe, 2009c pers.com).

Linked to the abovementioned segregationist agenda of the state, educators and the inspectorate for Bantu Schools began voicing their concerns regarding the paucity of art tuition (Grossert, 1968:76). It was realized that there could be no satisfactory link between art and manual and industrial work. Concurring with this, Grossert differentiates between vocational training and providing a practical course with some educational value (1968:56), as exemplified during the time of Zondi's schooling from the late 1930s. In his own controlling and guiding capacity within the system of Bantu Education, Grossert fulfilled his inspectorial duties and began to influence the school curriculum. Regarding education in art, he used important recommendations, made by Arthur Lismer, a Canadian artist and educator who visited South Africa in the mid 1930s. These included psychological as well as pragmatic guidelines for art education. Lismer's indictment of the ability and quality of teachers in art education found another apparently inadvertent response in the person of John Nixon. As *Organiser of Crafts and Woodwork* from 1941, Nixon recruited better qualified staff and saw to spatial accommodation and equipment.

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<sup>27</sup> Dr. Edgar Brookes was principal at the college for black students at Adams Mission (Couzens, 1985:55).

<sup>28</sup> See Grossert (1968:84-87); Brookes, E.H. (1924) *The History of Native Policy in South Africa from 1830 to the Present Day*. Cape Town, Nasionale Pers.

With few exceptions, in the 1940s there was still a dearth of pictorial and graphic art in Bantu schools. Attempts were made to foster 'imaginative self-expression' through modelling and decoration of pottery ware (Grossert, 1968:95). Nixon perceived an apparent lack of interest in creative art on the part of staff, but thought that 'enthusiasm and interest could be aroused' (Grossert, 1968:80). Under Nixon, by 1946, specialist teachers and class teacher responsibility for craft instruction was introduced (Grossert,1968:82). The intrinsic value of such training was emphasized, beyond any commercial concerns related to the sale of utilitarian objects. Zondi would have met Nixon at Dundee. Both as Organiser, presiding over vocational teaching and in his capacity as Zondi's patron during the 1950s, Nixon's intervention in the artist's early oeuvre would become influential.

Zondi sold some of his first pieces from Bantu Shows. Grossert links this institution to a fostering of an acceptance of art and crafts as a subject taught at Bantu schools (1968:113,114). The 'Bantu show' movement, guided by paternalist notions, was seen by the white educators in terms of their western ideas of progress and 'betterment' (Grossert,1968:109)<sup>29</sup>. Concurrently, Departmental exhibitions were held, showing a wide range of objects, from furniture crafted in vocational schools like Zondi's in Dundee, to primary school work<sup>30</sup>. This included sculpture in the form of portrait heads and small, stylized human forms, as well as animals. These are interspersed with ceramic and grass-weaving work. Significantly, the labelling still includes Arthur Lismer's terminology referring to self-expression, 'First Steps in Plastic Expression' and is possibly reflective of Grossert's comment about a 'growing interest in sculpture' (Grossert, 1968:106).

The Bantu Education Department's *Edendale Vocational School* to which Zondi moved in 1956, represents the *realization* of educational policy recommendations made three decades earlier by the a British government body, the *Advisory Committee on Native Education*. Touring South Africa as a member of the *Phelps-Stokes Commission on African Education*, two years earlier, in 1921 the West African scholar and teacher, Dr. James K. Aggrey, praised mission schooling, that is, the Natal system for Native Schools (Grossert, 1968:73). At a time of socio-economic turbulences linked to industrialization and post-war depression, he had an enthusiastic reception all over South Africa, by black and white audiences

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 2, III 'The Development of Bantu Shows' in Grossert (1968:108-124).

<sup>30</sup> Black and white photographs probably from the 1950s, of exhibitions presented by the Department of Education are in the Kay Nixon archive.

alike (Couzens, 1985:83). Aggrey's impact in South Africa is significant in that it seems to have struck the reconciliatory cord for fostering the new conception, at the time, of interracial relationships. His visit spawned institutions like the *Joint Councils of Europeans and Natives*. His emphasis on common humanity instilled hope in progressive Blacks. At the same time it was useful to liberals and had a calming effect on white South Africans (Couzens:1985:84).

In the wake of the findings of the *Phelps-Stokes Commission*, the advancement of Blacks was thus further propagated through mission and industrial schooling and a system of tutelage. A predominantly vocational orientation for rural dwellers was thought to facilitate a gradual assimilation into urban westernised life, without disrupting rural life patterns (Murphy, 1976:20,21)<sup>31</sup>. Judging from the information given by Zondi, regarding his work under government auspices in community outreach at the end of the 1960s, some aspects of his activities in the transfer of knowledge seem akin to those of the Jeanes system of schools<sup>32</sup>. This educational ethos is reflected in industrial schooling aimed at rural community development (Murphy, 1976:21,22). Teachers were specially prepared by means of in-service training. They travelled circuits of rural schools and communities, acting as stimulators of basic development activities like land improvement, providing better sanitation, adult education and literacy, better farming techniques and low-cost building (Murphy, 1976:21,22). Critiqued and deemed to represent 'education for subordination', this educational philosophy of rural-vocational 'education for self-reliance' was nevertheless incorporated later in the century, by post-colonial modern African governments. Zondi's work as *Organiser of Arts and Crafts* in the Department of Information in the late 1960s (Deane, 1978:201; Ogilvie, 1998:767), was linked to transfer of skills and knowledge, and making educational material available to rural populations mired in economic destitution (Zondi, 2007b:5,6 pers.com.). These activities reflected Brookes's ideas about agricultural instruction (Grossert, 1968:84 citing Brookes, 1925). Putting time and place into context may shed light on the subtle difference in objectives of such educational activities. Both Brookes, as a white liberal under Union government of the 1920s, and Zondi, working under the auspices of an apartheid state department four decades later, had the welfare of an impoverished and marginalized population in mind. On the one hand, Brookes

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<sup>31</sup> For more information about the origin of the *Phelps-Stokes Commission* and James E. Kwegyir Aggrey, see 'Moralising Leisure Time: The Transatlantic Connection and Black Johannesburg (1918-1936)' in Couzens, (1985: 82ff) and Murphy (1976: 21-22).

<sup>32</sup> The Jeanes System of Schools advanced the educational ethos of industrial schooling in the American South.

thought agricultural and economically viable craftwork tuition should be fostered, in lieu of 'less useful subjects' (Grossert, 1968:84 citing Brookes, 1925:463,465). Zondi's motivation, on the other hand, had a greater immediacy. He was seeking to promote improvement in the lives of rural people. Therefore Brookes, in his position of influence over the content of school curricula, was propagating that a whole system of learning should forfeit subjects in the humanities, in order to foster people's ability to make a living. This educational outcome, informed by liberal paternalism, fulfilled the intention of bridging the gap, as he saw it, between 'the average Bantu's education and his life after school' (Grossert, 1968:83-84 citing Brookes, 1924). Within the political agenda of differentiation, this was done with the aim of making school learning more relevant to rural life. It seems to have been an *a priori* conclusion that Blacks would remain on the land. From 1926, for a full decade, a host of proposed 'Native Bills' captured the intellectual and political imagination of South Africans vying for power, until the Bills were ratified in 1936. This new legislation, with its racist thinking, its embrace of tribalism, and its encouragement of ethnic nationalism, created the framework of restrictive legislation for black South Africans. It became the environment in which Zondi would live and work for the entire duration of his active career.

Since Zondi worked in both teaching and service learning under government employ, his vision for a country of equal opportunity coupled with his ethos of learning was too advanced for him to have fallen victim to political strategies confining the aspirations of Blacks to agriculture. As he resided in Durban and fraternized with white patrons, his informed perspectives regarding the development of a booming South African economy revealed to him the dependence of such an economy on a strong labour force. Such interdependence therefore made a mockery of any attempts to confine black aspirations to a bucolic existence. And yet, as a member of the educated elite, Zondi's moves between rural and urban life did not let him become condemnatory of rural existence, as had occurred in the obvious class divide during the 1920s.

### 1.2.2 The *amaKholwa* Intelligentsia

The foundation for political leadership in the African nationalist ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was laid in the mission stations of Natal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With sermons addressing universalism, mission stations were seen as 'seedsbeds of African Nationalism' (Etherington, 1971:294). As access to print by literate indigenous people's reading English



made a new 'imagined political community' as implied by nationalism a possibility (Marks,1986:56) literacy was used to 'write back' to a colonial centre. Zondi belonged to the educated elite. As a Christian in the second generation from his maternal side, he belonged to the class of *amaKholwa*. The status of being 'believers' situated converts among indigenous people in the region from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who were absorbed into the embrace of Christianity of mission stations. Assimilation meant a process of radical social adjustments and adaptations. This was linked to expansionist policies of imperialist power, which brought the market economy to Africa. Marginalized by both the traditionalist communities from which they had emerged, as well as the segregationist white power structures in the next century, this multi-ethnic elite formed various leadership expressed within African nationalist ideologies, considered above.

The Christian faith, more particularly Lutheranism, played a seminal role in the artist's motivation and defiance of the social norms of a segregated country. Practices of reconciliation became the hallmark of his mission. By translating specific philosophical tenets of Christianity, the artist was able to use his creativity in building bridges to his white patrons and friends, across artificial barriers linked to racial classification.

Implicit in conversion to Christianity was the western 'civilizing' mission, with church and school as the 'twin foundations' (Khumalo, 2003:210) conveying European Victorian moral codes (Etherington, 1971:74). Seeking land, security, and employment, usually within the ethical and physical embrace of the missionary enterprise, converts embracing western social norms and practices were immediately set apart from their neighbours with traditionalist roots (Etherington,1971:251,252,258). The 'politics of assimilation' imparted individualism (Mbembe, 2002:248), as missionaries attempted to create 'communities of individualistic, commodity-producing families' in opposition to tribal economies with communal labour underpinning polygamy (Guy, 2003:351). Independent means of accumulation under the aegis of colonial rule ensured that *amakholwa* moved beyond the orbit of Zulu power. This implied an alternative means of identification, alliance, and protection (Morrell, Wright, and Meintjies, 1996:37,38). The glorification of this individual mobility, encouraging 'Christian and civilized standards', became a class definition, which Tim Couzens interprets as a call for acceptance by the Whites (1985:16, 18). In accepting 'white cultural and socio-economic norms', sourced in the European Enlightenment, this class of Blacks undermined ideological racist principles (Lambert and Morrell, 1996:71). Their feelings of allegiance justified their

making social demands concomitant with their perceived status within the code of basic human rights granted and honoured in white civil society (Etherington, 1971:323).

Despite colonial directives to the contrary, an agenda of segregation along racial criteria was developed from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, affecting legislation, land tenure, and migrant labour. Separating black and white congregations within the missionary context contradicted the strong intellectual commitment to African equality and a sense of Christian unity of all believers. This prompted resistance, with various degrees of success. Contextualizing the relationship between the missions and African nationalism, Norman Etherington asserts that the denial of human equality did not create the dominant spark for engagement in aspirational politics (1971:337). He holds the suspended status of the *amakholwa*, between the black and the white worlds, accountable for forging their sense of unity. Yet, in his view, the salient factor which formed the crux for activism was the added factor of conversion to a sense of inferiority (Etherington, 1971: 337)<sup>33</sup>. Therefore while individuality and independence enabled *amakholwa* to compete in trade and entrepreneurial enterprise, equally these attributes fostered a spirit of political activism.

As literacy among an emergent black intelligentsia fostered aspirations of integration into white civil society, the predominantly *amakholwa* voice of the *Natal Native Congress* (NNC) around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century invoked a protestant work ethic. At the same time it promoted patriarchal social structures cemented by obedience and discipline. Etherington uses Absalom Vilikazi's argument that "Christian teachings about the value of sustained labour and frugality made *kholwa* more amenable to the new colonial economy"<sup>34</sup>. James Stuart, using evidence from indigenous people, points to the insight or perception that there was "a spirit of perpetual competition" and rivalry among Europeans. In their quest of accumulation through industry, they were known as *abalumbi*, i.e. "inventors and manufacturers" and were perceived to be actively pursuing wealth (Stuart in Webb and Wright, 1976: 251: evidence 1900). While Zondi shared their liberatory aspirations, economic gain was contradictory to the motives which he would pursue. While he nurtured, as they had and did, liberatory and professional aspirations, he did not share any aspirations to accumulate beyond providing for his family. Nor did he nurture a yearning for social prominence. Critique regarding entrepreneurial self-interest came from within the

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<sup>33</sup> Petrus of Indaleni is quoted as saying in 1863 - "to the natives we are but despised believers & to the English we are no more than Kafirs" a text printed by the *Natal Witness* & cited in Etherington (1971: 323).

<sup>34</sup> Etherington (1971) p. 266 citing A. Vilakazi (1962) *Zulu Transformations*, Pietermaritzburg. pp.118-21.

*amakholwa*'s own ranks (Dubow, 1989:151). Zondi commented about the elite of the 1930s, "some were prosperous, some were ambitious" (Zondi, 2007a:4 pers.com.). The artist was able to defend his integrity by remaining humble in status and consistently contributing his manual and literary skills to the benefit of rural communality.

### The New African - Nationalism and Nationalisms

Zondi's aspirations concurred with the mid-Victorian values related to progress and improvement, propagated by the New Africans of the generation before his own, which spanned the lives of the Dhlomo brothers from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He shared with them the idea of a free South Africa, purged of racism. His interest in politics, his insistence on education, his proactive engagement with Africans of European descent, and his career path from teaching, locate him among this black elite. Their literary and political engagement had its roots in the ethos of prominent Christians like Dr. John Langalibalele Dube, who belonged to a self-conscious petit bourgeoisie which had emerged from a class of prosperous 19<sup>th</sup> century peasant-settlers on mission stations.

In his *African Attitudes to the European* H.I.E. Dhlomo set out to characterise Africans according to three types, the "tribal" African, the "neither-nor" African, and the "New African"<sup>35</sup>. The latter referred to his own class of enlightened Blacks (Couzens, 1985:32-37). The boundaries of their class definition were delineated according to their conceptions of "western civilization". As the New African had engaged in positions of leadership, a vision of sovereignty and nationhood evolved, which was equally attached to western concepts. Development within the ideology of trusteeship was viewed from an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, stance, believed to lead inevitably to assimilation and a final acceptance "into a community based on "civilized standards" (Couzens, 1985:50,51). This concept of tutelage and initial progressivism of black writers and politicians thus presumed equality for black and white South Africans in civil society (Visser and Couzens, 1985:x,xi). By being excluded from governance and civic society, reserved for Whites only, the criteria for nationhood in a western context excluded both the educated and acculturated elite, and also the majority of the country's people. Therefore, it was only when this middle-class of Blacks relinquished its perceived exclusivity vis-à-vis the "uneducated" majority of South Africans, that the idea of unity as a nation could evolve. As noted, this occurred to some degree in the

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<sup>35</sup> For attributes of the "New African" see Couzens (1985:6,7).

emergence of unity around Zulu ethnicity, linked to the growth of resistance surrounding the Bambatha rebellion of 1906. Rather than being the black other for Whites, ðbeing ðnativeø now offered an identity of opposition to white ruleö (Maylam, 1996:116). The New Africans were the first South Africans to protest against racism and its entrenchment in the draft of Union of the ðSouth Africa Billø(Lambert and Morrell, 1996:83). Growing African resistance was given expression after Union in 1910, inter alia through the *South African Native National Congress* (SANNC), which succeeded the NNC, as well as the *African Native Congress*.

Under *amakholwa* leadership, resistance in the 1920s to oppression and injustice developed around a concept of Zulu ethnicity (Lambert and Morrell, 1996:85), considered above. Yet, while early Zuluness invoked the kind of inspirational collectivity required to imagine and shape a united future, until the 1940s, the rhetoric of the New Africans remained conciliatory and inclusive. In 1930 the status of individuals was given ðthe legitimacy of printö as Mwelì Skotaø *African Who's Who* <sup>36</sup> attempted to entrench the class of black intellectuals, legitimizing it in terms of patriotism, ðthe patriot being the one who was working for othersö (Couzens,1985:16). Victorian educational and moral values were exemplified, and the urge to contribute ðto knowledge and civilisationö (Couzens,1985:4,5 citing Skota, 1930:3). The aim of education was seen in the light of not wanting to be ðdespised by other racesö<sup>37</sup>. The choice of content made the *Who's Who* a national biographical dictionary, in which the rhetoric of progress embraced a form of Pan-Africanism, exemplified by the inclusion of scholars like Aggrey. Nonetheless, as noted, in order to solve the ðNative questionø constructions of racial affiliation and the language of ðcultural adaptationø were invented by Whites. The ironic parallels and ambiguities of ðZulunessø vis-à-vis the indirect rule of white governance, seeking to reintroduce tribal structures of authority, have been considered<sup>38</sup>.

Because ðblack-white relations became central to the way in which Whites made sense of the worldö, segregation became associated with dominance over, and control of, black Africans. ðRaceø began to rival ðtribeø as ðthe key word in the settler lexiconö (Maylam, 1996:112, 113). The injunction for other nations within the territorial confines of South Africa, namely the ðnon-Whitesø, to develop ðalong the lines of their own geniusø, attributed to the

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<sup>36</sup> Skota, T.D. Mwelì (1930) *The African Yearly Register: Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's Who) of Black Folks in Africa*. Johannesburg.

<sup>37</sup> Couzens (1985: 28) - citing S.V.H. Mdhululø's publication of 1933, *The Development of the African*

<sup>38</sup> See ðJohn Dube and the Ambiguities of Nationalismø in Shula Marks (1986) and Cope (1993).

the characteristic of uniqueness, albeit from a paternalistic and superior perspective of self. Seeking national self-determination implies the ability to freely determine not only the form of government but also one's own national identity and culture, which includes language, education, and religion (Kellas,1998:7,8). This shift, therefore, in the idea of nationhood from the former emphasis on sovereignty to evolving perceptions of uniqueness of a people, is thought to effect the loss of the erstwhile equivalence between nationalism and democracy (Greenfeld,1992:10). By the time Zondi began his career in the mid 1940s, the emergence of political mobilisation using the language of exclusive nationalisms was being enacted on two fronts, both of them sacrificing democratic principles. On the one hand, conservative descendants of early white settlers, intent on defending their racial and Calvinist identity against British imperialism, were shaping Afrikaner nationalism. On the other hand, in order to counter oppression, progressive New African thinkers who initially propagated pan-Africanism, built allegiances based on Zulu ethnic nationalism. Paradoxically, both nationalisms adopted Christian values.

Herbert Dhlomo, among the educated elite, became a prominent literary figure and the authentic voice of a community which Couzens (1985:xiii) describes as "deeply conservative" and at the same time "in some ways profoundly revolutionary". From 1943 the newspaper founded by Dube, *Ilanga lase Natal*, was under the editorship of the Dhlomo brothers (Couzens, 1985:256), with Herbert responsible for the English section, and Rolfes for the Zulu<sup>39</sup>. This was the prominent voice of the literary elite over decades, termed "one of the best forums of the New African in the twentieth century" (Masilela, 2007:xii). From Zondi's time at Dundee in the mid-1940s, he was among a wide black readership of this newspaper. As active members of the ANC, the Dhlomos also made contributions to black magazines and other newspapers such *Sjambok*, *Bantu World*, and *Umteteli wa Bantu* (Visser and Couzens, 1985:x). Not only their own literary art but also their opinions and their progressivism expressed through public media, initially made of them representatives of the class of black, educated professionals. Zondi was thus able to consolidate ideas exchanged in personal communication with the brothers, through their socio-political editorial commentaries. Bhekizizwe Peterson recognizes newspapers to have played a seminal role "in the instruction of the African elite, the development of a national consciousness, and the pursuit of literary and cultural activities among Africans" (

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<sup>39</sup> See H.I.E. Dhlomo, "Influence and Power of African Press" in *Ilanga Lase Natal* 6 March 1948 (cited in Couzens (1985:276).

(2006:239,240). The African press, he suggests, proffered narratives which cultivated a sense community. Literacy and education became the expression of what had been termed in colonial parlance at the time of Zondi's teens, 'the slow awakening of a new and regenerated African' (Peterson, 2006: 240).

Couzens's exploration of the context of Dhlomo's early work confirms that 'a desire for status lies at the root of nationalism' (Kellas, 1998:64). The concept of 'nation' and Zulu nationalism were being manipulated to become essential ingredients of the imagined new social order, providing status and dignity. For Herbert Dhlomo, ultimately the inevitability of 'The Rise of the African Middle-Class'<sup>40</sup> put the onus on the educated African to 'interpret African culture to the world' and shoulder leadership responsibilities. He regarded this as a burden lying on him 'to prove that the African is as good as anyone else in all walks of life' (Couzens, 1985:273).

By the time Zondi was completing his training at Dundee in the mid-1940s, a revived ANC was claiming the 'four freedoms' of movement, of choice of employment, of choice of residence, of the purchasing of land (Couzens, 1985:257). 'Africanism' was redefined by the ANC's Youth League under Anton Lembede, who was seen, finally, to have 'disposed of the myth of the black man's inferiority'<sup>41</sup>. Herbert Dhlomo's poetry became influential in this 'rallying call to the African'<sup>42</sup>. The writing of the New Africans as they called for engagement in mass-action, naturally under the leadership of the intelligentsia<sup>43</sup>, was ultimately reflecting the aspirations of a broader black population.

It will be shown below how the inspiration Zondi found among the generation of New Africans before his own would manifest itself in his art-making, as a tool for shaping modernity<sup>44</sup>. He understood how their vision of nationhood located their creative energies at the centre of their aspirations in shaping their future. Yet despite widely concurring perspectives and values, ultimately Zondi's consciously apolitical stance was *not* Dhlomo's idea of the heroic, truly progressive New African. It may be argued, however, that Zondi was far better equipped than the urban intelligentsia to speak on behalf of the marginalized

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<sup>40</sup> This was title of an article written by H.I.E. Dhlomo, in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 9 July 1949 (cited in Couzens (1985: 273).

<sup>41</sup> A.P. Mda, 'A.M. Lembede: A Signal Achievement' in *Ilanga Lase Natal* of 29 September 1945 - cited in Couzens (1985:259).

<sup>42</sup> J. Ngubane 'An African Poet Sings' in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 26 April 1941 (cited in Couzens (1985:258)

<sup>43</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, 1945 - in Couzens (1985:33,34).

<sup>44</sup> See 2.1 MODERNITY & ZONDI AND THE BLACK INTELLIGENTSIA p51.

majority. Despite their distant shared family histories, unlike the Dhlomo brothers and *amakholwa* such as Dr. Manogosuthu Buthelezi, Zondi emerged directly from a rural milieu, in the *first* generation, much like B.W.Vilakazi. Therefore, unity between some New Africans and the disenfranchised rural masses was the result of economic and political pressures exerted by intransigent state policies<sup>45</sup>. As Peterson claims, the black intelligentsia's socio-political fragility and their distance from the lower classes compelled them to intervene more in the sphere of ideology rather than in the domain of class struggles (2006:239). Some only 'discovered' an affiliation with their rural brethren, once the ideology of trusteeship had failed and they had been rebuffed from white civil society. In contrast, it was Zondi's rootedness among rural people, which would authenticate the mediatory role he was to occupy, by speaking on their behalf. Defending ethical concerns, he would do this from inner conviction rather than by political coercion. Also, only by remaining outside politics could Zondi continue to fulfil Dhlomo's early call to co-operate with white South Africans, using the idea of 'give and take'<sup>46</sup>, to interpret African culture and shoulder leadership responsibilities.

The aspirations and goals, then, for which the class of *amarespectables* fought in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were widely similar to those which Zondi sought to defend and attain half a century later. Perhaps Zondi's most notable departure from a late ideal of the vociferously oppositional New African was his transcendence of exclusivity that was inherent in nationalisms forged by criteria of ethnicity, whether Afrikaner or Zulu nationalism. By restricting his dependence to that which any artist experiences, namely patronage, his allegiance could shift solely to his conscience. His was a quietly self-assured integral protest, insistent and consistent, which was performed as an artistic narrative before a largely white audience. Zondi's was far more a mission to convey intrinsic humanitarian truths than a concern with demonstrations of ability and status.

### 1.2.3 Lutheranism in KwaZulu-Natal

Given the interplay between art and religion in the African context (Hackett, 1996:1,2), and the inseparability of the metaphysical from the worldly human experience, a brief exploration

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<sup>45</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, 'Influence and Power of African Press' in *Ilanga Lase Natal* 6 March 1948 ó cited in Couzens (1985:276).

<sup>46</sup> 'Give and Take' is a concept propagated under the auspices of The Chamber of Mines newspaper, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, launched in 1920, with its 'mediating role' to counter the sharply accusatory political texts published in the A.N.C.'s *Abantu-Batho* (Couzens, 1985:90,91). See 'Give and Take' (1974)(Fig.163 opp.p210).

of Zondi's professed Christian faith provides a conclusive backdrop for exploring his art-making. As Juliette Leeb-du Toit reminds us: "In Africa the centrality of belief and persistent recognition of the realm of the metaphysical remains an indivisible part of human experience" (2003:8,9). The artist's immersion in received spiritual paradigms and the Lutheran faith makes the amalgam of his values, beliefs, and mores typical of the hybrid nature of all indigenous religio-cultural systems affected by cross-cultural domination since colonial times (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:9). Nevertheless, Zondi regarded himself as "a product of the German Lutheran Mission" (Zondi, 1975, script). Yet, during the decades of his active career, the "church clause" prevented black South Africans from sharing with white congregations the most significant act within the community of the faithful, the Lord's supper (Villa-Vicencio, 1983:65; Boesak, 1983:7). The churches which the artist built, restored, and worshipped in were designated exclusively for black communities<sup>47</sup>.

A small but significant part of Zondi's oeuvre was biblically inspired, reflecting the artist's exploration of the scriptures and his seeking their relevance in relation to the oppressive circumstances of his life. The covert oppositional stance which Zondi chose and pursued as an artist, against abusive aspects of white rule that touched his life almost daily, was thus informed by not only received indigenous moral values and practices. The earliest published evidence of a Christian influence on the Zondi clan is in the vicinity of Bambatha kaMancinza. The involvement of Zondi's grandfather, Maneta, in the Zulu rebellion under Bambatha's leadership, would have made him aware, or even a part, of Christian services in his *kraal*. These were held by Moses Mbele<sup>48</sup>, whom the media termed "Bambatha's Chaplain" (Thompson 2004:9,10)<sup>49</sup>. At the same time, the traditionalist rituals surrounding preparation for the uprising (Guy, 2005) makes this environment an example of the developing syncretic vitality of religious beliefs and spirituality of indigenous peoples, six decades into missionary proselytising in the region<sup>50</sup>. Members of the artist's family were baptized in this Lutheran Church from the generation of his maternal grandparents<sup>51</sup>. The

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<sup>47</sup> Up to the completion of this dissertation, three Evangelical Lutheran churches have been located, for whose construction Zondi was responsible. These are the Dundee Dumisani church (early 1960s), the Vryheid Bhekuzulu church (1961) and the hospital Chapel at the Swedish Lutheran Mission at Appelsbosch (Foundation stone from 1962, completed around 1964).

<sup>48</sup> See Thompson (2004: 9,10).

<sup>49</sup> *The Mercury*, 25 May, 1906 as cited in Thompson (2004: 9,10).

<sup>50</sup> For an examination of the syncretic nature of socio-religious practices as linked to art-making in the region, see Leeb-du Toit (2003).

<sup>51</sup> Zondi was baptised in the Lutheran Church, as was his mother, Eva, in the Hermannsburg mission, in what was then the colony of Natal (Zondi, 2006c:2 pers.com). Zondi's maternal grandmother had converted to



Lutheran witness in particular, is therefore relevant to the thinking and the work of Zondi, because it represents those Christian values and tenets conveyed within the ambit of the Hermannsburg Mission, that played a significant role in his early life, parallel to his received indigenous beliefs and social principles. Therefore, while his encounters with patrons and friends were anchored in his overall conciliatory stance, he chose the forums with them as a platform for intellectually highly challenging and controversial discussions pertaining to religio-political themes (Bodenstein, Hans, 2008 pers.com.). Addressing racial bigotry formed the basis of the artist's dialogue which he sought with close friends. Two of these were prominent spiritual leaders within the *Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa* (ELCSA), who became vocal and active as Christians, defending humanitarian principles<sup>52</sup>.

The Lutheran Church, its witness and practices, and the voices of dissent from within its own ranks against bigotry, has a twofold significance in the context of this study. On the one hand, it reveals the extent and duration of Zondi's familial association with a Christian world view. On the other, it serves to reveal aspects of Europeans' attitudes linked to illusions of superiority and racial prejudice, which Zondi set out to defeat. These attitudes were prevalent within the Lutheran, as much as other South African Churches, during the decades of his career, and mirrored the racial segregation in everyday civil life.

The Protestant work ethic and the system of apprenticeship in trades, ensured that the colonial outposts of the *Hermannsburg Missionary Society* (HMS), from 1848, reflected the basic values of the home mission in northern Germany. Zondi's hands-on approach in learning a trade and acquiring his sculpting skills is a reflection of this atmosphere of industry. The patience and flexibility ascribed to German Lutherans, as prerequisites for successful proselytising (Etherington, 1971:121,131), is linked to their own pragmatic agrarian background of north German peasant communities (Oschadleus, 1992:30-32). Yet overall western missionary societies, in their rich variety of evangelization endeavours in south-east Africa, had very limited success (Etherington, 1978:24).

In 1936 Zondi spent the year in the primary school for black children at Hermannsburg (Miles, 1997:111), where his mother was a church elder. Nevertheless, his playmates

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Christianity against the will of her family and was rejected from the Ngubane clan as a result of her newly adopted spirituality (Zondi, 2007b pers.com.).

<sup>52</sup> The Rev. Prof. Axel-Ivar Berglund and Eckhard Bodenstein as a lay cleric.

included children from the white school<sup>53</sup>. As an *ikholwa* Zondi's mother instilled in her children the idea of equality before the Christian God. Theodor Harms, founder of the Hermannsburg mission near Greytown in colonial Natal, said of missionaries, that they may never become lords, but must remain servants<sup>54</sup>. This ethos of egalitarianism, much as it concurred with communalist ideals of African traditions and customs, was rarely reflected in church structures or worshipping communities.

Zondi initially concerned himself with the Lutheran rejection of some indigenous customary practices linked to polygyny and *ilobolo* (bridewealth), the nuptial negotiations around bridewealth, expressed by an exchange of gifts, such as cattle, between families on the marriage of a young Zulu couple<sup>55</sup>. The resistance to Christianity frequently centred around these practices. Zondi's very early mentor, the Swedish Lutheran missionary, the Rev. Gunnar Helander Gunnar, challenged the ideological and moral arguments of the Lutheran church in its arbitrary dismissal of these practices. Zondi read his publication *Black Rhapsody* with enthusiasm and recalled the stir it caused (Zondi, 2002a pers.com.) Helander invalidated Christianity's insistence on a monogamic imperative (1958:11,12,42,52). Early intellectual engagements like this were the precursors for Zondi's countless philosophical debates on ethics and morals in the church and the state.

Concomitant with the concern, that the new religion would interfere with traditional authority and relationships of kinship and obligation, was an opposition to the teaching of gospel by fear (Khumalo, 2003:226). The missionaries' teachings of the nature of sin were to be troublesome (Etherington, 1971:153). They were perceived to be boosting their own persuasive tactics of conversion, by co-opting the powers of established indigenous people who were serving the metaphysical needs of their communities.

Justification for segregation of church congregations, as Zondi experienced it, has been located within varying concepts related to conversion. In the predominantly rural communities of the German Lutheran missions, it became a normative factor of society

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<sup>53</sup> Personal communication Michael Zondi and Eckhard Dedekind, March 2004, Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg, KZN. From 1857 the school for white pupils, established at Hermannsburg, became one of the leading schools for Whites in the British colony of Natal. For expansion of the HMS, see Oschadleus (1992: 32,33).

<sup>54</sup> *Hermannsburger Missionsblatt* (1857) p. 158 and *Missionsblatt Evangelisch-Lutherischer Freikirchen* (1982) p. 168 ó cited in Oschadleus (1992:27).

<sup>55</sup> Early references to *ukuLobola* is made by Bryant (1949: 586,591). See also Etherington (1971: 197) and Couzens (1985:60). Nuptial negotiations and bridewealth cattle are considered at length in Hammond-Tooke (2008: 65,66).

which seriously affected its witness (Florin, 1967:72, 81). Due to the link of Christianity to western culture in the minds of indigenous peoples, sociological justification was used for acknowledging Christian missionaries as agents of culture rather than of religious contact (Florin, 1967:51). While the predominating Anglo-Saxon missionary concept aimed at individual conversion, the German corporate strategy of converting entire tribes and nations is thought to have posed the danger of the existence of an ethnic church for specific people (Florin, 1967:71, 113, 114)<sup>56</sup>. Where Lutheran Christianity had been accepted by pagan peoples, it was thought to have been understood as a certain cultural and ideological variation of the traditional tribal code (Florin, 1967:116). Paternalism on the part of pioneer missionaries reflected the authoritative role of the *pater familias* in the indigenous social order.

A lack of socio-political critical witness until the 1960s was attributed to the initial prevailing consideration among missionaries in the past that interference in political matters of any kind should be avoided (Voges, 1968:70). Therefore, by the early 1960s, the Lutheran church, like most others, had not solved the tension which existed between the Church's responsibility to the Gospel and the reality of the church in an apartheid society (Florin, 1967:69). Voicing an overt indictment of the discrepancy between preaching and practice in most South African Churches at the time, Absalon Vilakazi overtly indicted white Christianity, politely commenting that 'the African has learned to distinguish between the message and the messenger in his attitude towards Christianity' (1962:101). It was up to individual endeavour to mould the community of the church to be a living example of the Gospel<sup>57</sup>. Therefore, as segregation reigned in the Lutheran church, individuals like Zondi and the friends he chose, e.g. the Bodenstein brothers, Wolfgang and Eckhard, sought to effect changes in attitude from within their homes and their communities. Zondi and Wolfgang Bodenstein represented the kind of individual Christians whose confessing stance demonstrated the insight that their integrity was at stake<sup>58</sup>. Some of Zondi's cross-racial friendships were like 'fellowship of reconciliation' which was harmonious 'in the love of Christ', something seen to be as highly consequential for the South African Church in reconsidering its witness (Florin, 1967:78).

As one of the first institutions to acknowledge the need to reassess the nature of their mission in Africa, like many other Protestant denominations, the Lutherans were inspired by

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<sup>56</sup> See 'Traditional Strategy of the Missions' in Florin (1967).

<sup>57</sup> See proceedings of the Lutheran Missionaries' Fellowship Day, held in Durban in November 1963

<sup>58</sup> See 3.4. IMAGINING SELF THROUGH OTHER: A PHILOSOPHICAL EXCHANGE, p134

Vatican II in rethinking their mission and their role with regard to cultural plurism in Africa (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:191,192). The Catholic Church published statements in the form of pastoral letters of the South African Bishops' Conference, which regularly addressed the South African situation from 1952<sup>59</sup>. In addressing theological ethics, churches were required to address political theology (Florin, 1967: 57). Lutherans working towards a united church in Natal adopted a statement concerning the dignity of man in which the negative forces of racialism and nationalism were noted (Florin, 1967:68). Clergy and laymen from all churches realized their responsibility for active, even political witness. However, such awareness did not percolate down to white Christian congregations either by purpose or from indifference (Florin, 1967: 60). The people in Zondi's immediate circle, active in church life and witness, were the exception.

The kind of good will which Zondi pursued with vigour and endurance was invoked by a number of consultations regarding the witness of the Church, including the comprehensive and widely accepted formulation that emerged from the *Ecumenical Consultation* held at Cottesloe (Johannesburg), in December 1960. The Lutheran church's specific stance on the contentious interpretations of the doctrine of *Two Kingdoms* became a central aspect in determining whether its espousal of a socio-ethical mandate would embrace political responsibility. Ultimately, the doctrine and its practical application in the Lutheran witness was reformulated to facilitate a Lutheran participation in a confessing-church movement in South Africa (Florin, 1967:74,75)<sup>60</sup>. In 1963 the Church Assembly of ELCSA, South-East-Region, adopted a statement on race relations countering prejudice and injustice (Voges, 1968: 70,71).

Through his contact with Lutherans, like the Bodenstein brothers and the Rev. Axel-Ivar Berglund at Mapumulo, Zondi was aware of this critical debate surrounding the interpretation of the Gospel on African soil. In keeping with the aim to effect a strengthening of the Lutheran witness in South Africa, the work of Eckhard Bodenstein within the *Federation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa* (FELCSA), involved many of the recommendations made by Hans Florin (1967:148,149) in the mid-1960s. Besides his endeavours to further adult education and inter-communal fellowship between

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<sup>59</sup> Lesley Cawood (1964) *The Churches and Race Relations in South Africa*, Johannesburg, pp. 76-79 - in Florin (1967: 61).

<sup>60</sup> The confessing Church, (*öbekennende Kirche*) with a particular '*Seinverständnis*', associated with the Barmen synod, became relevant for the South African situation. See Engelbrecht (1968:31-35).

black and white Christian youths, the work of this 'apostle of reconciliation' included support of, and identification with, the *Christian Institute of South Africa* (K.H.,1991:114). Structural development, theological orientation, and studies of the ecumenical process were fostered, in the hope of attaining 'the necessary process of reconciliation of the theological thought and ethical practice' (K.H.,1991:114).

#### 1.2.4 Theologized Apartheid

Humanitarian concerns prompted Zondi to oppose state intransigence while the apartheid ideology was being legitimized by means of biblical citation. It therefore became imperative for Zondi to affirm *conciliatory* interpretations of the Bible. As the integrity of the Gospel was at stake (de Gruchy, 1983:81,82), Zondi's strong identification with Christianity implicitly meant that, equally, his own integrity was being challenged. This is the vulnerability which Albert Luthuli feared, should Christians submit to a secular state 'which opposes expressions of fellowship' (2006[1962]:124,125). Speaking of Christian churches as 'distorted symbols' representing 'an ethic which the Whites have brought, preached, and refused to practice', he indicted them for their alienation from 'the spirit of Christ', calling them 'a sort of patronising social service' (Luthuli, 2006 [1962]:124,125). By the 1960s, while other churches were taking a firm stand of condemnation towards all forms of racial, political and economic discrimination, the Afrikaans Reformed Churches still adopted a pro-apartheid stance (Villa-Vicencio, 1983:65,66). 'Theological racism'<sup>61</sup>, then, represents a key factor in considering how Zondi let not only his received social ethics but also his spiritual integrity guide him to rely on other hermeneutic paradigms of the scriptures for negotiating with and periodically living in defiance of, legislated apartheid.

In South Africa's long tradition of confrontational ecclesiastic discourse regarding the discrepancy between witness and practice of the church, fundamental divisions existed between Afrikaans- and English-speaking South African Churches and between black mission churches and their mother communities. While not exclusively, these are nevertheless significantly rooted in biblical exegesis concerning inter-racial relations. With this in mind, and given Zondi's strong Christian faith, those of his sculptures sourced in the scriptures may be located within the artist's moralizing and didactic metaphors pertaining to reconciliation and redemption. Besides images of Christ, his oeuvre includes several biblical

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<sup>61</sup> This term is borrowed from Charles Villa-Vicencio (1983: 71).

figures from the Old Testament. The centrality of such works in scriptural texts necessarily locates them within biblical citations, to many of which the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK) has traditionally appealed in support of apartheid (Bax, 1983:114)<sup>62</sup>.

Manifest in biblical hermeneutics were Afrikaner notions of superiority as God's chosen people. This was given institutional expression both in the state church, the NGK, and in structures of white rule. The fusion of church and state, with the former functioning to bolster Afrikaner national identity, implicates these in the protection of social and economic vested interests. It was officially published in an organ of the NGK, the *Kerkbode*, that apartheid can rightfully be called a Church policy<sup>63</sup>. The defence of apartheid therefore, as a Christian policy based on the Bible, relates an ideologically underpinned political programme to theology and the life of the church (de Gruchy, 1983:82).

Given the pivotal spiritual role of the NGK in the perpetuation of the Afrikaner people as a distinct *volk* the Afrikaner nationalist government tooled its policies of segregation around the theological justifications that were provided by the statutes of the NGK (de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio, 1983:xv). Spiritual leaders who emerged from among the proponents of Afrikaner nationalism, therefore, structured the apartheid ideology, attempting to solve the racial problem. Paternalist notions of guardianship dictated that the Bantu should be guided to full nationhood on the basis of their own tradition, yet enlarged by Christian civilization (Voges, 1968:63,66). Nationalism, then, by conflating a biological classification (race), with the cultural concept of people (the Afrikaner *volk*), became a group consciousness, used as a political basis of authority, where solidarity was based on sentiment. Such nationalism, as ideology, in Johannes Degenaar's view, becomes divisive (Degenaar, 1975:13,15,16). Zondi's relatively wide network of white friends and patrons included important liaisons with people of Afrikaner backgrounds. At the height of his career in the 1970s, during escalating social unrest, he was living and working periodically within the ambit of enlightened Afrikaners. Crucial for an understanding of the relationship between the artist and these friends would have been that they recognized and indicted apartheid ideologists, in Piet Veldsman's words, as sentimentalists rather than thinkers (Veldsman, 2008 pers.com.)

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<sup>62</sup> Douglas Bax cites the following texts to which the NGK, as the largest and most important of the white Afrikaans Churches, has referred in justification of the apartheid state ideology: Genesis 1:28; Genesis 11:1-9; Deuteronomy 32:8; Acts 2:5-13 and Acts 17:26 (1983:114).

<sup>63</sup> Villa-Vicencio (1983:59) - citing *Die Kerkbode*, 22 Sept. 1948, pp 664,665.

Three decades into his active career, Zondi's individualistic path of bridge-building, which he had negotiated with his art and his person in defiance of apart-ness, was given theological endorsement. In a seminal and politically significant declaration, following a conference of the *World Alliance of Reformed Churches* (WARC), in Ottawa in 1982<sup>64</sup>, apartheid was declared a heresy<sup>65</sup>. In keeping with the notion that 'the breaking down of barriers that separate people is an intrinsic part of the Gospel' (Bosch, 1983:35), the implications of a clear, unequivocal proclamation of heresy by the Church in South Africa was described as being fundamental to the struggle against the 'doctrine of separation' (de Gruchy, 1983:85). The practical significance of the declaration lay in its categorical denial that the politicized racial ideology had any Christian basis (de Gruchy, 1983:85). Further, the declaration affirmed the links between apartheid and an economic struggle, which Florin had indicted in the mid-1960s, (1967:24-26), this time not only in South Africa but also within the so-called North-South conflict for economic justice (de Gruchy, 1983:85).

Throughout the 1980s, various Church bodies and individual clergy continued to engage actively in supporting non-violent activism. Among other declarations, the *Kairos Document (Crisis Document)* was published in 1989, proclaiming Christian solidarity with the poor and challenging heretical practices of state bodies worldwide, with particular reference to South Africa. In many ways, this proclamation was a vindication of Zondi's endeavours over decades. The artist frequently used the term 'the poor' to refer to the marginalized people on whose behalf he was speaking. It is used in the *Kairos Document* as 'a Biblical category' referring to economically deprived people. Also, it includes 'all who are oppressed, discriminated against or marginalized – the outcasts, victims of racism, sexism, political repression and any other form of oppression', as well as 'all who side with the oppressed and take up their cause' (Anonymous, 1989:36).

### 1.2.5 Liberation and Black theology

Despite Zondi's apolitical nature, his oeuvre is, nevertheless, inevitably located within the highly politicized context of South African state intransigence towards indigenous people.

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<sup>64</sup> For the WARC statement 'Racism and South Africa', in Ottawa 1982 see de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio (1983:168-173).

<sup>65</sup> Heresy is given to mean 'Opinion contrary to the orthodox (especially Christian) doctrine' (COD, 2002:541). For 'heresy' as a 'distortion of the truth' see De Gruchy (1983:81). For its meaning as 'choice' in the *Kairos Document*, see Anonymous (1989:13).

Taking a moralistic stance towards injustice that was strongly sourced in Christian doctrine, his creative ability in making art suggested to him a way of effecting social change. When Zondi was beginning his teaching career in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, racial bigotry was reflected in increasingly restrictive legislation, which attempted to silence socio-political voices of black South Africans. Ultimately, this effected a crisis of legitimacy in the eyes of the 'classified' majority, not only of the government, but also of the Church. Late in the 1950s, Zondi began a covert discourse of dissent, using biblical citation as an allegorical resource. His artistic career took off in the 1960s, when Christianity increasingly became a vehicle for political ideas, which were founded in notions of dependence and underdevelopment. Zondi's early employment of his creativity to expose his own defiance of the oppressive system relied inter alia on Christian biblical imagery and concepts that he used as a metaphor to reflect his personal feelings and circumstances. He sculpted figures like *Invisible Bonds* (1960)(Fig.198, opp.p226), with its overt indictment of repression, and *David and Jonathan* (1964)(Fig.258 after p240), alluding to his friendship with a white man. With these pieces, Zondi began to use his art to reflect his struggle before an ever wider audience. Just as theologians of Black Liberation employed the tenets of Christianity in their endeavour to effect social change, so too Zondi exploited aspects of the Gospel. In his communication with his audience, he thus relied on teachings about redemption, reconciliation, and hope, which he translated into figurative sculptures<sup>66</sup>. Both inadvertently and, no doubt at times, also consciously, he was defying the misappropriation of the Christian faith as a divisive tool.

Zondi's proactive stance through his art-making exemplifies Jeff Haynes notion of the cultural components of politics, such as ever changing and dynamic religious, ethnic, and political identities and ideologies (1993). Countering scholarly claims in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he asserts that the religious dimension in Third World politics reflects an unwavering interconnectedness between belief systems and assertions of political power, manifest not least in Christian liberation theology all over the world (Haynes,1993:1). He thus creates the kind of causal link between the importance of religion and economic regression. These became foundational to Zondi's work as an artist.

In the South Africa of the 1960s, black (liberation) theology co-existed with many diverse religious groups 'for whom religion was a direct way of alleviating the problems of living'

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<sup>66</sup> Some examples are *Moses* (1959)(Figs.204-206 opp.p229); *Reunion* (or *Reconciliation*)(1964) (Figs.256; 257 opp.p241), and *The Prodigal Son* (1965)(Figs.236-238 opp.p237).



(Leeb-du Toit,2003:143). The deliverance for black people from white domination was the central aim and ethical premise. Moral tenets sourced in the teachings of the Christian Gospel were employed to counter both biblical textual interpretations condoning segregation and the indolence of religious, laymen, and individual members of Churches alike, in bringing about changes. At the root of the politics of liberation, then, is the question of legitimacy of government under circumstances of economic hardship (Haynes, 1993:7,8). From a Christian point of view, inherent aspects of hope, which point to a future, become the presupposition to the desire for positive social transformation and the legitimization to engage in such changes (Hopkins, 2005:112). Haynes aptly reminds us that people's world views are generally local in context, rather than moulded by state ideologies (1993:10). Just as Albert Luthuli had been prompted by such a local platform of rural economic hardship to become politically proactive and speak on behalf of marginalized people (2006 [1962]:48,49), so too did Zondi begin to employ his art-making for the same cause. His literacy, combined with his practical skills, formed the basis of the intellectual and conceptual content of his work. It was Zondi's attitude that people *must* understand what is politics, how it is that politics work. He decried that they received no lessons whatsoever (van Wyk, c. early 1980s). His contestation against an acceptance of socio-economic conditions involved his constant call for education, and learning languages as tools of self-determination. Without stepping onto any political stages, he was calling for a conscientization of South Africans. With a view to retaining the integrity of the Gospel in the face of its misappropriation, he was also making his artistic statements in the name of humanism. Fundamentally, this constituted a form of spiritualization which embraced socio-political awareness.

At the height of Zondi's career during the 1970s, a new subversive yet constructive movement arose, which had an enormous impact on political and religious practice in South Africa, namely the *Black Consciousness Movement* (BCM) (Leeb-du Toit, 2003 :143). As a graduate of St. Francis College in Mariannhill, Stephen Bantu Biko became the main spokesperson for the BCM. The Lutheran Theological College invited Biko to attend seminars and offer his opinions on the ways in which African people could be proselytised without undermining their cultural orientation and depriving them of their legitimate will and right to struggle for the revival of the dignity of their blackness (Xakaza 2001:11 in Leeb-du Toit, 2003:193). Zondi was opposed to radical action such as that propagated by the BCM. Its hostile and racist tone under its young leader in no way accommodated his own sense for conciliatory dialogue across the colour bar. Many of these deliberations held at the

Missiological Institute represented a collective momentum in voicing opposition to the state and centred around 'being human' in South Africa. This was equally at the centre of Zondi's figurative sculpture. Haynes notes that an emphasis on liberation revolves around the claim 'that it was first necessary to be 'humanised' (i.e. released from degradation and poverty) before becoming a religious Christian' (1993:98).

### **1.3 ZONDI'S WORLD VIEW**

Zondi's art is about people and implicitly their mutual relationships. From the microcosm of immediate and genealogical family ties in Natal, he moved within the system of meticulously orchestrated segregation into proactively fostering friendship and good will with others. Evolving from his lived reality, both that of African commonality as well as that of the struggle, the artist's oeuvre, then, makes statements about living together in the context of legislated separation.

Zondi's initial self-reflection, embedded in African communality, was imaginatively broadened to become a metaphorical embrace of human experience from a number of perspectives. As he charted his own philosophy through sculptural narratives, deep spirituality with an inherent moral code formed the backdrop for his works. The sculptures he presented to his audience ranged from portraiture to genre figures, including renderings of historical figures from the European and African past.

With humanitarian values and education as his Leitmotiv, Zondi's world view centred on the idea of progress towards an African modernity. He was passionate, even obsessive, about learning (Zondi, 2002b:6,7 pers.com.). The privilege he perceived to have enjoyed by having received a western education and his gratitude for being granted unusual opportunities evoked in the artist an urge to pass on his knowledge and skills. This was expressive of the obligation he felt towards people less privileged in his wider circle. It was his way of ensuring continuity in development as he believed in, and fostered, technological skills that might ensure human fulfilment in a modern world. At the same time his engagement expressed his hope for a more equitable distribution of resources among all South Africans.'

The notion of progress through human achievement is linked to a world view embracing an acceptance of responsibility (Leatt, Kneifel, and Nürnberger,1986:7). As a black man politically mired in a system of disenfranchisement, Zondi sought to recover a measure of

individual freedom and dignity within that system, building on his western education and his acquired skills. His powers of reason and observation thus acquired became the foundation for developing his own potential in artistic expression. Yet, rather than withdrawing into living the life of a recognized artist in the urban context of his patrons, Zondi chose a dual existence. His connection both with white patrons and his rural neighbours directly involved him in social and moral roles, obligations, commitments, and responsibilities, which the individual must fulfil (Gyekye,1997:67). As Kwame Gyekye reminds us: "Social life itself prescribes or mandates a morality that should orient the individual to an appreciation of shared, and not only individual, ends" (1997:67).

In connection with personal aims and aspirations, Zondi frequently used the language of the New Africans. As noted, terms like "improvement", "progress", "betterment", and "welfare" were linked to a world view that embraced responsibility and obligation. At the same time the terms conveyed aspects of development attached to ideals of alleviating or eradicating human suffering and humiliation. Ideally, the language aimed at the kind of democratisation that is ineluctably linked to economic development and mutual dependency (de Gruchy, 1995:179).

The land Zondi was granted by the Lutheran Church was managed by him as a custodian, in the manner of being a member of an extended, large family. By the time he participated in rural development programmes of the Department of Information at the end of the 1960s, poverty on the land, as he had known it since childhood, had been rife in the region for decades. The generation of Zondi's grandfather had already experienced economic pressures, exerted on black enterprise by settler governments, as they feared competition. The status of the Zondi people as tenants on the land of white farmers is an example of the consequences of individual land ownership imposed under European rule. But such private ownership was not unknown in a Zulu context, coexisting in pre-colonial times with public ownership (Gyekye,1997:150,157). Zondi let people live on, and work, his land to their personal benefit. He granted neighbours access to his land in order for them to make a living from it, by means of cultivation or grazing for their own cattle. Zondi was therefore recommitting erstwhile communal land, ceded to the Swedish Lutheran Mission under white governance, to a mode of usage similar to that of its former indigenous use. These were partnerships or trusteeships of land, akin to those that were widely practised in parts of pre-colonial Africa (Gyekye 1997:147,148). In the context of African communality, then, Zondi's moral

obligation as a landowner was fulfilled according to the edict that individual wealth elicits the expectation of contribution and redistribution. Implicit is the positive proviso that communal wealth is 'contingent' upon the wealth of its individual citizens' (Gyekye, 1997:154,155).

Zondi's urge to bring people together allowed the artist to practise a form of resolving differences, prompted by both African communality and his Christian faith. For Zondi, the vision of 'God's justice' in the world represented human hope implicit in Christian 'concrete utopianism', the loss of which, as John de Gruchy notes, 'would make the realization of a just world impossible' (1995:230,231). The Zulu leader of the ANC from the 1950s, Albert Luthuli, whom Zondi greatly admired and met, was schooled in institutions of learning that fostered the concept of Christianity as a path to neighbourliness. This required active engagement: 'I had to DO something about being a Christian, and in this something must be to identify me with my neighbour, not dissociate me from him' (Luthuli, 2006 [1962]:28). Zondi's dialogues, then, whether with white South Africans or as a mediator during internecine fighting, were conducted in this reconciliatory manner. By retaining a great sense of humility and responsibility for the common good, he was, in his own words, seen to 'side with the poor' (Zondi, 2007a:3 pers.com). The artist, therefore, did not fall victim to rationalism or the pursuit of self-interest to replace a dedication to God. His endeavours in the field of education are reflected by the invocation of Scripture for the purpose of human development. This has been termed a 'process of liberation and reconciliation', enabling people to develop 'towards the realization of the full potential' with which they have been endowed by God (Vorster, 1983:94).

Zondi's faith imbued in him a generosity of spirit which was revealed on a number of occasions, when he was subject to insults from people, Whites and Blacks alike (Veldsman and Veldsman, 2003, pers.com). His ability to imagine the stance of the (white) 'other' was as highly developed as it was entirely lacking on the part of many Whites living in fear of the 'Black Peril'. Zondi's attitude is an example of Luthuli's approach to the phenomenon of racial prejudice, expressed in *Baasskap* (domination)<sup>67</sup>, as a failure of the imagination. Despite black suffering under apartheid, Luthuli felt that to their own detriment, racial

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<sup>67</sup> *Baasskap* means 'domination of black people by white people under apartheid': origin 1930s: Afrikaans, from Dutch *baas* 'master' + *-skap* 'ship' (COD, 2002:77). Luthuli uses *Baasskap* to refer to apartheid politics, or the behaviour of 'Nationalist rulers' (2006[1962]:109) or in reference to 'white supremacy' (2006[1962]:138).

prejudice among Whites reduced them as people: 'The white is hit harder by apartheid than we are. It narrows his life. In not regarding us as humans, he becomes less than human. I do pity him'<sup>68</sup>.

From the late 1950s and early 1960s, Zondi used his art to express aspects of his struggle. This was resistance towards state intransigence, which, over decades, he would remain consistently determined to confront in a non-violent manner. The *Natives Act* of 1952, commonly known as the 'Pass Laws' permeated every move Blacks made and became the pivot around which, from that time, passive and organized resistance to white supremacy revolved. By 1960, resistance had exacted a huge tribute in human life and suffering, especially during riots and their aftermath of death and gaoling, at Sharpville, Nyanga, and elsewhere (Luthuli, 2006:220,221). Following the ANC leader's call, anchored in his non-violent resistance, people burned their *dompas* (pass)<sup>69</sup> countrywide, by the tens of thousands. In response to increasing social pressure but remaining clear of political activism, Zondi took up the idea of shackles in his sculptural oeuvre<sup>70</sup>, perhaps prompted by Luthuli's comment: 'We did not desire to leave our shackles at home. We desired to be rid of them' (2006 [1962]:221).

Zondi's mobility between his home at Mtulwa and his various places of employment partially included the artist in the socio-economic circumstances of labour migrancy. This had been deeply embedded and instituted in South Africa since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialization and was linked predominantly to mineral exploitation.

Romantic images and meanings attached to concepts of 'home' and 'belonging' are thought to be affectively defined rather than cognitively. Images embrace territorial and cultural elements linked to community, family, and the identification of a person's roots (Hedetoft and Hjort, 2002: vii). The specific geographical location of the familiar physical environment Zondi defined as home, then, constitutes the 'social environment' charged with emotional components. This was particularly the case in the fragmented disharmony in which black people became the 'other' in the country of their birth. Here concepts of home and belonging gained particular significance, as barriers of mistrust and suspicion across the 'colour-line'

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<sup>68</sup> Kader Asmal (2006:xx) quoting the American Journalist, Studs Terkel (1977) *Talking to Myself: A Memoir of my Times*. London, Wildwood House. p. 135.

<sup>69</sup> Literally translated this means 'stupid'pass.

<sup>70</sup> See *Undoing Shackles* (1980)(Figs.234;235 after p236).

became inscribed in white rule. Any interface with "other" which human mobility inevitably presupposes, was curtailed or reduced to a minimum, mostly occurring in the context of the "servant-master" relationships. Any further contact was undesired and often not legal. During the decades of his career, therefore, and particularly under conditions of social fragmentation, issues of birth and cultural heritage conveyed to Zondi a sense of being part of a greater collective. Yet concepts of "home" vary and understanding them may be problematic across cultures (Hannerz, 2002: 218). In a global world of hybrid senses of belonging in the present, people have multiple homes (Hedetoft and Hjort, 2002: xvi). In the light of this, the notion that a sense of transparency in, and trust of, people is allegedly not found in any new locality (Hannerz, 2002: 119, 223) requires qualification, especially in the case of Zondi.

Regional affiliations and specific geographical locations are associated with the concept of "home." Yet, it may be argued that emotional and intellectual relationships with individuals are equally, if not sometimes better, able to sustain a feeling of belonging, of "being at home" among people. Zondi's generosity of spirit carried him into inter-personal relations that enabled him to attain a feeling of being at home with white others. The same ethos of communality which determined his interaction with people in rural Natal equally shaped the nature of his interface with his white patrons. His own recollection of sharing the homes and the working environments of these friends is testimony to the strong measure of well-being and ease which he felt among them. Various personal communications have revealed that his lateral move to embrace particularly the Bodenstein family as his own, was an emotional commitment which was met by reciprocity. Zondi's daughter commented, "The Bodensteins were my father's second family" (Zondi-Molefe, 2008a pers.com), while the Bodenstein's oldest daughter noted, "Zondi was like a second father to us" (Bodenstein, C., 2008a pers.com.). In the home of Paul and Jacqueline Martens, Zondi was called "Uncle Michael" (McLean and Pienaar, 2005 pers.com.).

In the Bodenstein home, then, Zondi found another psychological "home" a place of spiritual belonging and well-being, where individual emotional perceptions of trust and security anchored his identity as an artist. It was here that he was able to redefine himself and explore modernity. From 1972, Zondi became a free-lance artist without any other means of income. Zondi's dependence on patronage, rather than regular employment, now required that he move outside his rural environment for extended periods. The South African population was compartmentalized according to dubious ethnic and racial criteria. Under such political

circumstances, his artistic exploration invariably had to proceed periodically under conditions of illegality, as he sought places other than his rural home in which to be creative and find inspiration.

Concurring with the Black intelligentsia regarding the use of English, Zondi emphasized to his children that learning languages would afford them freedom (Zondi-Molefe, 2008a; 2009a pers.com.). He saw in languages the potential to facilitate communication with other peoples and to gain knowledge of their culture: ðí one should have a clue of languages, so that the whole world can communicateö (Zondi, 2003a:6 pers.com.). As a vehicle of culture, language is thought to be essential in developing a sense of national identity (Gyekye,1997: 13). The issue of mother-tongue language became pertinent within the discourse of Zulu nationalism, for example in an anonymous poem by -Zuluø of 1927, where the loss of the language of the -ancestorsø was bemoaned (Couzens, 1985:53). While Zondi was absorbing the visual language of his patrons, he regretted that he did not learn their spoken languages. By this he meant German as well as Afrikaans which he did not speak beyond its use at school<sup>71</sup>. The matter of language in schools for Blacks, that is, teaching in the medium of Afrikaans became the rationale and incentive for oppositional action by black political activists attached to the ANC. Zondi was strongly opposed to such activism, an attitude which echoed the stance of the *Inkatha Freedom Party* - dominated KZN homeland authorities under Dr. Buthelezi. This attitude was also shared by pupils at the high school that Zondi's children attended in Dundee (Zondi-Molefe, 2008b pers.com.).

Apart from his art-making Zondi was highly talented in diverse spheres. He engaged in sports, play-writing and production, and poetry-writing (Byerley,1965:437; Miles, 1997:112,113). The artist commented that ðArt, Poetry and Musicö were ðall sheep of the same foldö (Zondi,1960c:2, letter), and he was an enthusiastic musician. Apart from crafting utilitarian objects in his youth, Zondi had made simple musical instruments from wood (Rankin, 1989:180). He later played various instruments, among them the flute, ðjust a cheap guitarö, as he called it, as well as ðthe biggest violiní a bass violinö which Zondi passed on to one of his sons (Zondi, 2006d:3 pers.com.). During the time he was studying at Dundee, Zondi sometimes played with a group of musicians on the Durban beachfront. From his years at Edendale, he knew the Caluza family, both as a pupil and during his entrepreneurial period

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<sup>71</sup> Zondi did in fact speak Afrikaans to Shangaan people in the northern Transvaal, yet he did so in the absence of his Afrikaans friends, with whom he always communicated in English (Veldsman, 2008, pers.com.).

in the late 1940s. The great musician and composer, Rueben T. Caluza, was from this family. Caluza was much admired for the synthesis of various forms of music. Herbert Dhlomo was interested in idioms and characteristics of various national music forms and the relationship between rural indigenous music and the new African music created in urban centres (Masilela, 2007:67). Dhlomo recalled spending a whole night, together with other New African intellectuals, listening to the quartets and symphonies of Schubert and Beethoven and discussing the arts<sup>72</sup>. Zondi's notion that art, poetry, and music created a unifying platform across cultures was expressed in his *Orpheus* (1972)(Figs.356-360, opp.p254), which was a far more mature portrayal than Zondi's mask-like portrait of Ludwig von Beethoven. Orpheus equally signified how music was able to transcend racial barriers.

Zondi was also an avid reader. Apart from *Ilanga Lase Natal* and other newspapers, he found periodical publications like *Zonk!*, *Bona*, and *Drum*<sup>73</sup>, inspiring (Zondi, 2007a:4 pers.com.). From his time at the DIBS, Zondi was able to keep abreast of happenings in the world beyond rural Natal. His world view enabled him to make informed decisions, corresponding to his need to form, and defend if necessary, his own opinions.

The harmony in nature from which Zondi drew strength and about which he wrote poetry embraced human existence. This harmony in turn, for the artist, was strongly relational, in a form of integrity expressed in the Zulu word, *ubuNtu* (humanity). Zondi associated this African philosophical concept only with human beings and with feelings between people: “*ubuntu* ...a feeling of a human is different from that of an animal” (Zondi, 2006c:7 pers.com.). As much as *ubuntu* implies humanity, where a person becomes a person through other people (Mbatha, 2004: 312), for Zondi it also involved the concept of pilgrimage, which will be considered below<sup>74</sup>. Zondi extended his use of *ubuntu* among Africans, to white people: “because a feeling, even towards a white, to me can be called *ubuntu*” (Zondi, 2006c:7 pers.com.). In contrast to this concept with its humanitarian bias, Zondi translated *ubandlululo* as meaning that “you treat him as some stranger” (Zondi, 2006c:5 pers.com.).

<sup>72</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo “Busy-Bee” Weekly Review And Commentary, “Weekly Letter: R.T. Caluza” in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, June 3, 1950 (quoted in Masilela (2007: 68,69).

<sup>73</sup> *Drum* was an illustrated magazine with black authorship, which surveyed township life, exposed realities of apartheid and monitored resistance movements. It was produced in Johannesburg for black readers.

<sup>74</sup> See *isiHambi* (1975)(Figs.217-220 after p234).



Zondi remained firmly within the ambit of the Lutheran Church, yet his spirituality reflects the syncretic nature of the belief of *amakholwa* (Leeb-du Toit,2003:128). Zondi's respectful veneration for human life embraced the idea of a dual existence of every person, whereby death implies the discarding of the physical body and the spirit goes home to the *amadlozi*, the revered predecessors. These are believed to have a new presence among the living as 'shades'. The prospect of this change in being in the future, from the physical to the spiritual world after death, is believed to give the individual an 'immutable sacredness' during life, deserving of 'reverence and respect' (Mbatha, 2005:34). The artist's ideas about *amadlozi* were specific. While he felt there to be no discrimination of gender for qualifying to becoming an *idhlozi* (ancestors), he was adamant that the 'becoming spirit' and reaching a status worthy of being elevated to a 'shade' was only granted those who had lived a good life. This perception of eligibility is qualified by Berglund, who asserts that among *amaZulu* all human beings are thought to have the potential to become shades, with varying importance attached to individual ones (1976:119). Apart from drawing on wisdoms from oral traditions handed down in many stories, particularly by his grandfather, Zondi accepted guidance from ancestors who, as he claims, came to him in an advisory capacity in dreams, e.g. his mother and Maneta. Under conditions of disenfranchisement, Zondi drew strength from sensing that his forebears were guiding him. This is an example of the traditionalist based cosmogony which is retained in Christian practice leaving room for 'ancestral intercession and mediation' (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:15).

Not all of Zondi's neighbours shared his Christian faith. Their spirituality was still anchored in a traditionalist world view based on ancestral veneration, aspects of which formed a distinctive element in the artist's world view. It was Zondi's perception as a Christian, that his neighbours were proud of him, having sculpted the *Christ on the Cross* at Appelsbosch. This reflects the communality invoked by Luthuli, which he thought transcended differences manifest in institutional dogma (2006 [1962]:11). Luthuli claimed that distinctions between 'relatively well-educated people, and people with no literacy at all', and those between Christians and non-Christians 'did not mean discrimination', and certainly not that Christians were superior (Luthuli, 2006 [1962]:11). Many fundamental truths in African traditionalist beliefs and Christianity are held in common and conversion to Christianity, therefore, did not imply a blanket acceptance of western civilization. Shared ideologies, especially those found in the Old Testament, thus facilitated the inculturation of the new faith on African soil, Christianity becoming 'an extension of already entrenched values and

ideals peculiar to traditionalist practice (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:127,128). The celebration of ancestral mediation, also for Zondi, remained important, parallel to his practice of the Christian faith. This included sacrifices that were linked to protection by the shades (Berglund, 1976:111) and serving communal cohesion (Sundkler,1961:250)<sup>75</sup>. An example was the celebration of the successful completion and consecration of the Appelsbosch chapel, when an ox was slaughtered in the African way and tribal people were invited (Zondi, 2002 pers.com). Zondi was also adamant that his daughter should follow certain rites of passage, having married and given birth (Zondi, 2002 pers.com). The above practices show the artist's strong emotional adherence to received cultural practices.

Zondi felt an affinity between himself and nature. His reverence for trees and wood formed a Leitmotiv in his life, because it was this material from which he drew his inspiration, or into which he was able to translate his creativity. He not only had profound knowledge of indigenous trees but also was familiar with regional medicinal plants and the ailments they cured. His childhood memories reflect his at-one-ness with nature, conveyed in part to him by his grandfather. The notion of nature being the vital force integral to the human family and communality is expanded to serve as metaphor (Hopkins, 2005:89). The ebb and flow of nature's cycles serve to mirror conflict resolution among human beings, where normal balance and non-antagonistic difference is exemplified, rather than egotistical conquering for self-serving expressions<sup>76</sup>. In the course of declaring, rather humorously, that he was an *inyanga* (doctor) familiar with traditional *umuthi* (medicines), Zondi described the frequently used herb *impepho*, employed, among other things, as incense, and to facilitate clear dreaming<sup>77</sup>. Also, he repeatedly spoke about a potion containing tortoise, to foster longevity (Zondi, 2004 pers.com.)

Recourse to ancestral intervention for spiritual and physical well-being, as exemplified above, was required to negotiate the practicalities and hardships of everyday life. These practices were considered by early missionaries to be tantamount to idolatry (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:35). Their ignorance or misinterpretation of mutual social obligations that were secured by means of polygyny and *ukulobola* (giving cattle) included other oversights. Leeb-du Toit

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<sup>75</sup> See 3.4 IMAGINING SELF THROUGH OTHER ó A PHILOSOPHICAL EXCHANGE p134.

<sup>76</sup> Kofi Asare Opoku (1991) In Pursuit of Community: an African Perspective in *Healing for God's World: Remedies from Three Continents*, ed. Kofi Asare Opoku, Kim Young-Bock, and Antoinette Clark Wire. New York, Friendship p. 21-22 ó cited in Hopkins (2005: 89).

<sup>77</sup> See Krige (1957: 294, 295, 300, 309, 328,329); Webb and Wright (1976: 98, 121) and in the Old Testament, see Jeremiah (34:4-5, in Bible,1999:889).

sees in early missionaries their contempt and rejection of indigenous healers and medical practitioners and sees the grave oversight of failing to recognize Biblical parallels in such practices. Only well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century did religious recognize that many cultural traditions attending to spiritual well-being among Zulu peoples could be easily accommodated within the Christian belief system (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:35). Related to this, are customary practices like polygny and *ilobolo*, in which Zondi showed a lively interest.

The above adequately confirms Zondi's syncretic form of spirituality as he deployed elements of a traditionalist based cosmogony. These enabled the artist to balance matters of physical and metaphysical being, parallel to his Christian faith. Grossert's notion, then, that Zondi's belief in the Christian faith resulted in his losing touch with received belief systems is flawed (1968:42). He noted: "Zondi is a convinced Christian and the influence of Christian thought on art has also impressed itself deeply on his mind. The old feeling for the spirits of the trees from which timber has been obtained, the desire for the approval of the *amadlozi* (spirits of the ancestors) and the naming and dedication ceremonies seem to have been superseded by newer attitudes adopted from the Whites" (Grossert, 1968:42).

Zondi believed that people must understand and be informed about politics (van Wyk, early-1980s). His political awareness was heightened from 1948 when he and his friends were dismayed at the takeover of government by Afrikaner nationalists, commenting: "It was a pain to both of us - Whites, and I, as one of the Blacks - we were very upset, especially because public places... we didn't have the same place to use" (Zondi, 2006c:3 pers.com.). More than a decade after achieving republican status in May 1961, the nationalist policies were seen to be in a crisis (Degenaar, 1975:35). Zondi's thinking was guided by a strong ethical and moral code which guided his arguments with friends like Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, as noted above. Yet, even under the circumstances in which black South Africans were entirely disenfranchised and restricted in their mobility, the artist claimed to be an apolitical person. This indicates a measure of independence the artist wished to retain from any specific political ideology, while at the same time opposing temporal civic constructions configured under white rule. While he may have shared many ideological tenets expressed in Zulu nationalist thought, he remained equally independent of the political activism of its proponents. With regard to citizenship, his strong Christian faith could also have been a

guide for this non-activist stance<sup>78</sup>. He remained steadfastly condemnatory of the cycle of violence in which politicians like Buthelezi became involved. Yet at the same time, on a pragmatic level beyond his art-making, he made his reconciliatory skills widely available as an arbitrator between oppositional parties (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com.)

It is very likely that Zondi remained acutely aware of a certain destiny which his paternal grandmother, Noziwawa<sup>79</sup>, had envisaged for him. She was the matriarch in the family, the wife of Maneta. She used a form of praise song for her grandson when he was growing up, an *isibongo* (referring to the clan). Proclaimed in public in something of a prophecy, it was said of Michael Gagashe by his grandmother that: *õLona ngumlethe kaMadinana Zonkøzizwe ziyothi mletheö*. Zondi's daughter translates this as *õAll the nations will say, bring him - he will be friends with all nationsö* implying that *õall the nations will welcome himö* (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a:3, pers.com.). She refers to the special relationship her father had with Noziwawa, and she notes that with this injunction, said on a formal occasion, *õeverybody would always remember that particular timeö* (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a:3, pers.com.)

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<sup>78</sup> Jonathan Jansen refers to his political consciousness in terms of his faith. His denominational perspective ruled out activism, as he considered Paul's letter to the Philippians, in which he reminds them that *õour citizenship is in heavenö* (Philippians, 3:20).

<sup>79</sup> Noziwawa was from the Zuma clan, while her mother was a maBhengu, creating the familial link to the artist Gerard Bhengu (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a, pers.com).

## CHAPTER TWO: FROM CRAFT TO ART

### 2.1 MODERNITY – ZONDI AND THE BLACK INTELLIGENTSIA

In South Africa, the embrace of modernity had sparked a lively controversy since the 1920s, particularly among the New Africans. Its emergence under the ambiguities linked to the political and economic status of Blacks is seen to have prevented it from taking its logical and natural course (Masilela, 2007:24). New Africans saw Skota's *African Yearly Register* of 1930 as a "modernist historical vision" in which the facilitating role that black intellectuals could play in South Africa's transition from tradition to modernity, was revealed (Masilela, 2007:62,63). As black intellectuals claimed their own interpretation of Zulu and other African histories differ from the colonial voice, this became their springboard to controlling the massive changes shaking their lives in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Peterson claims that their urge to reinscribe their past was linked to the racist distortions of this past within the colonial discourse, which, when not making it invisible, had disfigured and devalued it (2006:239).

Much of Zondi's critical thinking regarding the role of the humanities in politics and considerations of moral issues and personal conscience, reflected concerns and opinions of the intellectuals around the literary luminaries like Herbert Dhlomo and Benedict Vilakazi. Engaging with them as friends in his formative years of early adulthood (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com.), Zondi, the young cabinet-maker, was inspired by their creative works and shared their progressive approach. The role of creative art in nation building and national liberation was discussed in their circles also concerning music (Masilela, 2007:68), possibly prompting his adage about the visual arts, poetry and music belonging together (Zondi, 1960c:2, letter). As noted earlier, Zondi aligned himself both with the protest of these New Africans against racism and with the conciliatory voice of Dhlomo's earlier career, in which he called for the New African to be "the bridge and the interpreter between Black and White"<sup>80</sup>. Their views on tribalism and apartheid, the role of the arts, and the learning of languages in fostering understanding all became aspects of Zondi's intellectual engagement and formed the foundation for the broad spectrum of ideas that he would translate into his own art-making, which ideas he transported into his contacts with patrons. He shared their preoccupation with ancient Greek humanism and philosophy and a love of classical music.

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<sup>80</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, "Busy Bee" in *ILanga Lase Natal*, 31 January 1953 - cited in Couzens (1985: 321).

Not least, Zondi's expressiveness in poetry and plays, which he produced at the DIBS and in Pietermaritzburg during the early 1950s (Byerley, 1965:437; Miles, 1997:113), is easily located within the context of his friendships with H.I.E. Dhlomo and B.W. Vilakazi. He became a mediator for the ideals of the black intelligentsia as he took the idea of shaping African modernity into the next three decades after Dhlomo's death.

A distinctive reading of modernity is attributed to Herbert Dhlomo (Masilela, 2007:152). As the "champion of modernism", writing in English (Kunene, 2007:238), and a "passionate cultural activist" (Mphahlele, 2007:215), he believed that creativity in the form of prose, poetry, drama, and the visual arts, should be sourced in the Zulu past. Ntongela Masilela describes the playwright's quest to participate in the construction of modernity "from the point of view of its other", meaning the controversies surrounding "tradition" (2007:150). This involved redeeming the past from colonial invisibility (Peterson, 2006,239). It was a critical engagement with the colonial presence, in a mode developing in indigenous performing arts in other African contexts. Here, parody and humour was used to expose false assumptions on the part of the colonist, concerning control over African subjects (Okeke,C. 2001:29). The complexities of such re-evaluations of received culture were exacerbated within the context of apartheid. Dhlomo's concern, then, lay with received cultural tenets, which he deemed to be vital for the New African Movement in its embrace of modernity (Masilela, 2007:24,25). The literary works of the New African in southern Africa pre-empted Ben Enwonwu's suggestion, made in 1956, with respect to the visual arts, that borrowing techniques of the West, without copying European art, was ensuring the preservation and continuity of characteristic qualities of art-making in Africa (2001:434). Contesting the idea of cultural fixity or stasis, two years earlier Dhlomo had written, "...there is no question that African customs, traditions and culture need pruning, grafting, re-adjustment and reform and re-channelling to meet changed and ever-changing conditions". Tradition is not static and "final" as some think<sup>81</sup>. By means of a discerning selection and re-evaluation of social and cultural tenets from African histories, it was believed that a meaningful future could be forged. At the same time, by selecting, appropriating, and conceptualizing select European cultural elements, and integrating these into indigenous modes, in Dhlomo's view, artistic expression that was African and modern could evolve. Mazisi Kunene clearly draws direct inspiration from Herbert Dhlomo in his

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<sup>81</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo "Customs and Progress" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, November 20, 1954 (cited in Masilela (2007: 185,186).

very recent recommendations for negotiating the persistent dichotomy of modern living between people in rural areas and those in an urban environment. He reiterates how western liberal persuasions should be grafted onto carefully evaluated tenets of the African past, in order to show a way forward (Kunene, 2007:238).

Whether in the literary or the visual arts, with nearly every facet of their existence under state control, black artists saw a twofold purpose in their art-making. The first was linked to the transformative nature of their creativity. The second involved the mediatory potential of art in its sourcing in the past, while, nevertheless, embracing western ideas and techniques, in this way facilitating the move into modernity. The literary elite's acknowledgement of the need for engaging in mass mobilisation prompted them to take their inspiration among the black masses. Dhlomo's theoretical views addressed the processes of industrialization and urbanization and the uprooting and transformation of the peasantry into a working class (Masilela, 2007:40). He thus exhorted urban intellectuals to become the voice of rural people: 'we fear that unless our intellectuals get into the sufferings of their people; and weave themselves into the unvoiced fears and anxieties they will never speak the feelings of the people'<sup>82</sup>. By attaching to their literary art the criteria of immediate relevance to real life experiences, the intellectuals ensured that their black audiences recognized their creativity in the context of the struggle. Herbert Dhlomo saw the creative artist in the role of facilitating 'a cultural revolution' by involving the masses in innovation<sup>83</sup>. He invoked the liberatory potential of modern drama which, as an imitative art form sourced in the past<sup>84</sup>, in his view should concern itself 'with the progress of African people within modernity' (Masilela, 2007:52). Adversities in life, it was believed, could be confronted by art, and the translation of personal and national experiences could contribute to fulfilling social and aesthetic responsibilities. In this, visual art had the advantage over published writing, of being able to widely elude state suppression, as control and censorship became ever more stringent. Locating their work among the people, then, gave substance to speaking on their behalf in times of bewildering change. Kunene affirms this. He speaks of change as a positive force, calling for a discerning selection of the processes involved in progress (Kunene, 2007:238). He thus affirms an anchoring in 'old values and strategies' for the purpose of controlling that

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<sup>82</sup> Anonymous (H.I.E. Dhlomo) 'Our Intellectuals' in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, July 31, 1943 ó cited in Masilela (2007: 64).

<sup>83</sup> Dhlomo (H.I.E. Dhlomo) 'Masses and the Artist' in *Ilanga Lase Natal* April 10, 1943 ó cited in Masilela (2007: 40).

<sup>84</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, 'African Dramatists Should Not Fear Being Stigmatized as Imitators' in *Bantu World*, October 21, 1933 - cited in Masilela (2007:52).

change, while reminding us that modernity is only valid when it stimulates the African community and makes its inventive qualities native and natural to the African community itself (Kunene, 2007:239). The second purpose of art-making concerned cultural appropriation. While gaining expressive inspiration from the past, the art forms that emerged from reflecting lived realities in the present engaged tenets of European modernism. Art was thus created, in its flow from western education, in the visual and literary languages familiar to Whites. While the authors remained anchored in African experience and ideas (Kunene, 2007:239), English was used to transmit these. Their modern artistic subjectivity was thus being linked to political aspirations engendered within social upheaval and change. Yet rather than being a mimetic extension of European art, authors were revealing the kind of agency and originality in claiming modernity, which western narratives from the 1960s are thought to have denied African creativity (Okeke, C., 2001:30)<sup>85</sup>. Dhlomo's vision for a syncretic form of African drama, therefore, involved an idealistic rootedness in Africa, while at the same time it could appropriate from expressive European dramatic art forms (Masilela, 2007:52). In this way he acknowledged the potential of drama to harmonise and humanize race relations in South Africa (Masilela, 2007:52). The use of English among the New Africans was thus linked to the reconciliatory function between traditional and modern cultural paradigms and to inter-personal relationships across the colour-bar. Dhlomo was thus conceptualizing the nature and role of the arts for African modernity as being vehicle for transformation. Appropriately, Esokia Mphahlele views the humanities in their reflective and elevating capacity in situations of poverty. Privation is thought to prevent people from being political, thus further perpetuating economic marginalization (Mphahlele, 2007:221). Creative drama and the visual arts prompt reflection, breaking the cycle of mere reaction to one's own condition<sup>86</sup>. This, then, becomes a powerful argument for reaching the masses with art forms that prompt processes of cognition regarding their *status quo*. In Zondi's case, his carvings could foster this process among the rural poor and in his interface with Whites, who remained cocooned in their ignorance. Zondi's early relief landscapes would have been imagined in relation to the dramatic oral literary tradition, in terms of both the synthesis that this art form facilitates between past and present and the unifying potential which may be invoked through the classical Zulu poetic form<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Okeke refers to William Fagg and Margaret Plass (1964) *African Sculpture*. London, Studio Vista Limited.

<sup>86</sup> Mphahlele (2007: 221) uses Earl Shorris 'The Triumphant Power of the Humanities' in *American Educator*, Winter 1997-1998.

<sup>87</sup> See 2.5 ROMANTIC UTOPIAS? CONTEXTUALIZING EARLY RELIEFS AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL WORK p85.



The intellectuals around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave differing messages regarding the way they sought to integrate the Zulu past into the fabric of modern life. Given various white governments' tribal legislation since the 1920s, Rolfes Dhlomo, for example, feared a form of 'colonisation' by modernity, a 'perpetual petrification' of tradition (Masilela, 2007:25). Therefore he demanded caution in accepting new social and cultural forms, intimating also that a blanket rejection of the received culture would inadvertently strengthen white hegemony over it (Masilela, 2007:25). B.W. Vilakazi, on the other hand, believed in 'an accelerated construction and acceptance of modernity, thereby subverting tradition, as a necessary pathway that would enable Africans eventually to overcome European domination' (Masilela, 2007:25). In befriending Benedict Vilakazi, Zondi had the opportunity of engaging with one of the leading intellectuals of his time, who was said to have 'struck terror in Dhlomo because of his enormous intellectual power and fertile poetic imagination' (Masilela, 2007:69). Vilakazi, as a New African academic, was widely acknowledged among his peers as an 'apostle of modernity' (Masilela, 2007:72). He used his scholarly research for exploring the problems of his day, and publishing his findings in imaginative poetics (Masilela, 2007:73)<sup>88</sup>. With his extraordinary ability to conflate critical scholarship with artistic literary creativity, he is lauded as an African poet beyond South African borders (Masilela, 2007:71)<sup>89</sup>. Vilakazi asserted that the classical Zulu poetic form associated with the praise of kings and warriors, *izibongo*, could embrace the kind of 'deep emotional experience' which possessed 'a universal meaning in life even in a world dominated by the ideas from the West' (Masilela, 2007:73,75). Linked to the demand for relevance in the immediate, what Dhlomo admired in Vilakazi 'was his moral seriousness in striving to bring the African people into the modern age' (Masilela, 2007:72). This is reflected in Vilakazi's *Amal Ezulu* (Zulu Horizons), a publication of poetry that also appeared in an English translation (1962).

Although Dhlomo revered the Zulu language and promoted its adaptation to the modern world, he used English for his own plays, prose, and poetry<sup>90</sup>. The use of English related to being able to address a wider audience. Zondi commented: 'we had always thought that it

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<sup>88</sup> Benedict Vilakazi was the first black scholar to receive a doctorate from a prestigious South African university (Masilela, 2007:77).

<sup>89</sup> by Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

<sup>90</sup> Poems like 'Our Dying Speech' lamented the decline of the Zulu language and indigenous culture. See Couzens (1985: 53,54, 59 and 75, footnote 51).

was more acceptable (Zondi,2002a:19 pers.com.). Also, within the ‘civilizing’ mission, the study of English literature had become a status symbol of the educated black elite. This was expressed by H.I.E. Dhlomo in 1930 (Couzens, 1985:51). English-speaking teachers for subjects in the humanities in institutions for black teacher training, for example the Teachers’ Training College which the Dhlomo brothers attended, conveyed the idea that ‘the test of a nation’s civilisation was its achievements in literature’ (Couzens, 1985:51). The black American writer, James Weldon Johnson, is said to have influenced Herbert Dhlomo’s theories of art, linking creativity to the status of a people (Couzens, 1985:102,103)<sup>91</sup>. Zondi’s proficiency in speaking and writing English mirrors, in part, Herbert Dhlomo’s defending of English as the medium of writing for Blacks, which the poet and playwright launched late in his life (Couzens, 1985:316). While still concerned with status and kudos for the black man, in the eyes of Whites, Dhlomo believed that as an international lingua franca, writing in the English language afforded less danger of misapprehension regarding political or ‘tribalist’ agendas<sup>92</sup>. Apart from the much contested opinion that it was ‘impossible to produce national literature through the use of tribal language’<sup>93</sup>, English was confirmed as the language of black writing and as a symbol of defiance against Bantu Education from 1953 (Couzens, 1985:352). Dhlomo was thus as emphatic about education as Zondi would become. He acknowledged that ‘the acquisition of knowledge and high learning’ were the prerequisites for effectively negotiating a modern way of life (Masilela, 2007:137). The *Bantu Education Act* of 1953 therefore enraged him (Masilela, 2007:91,92) as he recognized its perversion<sup>94</sup>. He saw in it an inferior education for Africans in order ‘to put the Native in his place’, and enslave black intellectualism<sup>95</sup>. By means of many editorials in *Ilanga Lase Natal* he clarified the implications of, as he called it, ‘entombment’ of black Africans within the apartheid system. Dhlomo saw apartheid in terms of the conscious objectification of blacks, preventing their embrace of a modern way of life and their participation in it as active subjects (Masilela, 2007:93). Without a doubt, Zondi was able to reassess his own employment as an

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<sup>91</sup> See quote from James Weldon Johnson, used by R.H.W. Shepherd (1936: 20) *Literature for the South African Bantu: A Comparative Study of Negro Achievement*, written after Shepherd’s visit to the U.S.A. under the auspices of the Visitors’ Grants Committee of the Carnegie Corporation ó cited in Couzens (1985:102,103).

<sup>92</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, ‘Reflections on a Literary Competition’, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 31 October 1953 - cited in Couzens (1985:316).

<sup>93</sup> This was voices at the ‘African Authors’ Conference’ published in *Bantu World*, 21 November 1936

<sup>94</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, ‘Busy Bee’, ‘Weekly Review And Commentary’, ‘Using Law to Prostitute Law’ in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, October 3, 1953 ó cited in Masilela (2007:125). For Dhlomo’s articles on Bantu Education, see Masilela (2007:199, footnote 231).

<sup>95</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, ‘Busy Bee’, ‘Weekly Review And Commentary’, ‘Africans and Apartheid’ in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, July 21, 1951 and Editorial *Ilanga Lase Natal*, ‘Intellectual Slavery’, April 17, 1954 ó cited in Masilela, 2007: 91).

instructor within this system, on account of Dhlomo's widely mediated critique more than a decade before .

Dhlomo's persistent allusion to the leadership role of the educated elite is reflected in Zondi's mode of self-consciously seeking reconciliation. Within his project of modernity, Dhlomo indicated various ways to foster rapprochement with Europeans. This included his call for the New African intellectuals to "Educate the 'Masters' about Africans", "Masters" meaning the ruling white elites (Masilela, 2007:173)<sup>96</sup>. Possibly two decades later, in a two-page handwritten text, Zondi would echo some of these sentiments, alluding to the enlightenment of Whites. Ostensibly his script, *Racial Misunderstanding* (Zondi, c. mid-1960s), appears to be a direct reply to Dhlomo, as the playwright spoke of "one of the most startling and tragic things in race relations", namely "the ignorance of the average white voter and of some of the highest authorities. This ignorance concerns the African and what is happening in this country"<sup>97</sup>. Dhlomo's rhetoric was filled with notions of "historic responsibilities" of the New African. Prevalent in his thinking was that, in the confusion sown by the upheavals of modern society, the disoriented masses could be guided by the educated elite, who could intervene on their behalf, by means of "endurance, self-sacrifice and industry" (Masilela, 2007:57)<sup>98</sup>. Zondi's script alludes equally to the duty of the educated elite, "of those who see and understand" to clarify for others the meaning of individual responsibility "for the betterment of the country" (Zondi, c. mid-1960s:2). Dhlomo invoked "the great teachers in world history", among whom he included figures like Socrates, convinced that "only the absolute best of the African teachers would be the real makers and interpreters of a New Africa"<sup>99</sup>.

It is very possible that by the example of friends like Herbert Dhlomo and Vilakazi, Zondi recognized the agency of art. By means of his sculptural oeuvre, Zondi began to reflect on real-life experiences, as he addressed issues like child labour and famine<sup>100</sup>, and ultimately,

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<sup>96</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, "Weekly Review And Commentary" "Educating the 'Masters'" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, February 28, 1953 ó cited in Masilela (2007:173).

<sup>97</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, "Weekly Review And Commentary" "Educating the 'Masters'" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, February 28, 1953 ó in Masilela (2007:173).

<sup>98</sup> "Busy-Bee" (H.I.E. Dhlomo), "Weekly Review and Commentary" "Hail Graduates" in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, May 24, 1947 ó in Masilela (2007:57).

<sup>99</sup> "Xö" (H.I.E. Dhlomo) "Passing Thoughts On the Teachers' Jubilee", in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, June 26, 1943, in Masilela (2007:57).

<sup>100</sup> Examples are *The Found One* (late 1950s)(Fig.287 after p246) and *Famine* (1965) (Figs.302;303 after p249).

in anticipation, the metaphor of broken shackles of apartheid (Figs.234;235 after p236)<sup>101</sup>. His integrity began to mirror the inviolability with which Herbert Dhlomo had upheld his own progressive ideals as he questioned legitimacy, be it that of the white -centred of authority or that within structures of black leadership. A few months before his death, Dhlomo reiterated his belief in the emancipatory ideals of modernity, the Brotherhood of man, and the sanctity of the individual human soul and personality, of beauty and truth, of fundamental human rights<sup>102</sup>. These ideals are reflected in four decades of Zondi's art-making.

In many ways, Zondi occupied a liminal space between the two extremes of educated blacks initially seeking assimilation among Whites and a generation of -radicals as he called the activists of the 1970s, whose oppositional politics embraced ideals of an armed struggle. Zondi's generation, and the one after his, visualised modernity in altered power relationships, while seeking to evaluate and represent their own histories and experiences with a consciousness of being proudly black. Like their predecessors, they created visions of their future by using the fabric of their own history as a foundation for controlling the changes which modernity visited on them. In this way, they tried to reclaim a grasp on, and realize, their own potential, to counter divisive politics. However, they were still in a suspended status between a modern, booming South African economy, and traditionalist custom and structures of authority under the -modern form of tribalism, as Dhlomo called apartheid (Masilela, 2007:82). Appropriately, then, with the current African inquiry into modernity, the perception that it was mediated by colonialism or western education is being contested. Much rather, individuals are thought to have recognized in the autonomous practice of art-making in the European sense, a medium with which subjectivity could be expressed from the midst of social and political circumstances that were introducing modernities to Africa (Okeke, C., 2001:29). Ultimately, it is Zondi's understanding of the above inscriptions of modernity in practices of embracing aspects of the past in order to affirm the future that would most enduringly manifest itself in his work. This understanding prompted not only a shift from his craft of cabinet-making to art. Also, more significantly, as he developed his own strategy of communication through art, this understanding stimulated

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<sup>101</sup> Examples are *Invisible Bonds* (1960) (Fig.198 opp.p226) and *Undoing Shackles* (1980) (Figs.234;235 after p236).

<sup>102</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo writing as -Anonymous - `Thoughts At the Close of The Year: Recapitulating Events of Importance' in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, December 24, 1955 - cited in Masilela (2007:152,153).

his transcendence of the Zuluness from which he drew inspiration for the first decade of his art-making. This will be further considered below<sup>103</sup>.

Developments in South Africa would vindicate Zondi's pacifist manner of rapprochement. As Hyslop reminds us, freedom and the chances for creating modernity under democratic conditions was not gained primarily in the armed struggle but in the ambit of 'above-ground' organizations (2009:123). Individuals like Zondi made an important contribution in the process of mutual understanding.

## 2.2 CRITICAL RECEPTION

The meaning of art from Africa in relation to its originators, their place of domicile, audiences, and expectations, constitute arguments and criteria of evaluation of contemporary African visual cultures and modernity. Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor hold that a dominant tendency in emergent art histories is the displacement of African perspectives on both the parameters of cultural narration and questions of identity (1999:12). A persistently contentious issue surrounding the production of contemporary African visual culture is the construction of such identities. The claim that these have been imposed on Africans by others, has resulted in strong contestations (Oguibe and Enwezor, 1999:12). The anthology, *Reading the Contemporary*, outlines developments after 1989, in the critical language and method used to evaluate contemporary African art (Oguibe and Enwezor, 1999). Globalization and a new African Diaspora situates the endeavour to describe visual cultural forms of self-definition within constantly shifting parameters. These are linked to mobility, forms of mediation, and various dependencies to which art-making is subject. The critical assessment, in the form of the collected texts, constitutes a challenge to attempts to constantly limit Africa to a 'monolithic' entity in western critical narratives. Critical and philosophical perspectives are brought to bear on a broad re-evaluation of contemporary African cultural production from Africa itself, and from the Diaspora. The aim of the collected essays, then, is to elucidate the relationship between art, politics, and culture in the production of 'modern consciousness' thereby providing alternative art historical perspectives.

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<sup>103</sup> See 2.5 ROMANTIC UTOPIAS? CONTEXTUALIZING EARLY RELIEFS AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL WORK p85.

When Blacks began absorbing western cultural idioms, this form of acculturation was met with paternalistic responses by early white scholars in South Africa, who invoked a rhetoric of loss vis-à-vis indigenous values and practices. Pejorative connotations were attached to the European ‘civilizing’ advance as being destructive and demoralizing. It required black intellectual visionaries like Albert Luthuli to oppose the notion that indigenous people were turning into ‘black Englishmen’. When in 1945 Herbert Dhlomo voiced his opinion about the positioning and evaluation of black South Africans’ creativity, his addressee was the state<sup>104</sup>. Discrimination affected most facets of life for Blacks at the time. In the arts it was anchored in the European ethnographic outlook. Assumed meanings of ‘traditional society’ and ‘traditional art’ were located in Victorian Romanticism, which prompted the notion of ‘disappearing cultures’. The evaluation of visual and literary art by the black intelligentsia during the 1940s reflected opposition to the insidious doctrine, introduced in the 1920s, that ‘natives’ must remain ‘natural’ and that education might ‘spoil them’ (Couzens, 1985:253)<sup>105</sup>. Artists and writers formed circles of ‘mutual ideology’ of critique and self-critique (Couzens, 1985:254). The cultural crisis addressed by black intellectuals at this time centred around the notion that indigenous sculpture and painting were thought of as ‘mere curiosities’ (Couzens, 1985:294). In order to break the dominance of white scholars in African studies, black scholars put forward ideas and convened to discuss the establishment of an African Academy or conferences of black ‘authors, scholars and patriots’<sup>106</sup>. These ideas did not come to fruition.

Valentine Mudimbe’s term ‘reprendre’ alludes to the imposed western notion of an ‘interrupted tradition’ and to the evaluation of art-making in Africa from the stance of transformation through foreign intervention (1991:276)<sup>107</sup>. The education towards ‘conversion’ implicit in colonial era art workshops under white tutelage, had embraced all aspects of life (Mudimbe, 1991:280). The introduction of artistic modernity to Africa by foreign art teachers is associated with their romantic imaginary of an ‘unchanging aesthetic memory’ or the ‘aesthetic unconscious’ which they believed they recognized in their

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<sup>104</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, ‘Busy Bee’, ‘Weekly Review And Commentary’, ‘Culture’ in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, January 13, 1945 in Masilela (2007:142).

<sup>105</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo commented that ‘the protagonists of this pernicious doctrine are the so-called friends of the African’ (‘Busy Bee’ in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 9 August 1947) - cited in Couzens (1985) p. 253. See also H.I.E. Dhlomo in *Bantu World* 9 March 1935 - cited in Couzens (1985: 250).

<sup>106</sup> Couzens, (1985: 294) using H.I.E. Dhlomo, alias ‘Busy Bee’ in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 10 June 1944; ‘Peregrine’, ‘Natal’s Cultural Crisis’, *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 17 September 1944.

<sup>107</sup> This text was reproduced verbatim in Oguibe and Enwezor (1999:31-47).

students (Mudimbe,1991:277,278)<sup>108</sup>. Paternalistic politics of acculturation were thus guided by the belief in an "innate African artistic imagination" (Mudimbe, 1991:279). In acknowledgement of new styles, techniques, and artistic responses to changing social and political conditions, western categorizations of African art<sup>109</sup> which failed to do justice to diversity, were revised according to notions of "complementarity"<sup>110</sup>.

Oguibe's description of African creativity under the scrutiny of powerful and authoritative Occidental discourses in the present, contains many incriminations against the perceived hegemonic position vis-à-vis the evaluation of African art-making (1999). The creative act as authorial inscription of the individual implies the construction of reality. Free self-expression is seen as a mode by which to evade the dominance of others (Oguibe, 1999:19,20). The denial of self-articulation and authority for black African artists, over their own work, constitutes Oguibe's primary indictment. He expounds on the critical self/other binary employed in western critique of art by black Africans, and he describes the African artist's struggle for recognition by Occidental audiences. He describes the employ of "other" as "an object of exoticist fascination" within the western "master narrative" (Oguibe,1999:18). Subjecthood which focuses not on the artwork, but its author implicitly denies him his own language of articulation and, with this, his humanity (Oguibe,1999:19). African artists are thus portrayed in spaces of cultural production in the west, in which they are colonized and incarcerated, as their creative self-reiteration is policed (Oguibe,1999:19). A rhetoric of vassalage, and defacement, and denial of self-articulation is thus associated with western power politics, which are decried as being hegemonic.

Enwezor (1999) addresses the African contribution to the contemporary representation in the western metropolis. Like Oguibe, he identifies the work as testimonies of representing the self (Enwezor, 1999:245). He notes that through relocation by artists, the signs that they carry into their art-making from different localities become imaginary constructs of identity. Yet, African artists' work produced in the West in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, is, in his view, perpetually relegated either to invisibility and "critical silence" or, when reduced to a peripheral location, becomes subject to misreading. These identities are subject to translation

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<sup>108</sup> Mudimbe locates this in the "archetypal image" of the unconscious (1991) p.277,278 - using Carl G. Jung (1980) *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton, Bollingen Foundation and Princeton University Press p. 5.

<sup>109</sup> See Marshall W. Mount's distinguishing categorizations in "Between Two Traditions" in Mudimbe (1991: 279).

<sup>110</sup> Mudimbe (1991:280) - citing Ulli Beier (1968) *Contemporary Art in Africa*. London, Frederick, A. Praeger, p 14.

and transfiguration within theoretical discourses. As critical tools, these are applied to the extent that the creators are denied such identities in their new places of domicile (Enwezor,1999:245). A critic of Zondi's work in 1974, C. Hagg, recommended that "Zondi should isolate himself from White influences" in order "to retain the spirit of Africa" which he deemed to be "one of the most difficult problems facing Black artists" (1974). He spoke of a "dualism" with its destructive power, engendered by "the influences of missionaries and Western training" unhappily married with "the African spirit" (Hagg, 1974). Zondi had moved into an urban context, there to redefine himself as a modern artist. Hagg was exemplifying a critique of the work of "other" in the manner Enwezor aligns with criteria that are attached to prejudicial codifications set by western adjudicators (1999:272). Arguably, Zondi was being translocated into a cultural space with which he may have identified, yet which was inappropriate for the purpose he attached to his art-making. This was the exercising of power in critical discourse, where criteria of normativity, expected "authenticity" and the labelling to which the art-making of Africans is subject, determines its contextualization or dismissal (Enwezor, 1999:246). Pointing to the sovereignty of western narration within the linear parameters of the western modernist canon, Enwezor insists on the critical obligation to challenge and contest hegemonic hermeneutics of African self-representation (Enwezor, 1999:246).

Homi Bhabha's perspective on cultural comparativism imagines a "Third Space" which might liberate cultural encodings from notions of fixity and difference that are introduced into the discourse surrounding art evaluation. In this he addresses the kind of crossing of boundaries which Zondi attempted together with some of his white patrons. Zondi's art-making occurred in a political landscape, the foundation of which was based on reciprocal relationships between nationalist ideologies and principles of difference. Due to political conditions, the meeting of black and white people in South Africa represented a crossing of boundaries. The artist found in his creativity the means for self-fulfilment and advancement beyond such ideological boundaries as defined under white rule. Once he had understood this potential in his art-making, he employed it to facilitate his periodical trespass from the periphery of whiteness into its midst. By means of co-opting specific patrons who were complicit he did this on an intimate and personal stage, distant from overt political rhetoric and mass mobilisation. This was simultaneously a transgression of the social and cultural discourses which apartheid located within what Bhabha terms "exclusionary imperialist ideologies of self and other" (1995:19). Informing and exacerbating this stereotypical binary were



nationalisms. Both white Afrikanerdom, and Zulus, under Buthelezi's leadership, constructed politics on concepts of homogenous national cultures. These practised 'fixity and fetishism of identities within the calcification of colonial cultures' (Bhabha, 1995:9). Within the contemporary cultural discourse, Bhabha invokes the redefinition of such cultural comparativism, which is sourced in the 'consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or 'organic' ethnic communities' (1995:5). His rhetorical construction of a 'Third Space' for articulating cultural difference creates a framework that ensures that the meaning and symbols of culture 'have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew' (Bhabha, 1995:37). With this theoretical 'space', the politics of polarity may be eluded. Hierarchical claims of originality or 'purity' of cultures become untenable, even before empirical historicism reveals hybridity (Bhabha, 1995:37,39). With his theory of cultural hybridity, Bhabha undertakes to revise the theory of culture of western modernity from the post-colonial perspective. He rethinks questions and claims of identity, social agency, and national affiliation. By doing so, he provides a theory of cultural difference that goes beyond entrenched stereotypical polarities and oppositional binaries.

In his endeavour to find commonalities across the racial divide, Zondi's performance of culture may be located within post-modern cultural concerns of contemporary internationalism and trans-nationality, where voices are heard to articulate from the perspective of disenfranchisement (Bhabha, 1995:5,6). Zondi's mediatory ideal is reflected in this current cultural discourse, in which such boundaries are seen in terms of places from which redefined communality may emerge. Zondi and Bodenstein occupied that which Bhabha aptly describes as a 'liminal space' or 'in-between' designations of identity (Bhabha, 1995:3,4). They opened the possibility of cultural hybridity, in Bhabha's sense, where assumed or imposed hierarchies are not imposed on difference (1995:3). Social differences and diverse cultural traditions were considered by them to be building blocks in their vision of community. This took them beyond their individual utopia 'in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present' (Bhabha, 1995:3). This will be further explored below. The hybrid aesthetic which Zondi imagined with some of his patrons, as he interacted with them on the basis of reciprocity, was an engagement in inventing 'the beyond'. It is aligned with the 'hybrid aesthetic' of Bhabha's 'borderline work of culture' (1995:7). This cultural engagement demands an encounter with newness that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act

of cultural translation. This does not recall the past merely as social cause or aesthetic precedent. Much the same as the black literary artists had done in their art, the past is renewed and refigured as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. When Zondi claimed that the past and the present were brought into his work (2003a:5 pers.com.), it was a 'past-present' in the sense Bhabha refers to it, becoming part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living (1995:7). Therefore the rationale for the past-present conflation, meant that Zondi and the black intelligentsia could ensure that their 'right' to signify from the periphery of authorised power and privilege (Bhabha, 1995:2), was not reliant on the persistence of tradition. Rather, they sought to use the power of tradition, as Bhabha suggests, as a resource for re-inscription (Bhabha, 1995:2), the nature of which is determined by contingencies in the lives of people challenging imposed authority and formulating dissent. He notes:

The borderline engagements of cultural difference may as often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress (Bhabha, 1995:2)

Apart from sketches of works completed or planned around 1960, Zondi refrained from overtly confrontational work. At the same time, by embodying in his sculptures the abjection of poverty and marginalisation, in works like *Famine* (1965)(Fig.302 opp.p249), his indictment of societal dysfunction was never 'coloured by a malaise of acceptance' (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:194). Also, despite emerging from the milieu of people mired in poverty, Zondi's works did not become 'self-pitying'. Artwork by black students in the 1960s which revealed this characteristic were seen to forfeit their potential for agency<sup>111</sup>. In the context of art-making and critique in the art workshop at Rorke's Drift, Hobbs and Rankin address Gowenius' concern about sentimentality and the use of victimhood in pictorial expression. Persistent oppression, when used as a subject in art-making, was thought to be potentially as dangerously demotivating as in life (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:194). Perhaps this reflects Thami Mnyele's perception, which echoed in part Herbert Dhlomo's negative opinion about white tastes of three decades earlier. Mnyele asserted that the white art market of the 1970s seemed 'to pose the pernicious temptations of aestheticising and stereotypical sentimentality rather than an art that was socially effective' (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:195). Yet as Marion

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<sup>111</sup> This was a notion addressed by Peder Gowenius, other teachers and students of art-making at the Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift.

Arnold noted, one motivation for art production in South Africa was the 'wound of victimhood' (1999:38). Zondi's figurative sculpture, rather than being sentimental, is endowed with deep spirituality, exposing facets of suffering or humiliation for the viewer to read. Implicitly, his works became an indictment. They were self-referential only in the sense that Zondi revealed a self-consciousness through his images, while simultaneously prompting it in his viewers. With his works he aspired to elicit his audience's cognitive capacities related to 'projection' functioning by means of memory and imagination. The audience was prompted to develop a vision of situations beyond the immediate present, imagining 'alternative possibilities of experience' for a vision beyond the present moment (Crowther, 1993:150). This is what Zondi meant when he thought of each of his works in the homes of Whites as being 'a gospel' (Deane, 1978: 201)<sup>112</sup>. His sculptures thus refer to no particular event or comment. Much rather, his figures attain a universal relevance in terms of what it means to be human.

Regarding the Polly Street Art Centre<sup>113</sup>, an evaluation of art-making skills that were conveyed and opportunities for the exposure of the work of black artists, has elicited negative perceptions. The institution was never a professional art centre offering a formal education and a structured curriculum in theory and practice. Nor did it offer examinations and qualifications (Rankin, 1996:75). Yet, it remained a 'critical force in the development of art in South Africa' (Rankin, 1996:76,77). Pejorative comments about the venture, that it remained marginal to an independent development of black art, position it as merely the 'patronising gesture of white liberalism'<sup>114</sup>. David Koloane denies the white initiative the role of having empowered Blacks during the height of apartheid. Implicitly situating himself in a role of victimhood, he rather speaks of it as having 'reflected negative values in South African society, in that it offered a training for black artists different from that offered in white institutions'. In this way, in his mind, the Art Centre was being tacitly racist, reinforcing in art the doctrine of separate development. Black artists were seen in terms of denial of privilege from a western education. He accuses the educators of denying artists tuition, in favour of asserting their natural talents. Koloane interprets this as a pandering to the white art market (in Rankin, 1996:76). Yet, while the Centre functioned within the framework of segregation, as Rankin accurately points out, 'it is the policies of Bantu

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<sup>112</sup> 'There are White homes where the only message heard from a Black comes from a little wooden figure. And the figure preaches. It's a gospel' (Zondi quoted in Deane, 1978: 201).

<sup>113</sup> By the time Zondi visited it in 1960, it had moved and was called the *Jubilee Centre*.

<sup>114</sup> David Koloane in Rankin (1996:76).

Education that should be denounced for denying full educational opportunities to black artists, rather than Polly Streetö (Rankin, 1996:76). The policy of non-intervention regarding creativity and tuition among Blacks by white tutors, was premised on fostering free expression and the belief that an ñinnate talentö should not be prejudiced by western preferences. Such pedagogical and educational premises were initially critiqued as manifestations of western control, of othering and romantic exoticism. However, these premises have since been reconsidered, given öthat they disregard the aspirations and capacities of Africans to excel in western-based processes and intellectual capacitiesö (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:12).

### **2.3 ZULU DESIGN AESTHETICS - UCHWEPHESHA**

Art-making and design in South Africa occurs within a cross-cultural matrix of assimilations and influences between western and African visual aesthetics. These are prompted by constantly shifting preferences, needs, and forms of expression attached to ethnicity, commodification, and political expediencies.

Zondiö initial choice of cabinet making as a vocation was informed by the powerful design aesthetic of Zulu material culture of his rural background. A particular focus on the nature of educational paradigms in the creative arts within Bantu Education serves to emphasize the importance attached to an indigenous design aesthetic and artistic ability.

As a child, Zondi and his friends drew images in the sand, as did most rural children during his youth (Rousseau,1977; Rankin,1993:135)<sup>115</sup>. These ñfree-expression activitiesö related to all cultures in their first forms of visual expression (Grossert, 1968:38), also included shaping small clay figurines, like the culturally significant oxen<sup>116</sup>. In his own home, Zondiö father, David, was öa handymanö, adept at making and repairing household objects and related items of cultural significance (Zondi, 2002a:22 pers.com.). These included wooden milk pails (*amathunga*), meat platters (*izingqoko*), which Zondi also made, as well as knobkerries, staffs, bowls, spoons, and sticks (*izinduku*), which could be personalized

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<sup>115</sup> Shirley Deane also speaks of Zondi making drawings in the sand as a child. Yet it is probably an erroneous assumption, that he did so on the öbeaches of Natalö (Deane, 1978:201).

<sup>116</sup> John Koenakeefe Mohl, the ñpioneerö painter twenty years Zondiö junior, remarked that all boys modelled clay animals (Couzens, 1985:252). See Ian Calder (1998) ñBeasts of Africaö and ñNguni Cattleö in ñContinuing tradition and innovation in KwaZulu-Natal figurative sculpture: Hezekile Ntuili and contemporary ceramicsö in Bell and Calder (1998:73,74).

through particular decoration<sup>117</sup>. The aesthetic of Zulu artefacts is based on received traditions, evident prevalently in such personalized, small, portable domestic objects of great aesthetic value and beauty<sup>118</sup>. These skilfully made items of material culture have been scrutinized beyond their functionality, in terms of their social and intrinsic significance, as well as the ways in which regional trade, inter-marriage, and voluntary or involuntary migration stimulated cross-cultural stylistic influences (Klopper and Nel, 2002). Sticks, clay vessels, and objects like milk-pails, headrests (*izingqiki*), and spoons (*izinkhezo* and *izixembe*), handcrafted from indigenous woods, represent a visual aesthetic of functionality.

Beyond function, and of equal significance, is the intrinsic, spiritual value attached to such objects. In their role as potent ancestral relics, related to ancestral veneration in indigenous belief systems, some items are perceived to have a mediating function in communication between individuals and the deceased (Klopper in Klopper and Nel, 2002:42-44). While incorporating these religious and spiritual dimensions, the small portable objects in practical daily use have revealed subtle differentiation in the ornamentation to indicate social standing (Nel in Klopper and Nel, 2002: 17).

Subsequently Zondi was given the foundational skills for his craft and, ultimately, for his art-making by his industrial training at school and during his vocational training at the *Dundee Industrial Bantu School* run by the CSM. Here he studied cabinet-making, building design, and woodwork under Einar Magni who instilled in him a solid sense of craftsmanship (Ellis, 1966:13). After a further year's study around 1950, he became an instructor for woodwork at the level of industrial training in tertiary education<sup>119</sup>.

From the 1950s, Zondi exchanged ideas with the educator, Jack Grossert, in whom Zondi met a man with a fine sensibility towards the aesthetics of indigenous people (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:6,7). His association with Grossert was an important source of encouragement during the 1950s, for the young craftsman developing his three-dimensional art. Within the system of Bantu Education, the friendly relationship between the black employee and the white inspector developed on the basis of a significant reciprocity between the two men. Grossert's

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<sup>117</sup> See Klopper and Nel (2002: 184,185; Klopper, 2002: 40,41). Carved sticks were included in Bantu shows as *Izinduko*, *Ecijweo* and *Imiwisa* (Grossert, 1968:113).

<sup>118</sup> These items have received wide attention in museums as well as academic writing from the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in KwaZulu-Natal. See Bell and Calder (1998); Klopper and Nel (2002)

<sup>119</sup> See 2.4 THE DUNDEE INDUSTRIAL BANTU SCHOOL p74.

somewhat sentimental image of a shackled black African<sup>120</sup> is reason to presume a great measure of empathy for the oppressive situation of South Africa's black population. Zondi will have responded to this.

Grossert held that among the *amaZulu* the scope for 'free imaginative expression' was limited, due to the constraint imposed by the functionality of items made for household use (1968:40). Also, skills were subject to gender roles. Work in bone, horn, wood, and iron as well as work on calabashes and the dressing of skins was associated with men's crafts (Grossert, 1968:40). Zondi informed Grossert about craftsmanship and an understanding of the western terms 'art' and 'design' across cultures<sup>121</sup>. Mostly in reference to traditional woodcarving and metalwork, he conveyed concepts familiar to *isiZulu* speakers, linked to ability and emotional expression. Zondi made reference to the recognition of 'superior talent and intuition' among Zulu men, in contrast to craftsmen who had merely mastered their particular skills. He distinguished between *ingcwedi*, *umpetha*, *izinyanga*, and *uchwephesha*<sup>122</sup>. An *iNqcwedi* was the "lowest of craftsmen" who through sound training has reached the peak of his ability in a craft. As an efficient workman, he has developed skills through apprenticeship and practice (Grossert, 1968:40,41). Only a few of these craftsmen would qualify for the honour of being called *umpetha*, 'one who can do the extreme part of anything'. Such *ompetha* (pl.) frequently became attached to royal households, thus gaining the additional title *izinyanga* in connection with their specialisation, for example a skilled metalworker would be *inyanga yensimbi*<sup>123</sup>. Zondi explained that the *uchwephesha* was distinct from the general craftsmen among the *amaZulu*. This is the closest to the western term for 'artist' and implies "a man who mystifies by the inborn talent which he possesses and which he cannot transmit to others" one who knows and understands by intuition and who imparts to his craft a powerful emotional quality which others can 'feel' when they come in contact with his work (Grossert, 1968:41). Thus informed by Zondi, Grossert thought of the skilled craftsman being able to impart a form of

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<sup>120</sup> Grossert's own modernist pictorial imagery, albeit rather sentimental, becomes significant in terms of both his stance as an educator, and the fact of his personal friendship with Zondi, whom he encouraged in his art-making. His image of *Man in Shackles* (1950s) reveals a black man in wrist chains, with St. Francis and a 17<sup>th</sup> century European sailing ship in the background, alluding to white settlement and proselytising on the African continent. This was done in the stark black-white contrasts of the graphic scraperboard technique, a commonly available medium at the time (Heath, 2009).

<sup>121</sup> See 'The Artist and Craftsman in the Zulu Social System' in Grossert (1968:37-51).

<sup>122</sup> Having communicated with Grossert since the mid 1950s, Zondi reiterated his comments about art-making at a private lecture on his work, given at the home of 'Graham Ellis Esq.', 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1967 (Grossert, 1968:51). Graham Ellis had written an article on Zondi the year before. See Ellis, G. (1966) 'Michael Zondi - Sculptor' in *The Condenser* Volume V - No. 4 December 1966, Maidstone, Natal. Tongaat Sugar Company Ltd., pp.12-14.

<sup>123</sup> See Klopper, in Klopper and Nel (2002: 40) for information on blacksmiths.

life into an object, giving it a personal character. For him, the search for meaning in crafts became an examination of our own attitudes to the manufactured objects (Grossert, 1978:vii). The word for a work of art is *ubuchwephesha*, Zondi explained, which is limited in its connotation to the visual arts such as woodcarving or metalwork (Grossert, 1968:41).

The linguistic affiliation between woodwork and metalwork is significant in view of the histories of artefacts in southeast Africa. The skills of blacksmiths and specialized carvers or sculptors were appropriated by the courts in the early history of the Zulu kingdom, as was the distribution of the status objects they produced (Klopper,1992:92). In the context of these significant historical associations, implicit in Zondi's allusion to the embodiment of an emotional quality in an artwork, is also the exceptional status of its maker. He was fully aware of his exceptional talent. Zondi often made gifts of his own sculptures to persons he revered. His insistence would be that it must stay in the family<sup>124</sup>. It is possible that he made such gifts in the spirit akin to that with which gifts of household items were made in the traditionalist Zulu context, where valued status objects were passed on within a group context or as gifts to revered persons or visitors, such as European travellers and missionaries (Klopper, 2002:45). Working in wood, as a traditional medium, meant that his work, which was imbued with the powerful emotional quality (Zondi in Grossert, 1968:41), became a form of ancestral relic in his mind. Especially when the recipient could feel and read this emotional quality, Zondi was inclined to designate the piece to a particular patron. Given that Zondi made reference to his artwork in terms of its facility to 'speak to people long after his death (Zondi,1960f:2, letter)<sup>125</sup>, his works in the hands of his closest confidants and friends constitute a form of ensuring a spiritual continuity or a metaphysical connection with them.

Grossert's modernist background in art embraced those aspects of art-making which grappled with distinctions between 'high or 'fine art and the 'crafts or 'artefact. Of all the different meanings of the term 'art listed by Grossert (1968:20), that which came closest to his own understanding was where an association with 'artefact was made, provided an emphasis was placed on aesthetic qualities (Grossert, 1968:20). With a purposeful avoidance of the problematic concept of canons of beauty, he asserted that implicit in aesthetic expression of

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<sup>124</sup> Among those known to have been given pieces by Zondi under these circumstances were most prominently Agnes and Wolfgang Bodenstein, but also Chen and Piet Veldsman, as well as Prof. Johan van Wyk. They always gave Zondi appropriate remuneration for these pieces, thus building up large collections of his works.

<sup>125</sup> 'Art should not be a mystery, but should be able to speak to mankind and represent its creator even when he is long gone (Zondi,1960g:2, letter).

feeling and emotion – there was an application of ‘skill, dexterity, knowledge and taste’<sup>126</sup>. This contributes to an understanding of the reciprocity enjoyed between Zondi and Grossert.

Zondi affirmed creativity in its developmental and its reconciliatory capacities (1974). It is possible to place this proactive stance towards the potential of creativity, within the theoretical parameters of art-making set by Jack Grossert, which the educator shared with Zondi early in his career. Grossert’s acknowledgement of the artistic and aesthetic merit of Nguni material culture informed his argument countering the theory that practical work in adolescent education was necessarily purely vocational. His premise was that any craft programme is a means of imparting ‘fundamental principles of technology’, from the point of view of future crafters producing items and consumers (Grossert, 1968:14).

The craftsman’s sensibility towards the aesthetics of utilitarian objects, he believed, was becoming redundant, as these objects were no longer in demand by indigenous people. Form and design, formerly conflated into ‘significant expression’, degenerated as the users’ discernment was absent. Grossert spoke pejoratively about the quality and design of cheap articles taking the place of traditional crafts ‘of great beauty and sincerity’ (Grossert, 1968:142-144). He felt that the confidence of Zulu people in their own aesthetic judgement had been undermined by a change of allegiance. Implicit in this opinion is the loss of traditional forms and belief systems within western-type schooling. With his research, Grossert thus endeavoured to prove that received techniques, designs, and patterns provided impetus for adaptation of these in modern life (1968:14). ‘Traditional Zulu articles, such as sleeping- or sitting-mats, meat mats, spoon holders, beer- strainers, and -skimmers offered a wide scope for choice of techniques and materials and for the working of decorative surface patterns’ (Grossert, 1968:113). Grossert asserted that crafting was a catalyst for bringing the makers ‘into harmonious relationship with their environment’. He cited Zondi, Eric Ngcobo, and Azaria Mbatha as being examples of three prominent black artists of the 1960s in Natal, whose art-making emerged from the aesthetic background of indigenous crafts, as conveyed in schools for Blacks (Grossert, 1968:15). A focus on an indigenous ‘good sense of design’ (Grossert, 1968:144) was emphasized by local white educators like Grossert, in pedagogical considerations justifying an art course for black schools (Grossert, 1968:148). Lismer had pleaded for the correlation of design with African rhythm, ‘the relation of design to rhythm, music and singing’ (Grossert, 1968:148). Implying that organization and purpose belonged

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<sup>126</sup> See ‘Understanding Art leads us to the Crafts’ in Grossert (1968:19-36).



to the flow of consciousness of a designer, Lisper defined design as ‘orderly thinking’ as it transcended mere appearances. By relating design to fundamental things in nature as a functional principle in life, based on organic modernism or biomorphic styling<sup>127</sup>, Lisper was addressing conceptualism (Grossert, 1968:148). These ideas related to new concepts of symbiosis among ‘fine art’, architecture, interior design and applied arts.

Concurrent with such thinking, the assertion that ‘art sprang naturally from the soul of the peasant’ found in Romantic nationalism in Europe (Kaplan,1995: 44), may have partially informed the notion of there being ‘innate’ talent inherent in indigenous African people. Within the segregationist thinking of the white state, these convictions after 1952 contributed to denying black students formal art training at secondary school level and to severely limiting their access to art training at tertiary levels of learning. Photographic material from the 1950s, of the *Bantu and Agricultural Shows*<sup>128</sup>, reveals various craft skills like basketry, and ceramics with minimalist raised décor and objects carved from wood like spoons with relief patterning<sup>129</sup>. As noted above, during Grossert’s tenure as inspector, free modelling was encouraged in schools for black children at primary level.

A paradox becomes evident in Grossert’s emphasis on the sustained use for aesthetic appreciation and on the skills learned from objects of Zulu material culture. His arguments in support of the indigenous design aesthetic by way of conveying craft-making skills, was given pejorative connotations by art students in the 1960s. Bantu Education was perceived to be a system devised to prevent the advancement of Blacks into modernity and the knowledge of western culture and ideas (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:19). Therefore, Grossert’s aesthetics of modernism, which he sought to locate in aspects of design in Zulu material culture, was far ahead of his time. Ultimately, the modernist ideal of fluidity and integration between ‘applied’ and ‘fine art’ at the ELC Art and Crafts Centre at Rorke’s Drift fell short of the ideals set by the first educators there, for the same reason. This will be further considered below, in relation to Zondi’s affirmation of the physicality of his medium. This prejudice against crafting developed despite Herbert Dhlomo’s call two decades earlier to integrate aspects of indigenous cultures into shaping modern life<sup>130</sup>. Seen from this perspective, it is

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<sup>127</sup> For biomorphic styling, related to the round aesthetic of artists like Constantin Brancusi, Jean Arp, Barbara Hepworth, etc., see Dormer (1993:120).

<sup>128</sup> See ‘The Development of Bantu Adult and School Shows’ in Grossert (1968:108ff).

<sup>129</sup> Black and white photographs were in the private collection of John Nixon, now in the Kay Nixon archive.

<sup>130</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, ‘Three Essays in Tribal Culture: The Zulu and his Beads’ in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 4 October 1947 ó cited in Couzens (1985:297).

possible that Zondi's choice to serve in the cultural and agricultural programme of liaison between the state and rural people was motivated on the one hand by Grossert's affirmative theory, regarding the aesthetic potential of indigenous art and crafts. On the other hand, Zondi's recall of aspects of Herbert Dhlomo's theory regarding cultural appropriation would have struck a chord, as he acknowledged the manner in which his own art appreciation was grounded in the finely crafted objects of great aesthetic value from his own culture. Grossert's view would be vindicated by the end of the century, only in so far as Zulu material culture would be wholly embraced as pure artistic form<sup>131</sup>. This, though, has found sorely little, if any, reflection in art tuition in schools after 1994.

Basing design aesthetics and an affinity for wood on his own Zulu culture, then, Zondi assimilated his initial form of expression in the coerced idiom of furniture-making. With influences of modernist design brought to South Africa from western Europe, his foray into architectural and interior design became a major catalyst for his further artistic career. It was in his chapel that he most effectively blended the functional with the design from traditional artefacts. This reflects ideas linked to the modernist design aesthetic sourced in European national romanticisms, to be considered below<sup>132</sup>.

Having completed a course in building design in Dundee at the end of the 1940s, Zondi was able to accept the project of designing, in every detail, and overseeing the building of, the hospital chapel at the remote Lutheran Church of Sweden Mission station at Appelsbosch<sup>133</sup> in the early 1960s. Based on the triangle, it represents a twofold acknowledgement. Firstly, with the triangular shape of the chapel, Zondi was acknowledging his Christian faith, in that the shape represents the Holy Trinity (Zondi, 2002 pers.com.). Given the context of a mission run by one of the Scandinavian countries, the A-frame would have been a response to Nordic preferences regarding churches at the time<sup>134</sup>. But more significantly, Zondi was also responding as an architect to traditional geometric motifs found on utilitarian objects found in Zulu material culture. As one of the most frequent shapes found as decoration in Zulu material culture, the triangle is used in design as small pyramidal forms on wooden items<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> See Klopper and Nel (2002).

<sup>132</sup> See 2.5 ROMANTIC UTOPIAS? CONTEXTUALIZING EARLY RELIEFS AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL WORK p85.

<sup>133</sup> Appelsbosch lies in the Greytown district, 60 km north-east of the province's capital, Pietermaritzburg.

<sup>134</sup> An example is the Hammerfest church built in 1961 by the Oslo architect H. Magnus. For the final statistical calculations Zondi consulted the Swedish architect, Nyström (Zondi, 1961b:3 letter).

<sup>135</sup> *amaSumpa* are soft, wart-like additions to the clay surface (Armstrong, 1998:42). See Klopper and Nel (2002: 207) Fig. 68 (*Meat Platter*).

or ceramics, for example the omnipresent V-shaped *amasumpa* pattern<sup>136</sup>. By arching the entrance and making a masonry protrusion, Zondi has given it an African character in its resemblance to a Zulu hut entrance, the *ikhothamo*, the place of the shades (Berglund, 1976:104,105). This is in keeping with a definition of modern design around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, where use was made of native vernacular architecture and furnishings from past centuries (Kaplan, 1995:19). The wrought-iron wall-candelabras and the bench decoration recall once more the triangle. The smallest piece in the chapel also came from Zondi's hand, a round baptismal font with a central motif of a bird, beaten from copper, surrounded by writing - 'The one who believes and is baptised will be saved'<sup>137</sup>. These various forms of acknowledgement of traditionalist culture, merged here with Christianity, is in keeping with Dhlomo's notion for shaping of modernity, that is, using select or modified aspects of the indigenous culture, in order to create something new. Zondi's architectural and masonry skills were crowned by his most emotive and, for him, enervating ecclesiastical piece, the large blackwood<sup>138</sup> *Christ on the Cross* (c. 1964), which he regarded as symbolizing a bridge between nations (Zondi, 1975, script). Also, late modernist cement relief of different colours, designed on the arches flanking the apse entrance, depict on the left Zondi's *sgraffito* relief of a gigantic *Prophet* with a young child. On the opposite right hand side of the apse, a traditionalist *Mother and Child* is depicted with three male figures. This is attributed to Zondi's colleague and friend, Eric Ngcobo, whom Zondi assisted with the technicalities of the cement work. This technique was introduced by a German modernist artist, who came to South Africa in the 1940s, Elly Holm.

In keeping with his own egalitarian principles, Zondi declined to accept higher wages than the average worker on the site. This also reflects in some respects the creative ethos inherent to modernist movements, calling for cohesion across the arts, without the limiting hierarchical structures across art and crafts. Apart from the influence of Swedish modernists, to be discussed below, this notion was likely to have been communicated to him by Grossert. The educator opened the first chapter of his thesis (1968) with a quote alluding to building as an entity in which art and skills could conflate. The language is rather romantic, taken from

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<sup>136</sup> An *ukhamba*, or Zulu 20<sup>th</sup> century *Beer Vessel* reveals sections of interlocking V-shaped patterns, delineated with *amasumpa* decorations. See Klopper and Nel (2002) p. 206, Fig. 64.). See also Dieter Reusch (1998).

<sup>137</sup> *Imbiza kayibilø ingenambheki: the social life of Pots* in Bell and Calder (1998: 19-27 ) and Armstrong (1998) OKHOLWAYO-ABAPHATHIZWE + OYAKU-SINISWA ó 'The one who believes and is baptised will be saved' (Msomi, 2004).

<sup>138</sup> Agnes Bodenstein speaks of a 'donation' by the magistrate of Mapumulo (1998:3). See also Miles (1997: 115).

the First Weimar Proclamation of 1919, from which the *Bauhaus* emerged: 'Architects, sculptors, painters, we must all turn to the crafts'<sup>139</sup>.

On the basis of the above visual foundation, Zondi's vocational training in cabinet-making as discussed in the following chapter, places him within the industrial training and teaching programme of the state. Based on an older design idiom of furniture-making still popular up until the 1950s in South Africa, Zondi's work was influenced by a modernist design aesthetic through patrons and teachers who had cultural roots in western Europe. This proved to be a major catalyst for his further artistic career.

## 2.4 THE DUNDEE INDUSTRIAL BANTU SCHOOL

The vocational training Zondi chose after leaving school in order to learn a trade mirrors exactly that type of education which was propagated around the turn of the century for black South Africans. At that time, John Dube had a great influence on the thinking of the black *amakholwa* elite, anxious to stake their claim in the burgeoning capitalist economy (Marks, 1986:53). His political and educational philosophies, embracing ideas of racial self-help and the virtues of commercial activity, were based on the ideology of Booker T. Washington (Maylam, 1996:112; Marks, 1986:52,53). From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, vocational schooling fulfilled aspects of state ideology aimed at segregation. In the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Dube founded the Zulu industrial school at Inanda, the *Ohlange Institute*, 'the first purely African-founded and African-run industrial school' (Marks, 1986:43,44).

Besides the establishment of industries, trades, and agricultural ventures, the creation of Educational and Industrial Schools for the Zulu, after the model of Dube's Ohlange Institute, was an integral part of aspirations reflected in the constitutional programme of *Inkatha ka Zulu* political and cultural organization in the 1920s. Seeking Zulu unity and, ultimately, to embrace the nation as a whole (Cope, 1993:171), Inkatha's educational foundations were cast according to western educational criteria, coupled with loyalty to the South African government and the British Crown (Cope, 1993:171,172). The early mission schools that were acknowledged by government were provided with well-equipped workshops in which, amongst other skills, carpentry was taught. A good example is the workshop at the Mariannhill mission, a former Trappist monastery established in 1882, near

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<sup>139</sup> First Weimar Proclamation, 1919 quoted in Grossert (1968:19).

Durban. Labour was plentiful and cheap, especially in the apprenticeship environment, and these circumstances facilitated building for mission stations and equipping churches with pews and schools with desks and chairs. This was hand-crafted furniture made by black pupils according to prescribed prototypes.

The DIBS was a relatively small school and its workshops and rooms were in what appears to have been a residential house in a small town in northern Natal<sup>140</sup>. Specialising in teaching woodworking skills, this industrial school functioned under the auspices of the CSM. The school was founded in the year Zondi was born, in 1926, by the architect and building engineer, Einar Andreas Magni, who had artistic skills in drawing, painting, and carving (Rankin, 1993:132). Magni would become an important mentor for Zondi<sup>141</sup>. The founding of this school was indicative of pragmatic Nordic philanthropy, whose mission engagement from the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to be further augmented and boosted after the Second World War through various organizations, as considered below.

After ten years at school, Zondi completed his Junior Certificate. He then benefited from this Nordic philanthropy, by receiving private sponsorship around 1942, for further education from the Swede, the Rev. Gunnar Helander, to study at the DIBS<sup>142</sup>. This was probably around 1942. It was Zondi's perception that industrial schools did not enjoy a high status: 'It was the thing to do to study to be a teacher, and the industrial school was looked down on. But as a teacher's training was twice as expensive as industrial school fees, and my father was a working type so I learnt to build instead of teach' (Zondi quoted in Tilley, 1965). As an old man, Zondi spoke reverentially of Helander, remembering discussions with the Lutheran priest. Helander's support of the cause of black South Africans was shown by his contributing to the information flow, by means of reporting accounts to his home base in Sweden. This 'missionary-activist' was finally banned in 1956, and he had to leave South Africa (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:13,105). Apart from his empathetic publication, *Big City Zulu*, of 1957, dealing with the ignominious conditions of labour migrancy, the topic of Helander's second publication in 1958 fascinated Zondi. The artist's lively discussions with

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<sup>140</sup> These were photographs taken by Jenny Eriksson. The images were reproduced from the family album of the early 1950s during personal communication with Jenny. Taken on 35mm film on 20/21 June 2004, Uppsala, Sweden and subsequently digitalized.

<sup>141</sup> As an architect, Einar Magni was engaged in building projects of the CSM and later, the amalgamated ELC-SED. The plans from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Mapumulo are by the architect Einar Magni. See Archive of the Missiological Institute, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, File: LTS/LTC Buildings & Housing, Furniture etc.

<sup>142</sup> Miles (1997:111) and personal communication with the artist.

Helander around the topic of polygyny, makes it possible that the theologian's scholarly biblical exegesis was augmented by Zondi's perspectives, in his *Must we Introduce Monogamy?: A Study of polygamy as a Mission Problem in South Africa*. It is very probable that the reason for Zondi's travels to Roodepoort in October 1953 was to visit Helander<sup>143</sup>. The Lutheran minister was posted there at the St. Ansgar Mission, which also ran a vocational school for miners. One of Zondi's most important contacts for exchanging ideas about Christianity and the segregationist state a decade later, was the Rev. Berglund. The ELC Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift, while empowering women economically, simultaneously functioned as a centre for ideological subversion (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:4, paper). Working within the ambit of the Lutheran Church, art students came into contact with the students from the Theological College, propagating black Liberation Theology. Once the seminary had moved to the new Lutheran Theological Seminary at Maphumulo, designed by Einar Magni<sup>144</sup>, for a time Berglund was principal there.

Zondi finished his training as a cabinet-maker and simultaneously gained his *Bantu Builder's Certificate*<sup>145</sup>. Drawing was required of students at the DIBS: 'Whatever we built, we had to sketch first. Through sketching I knew that art was meant for me. And I was meant for art' (Zondi in Deane, 1978:201). He found employment in Pietermaritzburg, the provincial capital, but soon opened his own business at Edendale (Zondi, 2002a pers.com.)<sup>146</sup>, working for a largely *amakholwa* clientele. At the behest of Magni, the young cabinet-maker returned to Dundee around 1950. After completing a one-year teaching diploma, from around 1952 Zondi taught for almost a decade. Sven Eriksson, recently immigrated from Sweden replaced Magni as principal in 1952. Eriksson, a woodworking specialist from a small town in the north of Sweden, discovered Zondi's talent for carving and fostered it from the early 1950s.

Student life at the school was vibrant, given that the young adults studying at the DIBS were excluded by law from participation in the regular activities of the white town. Photographic

<sup>143</sup> Under the Group Areas Act Zondi required a pass to travel anywhere outside the area in which he was registered as a permanent resident. A letter written by the principal of the DIBS requested that this pass be given to the teacher (Zondi) at the school (Eriksson, 1953).

<sup>144</sup> Archive of the Missiological Institute, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, File: LTS/LTC Buildings - Housing, Furniture etc.ø.

<sup>145</sup> Around 1959 and 1960 he studied for *The National Technical Certificate* which was graded as a matric equivalent. Building Construction was the major subject while he took English Senior as an additional subject (Zondi, 1963a:1,2, letter).

<sup>146</sup> The newspaper, *Die Volksblad* (1977), made mention of the carpentry business which Zondi owned between 1945 and 1949, in Edendale, miss-spelling it as 'Edenvale'. This would have led to the misapprehension that Zondi worked in the Johannesburg suburb, Edenvale. Presumably this mistake was copied by both Jooste (1977) and *Die Volksblad* (1977).

records of the Dundee school<sup>147</sup> reveal trendy, fashionably dressed young men, posing with *Zonk!* Magazine, reflecting black youth culture and setting trends for a black readership<sup>148</sup>. Zondi and fellow students at Dundee saw to their own entertainment by playing music and putting on plays and theatre productions (Eriksson, 2004). Couzens shows how culture and entertainment can become an auxiliary force in social control in the context of diffusing Native passions. The moralising of leisure time became a channelling of literature and drama for Blacks who lived and worked in the city (Couzens, 1985:92,93). Zondi was an avid soccer player and captained and trained the DIBS team, the *Woodpeckers*<sup>149</sup>.

By 1953, around 41% of black children of school-going age were attending school. Before 1955, the secondary syllabus in black schools was in all cases the same as for White pupils (Horrell, 1968:2). State motivation for enforcing ideologically orientated Bantu Education included perceptions that these schools were regarded as breeding nests for agitators<sup>150</sup>. Despite severe cases of paternalism, education had been conducted by individuals with the best liberal intentions for the upliftment of Blacks in a Christian spirit (Zicode, 1957). Around 1954, the forty-one mission bodies engaged in education began to yield to state pressure to relinquish their mandate to educate Blacks. Mission schooling comprised about 90% of the total African educational system (Florin, 1967:36,47). In 1956, the DIBS was amalgamated with the Edendale Vocational School. Both Zondi and Eriksson moved to Pietermaritzburg to join the staff of the school. Nearly 50% of the initial intake of 97 pupils at the school chose to train as builders and plasterers. Woodwork ranked second in the choice of craft, with 30%. Other pupils trained in leatherwork, with just one candidate for the plumbing trade. 75 % of pupils were boarders (*Bantu Education Journal*, 1957a:214,215).

Apartheid legislation became ever more effective in accommodating interests of Whites to the detriment of those of the Blacks. Because of this, the development of technical and vocational training was restricted not only for financial reasons but also because of a lack of occupational outlets for the students (Horrell, 1968:2). After gaining his *National*

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<sup>147</sup> These were photographed by Jenny Eriksson. The images were reproduced from the family album of the early 1950s during personal communication with Jenny. Taken on 35mm film on 20/21 June 2004, Uppsala, Sweden and subsequently digitalized.

<sup>148</sup> *Zonk!*, the African People's Pictorial predated another of the major black pictorial magazines *Bona*, which incorporated it in August 1964.

<sup>149</sup> Personal communication, Michael Zondi, Edendale, KZN.

<sup>150</sup> B. Marais (1964) *The Two Faces of Africa* Pietermaritzburg, p. 53 - in Florin (1967:154). See also Muriel Horrell (1968).

*Technical Certificate* in part-time study, Zondi felt, by the early 1960s, that his vocation as a teacher under Bantu Education had come to òa dead endö (Zondi, 1963b, letter). Having understood the tenets of modernist functionality in furniture-making, his decision coincided with his awareness, nurtured over the previous decade, that his art-making could gradually develop into a career.

#### 2.4.1. Modernist Design from Europe

Up to the 1930s, the hybridized taste and design preference in goods imported from the home countries of Dutch and British white middle class settlers had until then, reflected the values and needs of their rustic lifestyle (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:1, paper). The conservative English taste informed the South African pre-war market in Natal.

Zondi's furniture-making began with heavy kists crafted in dark hardwood into which he integrated low-relief panels of camphor wood, which is easy to carve and acts as a natural moth-repellent. The *Kist* (1950s)(Fig.1 opp.) stands on bun feet, made in the idiom of panelled chests with hinged lids<sup>151</sup>. This was a tradition of construction dating back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, which superseded 15<sup>th</sup> century standard joined chests with their divisions of simple frames (Gloag, 1969:211,212)<sup>152</sup>. Zondi's kist has something of the ðclumsinessð associated with the oldest South African chests. The mouldings are rectangular and all metal hinges, mounts, and the loop handles on the sides are of crude cast-iron. The lid of the kist is secured by means of thick, ornate strap-work hinges, equally crude, thick mounts of brass along the vertical sides, and a basic lock plate. In shops and homes of South Africans, Zondi would have seen Oriental chests with relief on panels or with entire surfaces covered in high-relief carving, many coming directly from the Far East or Britain. From the 1940s, modernist chests were common in homes of white and black South Africans alike.

When Zondi and Eriksson made a *Welsh Dresser* for John Nixon in the mid-1950s (Nixon 2003, pers.com.) (Fig.2 opp.), although made in a lighter wood, this piece reflected the conservative, white Anglophile tastes at the time. Heavy claw-and-ball pieces of dark or stained wood, dating back one hundred years, were still highly popular in South Africa until

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<sup>151</sup> This is a tradition of construction dating back to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, which superseded 15<sup>th</sup> century standard joined chests with divisions of simple frames (Gloag, 1969:211,212).

<sup>152</sup> The strong *kist* tradition in South Africa goes back to 17<sup>th</sup> century settlers, who brought a great variety of stylistic influences from their home countries or colonies, for example the heavy Batavian chests from Java. Rather clumsy wagon-chests (*Wakiste*) were made suitable for transportation on vehicles of adventurers and traders and the *trekkers* (Baraitser and Oberholzer, 2004:393,398).



the 1940s, as exemplified in *Fleur* magazine of April 1947. This was especially so in regions like Natal and the Eastern Cape, which had large British settler populations. Zondi gave the dresser an indigenous touch by augmenting the uppermost level with a map of *Africa* (Fig.3 opp.p78), delineated in low-relief carving, which is integrated into the centre top. He also carved a chevron, to be placed onto the top of the cabinet, which depicts a *Springbok* (Fig.4 opp.p78). With the map, then, and the graceful antelope as one of South Africa's national symbols, Zondi gave the traditionally English piece an African touch. He further revealed his adeptness at carving by crafting all four feet into the classical claw-and-ball shape, breaking with the customary mode of only the two front legs of a dresser being thus embellished.

As is evidenced from work exhibited at agricultural shows and exhibitions under the auspices of Bantu Education during the 1950s<sup>153</sup>, Zondi witnessed the changes in post-war design brought in from overseas, especially Scandinavia. For the next four decades, Nordic design in particular, represented a challenge to colonial, mainly anglophile 'chaos in design' of the pre-war years (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:1, paper). Cultural, educational, and economic exchanges began to take place reflecting tenets of Nordic social democracy. Creative processes and design preferences, as well as facets of modernist culture were absorbed in South Africa and were 'driven by individual encounter and idealism' (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:1, paper). The marriage of artistic values and industrial design and the canon of affordable, tasteful goods of quality for ordinary people came to be associated with this Nordic design. But the espousal of the Scandinavian idiom of 'logical, clean and uncluttered designs' (Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa, 1972:103) occurred three decades later, when the *New Look* of the 1950s influenced designers (Jackson, 1998:8). The general public, however, was slow to follow their lead. It was perceived that the more slender, 'modern' Swedish design could not be accommodated in old homesteads with broad *stoeps*, the roofed verandas built onto a part of houses, or entirely surrounding them.

From the late 1950s, Zondi frequented the Bodenstein home, when the German medical practitioner and his family had moved to the Lutheran CSM station at Appelsbosch. Their Scandinavian modern furniture, paid for by their employer in 1958 (Bodenstein, A.,2004 pers.com.) subscribed to the initial *Bauhaus* ideals of individualistic design in prototypes that were incorporated into machine-produced elements. Also in the Bodenstein home, as well as

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<sup>153</sup> Black and white photographs probably from the 1950s, of exhibitions presented by the Department of Education are in the Kay Nixon archive.

in the Schlaudraff home in Pinetown, Zondi would have seen brightly painted walls in different colours. This was a modernist décor element initiated by Le Corbusier's buildings with colour schemes that was popular in South Africa during the 1950s (Leeb-du Toit, 2004 pers.com.).

Inspired by the simplicity of design in the Bodenstein home, Zondi created pieces of furniture for the family like the *Music Cabinet* (1959/1960) (Figs 5;6;7 opp.), and the *Oval Table* (1961) (Fig.8 opp.) (Zondi,1961a, letter). In August 1961, in a letter to Bodenstein, Zondi requested details of more furniture he was to make for the Bodenstein children (Zondi, 1961a:2, letter). Zondi he also designed another piece, a book case with two doors but had someone else build it (Bodenstein, A., 2004 pers.com.). His other designs in furniture at the time were very probably built by his pupils at the Edendale Vocational School. The unadorned cabinet's simplicity, with two doors and four slightly angled short, simple peg-like legs, fulfils the both the Nordic design aesthetic as well as British furniture designs emerging during the 1950s (*Design in the Festival*, 1951). In the *Oval Table*, Zondi made use of sections of laminated wood and natural colour variation as a feature. Alluding to its sturdiness, Zondi personalized this table, naming it a "strong animal" perhaps a buffalo (Bodenstein,A., 2004 pers.com.). With the simple, uncluttered designs, the cabinet-maker was responding to modernist tenets that are easily discernible in the simplicity and stylized mode of Zulu material Culture.

Leeb-du Toit associates the successful absorption of the modernist Nordic design aesthetic among an elitist white clientele with similarities in the impulses which had prompted its reception in Europe (2004:3). The "emergent and desirable modernity influenced by western aspirations" addressed social challenges in post-war South Africa, which were akin to those which had elicited late 19<sup>th</sup> century design preferences in Britain, Germany, and the Nordic countries. Economic systems dominated by burgeoning urbanization and industrialization prompted a more personalized design. In the face of mass-produced items, creativity should reflect independence and a national spirit (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:3, paper). The spread of Nordic design with this ethos was linked to international trade and a philanthropic assertiveness in social and political spheres. This was also reflected in post-war South Africa, when a privileged white elite developed a preference for natural materials and colours, and handmade items that imparted an aura of authenticity. Helen de Leeuw's stores or galleries reflected the changing attitudes to taste in late modernism, implying that it

was ño longer dictated from above, but was eclectic, idiosyncratic and flexibleö (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:6, paper). The clientele for these articles for house and home were young, educated, liberal professionals enjoying the fruits of economic growth, seeking to reflect in their homes an unconventional style consciousness (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:6, paper). Theirs was, in part, a nostalgia for their immediate colonial past, akin to the European reiteration of aspects of the peasant culture expressed in a blending of the functional with design from traditional artefacts in Swedish national romanticism (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:2, paper). During the cultural and economic boycotts during the time of the apartheid struggle, rather than merely representing an assertion of modernity, the import and absorption of mass-produced and industrial Nordic design and craft had political connotations. The clientele for these items were wealthy, progressive, urban Whites countering what was perceived as conservative parochialisms in South African taste and design of western and ñmostly anglophile importationsö (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:3,4, paper). More significantly, these items reflected ña quasi partisan defianceö by its patrons, like, for example, the Bodensteins, who were still in a rural context linked to job opportunity. Their predilection partially countered the lack of acknowledgement granted black South Africans in the social and political sphere (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:3, paper). As a ñtacit manifestation of defianceö of white politics, at the same time the white clientele was embracing continuities in indigenous craft and material culture. In the South African context, simple, functional furniture represented a ñnostalgic reiteration of settler interiorsö (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:3, paper). Nordic modernist examples were absorbed, inter alia, by an Afrikaans intellectual urban elite. H.I.E Dhlomo and B.W. Vilakazi's call to open avenues for modern life had also emerged from a progressive urban economic and industrial environment, as they countered state parochialism and repudiated patriarchal structures of authority. Reflecting on this irony, Leeb-du Toit draws a parallel between their preference for difference and modernity and the emergent Afrikaans literature of *Die Sestigers*, whose work reflected renewal and rebellion. Their repudiation of patriarchy and the embrace of a new self-criticism was ñvested in individualism, internationalism and modernityö (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:4, paper).

Under strongly social democratic governments after the war, Nordic countries' solidarity with South Africa's marginalized victims of apartheid manifested itself in financial and developmental support, and also in the form of NGOs which developed training facilities for rural communities (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:4, paper). Swedish religious, crafters, and educators came to South Africa before and after the second world war. Noted are the commonalities,

which drew South Africans to Nordic design. As aesthetic and functional requirements conflated, it became associated with 'design excellence' (Leeb-du Toit (2004:2, paper)). The design ethic was inspired by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century 're-evaluations of history, ethnic character, vernacular techniques and an indigenous regional 'native spirit''. A nostalgia for the peasant culture of that time was thus allied to this design aesthetic which embraced craft, which reflected 'simplification and utilitarian ideas' that were then harmonized with new industrial rationalism (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:2, paper). The 'sanitized functionalism' derived from modernist Bauhaus sources was later collectively described as 'Scandinavian modern'. Nordic idealism and inclusiveness reaffirmed the rejection of industrialized products according to ideals espoused by Morris in the British *Art and Crafts* movement before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As products became affordable for a broader public, ideals of harmony were realized in good home design, allegedly promoting a sense of well-being, a 'created environment in which man, machine and product could coexist' (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:2, paper).

Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the reform and freeing of design from ornamentation led to the foundation of various institutions in Austria and Germany<sup>154</sup>. The introduction of a modernist style was associated with the aesthetics of industrial production and an intimate union between art and industry (Marcus, 1995:52,54). Functionalist ideals from Germany, in their turn adopted from the philosophies of 19<sup>th</sup> century British *Arts and Crafts* Societies, had reached Sweden after the first world war<sup>155</sup>. The reform, of freeing design from ornamentation, generated new ideas about production and style (Garner, 1978:251). From Functionalist tenets, of producing good, useful, and reasonably priced furniture for a mass public, slogans emerged, for example 'better household goods' and 'let the artists design for industry' (Garner, 1978:251). Theoretical and practical considerations were being conflated in the search for a new idiom for household design (Garner, 1978:253). The early *Bauhaus* tenets emphasized individualistic handcraftsmanship and design that was destined for mass-production. The chair achieved new minimalist conceptions with new materials in various combinations and, by the late 1920s, became a vehicle for expressing design aesthetics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Dormer, 1993:117)<sup>156</sup>. In Britain, too, the *Utility Furniture* experiment during

<sup>154</sup> Muthesius published 'Das Englische Haus' in 1904-1905, with an abridged version 'The English House' cited in Marcus (1995: 50, 65).

<sup>155</sup> Gregor Paulsson's 'More Beautiful Things for Everyday Use' was outlined in the 1919 publication *Vackrare vardagsvara* - cited in Leeb-du Toit (2004: 2).

<sup>156</sup> Le Corbusier's *Chaise Longue* (1928), as well as Mies van der Rohe's *Barcelona Chair* (1929) made by Bamberg Metallwerkstätten, Berlin-Neukölln cited in Marcus (1995: 26).

the war was deemed to have been successful. A call went out for a renewed respect for material used in mass production. At the same time handwork was promoted for small-scale production (Gloag, 1951:13,14). By 1951, Gordon Russell, the director of the *Council of Industrial Design* in Britain, was emphasizing purposefulness as well as availability of good design for a mass market and was associating the critical and appreciative eye of the buyer with high standards of design (1951:11).

Uncluttered designs of practical furniture, then, made at Industrial schools, reveal the influences of Nordic and *New Look* designs emerging from Britain, catering for modern tastes. Individual pieces on exhibition include a *Vanity Stool*, reminiscent of an example in the British *Design at the Festival* magazine of 1951, a *Telephone Table*, a *Radio-Sideboard*, and, catering for cramped single households, *Utility Set for One Room Apartment*<sup>157</sup>. The ergonomic considerations in the making of furniture, especially the *chaise*, in some small measure seems to have found its way into the carpentry workshops of the system of Bantu Education, in the form of a two-seater *Bench* behind a *Coffee Table Set*. In Britain and Europe, hand-crafted articles of furniture were reserved for a wealthy minority. In the South African context, policies of segregation, job-reservation, and salary discrimination attached a different attitude to vocational manual training for Blacks. Due to the low salaries, or the apprenticeship status of students at industrial schools, in South Africa individually hand-crafted pieces of furniture were still an affordable commodity. The middle class clientele included the Whites, who constituted the relatively wealthy minority, as well as some few black patrons.

After Bodensteins move from the Lutheran mission at Ceza, an initial pragmatic empowerment project developed into an Art and Craft initiative at Rorke's Drift, engendered under the auspices of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South-East Region (ELCSER). The head of the newly merged ELC, Bishop Helge Fosseus, was a modernist cleric in the broadest terms, who nurtured the idea of incorporating the potential of the visual arts in mission work (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:14,15). Ulla and Peder Gowenius, who would become founders of the ELC Arts and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift, were graduates from Stockholm's *Konstfackskolan*. They met Zondi and Bodenstein in 1961, the latter in his

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<sup>157</sup> Black and white photographs probably from the 1950s, of exhibitions presented by the Department of Education are in the Kay Nixon archive.

capacity as a hobby artist and a strong supporter of black artists in the area (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:17).

Zondi's pride in not having had formal art training was grounded in his perception that teaching in art schools was too limiting, if only stylistically. He was informed about the nature of teaching at the Art School of the Ndoleni Teachers' Training College. Swedish art educators in the early 1960s confirmed Zondi's perception that art schools in Africa were generally stereotyped (Gowenius, 2003:xv). The Arts and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift offered students from widely diverse backgrounds an interactive way to come to terms with aspects of modernism. They learned the skills of art-making in the applied arts, and later, in mainly printmaking, with some few cases of desired conflation as in pictorial ceramics. Young Swedish teachers adopted an allegedly non-interventionist approach in their teaching, working with positive reinforcement rather than critique (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:41). Peder Gowenius's personal agenda, the *bildspråk* methodology, embraced ideas sourced in tenets of modernism. This language in pictures fostered the notion that the subject-matter elicits reflective thinking. It could thus provide black people with an anti-apartheid language, a visual language of self-awareness as the foundation for developing critical thinking (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:163 citing Peder Gowenius). The notion of working towards aspiring to modernity, which black intellectuals had championed for decades, was affirmed in this creative environment. The skills of young people were fostered in the visual arts thus fulfilling the potential inherent in the humanities for reflection rather than a mere reaction to life in blunt acceptance. Through the opportunities Zondi had, for an intellectual exchange with the black intelligentsia of his time and liberal Lutheran thinkers, like Helander, he understood the language of empowerment through art by the time he met Bodenstein.

The liberalism inherent in modernity found its expression, inter alia, in modernist art. Outside any formal tuition, Zondi had opportunities for coming to terms with its tenets, conveyed to him by individuals who were practising artists or familiar with European modernism. This was simultaneous to his absorption of modernist design.

## 2.5 ROMANTIC UTOPIAS? CONTEXTUALISING EARLY RELIEFS AND THREE-DIMENSIONAL WORK

Zondi's unobtrusive pride in being Zulu (Bodenstein, J.W. c. 1968) was given expression from the 1940s, when he affirmed the New African's celebration of the past in his own early work. With inspirational images evoking continuity from a glorious and heroic past, his works were not only creatively shaping their future, but equally making subversive political associations. Zondi's Romantic utopias, set in a Zulu traditionalist context, became relevant to his own construction of modernity. He was reflecting on cultural tenets from the past, as he evaluated and conceptually drew on ethical guidelines from received communality, reinterpreting these for their relevance in contemporary living. Echoed almost half a century later, a moulding of the future is being proposed by the scholar, Gyekye, who calls for making discerning choices and selections from the African past (1997).

As Zondi was beginning his career, accelerated industrialization was disrupting human relationships, not only by means of the segregationist colour bar. The artificial divide was firmly entrenched and a functioning social norm while undergoing further refinement by Afrikaner nationalist legislation from 1948. Human relationships were also failing among Blacks, as the urban-rural divide became ever more difficult to negotiate within families torn apart under the strain of decades of labour migrancy. Later in Zondi's career widespread removals of people across the province to clear black spots in the region would further sorely challenge the existences of people and their familial values (Bonner and Ndima, 2008:378). If this was modernity, then it was perceived, by the vast, pre-literate majority of the population who were barred from its benefits, as being a threat.

Zondi's sculptural talent emerged from the idiom of furniture-making, initially in the form of embellishment, such as the low-relief carving on the *Welsh Dresser*, as noted above (Fig.2 opp.p78). The relief camphor wood narratives as panels in kists included landscapes and people. His images of rural scenery testify to regionally specific phenomena such as plants, the Zulu homestead, as well as Zulu men and women with body adornment and accoutrements specific to the region. Kists were for a predominantly black clientele in Edendale, where he set up his workshop. At the time, around the mid-1940s, kists served as wedding gifts, handed down from one generation to the next. The inspiration for this early work, which began to include the first figurative three-dimensional sculptures by 1954, came almost exclusively from the Zulu cultural context. As an old man Zondi, was sentimental

about landscape in its specific Zuluness. Zondi's scenes on jewellery boxes and kists were based on the Zulu kingdom's past. They were utopian scenes which described a rural Zulu vernacular. The idea of continuity is implicit in the use of a male-female binary and *kraal* scenes.

Zondi's earliest three-dimensional sculptures were finely carved figurines, some of which he integrated into jewellery boxes by placing them centrally onto the lids. An example is a *Drummer* (1954)(Fig.367 opp.p255) on a *Jewellery Box* (1954)(Fig.9 opp.) with four panels, carved in low-relief within smooth, heavy mouldings. The scenes on this box include, on the front, two *Portrait Heads* one either side of a centrally placed shield and spears, whose symmetrical arrangement alludes to a coat of arms (Fig.9 opp.). Zondi has depicted a Zulu couple, perhaps of royal standing. This is evident through dress signage. Both wear ear plugs. The female has an *isicolo*, the distinctive top-knot comprised of matted hair and often red clay, indicating her married status, while the bearded male's head ring, the *isicoco*, is a sign of seniority in a regiment. An important traditionalist accoutre-ment is a gall bladder attached to the top of his head. The back panel depicts a grass hut with a curved entrance, the *ikhothamo*, enclosed by a dense fence of natural twigs, *Hut with Ikhothamo* (1954)(Fig.10 opp.). The side panels show a musician playing a stringed instrument, and the torso of a very muscular, bearded young *Warrior* (1954)(Fig.11 opp.), with a shield and spear.

Rural traditionalist life was also invoked in relation to the vows made between two people in marriage. Zondi's marriage kist has two front panels with landscape scenes of hills and indigenous plants<sup>158</sup> that form the backdrop of human action, *Landscape Scene I* (Fig.12 opp.p87) and *Landscape Scene II* (Fig.13 opp.p87). This includes a man, his dog, and their prey, an antelope. The centrality of a female figure with a vessel on her head, augmented by a *kraal* in the distance, with a plume of smoke from a cooking fire, invokes continuity of a traditional lifestyle of order and stability. The scene invokes that which Dhlomo extolled in his *Valley*, 'Far back at home in dung-clean kraals and yards \ Where custom, age, tradition and herb-lore \ Hold toning swayí ö'<sup>159</sup>. It seems as though Zondi was referring to Dhlomo's old forms, which the playwright was seeking to amalgamate into the new forms of modernity.

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<sup>158</sup> Zondi includes indigenous plants like the *Aloe candelabrum* and the common tree euphorbia (*Euphorbia ingens*) indigenous to KwaZulu-Natal. Called *Umhlonhlo* (Pooley,1997: 234)<sup>158</sup>, in local legend the *Euphorbia ingens* is believed to have been the first tree of creation (Schlosser, 2004:Tafel 128). It is frequently found on graves.

<sup>159</sup> See *Valley of the Thousand Hills* in Visser and Couzens (1985:302).



On the side panels, Zondi has again focused on rural life, with people's attire and specific adornment signifying their Zuluness, *Side Panel I* (Fig.14 opp.). The man wears the traditional Zulu *ibheshu*, a loin cloth made from tassles of animal fur. He sports an *isicoco*, and carries an *induku*, a knobbed stick. The woman in an *isidwaba* skirt made of cowhide, and wearing *iziphandhla*, goat skin arm-rings, fills her clay vessel, the *ukhamba*. Her demurely downcast eyes befit her code of conduct during courtship in a patriarchal society, which would also involve traditions of *ukuhlonipa*, showing respect for the family of her suitor, this being linked to ancestor-communion. This scene was described as a *zinyanya* by young men, in the lengthy process of courtship. It is linked to the two panels on the back of the kist, depicting handshakes, the most significant gesture consummating marriage in Zulu custom (Mkhize, 2009 pers.comm.). The other *Side Panel II* (Fig.15 opp.) shows a traditionalist man with his dog chasing a monkey in a tree.

All these scenes are utopian. The wholesome, self-supporting homestead economies, with inhabitants living according to the laws of custom, belied reality. As Dhlomo had commented pertinently not long before: 'Despite charmed peacefulness here is no rest'<sup>160</sup>. The imagined rural utopia, if it had ever reflected reality, had all but ceased to exist with the vanquishing of the Zulu kingdom. From the time of Zondi's birth, the theories of economic under-development of two generations later were already being anticipated. The 'complacent myth of the reserves as rural idylls' was being debunked (Dubow, 1989:67,194). Already then, 'Native' reserves were economically dependent on capitalist industry. As noted, from earliest childhood Zondi witnessed the reality of families reliant on wage labour, procured in industry by migrant workers. There was hopeless congestion in reserves 'gripped by endemic poverty' (Dubow, 1989:67,194). As Mbembe reminds us, in communities suffering deprivation and humiliation, the utopian function of artistic production has frequently represented 'the last bulwark against forces of dehumanisation and death' (2009:90). In the face of state intransigence towards black South Africans, Zondi's carved utopian scenes thus become a celebration of continuities of codes of law and mores from his own rural childhood. He evokes aspects of familial and communal togetherness (*simunye*)<sup>161</sup> that do not lose their validity in the face of change.

<sup>160</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, from *Valley of the Thousand Hills*, 'The Valley of Hills: Meditation and Introspection' and Tears and Thought' - in Visser and Couzens (1985:302).

<sup>161</sup> The use of *zinyanya* alludes to a title Zondi gave to a number of sourced three-dimensional sculptures featuring couples, mostly male and female.

In stylistically very diverse ways, Zondi made repeated reference, predominantly in the first two decades of his oeuvre, to the Zulu past. Moving on from the kists, Zondi made larger three-dimensional works, focusing frequently on female figures, still in a traditionalist context. Much later, in the mid-1960s, he chose to portray specific historical figures from the Zulu kingdom<sup>162</sup>. In a linocut from a decade later, once again Zondi availed himself of signage referring to traditional male dress linked to *amabutho* regiments, in *Zulu Warrior and Maidens* (1975)(Fig.16 opp.). In all cases Zondi was identifying these people as Zulu (Zondi, 2006d pers.com.). In doing so, he was reflecting on some of the cultural values of the region and, in the case of the historical portraiture, he was exploring the exercising of power in the context of the vanquished kingdom. As he said, his art was about the past and the present (Zondi, 2003a:5 pers.com.).

Zulu traditionalist life, as a source of subject matter, represents a transmission of collective physical, as well as spiritual, values, to counter the threat of urbanization and industrialization. The visualisation of elements from the past expresses a grounding in traditions. These traditions serve as inspiration for facing the future without being overwhelmed by incomprehensible structures of control (Kaplan,1995:20). As state intransigence accelerated during the 1950s so did the struggle for freedom from foreign domination. In this, basic similarities with past western histories becomes evident. European nations had visualised shared cultural codes for the purpose of unity and political mobilisation<sup>163</sup>. Romance language noted in the formation of 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalisms (Hobsbawm, 1990:121), now embraced various vernacular cultural rituals and manifestations in South Africa. Legends were subject to modification, institutionalization and ritualization for an agenda invoking nationhood (Kaplan,1995:24). This was an encoding of national characteristics which served to create a shared heritage. Such Romantic nationalism is seen most overtly in the work of H.I.E. Dhlomo. In seeking to integrate African cultural tenets into processes shaping modernity, romantic devices were employed to recall the regional past as inspiration. His call for a revolution in our theories and conceptions of art and religion implied the appropriation of our Tribal Heroes, Kings and gods, our rich mythology, our great and glorious scenery<sup>164</sup>. Just as Chika Okeke recalled performance art in Nigeria in a critique of foreign intervention (2001:29), Dhlomo's tribal drama performed

<sup>162</sup> 5.2 NARRATIVES OF POWER & ZULU ROYALTY p214.

<sup>163</sup> Examples in the past and the present are nations like Norway, Finland and Ireland.

<sup>164</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo *Ilanga Lase Natal* , 10 April 1943 & cited in Couzens (1985: 255).

on a communal scale, became something national. Colonial figures came under scrutiny in interaction with indigenous voices. The ethical foundation of a people and the values that bind were being remembered. This provided models for national unity in the present. While the idea of universality in Dhlomo's art is found in opposing the segregation ideology's insistence on 'cultural and other differences' (Couzens, 1985:155), the disillusioned playwright was, nevertheless, retracting into strong expressions of Zulu nationalism (Couzens, 1985:356). From the critique and self-critique among black artists and writers, a clear mutual ideology evolved. Their didactic role was expressed in overtly and confidently addressing, for example, the purposeful paternalism on the part of white benefactors, which resulted in New Africans being denied formal art tuition. Dhlomo singled out the painter Gerard Bhengu<sup>165</sup>, and the clay sculptor Hezekile Ntuli<sup>166</sup>, whose 'natural' artistic talent was not fostered for fear that it might be 'spoiled' (Zaverdinos, 1995:9). Identifying with talent in the visual arts, a strong invocation of nature and human life cycles and rhythms served pioneer artists and writers as a thing of beauty to be exploited in their work (Couzens, 1985:253).

There are obvious parallels between Zondi's regional cultural sourcing and the the images reflecting regionalism that were invoked by the literary elite. Yet Zondi did not succumb to the extreme romanticism of the disillusioned much older Dhlomo of the 1940s, nor to his rhetoric of loss<sup>167</sup>. The young cabinet-maker took his cue from the playwright from earlier years, affirming modernity. Gyekye's contestation of the alleged polarity between 'tradition' and 'modernity' (1997:217) is helpful in guiding the argument in favour of Zondi's cultural sourcing, as being relevant inspiration for shaping modernity. In his consideration of African modernity, Gyekye explores tried and tested modes of achieving human fulfilment in Africa over time. An ethic of respect for human life lies at the core of his thinking, human relationships in other words, through which fundamental human values are expressed (Gyekye, 1997:261). This ethic he holds to be one of the fundamental communal values that are the glue of any society. Consequently, ideas and institutions, that have survived and

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<sup>165</sup> In a review of the Rolfes Dhlomo's Book *Izikhali Zanamuhl*, which Gerard Bhengu illustrated in 1935, H.I.E. Dhlomo described the artist as a 'genius' (in *Bantu World*, 9 March 1935 ó cited in Couzens (1985: 250).

<sup>166</sup> 'Ntuli is one of the pioneer African sculptors. His story is a tragic one in that his work and progress were sacrificed on the altar of the theory that training ó especially overseas training ó 'spoils' African artists and musicians' (H.I.E. Dhlomo, 'Drama and Art', in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 13 September 1952 ó cited in Couzens (1985:328).

<sup>167</sup> Dhlomo's African nationalism is expressed in his major poetic epic, *Valley of the Thousand Hills* of 1941, where this 'valley' is used as metaphor for the heartland of the Zulu people. See *Valley of the Thousand Hills*, VI 'The Present State' in Visser and Couzens (1985: 317, 318).

fulfilled the needs, hopes, and aspirations of many generations, in his view, deserve to be considered as relevant for present needs. Implicit in the term "tradition" is the notion of something having endured through generations (Gyekye,1997: 219-221). Gyekye proposes a conceptual or semantic relationship between culture and tradition, both of which are viewed as being socially inherited beliefs and practices affecting human being. He understands tradition in relation to cultural products or sets of values, beliefs, and practices which, with varying tempo, are placed at the disposal of, and survive, at least three generations of people. Importantly, however, moral assumptions and beliefs anchored in received cultural modes require critical examination on the basis of their ethical sustainability in contemporary practice, for endorsement or possible rejection (Gyekye, 1997:60,61). Just as Herbert Dhlomo had suggested, re-evaluations of received forms thus ensure a revitalisation of cultural tradition. Choice and evaluation is emphasized as cultural products are accepted, modified, rejected, or augmented by novel features over time to make them relevant to contemporary conditions (Gyekye,1997:222). Hallowed by time but also by function, some traditions, then, that embrace humanitarian values, have survived, and may further contribute to enriching people's lives in the context of an ethos of progress and development in modern Africa (Gyekye, 1997:261). Zondi was using histories to seek encouragement, not so much as a form of escapism to counter perceived threats of modernity but as a way to select aspects worthy of transporting into the present for shaping it. Zondi always presented himself as a family man. His representation of the Zulu past reflected on the institution of marriage and communality. He was implying that wholesome, individual families (such as his own), as much as before, form the foundation for successful "togetherness". These were covert pointers to cultural tenets of the past, the validity of which Zondi was placing on the moral weighing pan of the present. These images would become his foundation for advancing into a broader discourse related to cultural cross-pollination.

Possible interpretations of Zondi's work reveal a hermeneutic dichotomy, contingent upon the audience. With a new white audience for his Zulu motifs from the 1950s, what recurs is the delicate divide, seen in the 1920s, between interpretation of African history by the black intelligentsia on the one hand, and the white tribalist gaze on the other. Tribalist policies, initiated in the 1920s, were founded on perceptions that otherness was irreconcilable with (white) modernity. As noted, "retribalization" became a state strategy exploiting ethnicity in the face of mobilization and militancy (Maylam, 1996:98). This evolved into the Bantustan policies which pervaded the apartheid era, coinciding with the four decades of Zondi's

career. For black South Africans cutting a path through the restrictive thicket of new apartheid laws, the subject matter that was also being evoked in literary drama was serving as a historical source of inspiration. Nostalgic collective memory of histories were linked to a time of pre-colonial socio-economic integrity within the region, where the pre-colonial household structures under patriarchal authority were stable. Therefore, under given circumstances of marginalisation and wretchedness in the rural reserves and urban townships, a reading of literary drama could be inspirational. Zondi's early Zulu narratives inadvertently equated identity with geography. Under the segregationist ideology, therefore, his inscriptions of Zuluness harboured the potential to be burdened with perceptions of difference by audiences conditioned to racist thinking. Initially, such a dual reading had become latent in Gerard Bhengu's depictions of customary or 'tribal' life, with which he had responded to his white viewer's ethnographic predilections<sup>168</sup>. The artist's allusions to harmonious rural traditionalist structures fostered the fallacious perception among Whites of coherence in Zulu ethnic identity. This supposition was linked to political, economic, and cultural expediency of a white political power base (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:16,17). Zondi's utopian scenes, from the other side of the racial divide, could thus be interpreted to confirm perceptions of alterity and vindicate segregationist policies. From Zondi's earliest depictions of Zuluness in the 1940s, it would take the next two 'liberation' decades in Africa before white scholarship and historical fiction would reflect affirmative aspects of the Zulu kingdom. This would coincide with Zondi's own interpretation of a leader like Shaka, outside the heroic stereotype.

It becomes clear from Zondi's progressive interaction with his early white mentors that his reliance on inspiration from the past did not occur in defence of autochthony or harbour connotations of exclusivity. In the context of segregation, a critical assessment of ethical values and practices on both sides of the racial divide would remain implicit in Zondi's art. In the course of his dialogues with trusted black and white friends, the artist and his patrons were given rare opportunities for exploring cultural paradigms. An internal criticism, each of their own particular cultural values and practices, could be augmented by 'external (non-indigenous) cultural influences', all of which determine the validity of traditions (Gyekye, 1997:222). While he revered certain practices and beliefs of Zulu culture, Zondi's urge to progress in his art-making and to shape modernity beyond the restraints of traditionalist modes ensured his consistent re-evaluation of cultural modes.

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<sup>168</sup> Dr. Max Köhler and Killie Campbell encouraged Bhengu.

With hindsight, it is possible to embed Zondi's early narrative language in his art-making within the context of his entire oeuvre. His increasingly conceptualized figurative sculpture would always resonate from this traditionalist milieu. The Zulu culture remained his guide, as he evaluated and re-evaluated, made selections, and discarded from it. This was in the manner of Dhlomo and the more progressive Vilakazi, who both sought to define what it meant to be an African in modern times. In recognition of his skills and his talent, by the end of the 1950s, discerning mentorship effected that Zondi, however, emancipated himself from Zululness. Stylistically, he advanced rapidly into a modernist form of expressiveness. Freed from the conceptual constraints imposed by references to ethnicity, he chose a more universalist form to appeal to a wider audience. In so doing, his art-making began to give him an effective political voice. His own constant shift between cultures required enormous processes of adaptation. In Zondi's view, cultural development was based on reciprocity. He thus demanded acculturation of his white friends living in Africa. The artist's discourse with Wolfgang Bodensteyn in particular, who was claiming his Africanness, revolved around the ideal of a 'Human Family'<sup>169</sup>. This disqualified the use of racial criteria for guiding political and civic rights, while shifting the focus to that of morality. Their rigorous scrutiny of the moral aspects of segregation, will be further considered below.

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<sup>169</sup> See 3.4 IMAGINING SELF THROUGH OTHER ó A PHILOSOPHICAL EXCHANGE p134.

## CHAPTER THREE: PATRONAGE

### INTRODUCTION

Patronage in the arts is diverse, embracing both the process of art in the making, and its dissemination. Acknowledgement, encouragement and moral support are a form of patronage, as is art criticism or the provision of studio or exhibition space. Modes of dissemination of art include individual mediation through private and public exhibitions. Patronage further involves financial support in purchasing work, mediated by galleries selling to a broad public. More indirectly, it also involves exposure of art through the media, in popular and formal publications, in the radio, and on television.

Encouragement and mentorship for Zondi, as for any artist, was a vital part of developing his creativity. Yet, the socio-political stage under apartheid ensured that the state was actively determined the nature of every facet of life for black people. In an environment in which black Africans were being constantly affected by restrictive legislation, it is thus significant that Zondi was able to break this mould. Acknowledgement and reciprocity involve the realm of Otherness, in the wide sense of Other, as sensible beings and things (Crowther 1993:1,5). A theoretical so-called ontological reciprocity is described in which an artwork is seen to be able to express the relation between subject and world (Crowther,1993:7). When Paul Crowther asserts the need of every individual to be at home with other human beings, he describes art as playing a seminal role in being able to identify with, and appreciate, others, on the basis of free rather than coercive relationships (1993:6,7). Zondi used his art-making to establish such relationships across the colour-bar, that were largely free from coercion or oppression. As a black man in South Africa, his vision to become an artist constituted a new mindset, a whole new language, and a new possibility of expression.

The opportunities which arose for Zondi to expose his work to public viewing began with his initial cabinet-making workshop in the semi-urban environment of Edendale in the late 1940s, and with his rural audience in his home village. His career culminated with a vast international audience for his art in Paris three decades later. By the end of his long career, his art would be housed in collections on three continents. Between his diverse platforms of exposure Zondi chose as the preferred stage for his work the intimacy of the private homes of individual friends and mentors. His point of departure for moving into a more global context was that his art should always remain meaningful to his people, a viewpoint he shared with the black literary elite around Dhlomo and Vilakazi.

While Rankin claimed that ðí the Zondis were working for people outside their own community from the firstö (1989:72), this is not quite accurate, or at least requires qualification, in terms of the concept of patronage. The dissemination of Zondiø furniture from the 1940s was from an entrepreneurial workshop in Edendale, where he was dependent on private customers. The work included kists and jewellery boxes, embellished with increasingly adeptly carved three-dimensional figurative miniatures which he continued to make into the 1950s. From the outset, Zondi was proud that his artistic capacities were recognized in his rural community among family, friends, and the larger community<sup>170</sup>. He received significant acknowledgement as an artist from black friends of his generation, who performed roles of communal and regional leadership. Even if Zondiø pieces found buyers among Whites from the 1950s, implicit in patronage is the reception of the work, also from people unable to purchase it. His art-making was an autonomous practice, no longer serving any traditional idioms of repetition based within a communal patronage base. Yet his rural audience was able to share his carved narratives which reflected aspects of their own collective histories and which expressed their humanity. Zondi thus experienced ontological reciprocity of the kind that fulfils the human need to have oneø ðinner life reflected in, and acknowledged by, the realm of Othernessö (Crowther, 1993:5,7). These non-coerced human relationships no doubt encouraged him and created for him a mental springboard to take his art beyond the sphere of personal familiarity in which he felt secure. It remained his lifelong concern to speak to *this* particular audience with his art.

Public commissions, group exhibitions, various smaller exhibitions, and two major solo ones were important in enabling Zondiø economic survival as an artist. Yet it was the personal contact with particular patrons that Zondi valued most, and it remained consistently personal throughout his career. This accorded with his humble yet communicative manner. With his skilful and forceful ability to be articulate, he could politicise and make himself heard in individual dialogue with trusted friends . His individually sculpted wooden figures suited this personal approach, as he designated pieces for particular patrons. At the same time, as individual pieces reflected in various ways the content of his dialogues with these patrons, they were able to critique his work, both stylistically and for its content. For Zondi, this adjunct of personal interface to his art-making was the life-line for his creativity, beyond

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<sup>170</sup> This was conveyed very emphatically during the funeral ceremony for Zondi at Mtulwa in March 2008, by his long-standing friend, the educator Vincent Mseleku.



commercial concerns. He did not display any kind of business acumen. On the contrary, by pointedly placing some of his sculptures with particular persons, saying that they should remain in the family (Van Wyk, 2003 pers.comm.), he strove only to underscore the intrinsic meaning which he attributed to them. In making such choices, he designated homes for particular pieces. When Zondi had achieved a gratifying internal relationship between himself and his work, he seemed to feel the need to extend this reciprocity into the social context of Otherness. Implicit in this sustained policy was the knowledge, important to him, that the designated patrons and friends he trusted had received the message he intended the sculpture to convey. They in turn would remunerate Zondi according to their own estimation (Veldsman, 2003 pers.com.). With regard to putting a price tag onto any work, it is very probable that Zondi had spoken to Muziweyixhwala Tabete, an apprentice to Laduma Madela at Ceza during the 1950s. Tabete had refused remuneration for his work from white patrons, noting "we human beings must take good care of what God has given us and use it. If we buy and sell our gifts, we lose our souls" <sup>171</sup>.

Rankin points to factors in patronage and mentorship which rely on personal enterprise and individual interaction (1989:34). This was the case with Zondi and Einar Magni, who encouraged the young cabinet-maker to return to Dundee to qualify for a teaching certificate. Once he was teaching at the DIBS, Zondi began his three-dimensional sculpture for which fellow educators within the teaching profession (mostly superior in rank), mentored and encouraged him. They also began to buy his work.

In the mid-1950s, Zondi received a commission for the *Crucifix* for the large Lutheran Church at the Ceza Mission in rural northern Natal. Concurrently, the principal of the DIBS, Sven Eriksson, also brokered a few works for Zondi, commissioned by the CSM, which are now located in churches in Sweden <sup>172</sup>. Church patronage was frequently the only avenue open to creative talent among Blacks, in order for them to have the opportunities for art-making, exhibiting, and selling their work <sup>173</sup>. Workshops with tools and materials were crucial in this. Leeb-du Toit contests the condemnation of Christian church patronage as being "stultifying" despite stylistic interventions which occurred (2003:137). She points to an

<sup>171</sup> Hobbs and Rankin (2003:41,42,45,46) citing Peder Gowenius' memoirs.

<sup>172</sup> Among these is a *Christ on the Cross* (location unknown, probably Sweden) recorded from a black-and-white image in the Eriksson family album. Another is the *Crucifix* in the Långselet Lutheran Church, in the north of Sweden, which Eriksson organized for that community (Fig.48 opp.p174). It was recorded from a small colour photograph from the Eriksson files, by courtesy of Dr. Lennart Eriksson. See also Miles (1997:112).

<sup>173</sup> For an overview of church patronage, see "The church and art patronage in KwaZulu-Natal" in Leeb-du Toit (2003:76ff).

increasing liberty, even in repetitious commissions received by artists like Ruben Xulu, who were dependent for their livelihood on church support (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:137). In Zondi's case, church patronage was more in conjunction with his building commissions than his art-making. Zondi served as Manager at Appelsbosch. This involved maintenance, personnel management and the supervision of building projects. In conjunction with Zondi's venture into architecture in the building of the hospital Chapel, he was able to realize his most emotive sculpture, the *Christ on the Cross* (c.1964). It was a project that was burdened by grave financial difficulties. Zondi's building skills seem to have held him within the ambit of the Lutheran Church in their construction and restoration ventures during the 1960s. Even so, for his art-making, he retained a greater independence from church patronage than for example Bernard Gcwensa and Ruben Xulu, whose work he knew<sup>174</sup>. Generally, Zondi found other outlets for his art, linked to private initiatives and the *South African Institute of Race Relations* (SAIRR). Yet in the 1970s he exhibited under the auspices of Mariannahill, the Catholic former Trappist Mission established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century near Durban. Exhibitions were held in 1974, 1976 and 1977. Sister Maria Pientia Selhorst of the Congregation of the Precious Blood (CPS) taught at the St. Francis College at Mariannahill from 1941 until the 1970s. Major developments in liturgical art had been initiated by her from the 1940s (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:94). Under her tutelage, which embraced a modernist approach, a cross-cultural African sacred art was developed at Mariannahill. Also, a new aesthetic was created as she responded to the innate capacities of her students (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:94,95). Zondi's itinerant presence at Mariannahill was very likely facilitated by Grossert, who exchanged ideas about art training with Pientia from the 1950s. In sharing a concern regarding the advancement of both secular and liturgical art, together they developed a vision for art training and curriculum development within schools in Natal (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:95).

During the 1970s, Zondi received at least two church commissions for portrayals of Christ. One is in a church in Pretoria<sup>175</sup>, while the other was commissioned by the Lutheran community of the Große Kreuzkirche in Hermannsburg, Northern Germany. This is *Christ Bearing the Cross* (mid-1970s)<sup>176</sup>. Maintaining his connection with Mariannahill, during his time as a freelance artist Zondi was given residency, on and off, in the studio of Pientia's

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<sup>174</sup> See Cormick (1993).

<sup>175</sup> The search for this church is still ongoing. It was possibly a Catholic Church in Pretoria.

<sup>176</sup> This was brokered by Wolfgang Bodenstein, whose cousin, Annegret Cassier, lives in Hermannsburg.

successor, Sr. Johanna Senn, especially in 1984 (Senn, 2003 pers.com.). Senn brokered pieces for Zondi, always giving him the full price (Allen, 2003 pers.com.).

As Zondi began making larger individual sculptures during the decade of the 1950s, his spare time was occupied largely by trying to keep up with a private clientele keen to own one of his predominantly genre pieces. These were thematically strongly related to his Zulu themes on his kists. As a member of the teaching staff at the Edendale Vocational School, Zondi's talent was publicized on the front cover of the *Bantu Education Journal* (1957) (Fig.347, opp.p253). His patrons at the time began to include inspectorate staff of the Department of Education. By the end of the decade, he was receiving orders from government officials. As is evident from letters between Zondi and Bodenstein, these orders were for three-dimensional sculptures. The choice of subject matter was left to the artist whose quest it became to reflect on the human condition. The acknowledgement he received from Bodenstein and in turn, from a wider patronage base, seems to have sustained Zondi through difficult times of self-doubt. From the late 1950s, through Bodenstein, Zondi met and befriended the administrator, Sighart Bourquin, responsible for much of the mass housing for labourers in greater Durban. Zondi admired him for his command of Zulu and knew that he was well versed in Zulu history (Zondi, 2003c pers.com.). As their friendship grew, Zondi said that one of his earliest, most overtly political, pieces was to remain in the Bourquin home<sup>177</sup>. Significantly, in a letter to Bourquin, he signed himself 'Zulu sculptor' (Zondi, 1960f, letter), perhaps in acknowledgement of Bourquin's reverence for the *amaZulu*.

During his employment at the Swedish Lutheran Mission station in Appelsbosch in the early 1960s Zondi was able to engage more profoundly in art-making after-hours. His audience then came from outside his rather intimate circle of patrons.

Many of Zondi's first white patrons with whom he engaged personally beyond purely commercial dealings, belonged to an elite of well-educated middle-class Europeans and descendants of settlers. A large number of these were direct immigrants<sup>178</sup> or of immigrant

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<sup>177</sup> See *Invisible Bonds* (1960) (Fig.198, opp.p226) and its counterpart figure *Mater Dolorosa* (sic) or *Sorrowful Mother* (1960) (Fig.194 opp.p226).

<sup>178</sup> Einar Magni (Swedish); Sven and Jenny Eriksson (Swedish); John Nixon (British); John Hooper (British); Kurt and Meg Strauss (German); Jo and Jim Thorpe (British); Heinrich and Hildegard Schlaudraff (German); Jacqueline and Paul Martens (Belgian); Madame Wisznicka-Kleczynska (Polish).

parents<sup>179</sup>. They represented an elite, familiar with modernist art-making in Europe. The nature of their encouragement, therefore, could provide the autodidact Zondi with an invaluable perspective of the contemporary modernist aesthetic elsewhere. For this, they used their personal libraries. Through these patrons, he could, as Rankin noted in the case of Selby Mvusi, gain knowledge of alternate art styles which, while providing choices, equally encourages experimentation (1989:47).

Further, in the course of transmission of modernist tenets in western art-making, there were sometimes immigrant voices that were perhaps more objective and more compassionate towards Blacks. Those Europeans outside the entrenched master-servant mould, that had been perpetuated through generations, were arguably more easily able to function beyond prejudicial patterns of behaviour towards others. Their perception of interacting with other human beings, without the encumbrance of any stereotypical racial categorization, enabled them better to listen and sympathize. A foundation of trust could be created. While Grossert and Nixon were able to encourage Zondi in his first endeavours in three-dimensional art, Hooper became an important mentor in technical skills. Zondi enthusiastically recalled Hooper's sense of humour (Zondi, 2002:6 pers.com). At the same time the two men engaged in political discussions that enhanced Zondi's perspective of white liberalism. However, ultimately, it was Wolfgang Bodenstern's affirmation of Zondi and his work that enabled the artist to visualise a different future for himself, beyond that of a woodwork instructor. Bodenstern was able to convey to Zondi how his art could give him a voice. This they explored by means of personal exchanges as often as their professions would allow.

Only later, once Zondi was based in Pretoria from the 1970s, did his patrons include white Africans with long family histories on this continent<sup>180</sup>. All of them were contacts made through Wolfgang Bodenstern. There was no acceptance by default, or opportunism in accepting their invaluable support over many years, and Zondi valued them as friends and sparring partners with a liberal outlook. Chen and Piet Veldsman were important patrons of Zondi's in the 1970s. They were *verligte* (liberal) Afrikaners, who felt that the change of government in 1948 was a disaster. Veldsman thought of the Afrikaner nationalists as

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<sup>179</sup> Jack Grossert was South-African born of a Scottish father and second-generation South African mother; Wolfgang Bodenstern was born about 8 years after his parents settled as missionaries in Natal in 1918 while Agnes Bodenstern (nee Leistner) was an immigrant born in Germany of missionary parents and raised in East Africa; Axel-Ivar Berglund was South-African born, at Ceza, where his Swedish father Axel was a Lutheran missionary immigrant.

<sup>180</sup> These include Johan van Wyk, Trebot Barry, Dawie and Margot Chamberlain, Werner and Magda Wittmann, Piet and Chen Veldsman.

ōsentimentalists, not thinkersō (Veldsman, 2008 pers.com.). Zondi emphasized the fact that it was only on account of art that the opportunity had arisen for him to meet these friends in the context of segregation: ōMe a Zulu, you a white Afrikaner, weŕe talking about art which has brought us togetherō (Zondi quoted by Veldsman, 2008 pers.com.). These Afrikaners were recipients of particular pieces which Zondi designated as having to ōstay in the familyō or which Zondi had not wanted to sell (Veldsman and Veldsman, 2008a pers.com.).

Zondiŕs intermittent migrant status was linked to patronage. He, therefore, shared this status with fellow black South Africans. His migrancy was, to a degree, voluntary, as he chose to be creative in the sphere of influence of white patrons whom he described as inspirational (Veldsman, 2008 pers.com.). During his time in Durban from the late 1960s, in the face of pass laws, Zondi first lived with the Bodenstein family in Montclair, in defiance of Group Areas legislation. In order to be ōamong his ownō<sup>181</sup>, he visited friends and members of his family in hostels for male migrant workers (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com.).

Zondiŕs education and concomitant social status determined his perception of political realities and ideological relations among South Africans. Outside his circle of individuals comprising members of the black intelligentsia, initially Zondi moved amongst an educated, white progressive group with whom he could converse in English. Here he will have understood the ways in which they represented an elite within a broader white population. This revealed the extent to which segregation, as an ōideology of controlō, was masking class divisions among Whites (Marks, 1986:4). It was a division akin to the rift experienced among black South Africans, which rift, from the 1920s, the black leadership sought to overcome for the sake of oppositional politics. In exchanges with Whites, Zondi would have gained greater insight into how disproportionate ownership and control over production, on the part of the white minority, were being maintained by political ideology. There were obviously pragmatic reasons for Zondi remaining within the ambit of a white audience who bought his sculptures. Aside from such considerations though, Zondiŕs solidarity with Whites was guided by his quest to contribute to solving the political and social impasse between different groups in South Africa. He recognized how he could achieve this by means of his creativity. He embodied in his artwork those aspects of respect and dignity that were absent in everyday

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<sup>181</sup> This term is borrowed from Zondiŕs daughter, Nomfundo Zondi Molefe. See *Mine Worker* (or *Accordion Player*, (1965) (Fig.380 opp.p257) and *Wema Blues* (1970) (Fig.381 opp.p257).

life beyond his small utopian circle of white friends. His art gave him the means for ensuring that his voice was heard beyond this circle, with each sculpture anew.

Florin noted in the 1960s, that in their interface with Whites, the black middle class had a preference for English over Afrikaans-speaking South Africans (Florin, 1967: 17,150). He attributed this to the English-speaking South Africans' greater distance from the situation of manual labour, as they were generally in higher positions in the urban economy (Florin, 1967:17,150). This would imply the retention of a class consciousness on the part of the black elite. Certainly among the black intelligentsia, this is something they were attempting to bridge in the cause of mass mobilization, as noted above. Appropriately, H.I.E. Dhlomo used Marxian notions of class when he referred to the artificiality and fixity of racial barriers:

In the final analysis, there are no racial attitudes, only class attitudes. To speak of racial attitudes is a way to spread false propaganda and notions of a subtle method of fixing racial barriers and encouraging antagonisms, of making people believe that races have fixed and unchangeable attitudes caused by inherent traits of superiority or inferiority. (H.I.E. Dhlomo, 1945 in Couzens, 1985:36).

Zondi commended the directness of Afrikaans and German people, in comparison to English people<sup>182</sup>. Here Dhlomo's perception regarding enslavement is helpful, as the playwright compared an environment under English jurisdiction with one under Afrikaner domination. It was his perception that Blacks living under the apparent approval of Whites, as in Natal, were subject to a greater degree of domination than they were under subjection of overt disdain, giving the Orange Free State as an example (Couzens, 1985:35,36). He asserted that the tacit approval of Whites affirming tribalism was likely to culminate in a far more difficult struggle for freedom. In the light of this perspective, John Nixon's advice to Zondi becomes significant. He guided the artist during the mid-1950s, to go beyond the tribal idiom he was initially expressing through portraits showing different racial types (Nixon, 2003 pers.com.). These were finding a ready white audience. In part they were serving to confirm the omnipresent notion of difference and, in Dhlomo's thinking, 'fixing racial barriers'. Zondi was further guided into a more universal expressionism by the stylistic and ideological modernist intervention of Hooper and the tenets conveyed by Bodenstein, who favoured the German expressionism of Ernst Barlach and Käthe Kollwitz (Zondi, 2002a pers.com).

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<sup>182</sup> Personal communication, Michael Zondi, 2006, Edendale, Pietermaritzburg.

Zondi had both a humble and an assertive manner. The knowledge of his own heritage and his grasp of its meaning as a source of inspiration for modernity were too profound for him to be deceived by inauthentic affirmation. It is likely that he spoke with the Dhlomos and Vilakazi about the concept of enslavement or read their poetry pertaining to notions of subjugation<sup>183</sup>. The profound nature of Zondi's personal engagement with individual white patrons, from the onset, became his best guard against becoming involved with people whose urge for cultural exchange was anchored in a romanticized admiration of tribalism.

The extent to which Zondi would reveal his opinions of life under *ubandlululo* were frequently contingent upon the trust he built up in the course of friendships with patrons. Under these conditions, he exposed his passion for information and agitation, which his outwardly humble manner belied. Zondi divulged his insight into the politics of the day, forming what became a critical solidarity with Whites. In conversation he would always approach the 'borderline of courtesy'<sup>184</sup>, falling just short of being insulting towards his white friends as they grappled with the indignities of apartheid legislation (Bodenstein, Hans, 2008:2 pers.com.). Hans Bodenstein regards the frank discussion he and his brothers were able to have with Zondi in the light of a tacit indictment of the white man. It was Bodenstein's perception that Blacks associated white people with the destruction of 'what was good' (Bodenstein, Hans, 2008:2 pers.com.). Through education and acculturation, the black man found himself attracted to modernity, which the white man had fostered and accelerated. This, in Bodenstein's mind, prompted a new era of thought. This is borne out in the literary work of the black intelligentsia, as they sought ways of creating a meaningful modern life by incorporating aspects of African cultural modes, as noted above. The Bodenstein brothers' socio-political position and that of some of Zondi's other more liberal patrons places them in a class or structural disparity. Such so-called 'sub-grouping' involves members of the 'owning class' becoming proactive 'intra-class' agents as they act politically and ideologically against their own economic status 'in favour of working class people' (Hopkins, 2005:66). This also places them outside white male elitism, held accountable for plunder and subjugation (Hopkins, 2005:137). In another context, Dwight Hopkins asserts that this elitism provided the intellectual, scientific, and Christian justification for conquest

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<sup>183</sup> An example is *Ezinkomponi* (In the Gold Mines) in the cluster of poems of *Zulu Horizons* (Vilakazi, B.W., 1962:170-174).

<sup>184</sup> 'die Grenzen der Höflichkeit' trans. Nieser.

by means of philosophical, anthropological, and missiological doctrines<sup>185</sup>. The concept of 'authentic conversation' as validated within the context of Christianity as well as 'agape' will be explored below<sup>186</sup>.

Further to patronage, Zondi was intermittently in the ambit of an adult education initiative in Durban. Paul Martens, as founding member of *Bantu, Indian, Coloured Art* (B.I.C.A.), was one of the initiators at a time when Zondi was frequenting the Martens' home in Durban (McLean and Pienaar, 2005 pers.com.). This venture was established for Blacks and convened in privately rented rooms. It included the teaching of music (Martens, P., 2004 pers.com.). The provision of such educational classes is an example of the many private institutions and individuals besides missions, who, in the old system before Bantu Education, were funding education for Blacks in acts of 'mutual goodwill' (Horrell, 1968:2)<sup>187</sup>.

Zondi's art-making involved state patronage in a number of ways. His employment under Bantu Education resulted in his achieving a high profile for his artistic talent. At the end of the 1950s, while employed at the Edendale Vocational School, he received some private commissions from state officials for his work. During the time when he was again working in the ambit of the Lutheran Church, between 1963 and 1967, the Department of Information sponsored his participation in the Venice Biennale of 1966, with the showing of *Calabash* (1963)(Figs.348-350 opp.p253). After his second one-man exhibition, a sculpture of his, *Mother and Child* (1975)(Fig.18 opp.p111) toured three European countries in the exhibition *Zulu Culture*, again under the sponsorship of the Department of Information (Figs.17-21 opp.pp88;111). His most important overseas exposure occurred, under the same state department when he spent a month working and exhibiting in Paris in 1977.

In the late 1950s, Zondi received commissions from senior state employees (Zondi, 1959a:4, letter). He did this work outside of his teaching commitments. The young artist's response seems to have been an embodiment of ideas pertaining directly to the subjugation of Blacks, like his *Prisoner of Hope* and *Invisible Bonds*<sup>188</sup>. With one or two exceptions, only a couple

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<sup>185</sup> see 'Philosophy' in Hopkins (2005:138-143).

<sup>186</sup> 3.4 IMAGINING SELF THROUGH OTHER ó A PHILOSOPHICAL EXCHANGE p134.

<sup>187</sup> For further initiatives, see Muriel Horrell (1968: 2,3).

<sup>188</sup> Other titles include *Sorrow* (Fig.195 opp.p226), *The Scourge* (Fig.202 opp.p228) and *Hands of Triumph* (Fig.203 opp.p228), drawn as sketches and included in a letter to Bodenstein (Zondi, 1960g, letter).



of sculptures have been found among his later work, that evidence a similar overt engagement with the idea of dissidence or protest <sup>189</sup>.

Zondi seized an opportunity of working towards humanitarian goals within state structures, without compromising his political and aspirational goals. On the contrary, five years after resigning from the Department of Education, he was able to pursue his commitment to serving the poor under the Department of Information. In 1967, after the failure of his dream to establish a school for the arts in northern Natal (Zondi, 1965a:2, letter), at the request of this state department (Rousseau, 1977), Zondi found formal employment as 'Programme Promoter, African agriculture, arts and homecraft' (Deane, 1978:200). At the time, he was living with the Bodenstein family in Durban, where their garage became his workshop. The artist began liaison work, becoming the *Organiser of Art and Crafts* (Ogilvie, 1998:767), as well as transferring agricultural know-how to rural areas. As an Organiser, Zondi was returning to education, albeit on a more managerial level. He travelled throughout the province, inter alia showing films with electricity from a generator (Zondi, 2007b:5 pers.com.). Zondi used this programme for community development, actively to support aspiring sculptors wherever he met them (Bodenstein, A. 2004 pers.com.)<sup>190</sup>. At the same time, in this professional capacity, Zondi is said to have endorsed 'African art' (Deane, 1978:201). He not only served as 'a professional consultant to art teachers' but, as Deane noted, also lectured on art 'to Blacks and Whites in universities and secondary schools' (1978:201). Here Deane may have been referring to Zondi's contact with the University of Natal's Fine Art Department, in the late 1950s until 1961, when John Hooper left South Africa for Canada. Hooper had facilitated the informal interaction between Zondi and the students of the Whites-only institution (Hooper, 2006 pers.com.). Some years later, once Grossert had become head of the Fine Arts department at the University of Durban-Westville, he may have organized for Zondi to speak to students there also. In March 1967, Grossert arranged for Zondi to present a private lecture on his art-making in the home of Graham Ellis (Grossert, 1968:51)<sup>191</sup>. Therefore the criticism of Zondi by 'many of his admirers', for accepting employment with the government department (Paton, 1979) must be seen in the light of this broad range of activities in which Zondi was able to promote

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<sup>189</sup> See 5.3 LIBERATION AND LEADERSHIP p225.

<sup>190</sup> Agnes Bodenstein commented that Wolfgang was constantly having to buy chisels, as Zondi would give them to any aspiring talent (Bodenstein, A. 2004, pers.com.).

<sup>191</sup> A year earlier Ellis had published an article on Zondi in the *Condenser*, a publication of the Tongaat Sugar Company (1966). The Bodenstein file contained the typewritten rough script as a blueprint copy of this article, making it obvious that Ellis sought the Bodenstein's input for information on Zondi.

creative thinking. No doubt the Department of Information's name, in this particular instance, was rather misleading regarding the projects in which the artist became involved.

Both tenures under state employment, therefore, involved the transfer of skills and knowledge. Having initially served as a woodwork-instructor, he was then able to extend his mentoring and educational activities in extension work. This suited Zondi's pragmatic nature. Taken on face value, Zondi's engagement with the state for a second time may appear to compromise the integrity of his struggle. But any condemnation of the kind as reported by Paton<sup>192</sup>, merely serves to reveal a lack of knowledge as to the nature of his work, as well as a lack of discernment towards Zondi's commitment to this struggle and his firm moral stance.

Zondi's involvement in the state programme of promoting rural development as well as his later participation in the government's promotion of South Africa overseas provides insight into two fundamental aspects of Zondi's holistic concept of art-making. Firstly, few progressive visions for modernity would deny the role of education. As noted, Zondi was passionate about learning and he took every opportunity to foster his own, and that of others, especially his own children's. He acknowledged the inadequacies of Bantu Education from the 1950s, and the perfidious motivation behind the programme under the then minister of education, Hendrik Verwoerd. It is likely that Zondi's insights contributed to his resignation from the Department of Education in the early 1960s. He succinctly commented that his career had reached 'a dead end' (Zondi, 1963b, letter). During his second employment tenure with the state later in that decade, his task was akin to that of Organisers in Bantu Education. As noted, his engagement in promoting creativity as an educational concept beyond art teaching was arguably nurtured in discussions with Grossert. Under the circumstances of the state's spatial control and general marginalisation of Blacks, its purported aim to develop and uplift rural communities might seem naïve, hypocritical, or even cynical. Nevertheless, there were always dedicated individuals, working within the state's restrictive parameters, whose commitment gave no cause to doubt their integrity. Within the austerity of the system, by fostering creativity, Zondi was providing Blacks with a foundation for earning a living. This was linked to overcoming poverty and its concomitant sense of hopelessness. It thus became intimately linked with one of Zondi's prime motivations, that of preserving human

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<sup>192</sup> Alan Paton commented that Zondi's employ with the state caused 'anxiety and disappointment to many of his admirers' (1979). See also Paton (1979a;b).

dignity. A second factor to be considered in Zondi's employment under state auspices is his determination to foster reconciliation. As one of the most frequently invoked concepts in South Africa's post-apartheid era, reconciliation demands the will to communicate and work together to uphold dialogue and bear witness to unifying ideals. It lies at the heart of democratic governance which is also reliant upon accessible and open channels of critique, in the manner Herbert Dhlomo had resolutely emphasized. As Hyslop reminds us, freedom in South Africa was gained in the hard struggle of above-ground initiatives (2009:123). Ultimately, the acknowledgement of interdependence lay at the core of nurturing the will to unite South Africans in creating modernity under democratic conditions. This involved the long and hard process of pragmatic rapprochement, which Zondi practised. A condemnation of his employment in this state department, therefore, without denouncing all black teachers working within the system of Bantu Education, seems inconsistent.

Further to audiences and buyers for Zondi's work, apart from exhibition outlets, friends and acquaintances identified prospective buyers (Siedersleben, 2004 pers.com.). Veldsman declared that during the 1970s, Zondi was never able to keep up with orders (Veldsman, 2008 pers.com.). Works that also came into public collections, for example through the Haenggi Foundation, were his significant, large red ivory piece, *Woman* (1972)(Figs.61,62 opp.p181),<sup>193</sup> and the portrait head of an *African Queen* (1990)<sup>194</sup>.

Patronage through private individuals, in one particular case, included that fostered indirectly under the auspices of the Australian Embassy in Pretoria in 1976. A small genre piece of a woman<sup>195</sup>, was purchased by Dianne Johnstone in the course of what Shirley Deane has noted as a 'Joint Exhibition' Australian Embassy (1978:200). As a young employee of the Australian Embassy, Johnstone staged an exhibition of the work of black 'township' artists. Together with Bruce Haigh, she is mentioned as the founding donor of artworks being repatriated by the *Ifa Lethu Foundation* from 2005 (Ramphela, 2007). The 'value of heritage in building a strong democracy' is addressed by the chairperson of *Ifa Lethu*, Dr. Mamphela Ramphela (2007). She speaks of the dilemma of neglecting matters of 'the soul' in the first

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<sup>193</sup> Bought by the Haenggi Foundation from Gallery 21 in Johannesburg. PELMAMA Register AAMC MZON 72/01 - on permanent Loan to the Oliewenhuis Art Gallery in Bloemfontein.

<sup>194</sup> The Pretoria Art Museum acquired and accessed this piece on 5 Feb. 1991, From *Gallery 21*, Johannesburg. The back of the black and white photograph has a hand-written note: *Haenggi Skenking*.

<sup>195</sup> *Woman's Head* is the title taken from the Pretoria Museum inventory card Nr. 04/39. In the *Ifa Lethu* Publication, it is entitled *Woman* (Offringa, 2007:45). An image of the small 'Di Johnstone' sculpture is shown on page 101 of the *Sawubona* Magazine (2005), without any acknowledgement, neither to the artist nor the photographer.

post-apartheid decade, resulting in ‘fractures in our society’. This neglect was being addressed by the *Ifa Lethu Foundation* by repatriating art and by fostering development through nurturing ‘creative entrepreneurship’ (Ramphela, 2007; Sawubona, 2005).

From the mid-1960s, Buthelezi, as Zondi’s friend and patron, was the recipient of many of Zondi’s pieces (Zondi, 2006d:2 pers.com.), which he used in international diplomatic exchanges as state gifts (Buthelezi, 2007). In the mid-1970s, in Zondi’s reference to the predominance of white patronage, he called for a greater support for black artists by Blacks (1974:10):

There is currently a great stirring amongst Black people ó they are discovering the true nature of their art and the richness it affords the very quality of life. It is becoming part of the actual progress and practical development of our communities. While an increasing number of Black artists are gaining recognition, there is a pressing need for more support for them from a still wider section of their own people. The origin of much of the existing recognition is due to the encouragement and support of our White friends. The growth of interest among the Black population can only be sustained and stimulated by a wider education into the values of art ó not only aesthetic values, but also that of its dynamic role in the actual and comprehensive development of our people; and also for its value in bridge-building among all peoples, all colours, and for all time (Zondi, 1974:10).

### 3.1 PUBLIC SPACES – EXHIBITIONS

Public exposure for Zondi’s work embraced exhibitions, the media by means of newspaper reports and magazine features, and formal publications on art-making in South Africa. Revealing his work to the public and opening it up to critique outside the intimacy of friendships and mentorships, began modestly. In conjunction with his employment under the auspices of Bantu Education, his work was shown at Bantu Shows, as noted above<sup>196</sup>. In 1957, his artistic talent was featured in the *Bantu Education Journal* in conjunction with a report on the new Edendale industrial school of the Department of Bantu Education outside Pietermaritzburg. In the June edition, Zondi was pictured on the front cover as ‘Artistic Woodwork Instructor Michael Zondi of Edendale’ (*Bantu Education Journal*, 1957)<sup>197</sup>. The artist is pictured carving a portrait head, using a commercial mallet. Next to him on the workbench is one of his larger pieces of the time, a very obviously traditionalist Zulu female

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<sup>196</sup> John Nixon acquired his *Kist* (mid-1950s) through a Bantu show (Nieser, 2004a).

<sup>197</sup> The photograph was taken by L.M. Pfeiffer (*Bantu Educational Journal*, 1957:214).

figure with an *ukhamba* vessel on her head<sup>198</sup>. Implicit in the interpretation by his white audience would have been the 'wholesomeness' of rural life led by 'happy natives'

From the 1960s, Zondi's art reached a wider public through group exhibitions, where he met many other artists. Over the years, the shows included those held under the auspices of the SAIRR, within the ambit of the Catholic Church at Mariannhill, under corporate sponsorship, and under municipal and state sponsorship. From that decade, a number of artists began exhibiting in the large urban centres like Durban, Johannesburg, and Cape Town. This was an important shift in the art scene, as a number of gallery owners, buyers and art critics were realising the potential of black artists (Rankin, 1996:74).

Economic conditions at the time were thought to be suitable for breaking caste and ghetto barriers. Integrative social structures included the labour union movement (Florin, 1967:18,19). Economic integration had brought about an effective inter-dependency of the main population groups to create and perpetuate a booming economy. Hope for inter-group cohesion was therefore placed in economic interests to promote greater cultural and emotional contact between population groups, rather than a reliance on political, social and religious, spheres (Florin, 1967:16,19,20).

Extending his sights beyond the realm of private patronage of the late 1950s, Zondi became confident enough about his skills to proffer his work for public viewing in 1960. By reading an advertisement in the *Zonk!* magazine, he was prompted to enter the 'Art Competition' of the South African Festival held in Bloemfontein in 1960, (Zondi, 1960a:1,2, letter). He had been familiar with this publication since his student days in Dundee in the mid-1940s<sup>199</sup>. It is probable that the Bodenstein's piece, *Realisation* (1960) Fig.288 after p246) was entered, together with 'my little boy', the *Dreamer*, as Zondi referred to the *Fluitspeler* (Flute Player) (1960)(Figs.374;375 opp.p256) (Zondi,1960a:1, letter). For Zondi it promised to be a first opportunity for gauging the standard of his work before a national, as well as an international, audience. In a letter dated 15 February 1960, he wrote to Wolfgang Bodenstein: 'I think this will be my chance of testing my standard in sculpture and a way of finding

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<sup>198</sup> *Woman with Vessel* (1957)(Figs.346;347 opp.p253).

<sup>199</sup> Zondi conveyed this in personal communication in Edendale. Confirming the fact that it was read by students at Dundee is a photograph of 1954, taken by Jenny Eriksson. A student, fashionably dressed, is reading the 72-page November 1954 edition of *Zonk! African People's Pictorial* - which was sold for 6 pence. The photograph was taken by Jenny Eriksson. The image was reproduced from the family album of the early 1950s during personal communication with Jenny. Taken on 35mm film on 20/21 June 2004, Uppsala, Sweden and subsequently digitalized.

out what South Africans as well as outside visitors to the Union think of my workö (Zondi, 1960a:1,2, letter). With this first entry into public viewership, *Zondi's Dreamer* was awarded a bronze medal<sup>200</sup>.

From Zondi's initial surprising success in 1960, in winning a bronze medal for the first piece he proffered for public exhibition, the artist became active in seeking and seizing opportunities for showing and selling his work. Private initiatives were the predominant thrust in providing outlets for the work of black artists (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:27).

The Durban Art Gallery (DAG) served as a venue for group exhibitions held under the auspices of B.I.C.A., and the SAIRR. Into the 1990s, Zondi sold work through *African Art Centre*, which was an outlet of the SAIRR in Durban (Meijer, 1990). In 1960, Zondi combined delivering a sculpture to patrons in Johannesburg with a meeting with Lawrence Adler, to discuss possibilities for exhibiting. He took the opportunity of visiting the *Jubilee Art Centre*, meeting Khabi Mngoma and other musicians, as well as Cecil Skotnes. In Durban Zondi participated in two of the controversial *Art: South Africa Today* exhibitions, held in 1963 and 1965, receiving awards for his work and selling pieces to public collections. Having returned into the ambit of the Lutheran Church, Zondi built churches in various parts of Natal, including the hospital Chapel at Appelsbosch. This drew the attention of the director of the South African National Gallery (SANG), Dr. Matthys Bokhorst.

As the second black artist in the DAG's history, Zondi had his first of two solo exhibitions in Durban in 1965. Under the curatorship of Madame Z. Wisznicka-Kleczynska from Poland, the exhibition consisted of forty-one pieces, of which thirteen were new works. At the end of 1965, he participated in the important *Interfaith Bantu Art Exhibition*. A year later, in 1966 Zondi's *Calabash* (1963) (Figs.348-350 opp.p253) was shown in Italy at the prestigious *Venice Biennale*, under the auspices of the Department of Information (Berman, 1983:474; Deane,1978: 200).

By the late 1960s, Zondi's works were so popular that it was only with a concerted effort and the support and encouragement of his patrons in Pretoria that he was able to accumulate a sufficient number of works for a second solo exhibition, this time under the auspices of the University of South Africa (UNISA). In 1974, he showed thirty-five works to his new

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<sup>200</sup> Rankin notes his participation in the 1961 'Republic Festival Art Exhibition in Bloemfontein' (1989:180). He may have exhibited at this event, but given that she indicates his 'bronze medal' award, it is likely that this refers to his participation the *South African* or the *Union Festival* in Bloemfontein in 1960.

audiences on the Witwatersrand. Significantly, the exhibition was opened by Punt Janson, the deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Development. In his address, Janson used the divisive rhetoric of the state, in which South Africa was perceived as being not one cohesive populace but as being made up of many differing 'nations' (Staff Reporter, 1974). However, the public was admonished by the minister and told that those who did not familiarize themselves with the arts of the black 'nations' were missing a part of South Africa's culture. Alluding to Zondi, he implied that in each nation there are those that create (Staff Reporter, 1974). Zondi was thus not shown to be the modern artist but the black, Zulu artist. Very aptly though, the minister suggested that the works of Blacks should be bought not in order to do them a favour but rather to appreciate their content, which he understood to be as good as that of white artists. Media reports on Zondi's exhibition appeared in newspapers like the *Star* (1974), *Pretoria News* (1974), and *Beeld* (1974)<sup>201</sup>, as well as the Department of Information publication, *Suid-Afrikaanse Panorama* (1975:8-9).

The strongly propagandistic pro-state disposition of these publications is beyond contention. It is obvious that the state omitted to address its deeply dehumanizing control of the black population through *Panorama*. On the contrary, periodicals like these acknowledged the progress, development, and achievement of the modern African state under white rule. Government publications<sup>202</sup> included Zondi as the successful South African artist with overseas patrons. His achievements and his talent were thus being appropriated for state use. His accomplishments were testimony to his mission education, to private patronage, and to his determination for self-improvement and hard work, *despite* the state. Yet, implicit in the publicity afforded the artist in these publications was a celebration of his success, as 'other'

Probably on account of Zondi's liaison work in the community development programme of the state, the publishers of *development southern africa* profiled Zondi in the 'science-based, non-political' quarterly journal concerned with development. The independent publication featured him not only as an artist but also in his capacity to communicate skills for empowering people. As a man with a holistic vision of human life, Zondi understood the link between artistic creativity and all other facet of human advancement. It was, therefore, appropriate to link his art-making and the application of creativity with other fields of

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<sup>201</sup> *Beeld* was a daily newspaper which had only just been re-launched in 1974, for the Johannesburg market <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/intranet/sphider/search.php?query=beeld+newspaper&search=1>: (URL 24 March 2009).

<sup>202</sup> *Suid-Afrikaanse Panorama* (1975); Basson (1976); E.J. de Jager (1977).

endeavour, like his liaison work. At the time, the journal primarily focused on the development of environmental and human resources, providing a forum for analysis and discussion surrounding concerns related to economic, physical, and social progress in black communities (*development southern africa*, 1974:3). Zondi's emerging stature as an internationally recognized artist was mentioned, and that the artist's consciousness was founded on an intensely personal responsibility to his fellow man (L.M., 1974:10). Related to Zondi's holistic world view, he is identified as a husbandman, whose roots are deep in the African earth and who identifies the soil and its husbandry as being as much an integral part of human destiny as the art which it inspires. It was reported that Zondi described art as a powerful yet infinitely sensitive component in the total landscape of practical effort towards human development (L.M., 1974:10). This expresses the pragmatic link Zondi forged between overall human well-being and economic welfare and development. This world-view concurs with the dream the artist nurtured, of establishing a school for the arts. Here he thought the development of creative skills could be translated into every facet of life, be it in the scientific domain or that of the humanities. In the article, Zondi is idealistically cited as being a creator of art who is in love with humanity, embracing the idea and inevitability of reconciliation (L.M., 1974:10). This positive perspective, that reconciliation was inevitable, is undoubtedly reflected in Zondi's certainty and persistent attempts to find common ground with white South Africans, despite the state's increasing intransigence. In connection with his UNISA exhibition in Pretoria in November 1974, the journal featured -Michael Zondi, artist: Black Artist makes a Breakthrough (1974:9-10).

Around the mid-1970s, the cultural section of the Department of Information was organising or participating in about forty international exhibitions annually, showing artwork from all population groups in South Africa (Basson, 1976a:1). Government voices extolled the work of the Department in highlighting the work of black artists overseas (*baNtu*, 1976). While this may be true, ironically, the state had done little to facilitate art education in South Africa<sup>203</sup>. Its education policies denied the teaching of art at secondary school level, an exclusion that was exacerbated by a wide denial of public representation in the arts. As Rankin comments, with the advent of Bantu Education, independent efforts in black education were coming into disfavour (1996:69). Just as the authorities occasionally used the *Polly Street Art Centre* as something of a show-piece of successful inter-racial

<sup>203</sup> The University of South Africa (UNISA), the correspondence university, opened its art tuition to all races in 1973 (Rankin, 1989:30), while doors of the traditional universities, with few exceptions, remained barred for Blacks.



cooperation (Rankin, 1996:74), these overseas exhibitions were presented ostensibly in the light of a similar mood of benevolence and goodwill.

Zondi's position within the state's exhibition programme, as he was twice granted a platform for showing his work overseas, is an ambiguous one. Between May and July 1975 a single piece of Zondi's was included in an exhibition featuring the *amaZulu*, shown in Austria under the title *Kultur der Zulu*. This show, in which *Mother and Child* (1975)(Fig.18 opp.) was prominently displayed, also travelled to France and Belgium. In 1977, once again, the Department of Information and its publications were Zondi's most prominent public platform. This time, Zondi, as well as the prominent graphic artist, Raymond Andrews, represented South Africa at the largest single promotion the Republic had ever staged in France. Zondi's knowledge of indigenous hardwoods and his artistic skills were shown at *L'homme et le Bois* (Man and Wood) staged at the Orly airport in Paris.

In keeping with Janson's opening comments for Zondi's 1974 solo exhibition, the 1975 show which toured three European countries, presented the Zulu people as a distinct, black nation. It emphasized history and material culture. Jenny Basson commented that the purpose of the exhibition was to give the visitors a 'better insight' into both the culture and 'the earlier and current way of life of the Zulu' (1976b:4-9). The spear, shown with other objects of material culture, is described not only as 'the object of prestige for the Zulus', used for social distinctiveness but also as 'an extension of a Zulu's hand' (Basson, 1976:5). In effect, the exhibition was a projection of the state's policy of separate development, where difference and otherness was highlighted. Paradoxically, within its segregationist policies the state assumed an implicit identification with the cultural aesthetic of the *amaZulu*, yet presented them not as South Africans, but as a distinct people within the Bantustan states. Cultural difference was a normative factor in the attempt to legitimate the divisiveness of these politics.

Zondi's *Mother and Child* (1975)(Fig.18 opp.) piece was given a place of prominence in a cabinet of its own in a large exhibition space taken up by the second section of the exhibition that was devoted to Zulu artists (Fig.17 opp.). Since carving his *Woman with Vessel* (1957), almost two decades earlier, Zondi's art had progressed beyond Zulu cultural parochialism and overt reference to ethnic distinctions. The state department could have chosen to portray Zondi as a modern artist who understood his art as a bridge between all people. Yet a piece was chosen which reflected a 'tribal' image of the rural *Bantu*. He was staged not as a South

African artist, but a Zulu artist, with a piece that anchored the black woman in her domestic role. The traditional manner of tying a child to its mother's back is depicted, the woman being portrayed as the nurturer, homemaker, and worker in the field, implicitly with a husband who is a migrant worker<sup>204</sup>. This ethnic focus in an overseas exhibition had a far less progressive message than the one implicit in the photograph of a year earlier, depicting Zondi and Punt Janson with *Orpheus* (1974)(Figs.356-360 opp. p254). Zondi fully understood how to embody in his art, those aspects of being human which are shared globally. His own understanding of culture and of artistic expression of fundamental humanity had converged in a figure like *Orpheus*, being symbolic of the arts that know no barriers between people. Yet in the *amaZulu* exhibition custom as an institutional 'native' order, was being preserved, cementing what Mbembe terms the 'thesis of non-similarity'(2002:247). The canonization of difference was effectively anchored in specific forms of knowledge like racial and tribal studies. Shown in the hallowed halls of ethnography in Vienna and Tervuren's Museum for Central Africa, 'Zuluness' was rightfully portrayed as something specific. Yet, by correlating tribal culture with the current mode of life, custom was serving to reveal the lack of correspondence with the western 'civilized' world. In this way, the South African policy of separate development was given legitimacy before an international audience.

With his knowledge of indigenous hardwoods, and in keeping with the theme of the exhibition in Paris 1977, Zondi was an artist who could convey a deep love for the preferred medium of his sculptural oeuvre. The show revealed a disproportionate representation of the work and skills of white South Africans. Individual black crafters and artists were neglected in favour of the display of material culture emerging from distinct Bantustans. As a sculptor and an expert in wood, Zondi represented his country. In contrast to his participation in the *amaZulu* show, ostensibly he was here given a common identity with Whites as South Africans. The exploration of his letters home, accounts of Zondi's friends, and the report by the Department of Information enable some reflection on the tenor of the staging of his work overseas, where South Africans faced a critical European and international public.

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<sup>204</sup> Among the twenty-five other mother-child pieces in Zondi's oeuvre found thus far, there is only one other piece, *Lullaby* (1980s)(Figs. 319-321 three after p250), which reveals this customary Zulu way of carrying a baby. All the other double portraits reveal an immediate face to face intimacy between the mother figure and her child.

Theoretical aspects of cultural identity may provide a perspective on the apparent contradiction in Zondi's acceptance of this propagandistic public platform. Kwame Gyekye claims that there is no such thing as a purely or absolutely unified cultural life (Gyekye, 1997: 112,113). His theoretical concept embraces culture as a communal structure, which is divided into private and public aspects (Gyekye, 1997:112,113). This distinction is helpful in positioning Zondi in the ambit of the state and supposedly representing it, while in fact he appropriated the platform it provided for his own ends. As a South African, he was representing a state whose political, social, economic, and legal values and institutions were ideologically determined by white intransigence. These aspects of statehood fall under the category of the public sphere of culture. To ensure and create the basis of 'national unity and integration' this sphere is dependent on minimal diversity (Gyekye, 1997:112,113). Yet under conditions whereby the human dignity of the black population in South Africa was abused in every facet of public life, the dis-integration could not have been more pronounced. On the other side of the cultural communal structure are the private aspects, embracing aesthetic perceptions (Gyekye, 1997:112). These include specific forms of dress, culinary habits, and artistic modes like music and dance. By portraying ethnic groups as being integral 'nations' with their own cultural tenets linked to such aspects of culture, the South African state, with its exhibition programme overseas, was enacting a myth of unity in diversity. It was obscuring the divisiveness of its Bantustan policy. By the time Zondi came to Paris, he had understood how such specific aesthetics could translate into something that could be communicated through art, in a mode of cross-pollination and enrichment across the colour-bar. This stood in stark contrast to the state's efforts to define otherness and legitimate segregation by the same criteria.

With regard to political innuendos, Angelis reported that: 'No-one was interested in politics or they were there for a purpose and got on with the job' (Angelis, 1977:2). Emerentia Hutten (1977b) attributed the success of the expo to 'the constant support the artists received from the SA Embassy in Paris' but also, cryptically, to 'Michael Zondi's talent for answering tricky questions'. In a letter to Bodenstein, Zondi recalled an incident which addressed the South African political situation (1977a:6 letter). He reported that there were not many queries from 'white people' but that there were some discussions with 'a number of black people' who were surprised that he was in Paris under 'sponsorship by the S.A. Government' (Zondi, 1977a:6, letter). While reporting that 'members of the public' did not seem interested in political matters, Angelis nevertheless recounted this incident in more

detail in her report. In her statement to the Department of Information, she reported rather smugly:

one French-speaking West African gentleman who asked Mr. Zondi how he came to be there. He couldn't believe his ears when he heard that Mr. Zondi had been sent by the Government and was even more amazed to hear that, having managed to 'escape', he actually intended returning to South Africa! (Angelis, 1977:2 report).

For his part, Zondi felt that he had answered the numerous questions to people's satisfaction (1977-20 Feb.:6). With regard to the political landscape in South Africa, less than a year after the Soweto killings, it seems reasonable to assume that many outsiders had a biased view of South Africa under white rule. Yet in keeping with Zondi's essentially positive outlook anchored in hope and perhaps his failure to recognize the full implications of discriminatory government policies, it appears that he was keen to convince 'a few twisted minded fanatics from Africa' about changes in S.A. (Zondi, 1977b:6, letter).

Given the discussions which this public platform prompted, the question arises, where Zondi may have felt that his loyalty lay or where he positioned his 'national' affiliation in this environment of nations. National identity generally refers 'to principles of collective belonging to a single political community' implying a 'national character' and cultural elements (Gyekye, 1997:113). Beyond his differentiation between a private and a public sphere of cultural life, and refuting that cultural life may be absolutely unified, Gyekye distinguishes between 'a strong and a weak sense of the idea of unified cultural life' (1997:112,113). He defends the 'weak sense' of that notion, both conceptually and empirically, holding that cultural life serves to promote the idea of a national culture. It thus becomes an ingredient of national identity without making it coterminous.

The above private cultural aspects could well be embraced by the racial fetish of the apartheid ideology. Yet the state's fragmentation of groups into distinct nations under discrete forms of government ensured that the public aspects of culture stood in the way of South Africans feeling that they belonged 'to a single political community'. Inherent in a national character, which holds citizens together, are shared common characteristics. These include emotional sentiments of loyalty and attachment. They are sentiments that derive from a common sense of history and from sharing common territory, creating a feeling of

belonging together, also in terms of future and goals ó a common destiny (Gyekye, 1997: 113). Under the given circumstances of clinically executed segregation as the order of everyday life in South Africa, this may have seemed like utopia. Yet Zondi had found enough proof by then, that there were many white South Africans with whom he shared fundamental values. These values were the common foundation for individualistic pursuits and differences, which inherently constitute cultural life (Gyekye, 1997:113). Within this heterogenous cultural life the artist's endeavours of reconciliation were based on this belief in shared values. He was both a pragmatist and a fervent patriot. Therefore, while Zondi was allowing himself to be wooed by the apartheid state, he presented himself in Paris as a modernist sculptor, not the Zulu craftsman. From 1994, once South Africa was ruled under the new dispensation, while art education has remained dismally sparse, the emphasis on various component aspects of culture has been used in the propagation of unity within the diversity in one 'rainbow nation'.

### 3.2 RE-PRESENTING SELF

Zondi's work may be located between his own productive, self-expressive creativity and the capacity of his sensuous artwork to elicit a response from others. The aesthetic domain will here be explored in the way in which it is able to promote a consciousness of self, and to *facilitate* relationships of reciprocity. This concerns the human experience of 'being-in-the-world' with Others (Crowther, 1993:7). Crowther's theory of art (1993) is helpful in placing Zondi's work in this context. The notion of the artist as mediator of human experience will be used to show the capacity of Zondi's art, through such relationships, to transcend the paradigm of race which the 'cult of victimhood' has re-inscribed. Achille Mbembe's 'historicist' framing of *African modes of Self-Writing* (2002) reveals how cultural identities in the present rely on a rhetoric of loss which effects a reinscription of autochthony. It will be argued that Zondi's reconciliatory endeavour was founded on a positive view of the past, a discerning scrutiny of its values, and an imaginative and empathetic manner of mediation between himself and his art, and his audience.

Zondi's motivation for art-making was 'a restless urge for self-expression' that simultaneously reflected an identification with his fellow man (Bodenstein, J.W., c.1968: 1,2). Being closely related to immediate experiences, art is able to transcend language (Crowther, 1993:140). It thus becomes an alternative means of communicating and sharing

with others, which is beyond personal confrontation while also being independent of time. Yet Zondi's mode of self-representation and his mediatory role through his art-making were importantly linked to the personal contacts he forged with patrons. Zondi's clear voice of dissent against state control was matched by the artist's capacity to engage imagination and empathy, as he sought to foster harmony between South Africans living on either side of the racial divide. His creativity and his persona thus became a constructive force in the struggle, which he understood to be a project of reconciliation. His overall stance is reflected in his frequently reiterated quote, "Blessed are the peacemakers, because they shall be called the children of God" (Zondi, 2006d:6 pers.com.).

The artist was an exceedingly private person who chose very discerningly the people with whom he engaged. Although he was not timid in confrontation with people he trusted, in the case of strangers his manner remained reserved. He tended to shy away from direct confrontation with people he did not know well (Veldsman, 2008a pers.com.). Apart from noting how Zondi embraced his Zulu identity "with quiet and unobtrusive conviction and self-assurance", Bodenstein described Zondi's personality as "exceptionally strong and forceful" (c.1968:1-2). He juxtaposed this with a characterisation of the artist as being "humble, modest and considerate" (Bodenstein, J.W., c. 1968:1,2). Zondi was described by Bodenstein as a man deeply respected and loved "by his own people in all walks of life and at all levels of development", and who was "a deeply convinced Christian". Equally, Deane associated Zondi's avoidance of passing judgement on people in public with a "gentle quality", a "reticence", and "softspokenness", which she thought contradicted his "almost grim" outward manner, devoid of "any glimmer of a social smile" (1978:201). On the broader public platform of exhibiting, Zondi understood his creative function in letting his works speak for themselves. The humility, of which a number of his patrons speak, was understood in the sense of both an unassuming manner and a reserve, it was never modesty akin to meekness or diffidence. Zondi always responded to a personal affront with polite but clear retaliation. Among family and friends he could relax. Then he revealed a well developed sense of humour and a deep need to grapple philosophically with ideas and ideologies concerning the South African socio-political realities.

Given South Africa's racial divide and the enforcement of the Group Areas Act, people had very limited opportunities for developing a sense of self in relation to the racial other. Rarely did situations of normal social contact arise, by which a sense of affirmation could be

gained outside the secure confines of family and friends of the same racial group. During Zondi's career, then, personal relationships across the colour-bar were rare. When they did occur, they were invariably cloaked by notions of white paternalism or at worst, European superiority. As Zondi noted about Whites, "sometimes we called them animals" (Zondi, 2006d:6 pers.com.). Although he saw himself as an African and a Zulu, most significantly, Zondi recognized the inter-relatedness and inter-dependence of all of humanity, especially in the context of divisive politics. Implicit in his notion of specific regional belonging was the notion of "being human" per se, augmented by *ubuntu*, of being a person *because* of other people, with whom the human experience is shared. Being conscious of the self and personhood are regarded as being contingent upon these experiences (Crowther, 1993:150)<sup>205</sup>.

Mutual affirmation and love and respect within his own received communal and cultural framework among family and friends was Zondi's foundation and catalyst for engaging in socio-political and cultural discourses elsewhere. From the circle of the black intelligentsia, whose western education and ideology of non-violent conflict resolution he shared, he came to realize, in late 1940s, that art was meant for him (Zondi in Deane, 1978:201). He nurtured his talent progressively over the decade of the 1950s, until he felt sufficiently self-assured to proffer his work for public viewing. As the ideology which he opposed became the wellspring of his creative energy, he was able, in 1959, to develop his first narratives of liberation<sup>206</sup>. These represented a means to counter oppression and be pro-active in helping to shape a future in which Blacks might be free, at least from *white* oppression. This was his struggle.

Sovereignty and personal freedom were Zondi's goals. He once divulged something about his aims when he referred to a needy friend in Johannesburg, whom he was unable to help (Zondi, 1961b, letter). He spoke evocatively of deep affiliation, of "ties that bind". At the same time, he expressed his distress at his own sense of failure. He could only remind his friend,

of praying to the Almighty to help us reach our intended goals. We are like leaves in the storm of life; yet we go our way with a common destination; some luckier than others to reach their

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<sup>205</sup> In the context of Crowther's exploration of art-making, this "other" is given no racial connotations. But for the purpose of the theory's application to this analysis, besides "other" as a physical *object* of interaction for the artist, it refers to people, which, in the context of this work is used frequently as *racial* other.

<sup>206</sup> An example is *Moses* (1959)(Figs.204-206 opp.p229). See 5.3 LIBERATION AND LEADERSHIP p225.

destination without much trouble. Some falling off to be crushed under the wayfarer's feet before their dreams are realised; and some, some struggling along to reach their goal or to collapse at the gates of their destination (Zondi, 1961b:3).

An immediate association Zondi made with freedom, implicitly that from apartheid, was the autonomy to make choices in education, as his children would have the liberty to do for his grandchildren:

I say apartheid must have been a blessing in disguise for the underdog because that's where we learned to be challenged. I should tell you one thing, it helped me very much, once, the Apartheid world, because in my mind I thought that everybody on earth has a right to be free and should we have been free, we should have been a long way by this time! think of the education, when you couldn't go to certain schools. Should we have done that, gone to all those schools, perhaps I should have been a master surgeon instead of carving wood. (Zondi, 2002b pers.com.)

Looking back on his career, Zondi regarded his struggle as something worthwhile, implicitly because the efforts made had come to fruition. He was an old man when he commented, "I never knew that I would live like a king!" (Zondi, 2003d:2 pers. com.). Taking on apartheid as a challenge he regarded the ideology as the originator of the enormous energies which he marshalled and translated into creativity (Zondi 2002b pers. com.). These he used in the service of building bridges, as he called it, across the racial barrier (Zondi, 1974). Perhaps Cecil Skotnes had reminded him, during their meeting in 1960, that "art grows out of the mind of freedom and that it becomes an element of freedom" (Skotnes in Harmsen, 1996b: 61).

The literary works of the black intelligentsia had exemplified for Zondi the manner in which art could not only be made relevant to the context from which it drew its inspiration, but could also be used as a voice of dissent. Significantly, as an artist with similar capabilities, his own development towards a positive consciousness of self was nurtured in the utopian environment of white friends and patrons. As his practical art-making always went hand in hand with intellectual and moral pursuits, this environment of empowerment outside his own immediate cultural sphere inspired his art-making (Veldsman, 2008 pers.com.) With its mutual respect and acknowledgement, the friendship with Wolfgang Bodenstern, more than any other, led to a mentorship around which Zondi's further artistic career would revolve. In an environment in which humanitarian ideals were validated, he



found affirmation of his creativity. His art began to impart a newly found sense of individuality and autonomy. Despite the limitations imposed on his physical movement within the apartheid state, autonomy, as a fundamental feature of personhood is thought to enable the pursuit of personal goals (Gyekye, 1997:54,55). Personal freedom is confirmed as being one of the capacities which secure self-consciousness (Crowther 1993:151). In principle, all who are conscious of self have the capacity to inaugurate action on the basis of their own choices and decisions (Crowther, 1993:151). Within the constraints of socio-political marginalization that was decreed by law and bolstered by individual chauvinism, Zondi, as a black man, could realize a measure of freedom through his art-making. This afforded him self-assurance, which, in turn, encouraged him to embark on a very individualistic manner of seeking release from structural oppression. With visual art as his "voice" he gained visibility, standing out as a black intellectual from the largely "invisible" status of Blacks in white civil society, in a way that did not speak of servitude. Creative and autonomous creativity began to replace his dependency on the teaching profession under Bantu Education and this creativity tempered the inadequacy which troubled him (1961-29 August:1,2). As Wangari Maathai reminds us, the "culture of dependency leads to passivity, fatalism, and failure" (2009:5).

Zondi remained outside active politics, yet he fulfilled the kind of political responsibility that democratic structures should elicit from conscientious citizens. The role Zondi took on, in his personal struggle for justice, frequently was used to explore and convey the kind of cross-cultural mutuality which the national political climate denied by decree. Remaining a man of "his people" in rural Natal gave Zondi the kind of authenticity and credibility which an attachment to political agendas or economic interests might have diluted. He was thus able, more effectively, to mediate between black and white South Africans, while the moral and ethical edicts he followed were dictated by his personal convictions.

Zondi's rejection of involvement in politics is, in itself, a statement of defiance. But more than that, it reveals the autonomous nature of the artist seeking a measure of self-determination, both within the confines of restrictive state legislation and also in his art. In Zondi's own familial past, characteristics such as prominent leadership were known and revered, as in the case of Bambatha. In 1977, it was reported that Zondi's father had enlisted

n the South African war effort (Rousseau, 1977)<sup>207</sup>. This was used to exemplify another precedent in Zondi's family, of the pro-active defence of one's beliefs in the face of adversity. Features of innovative activity or leadership like this are thought to extend and enrich the present community. As in some respects they arise the community's past, this activity is able to sustain the integrity of a system or tradition (Gyekye, 1997:58). With a destiny 'among nations' (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com), Zondi's art-making became a part of his own integrity, and therefore that of the wider community in which he moved.

Zondi's non-political nature dictated that ethical concerns and mutual compassion in the social relationships of civil life generally were of more immediate concern than merely the possession of rights. It can be argued that rights as well as a large measure of autonomy were granted within the confines of the homeland policies. These became nearly inconsequential because a viable framework did not exist for a truly integrative South African polity. Zondi's discussions with black and white patrons, regarding the future integrative course imagined for South Africans, revolved around ethics and morality and were centred in guidelines for ensuring dignity and open-mindedness. When the artist and patrons like the Bodensteins, Berglund, and others debated the wider South African civic community, they found few expressions of respect between people across the racial divide. Individual and community rights of one sector of the population did not show sensitivity to, or match social responsibility towards, the black majority of the population. Zondi's urge to establish a sense of harmony was confirmed, when, among these white friends and their families, the existence of ethical testaments of concern and compassion for the predicament of Blacks was expressed. Here, reciprocal esteem and understanding could be, and was, nurtured through dialogue. But Zondi's utopian circle was small. He was speaking on behalf of family, friends, and neighbours who were far more disadvantaged than he. Therefore, he felt obliged to employ his art as a means of conveying to a wider audience the message of respect.

The way in which people saw each other in the segregationist context in South Africa was inevitably defined according to racial classifications, at least until 1994. Subjugation, prejudice and ignorance shaped pictures of the others from both sides of the artificial divide. The domain of aesthetics and that of consciousness of self has been located in human

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<sup>207</sup> Born in 1901, it is not likely that David Zondi would have enlisted into the South African army to fight in the First World War. His grandfather, Maneta could have been meant as having enlisted, or David Zondi, in the Second World War.

experience and relationships between people<sup>208</sup>. Art is thought to conserve human experience, both sensual and conceptual, and thereby play a seminal role in facilitating relationships (Crowther, 1993:7). Crowther's ecological theory of art and embodiment (1993) is able to provide an essential foundation for two aspects of Zondi's art-making, namely the capacity to *facilitate* relationships of reciprocity. An initial aspect of this exchange is described to exist as an internal relationship between the artist and his work, as well as that of others to his work. A particular integrity is attributed to the subtractive technique employed by Zondi, as a method of direct confrontation between the artist and his material (Rankin, 1989:13). Secondly, reciprocity may develop between a work of art and people. This is reciprocity understood in the social context of Otherness, of being-in-the-world with others (Crowther, 1993:7). With his art-making, therefore, Zondi embarked on exploring and exploiting the relationship between himself as creator and his art, and between himself and his audience. Beyond practical functions, the aesthetic domain is thought to engage a psychological dimension that is expressed by means of cultural activity in ritual, discussion, and artefact-making which deepen this consciousness (Crowther, 1993:153,154). It is by means of such cultural engagement that Zondi consciously employed his creativity. His vision, manifest in sculpture, evokes a response and thus became a catalyst for initiating understanding with an audience, of the shared world he portrayed. The work of art as 'sensuous configuration' reveals a form of truth, echoing, as Crowther proposes, 'embodied spirit' (Crowther, 1993:140). The work may be viewed for purely aesthetic enjoyment, based on the viewer's visual experience. Another possible view is cognitive, which considers contextuality. Art is able to reflect personal experience or embody visualisations of new experiences, which are proffered to an audience. Confrontation and alienation which may be experienced through direct engagement between people is foregone through the mediatory nature of art (Crowther, 1993:141). This is the significant role of art in a 'midway position between pure thought and sensuous material things' (Crowther, 1993: 141)<sup>209</sup>. The fact that an artwork becomes physically discontinuous from the artist after its completion creates the opportunity for the viewer to share the artist's vision. Yet at the same time, he or she is freed from the constraints arising out of any other modes of communication or discourse, without forfeiting the immediacy of direct experience that is inherent in the work of art (Crowther, 1993:141). When Zondi freed his work for appreciation by his audience, therefore, the notion of 'sharing' is implicit in his idea that his work then spoke as a gospel to a receptive,

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<sup>208</sup> See Chapter I, 'The Aesthetic Domain: A Logical Geography' in Crowther (1993: 17-30).

<sup>209</sup> Hegel in Crowther (1993:141).

explicitly white, audience (Deane, 1978:201). By means of his intentional artistic embodiment of ideas, beyond the aesthetic appeal of his art, Zondi sought to elicit an audience response. He preferred to let it speak for him, also beyond his death (Zondi, 1960g:2, letter). In this way, as an artist, he became a mediator. By portraying human emotions in his works, his audience was confronted with sculptures in which their own humanity inhered. His work was therefore able to serve as a catalyst for reconciling ostensibly opposing viewpoints in the wider business of living together in South Africa, without the colour-bar. Consensus, in being a vital aspect of the practice of democracy in most traditional African political systems (Gyekye, 1997:130), compels solidarity. Equally, it reveals respect for the opinion of others. Through the pursuit of consensus, then, the will of every individual is effective to a degree, and is not cavalierly set aside, which deprives the minority of the right to have their opinion reflected as a decision (Gyekye, 1997:130,131).

Some sculptures were of special significance for the artist. When he knew that he, as their creator, had realized particular emotive capacities or forms of expression, he left them in the family, thus ensuring his own accessibility. An example is his *Reunion* (1964)(Figs.256;257;259 opp.p241), presented to Bodenstein in 1964 after a traditionalist blessing. It was by proffering his art, therefore, that Zondi was able to augment and complement the socio-political and humanitarian concerns which he shared verbally, in direct confrontation with his trusted friends. At the same time, by having projected passion and feeling into three-dimensional sculpture, he was implicitly throwing the emotions which energized such discussions, to a wider audience. As Crowther accurately observes, the artwork, severed from the artist after completion, is able to be contemplated on the viewer's own terms, without direct confrontation (1993:141).

Zondi desisted from seeking to define himself as an African by means of an understanding of history from the perspectives of foreign subjugation. The historicist theory proposed by Achille Mbembe (2002) points to the paradox inherent in the rhetoric of formerly colonized Africans. Their modes of self-representation, in his view, reveal a nativist understanding of history which gave reinforcement to victimhood, resulting in re-inscriptions of alterity and racism (Mbembe, 2002:245). Exploring modes of self-writing in the present, Mbembe asserts that nativist thought and rhetoric, speaking on behalf of Africa as a whole, has impeded the experience of self and self-representation on the continent. He describes rhetorical historicist modes as mired in a re-inscription of race, trapped within a conception

of identity as geography (Mbembe, 2002:272). As slavery, colonisation, and apartheid have become a unifying center of Africans' desire to know themselves, this triad of historical events has been firmly entwined with the Africans' urge to wrest sovereignty from the institutions of foreign rule (Mbembe, 2002: 241,242). The events are described as the source for the post-colonial narratives of loss that are essential for nurturing a 'cult of victimisation'<sup>210</sup>. Within Mbembe's project of creatively seeking 'new and shared spaces' in the world in the present, he holds the prose of autochthony accountable for the failure to end the servile condition (2002:263). The result is a construction of the African self, still in terms of victimhood and mutilation (Mbembe, 2002:272). Mbembe's observations concerning African self-writing are dominated by his indictment of the resultant autochthony, which construction of the self the African scholar understands in terms of both 'victimhood and mutilation'. He claims that the fetish of race has been re-inscribed by nativist thought and is being maintained by it (Mbembe,2002:252,253,272). When situated within the rhetoric of African cultural identity, this current of thought is said by him to be *characterized* by an oppositional tension between a 'universalizing' and a 'particularistic' move. Implicit in the former is a 'sameness', the claim of a shared human condition. The latter accentuates difference and specificity, namely 'the principle of repetition' or 'tradition' and the values of autochthony. A concept of custom is thus understood as being a 'thesis of non-similarity' (Mbembe, 2002:247). Mbembe claims that both modes are associated with the denial of humanity and are responses to it. The universalistic response attaches African identity to a generic human one. It insists on 'sameness' inscribed in the incantation 'we are human beings like any others' (Mbembe, 2002:252,253). The other mode, which Mbembe declares to be oppositional to the first, is a 'particularistic' one. This makes reference to a 'glorious past' as testimony to 'being human'. It insists on uniqueness within a diversity of cultural forms expressive of a single humanity, as proposed in Léopold Sédar Senghor's *Négritude* philosophy. The purpose of this latter form, rather than being self-sufficient, is to signify the universal. Both positions, in Mbembe's view, frequently emerge simultaneously (2002: 253).

Mbembe claims that by means of a re-inscription of alterity, the pathos of the post-colonial paradigm of victimhood continues to permeate imaginaries of the African self into the

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<sup>210</sup> Dwight N. Hopkins' interpretation of cross-cultural contact through colonisation by Europeans is wholly subject to a rhetoric embracing conceptions of dispossession, enslavement and loss inflicted on receiving cultures (2005:153,154). His vitriolic indictment of Evangelisation, as complicit in the slave trade and commercial enterprises makes a smooth condemnatory transition to white supremacist theological anthropology centring on white masculinity. For a wider view of missiology, see Hopkins (2005:148-159).

present (Mbembe,2002:263). Victimhood implies a sense of disempowerment and helplessness vis-à-vis circumstances that are perceived to be inexorable. An implicitly defenceless self is overwhelmed by aggressive others. By rejecting the violence of historical events as his main point of reference for self-definition, Zondi was taking on the responsibility of critically viewing historical events and contemplating political accountability, both for the past and the present. In his reflections on relationships of power, for example, manifested in portraits of Zulu royalty<sup>211</sup>, Zondi was pondering the nature of power, traditionalist authority, and supremacy in the kingdom. What interested him was to extrapolate from past events in such a way that certain aspects could be of value for the present, as the literary elite had exemplified in their work. In so doing, Zondi was opening up an avenue for his own life and future, in which, through his art-making, he could become a constructive force.

Zondi's avoidance of exploiting events of violation and loss from past histories in Africa, as a tool for self-definition in the present, does not imply his ignorance of realities in his own time. On the contrary, in his own times Zondi was subject to the ignominy of being denied humanity in civilian spaces. The degree of injury to the artist's personal sense of self, which the ubiquitous segregationist regimentation inflicted, should not be underestimated. On one occasion Zondi purposefully declined to pay his fine for not having his *dompas*, taking the option of prison overnight to see the conditions to which so many of his compatriots were subjected. He described these as dismal<sup>212</sup>. Yet his rejection of victimhood concurs with the artist's strong sense of personal accountability and responsibility, both to himself and others.

Aspiring to foster understanding among South Africans across the racial divide, Zondi used his affirmative consciousness of self to actively promote reconciliation. As he was intellectually and imaginatively able to transcend stereotypes, his 'voice' in art-making became empathetic testimony to human experience translated into affirmative messages (Deane,1978:201). Yet there was nothing submissive or reticent in Zondi's conciliatory spirit. Various patrons testify that, apart from his message through art, he very ably and vociferously conveyed his indictment of dehumanizing circumstances that motivated his dissent. Zondi took his first overtly political work *Invisible Bonds* (1960)( Fig.198 opp.p237) to a white municipal manager, who had become his friend. Given the artist's insistence to remain on the periphery of vociferous oppositional politics, this clearly shows the alternative

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<sup>211</sup> 5.2 NARRATIVES OF POWER 6 ZULU ROYALTY p214.

<sup>212</sup> Personal communication, Michael Zondi, Edendale, Pietermaritzburg, KZN.

he chose, boldly using his art as an instrument to comment on oppression. On the other hand, the firm statement, made through art, becomes testimony to the artist's unwavering commitment to a non-violent, diplomatic expression of reconciliation. More than this, by proffering his figurative sculptures that spoke of humanity, it could be said that Zondi was inverting the requirements for acceptance into a civil community, as had been demanded of Blacks seeking assimilation into white society. His intention could have been a covert demand of Europeans to adopt more of Africa, in order for them to be eligible, respectably, to call themselves African. On an individual level, Zondi actually made this demand of Bodenstein, who claimed his Africanness (Bodenstein, 1977:5). The artist required his "white friend" to become a part of an age-old ritual in the traditional manner, related to "the African way" of invoking the metaphysical (Rousseau, 1977)<sup>213</sup>. This shows that he expected reciprocity in the great project of finding commonality. Zondi's was thus never a deferential plea for acceptance. It was the summons for people, under the given circumstances of being co-inhabitants of one country, to bestow dignity upon each other and treat others with respect. From the confines of utopia, which Zondi created with specific patrons and friends, his art-making thus began to enable a certain destiny which it may well have been Zondi's urge to fulfil. This had been invoked by his grandmother, Noziwawa, that he should be "welcomed by all nations" (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a:3 pers.com.). Being responsible for one's own destiny was a notion which the artist conveyed very firmly to his children (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a:3 pers.com.). It is likely that, when Zondi presented himself and his art to his national and international audiences, there was an aspect in the staging of his person and his creativity that will have invoked for him a recall of the injunction made by his grandmother. In old age Zondi frequently reiterated the fact of having had so many "white friends". Seen in the context of apartheid, this certainly was remarkable. But perhaps his obvious sense of pride was also an expression of gratitude for having fulfilled the destiny which his ancestor had envisioned for him.

The foundation of Zondi's reconciliatory spirit may be sought in his spiritual development, which the artist linked with the ability to empathize. Zondi claimed that one had to be strong in order to be able to work but that *spiritual* development was necessary in order to care about, and for, others (Rousseau, 1977). Having gone without food so that his younger siblings could eat, he associated the hunger he suffered as a child with his appreciation that

<sup>213</sup> This was Wolfgang Bodenstein. See Fig. 22 opp.p157. The ritual blessing will be considered below, also in relation to Zondi's most evocative reflection in *Reunion* (1964)( Figs.256;257;259 opp.p252), which marked Bodenstein's initiation into Zulu cosmogony.

spiritual strength is able to nurture the body. This taught him to be conciliatory<sup>214</sup>, accommodating and understanding of the weaknesses and needs of others (Rousseau, 1977). He believed that making sacrifices did not mean that one would be regarded as weak but that this would rather elicit respect. This was the foundation of his endeavour to reconcile. It was also the reason for his deep understanding of, and respect for, Wolfgang Bodensteyn's ethos of 'human care' which will be considered below. In the face of violation of human dignity, Zondi's reference to apartheid as 'a blessing in disguise for the underdog' (Zondi, 2002b:6 pers. com.) further reveals his conciliatory nature. Knowing when wrong was being inflicted, he developed empathy for the aggressor, as Luthuli had done<sup>215</sup>. Given this attitude, Zondi's oeuvre cannot be positioned in terms of his trying to 'prove his worth' to his white audience, as his literary friends had done. Rather than being a tool to garner acceptance, his figures provided a self-confident testimony to his own humanity. Implicitly, with each piece, the artist was extending an invitation to his audience to contemplate a human portrait, and by engaging in *Einfühlung* (empathy), hopefully to recognize not an other, but another self, an *alter ego*<sup>216</sup>. In this, his works never became a pitiful or sentimental testimony of suffering and subjugation. With some pieces, he was making subtle comments and expressing understated indictments. An early figure like *Lot's Wife* (1959) (Figs.248-251 before p240) may easily be interpreted as a lesson in morality, particularly obedience. Yet at the same time the artist was beginning, covertly, to address the intransigence of the state, even pointing to the implicitly dire consequences of rejecting advice<sup>217</sup>.

Empathy from two distinct perspectives best describes the emotive aspect of Zondi's expressive art. By means of empathy, he was able to acknowledge and translate human experience into art. During the process of art-making, a form of initial reciprocity needs to occur between the artist and his art-work. This is something which involves a conceptual empathy with the human experiences of others. In reflecting 'emotional moments' as Zondi is quoted as saying, (Deane, 1978:201), his sculptures were interpretations of the experience of living. Zondi's strong personal identification with particular life experiences and his

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<sup>214</sup> Rousseau uses the Afrikaans word *överdraagsaam* (1977).

<sup>215</sup> When an incident of Zondi's arrest could be avoided, as two policemen found him to be in contravention of the Group Areas Act, trespassing in a 'white-only' area, he received their apologies with the conciliatory comment that they were only doing their duty (Veldsman, 2008).

<sup>216</sup> This concept is borrowed from Achille Mbembe (2002: 246).

<sup>217</sup> See *Lot's Wife* (1959) (Fig.248-251 after p250) in 5.4 BIBLICAL INSPIRATION p236.



embodiment of these in such æmotional momentsø are testimony to his belief that all his works have life in them: ò í .When a figure weeps, I also weepö (Zondi in Deane, 1978:201). Zondi described the process of creating his *Christ on the Cross* at Appelsbosch (Figs.270-275 opp.p244). His empathy for the man suffering crucifixion let him become one with Christ, to the point of tears (Zondi, 2002 pers.com). Zondiø art-making was thus a profoundly personal experience as he imbued his work with emotions, which, during the carving process, became reciprocal. This is the kind of internal relationship between himself and his art that prompts the assertion that his works became self-representations. A -becoming oneø with his work echoes the internal relation between the artistø existence and the artwork he is creating, the òsymbolically significant sensuous manifoldö (Crowther,1993:4). By means of conceptualism in sculptural representation, Zondi was imbuing wood with symbolic significance and, in this way, referring to some aspect of the world other than to the object itself which he was creating. On another level of compassion, for him to respond to the folly of *Baasskap* with a resolute engagement in reconciliation represents a form of transcendence that is equally, if perversely, an act of empathy. Zondiø own somewhat idealistic view of artistic talent made him sure that this creative capacity of transcendence would always be revealed:

One who thinks little about himself and a lot about others has the quality of an artist. Artists love others more than themselves, and itø that love that expresses itself.

(Zondi in Deane, 1978:201)<sup>218</sup>.

The social process of Zondiø chosen engagement with white patrons and friends in an economic and socio-cultural world that was ostensibly very different from his own milieu, required of the artist to engage imaginatively in a form of -role-takingø He thus represented an òactive social selfö<sup>219</sup> in a process of transcendence which, in another context, is thought fundamental to proactivity (Hopkins,2005:108). Marginalised people are thought to remain receptive to received social forms, while the individual capacity for transcending awareness empowers them. In this way a passive incarceration within their own biography and history may be avoided (Hopkins, 2005:111,112).

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<sup>218</sup> This conviction might explain the artistø embarrassment when Wolfgang Bodenstien found and resurrected his *Self-portrait* (1961), amongst workshop debris (Bodenstien, 2004, pers.com).

<sup>219</sup> Hopkins (2005: 108) óciting Archie Smith Jr. (1982) *The Relational Self: Ethics and therapy from a Black Church Perspective*. Nashville, Abingdon.pp. 66-67.

Zondi's agency through visual art occurred as a result of his capacity to position himself and take on the role of an Other among white patrons. Reflexivity is the ability of a person to imagine himself as other (being the object). This involves self-critical reflection, which is regarded as being the foundation for conducting the struggle for freedom from structural oppression. As noted, Luthuli took the stance that *Baasskap* was a failure of the imagination which degraded Whites<sup>220</sup>. The manner in which Zondi represented himself in dialogue and art-making, then, indicated a profound sense of being able to employ imagination, as a corollary of empathy. Imagination, as a cognitive capacity, is able to nurture a vision of the future by means of picturing alternative possibilities of experience (Crowther, 1993:150). By moving into the realm of whiteness, Zondi was extending his basis of comparison and contrast. The new social interchange involved recognizing what others are and receiving recognition from them (Crowther, 1993:151). Zondi's ability to empathize, to imagine and to transform, is revealed by his answer to the question, how he felt about the colloquially known "Dingane's Day". As the highest annual festivity of white Afrikanerdom, the Day of the Vow celebrated victory over the Zulu king's army on 16 December 1838. Rather than seeing himself in the light of being the vanquished and thus perpetuating controversy, he was drawing strength, at the time, from receiving Afrikaner hospitality in the homes of people with whom he had developed a deep understanding<sup>221</sup>. In the 1970s, years before this day was marked as the *Day of Reconciliation* in the South African calendar under the new constitution, Zondi replied that he felt good, because, as he explained, he had worked out for himself that "this is a day of reconciliation and peace" (Zondi quoted by Veldsman, 2008a, pers.com.). This was a manner of self-representation, based on faith and trust, that allowed Zondi to believe that modernity could be shaped through at-one-ment and working for the common good.

### 3.3 BEYOND RACIAL IDENTITIES

Historically based racist inscriptions of alterity and tribalisation policies affected Zondi's whole career over four decades. In response to the resultant denial of human dignity, Zondi engaged in a positive discourse of rehabilitation, which he also negotiated on behalf of others. Zondi's expressiveness, manifest in the many pensive portraits of people which he

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<sup>220</sup> Kader Asmal (2006) p. xx using Studs Terkel (1977) *Talking to Myself: A Memoir of my Times*. London, Wildwood House. p135.

<sup>221</sup> Zondi referred to the unifying aspect of the arts (Zondi quoted by Piet Veldsman, 1 April 2008).

carved, conveys a poise associated with self-esteem, even solemnity. These figurative works were statements about being human. When he said that his works in the homes of his white audience should serve as ‘a gospel’ the message he sought to convey was that of inalienable inborn human dignity. Wolfgang Bodenstern (1965a, script) used this subsequently much quoted expression, to characterize what Zondi’s figurative works were expressing, i.e. human ‘worth’ –the state or quality of being worthy of honour or respect. Equally it denotes a ‘serious manner’ as well as ‘a sense of pride in oneself’ (SA COD,2002:325). These attributes characterize the artist and the manner in which he presented himself and his work. Zondi’s refusal to engage in the rhetoric of loss enabled him to overcome the language of race and equally to rise above servitude, both of which lay at the core of inscribed segregation. He thus became an active party in fostering positive change, thereby reclaiming his dignity. This is central to Zondi’s oeuvre and its interpretation.

Once Zondi moved from his overt reference to the regional past, he relied on positioning his individual figures in the present. He still incorporated subtle citations in acknowledgment of his Zuluness but these served as a cultural pointer, implicitly serving the objective of cross-cultural enrichment. His figures were of people in the present, and many of them were imbued with a deep spirituality. All of them remained unfettered by allusions to the kind of victimhood which is thought to have been privileged in African representations of the self, often resulting in sentimental art. Zondi was thus able to free the notion of difference from its association with nativist thinking. As a mediator of human experience through the aesthetic domain, Zondi was able to transcend and move beyond racism. The artist could not extricate himself from the realities of segregation. But in defining and redefining himself as an African, a Zulu and an artist, he could choose to disentangle himself from the burden of identity-formation that is tied to the polemics of Afro-radicalism and the nativist rhetoric of reinvented alterity.

The issue of race was the most pervasive and dominant aspect of the social and cultural politics of Zondi’s life and artistic practice, which spanned four decades. Connotations of the way in which the term ‘race’ was used changed over his lifetime. From being used in the 1920s to distinguish between white English-speaking South Africans and white Afrikaners (Dubow, 1989:15), among black intellectuals the term was used to imply unity<sup>222</sup>. Under

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<sup>222</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo ‘Reviving Tribalism’ *Ilanga Lase Natal*, March 4, 1950 and ‘Aspects of the Race Problem’, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, March 14, 1931 – cited in Masilela (2007: 84,186).

segregationist policies the term changed to denote the white-black (opposing) binary. *Racial* difference was vital for the policy of segregation. The notion of ontological difference served to permanently defer the aspirations of the black intelligentsia to be included in white civil society on the basis of their *class* definition. Informed by specific forms of knowledge like racial and tribal studies, a *ōthesis of non-similarityō* was devised that served to highlight the purported lack of correspondence with the western *‘civilized’* world (Mbembe, 2002:247,248). What appeared to be an overt approval by Whites of black otherness constituted the foundation for the Bantustan policy within in the institutional *‘native order’* and in Dhlomo’s view, the *‘entombment’* of Blacks within Bantu Education<sup>223</sup>. Citizenship was granted with rights, not for reasons of *‘being human’* but for particularistic factors, such as colour and autochthony (Mbembe, 2002:256). Radical, racial difference was etched into judicial edicts legitimating any number of exclusions from white civil society, thereby denying the majority of citizens the dignity of their humanity.

Wolfgang Bodenstern asserted that Zondi clung *ōto* his Zulu identity with quiet and unobtrusive conviction and self-assurance (c1968:2). Nevertheless, despite Zondi’s self-assurance and certainty regarding fundamental human dignity and rights, when the Swedish Lutheran theologian, Axel-Ivar Berglund (2003), provided the artist with confirmation of the full humanity of the *amaZulu*, also in their autochthonous state, this represented an important moment for Zondi. In the mid-1960s, Berglund, whom the artist greatly respected, gave a presentation entitled *‘The Zulus, Our Neighbours’*<sup>224</sup>. It outlined aspects of being fully human, independent of the European *‘civilizing’* mission. The talk was given to a mixed audience in Durban, when Berglund shared a stage with Alan Paton and the archbishop, Denis Hurley. Zondi later claimed that *‘it dawned’* on him that implicit in Berglund’s reference to black people, was that their humanity was immutable. Zondi was frequently described as being a man of strong character and great self-assurance. Yet the impact this acknowledgement from a respected white scholar had, verifies the efficacy of the conversion to inferiority under divisive white rule. For Zondi, Berglund’s talk was an affirming moment of the kind described by Mbembe, that belongs within the African *ōdiscourse of rehabilitation’* (2002:254). Etherington’s research into the 19<sup>th</sup> century mission enterprise had revealed that it was not the denial of human equality that created the dominant spark for

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<sup>223</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, *‘Busy Bee: Bantu Education, Controversy and Developments’*, in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 20 November 1954- in Couzens (1985: 315).

<sup>224</sup> This was a public address given in May 1965 under the auspices of the SAIRR. See annual report SAIRR (1965-1966). See Berglund (1976).

engagement in aspirational politics, but the added factor of conversion to a sense of inferiority (1971: 337). In affirmation of this, Mbembe also refers to the denial of humanity as an "attribution of inferiority" (2002:253). Acknowledgement of humanity, thus imparted a sense of sovereignty of the kind which had significance beyond legislated freedoms.

The potential for Zondi's early low-relief work to succumb to racist encodings of white audiences has been considered. Within historicist modes of nativist thinking, these Romantic utopias may equally be construed as inscriptions of a so-called particularist mode (Mbembe, 2002:272). As noted, Mbembe locates this mode, which is thought to accentuate difference, in opposition to the "universalizing" mode, which is premised on a shared human condition, or a "sameness" (2002: 252,253).

No doubt Zondi was alert to the phenomenon of looking at African cultural tenets through the eyes of others, as exemplified by Gerard Bhengu's art. This is the kind of "double-consciousness" which has been located in awareness of racial difference (Scheurich, 1997:121). It was inscribed into his own art-making until mentors challenged his depiction of racial types. Nevertheless, his early narratives were not premised on notions of "paradise lost" which, according to a nativist understanding of history, inscribes victimhood. In the process of inscribing Zuluness, his freedom from nostalgic retrospection enabled him to draw from it, while evading the exclusionary implications of particularism. The artist was able to transport his own cultural tenets into other geographical spaces and into modern life as he experienced it as an artist. By exploring the nature of his voice as a creative person, Zondi's engagement took him across racial and cultural barriers. With new energies emanating from his cross-cultural interactions, Zondi's art progressed and transcended encodings of Zuluness. As his modernist sculptures in the following three decades broadly embraced the reflection of what it means to be human, by largely avoiding specific dress encodings, his work became dissociated from implicit suggestions of exclusiveness and ethnicity. The moral weighing pan, with which the artist had measured the relevance of received cultural values and practices for the present, retained its conceptual relevance. In his endeavour to convey unity and to suggest a shared humanity, his works became more universalist as they communicated to a wider, even international, audience. The shift from encodings confining his art within specific regional markers, simultaneously helped to disassociate Zondi's work from obvious perceptions of difference. Zondi began to create works in which all his patrons could find reflections of themselves, as his alter ego with

shared humanity. By emphasizing communality, he was contradicting the premises of alterity inscribed in racial encodings that guided the segregationist ideology of white rule.

It was because of this fundamental humanity, or sameness, that when Luthuli invoked his Africanness, he opposed the conception that western education had converted indigenous Africans into "Black Englishmen" (2006 [1962]:16). He voiced the optimistic opinion that, through the meeting of two cultures, "both Africans and Europeans were affected by the meeting; both profited, and both survived enriched" (Luthuli, 2006 [1962]:16). Luthuli was emphasizing that, by being educated and adopting the Christian faith, he had yet remained profoundly and wholly "of Africa", meaning that in the exchange, reciprocity had occurred. Similarly, Zondi was self-assured in describing himself as a Zulu. He required, in his own mind, nothing further to qualify him to be a modern citizen and to belong to the great "Family of Man". Implicit in Zondi's understanding of himself, and the way he presented himself as a Christian man with a western education, was that he did not need conversion to the "civilized" world of whiteness. Zondi had the certainty that he more than qualified in fulfilling the whiter state's criteria, which the black intelligentsia before him had initially sought to meet. His stance embraced the understanding that modernization need not be defined, necessarily, by westernization (Gyekye, 1997:274). Neither education nor urbanization could alter the fact for Zondi, that he was in the first instance African, then Zulu. By siding with the poor (Zondi, 2007a:3 pers.com.), and addressing all people, Zondi was refuting the arrogance and the conditionality of the politics of assimilation. On the other hand, by depicting highly individualistic portraits, rather than stereotypical figures, he was also explicitly acknowledging individual humanity.

Mbembe suggests that a broad embrace of people in the manner of a "universalist" mode necessarily precludes or opposes localized affiliations and cultural tenets within smaller collectivities that may be defined according to the "particularist" mode (2002: 252,253). It would be inappropriate here to delve further into the topic of "global citizenship" which he suggests as the remedy for the narrowness of particularist thinking. Mbembe's rightful condemnation of autochthony is rooted in the definitive and exclusionary manner in which the nativist rhetoric defines race and territorial belonging. Yet Zondi's strong affiliation to the rural Natal of his childhood, which his early landscape reliefs and traditionalist figures reflect, was far from a "cult of locality" with pejorative or exclusionary connotations. People give meaning to life within narrow familiarity, by nurturing values, practices, and

imaginaries of the metaphysical, often in their received form. The artist's particularist Zuluness, therefore, does not contradict the universalist mode of his later work. Pertinent to the issue of regionalism, in contrast to an embrace of universalism, is whether it is misappropriated for power-political purposes. Therefore outside of politics, both expressions are able to coexist in celebration of sameness on the one hand, while, nevertheless, self-consciously celebrating diversity.

Zondi's "discourse of rehabilitation" much like the modes of current African self-writing, sought to reclaim human dignity by confirming the African's status within the family of humanity *per se*. At the same time, Zondi challenged the fiction of race and servitude, which, according to Mbembe, is being neglected in African re-appropriation of identity, as new forms of alterity buttress racial collectivities (2002:254). Under the guise of "authenticity" these in turn nurture the cycle of inclusion and exclusion as the basis for new discrimination and marginalisation. Mbembe implies that apartheid's appeal to race as the moral and political basis of solidarity has thus become the foundation of the African "discourse of inversion" which re-inscribes the language of race (2002:252,253,263,272). Zondi was considering an integral philosophy for living in modern times, free from the racial prejudice in which servitude inheres. His first concern was to gain some understanding of the nature of domination and power. This implied exploring both responsibility and accountability, noted for their absence in narratives of loss. Zondi's portrayals of Zulu royalty in positions of power reveal his contemplation of human relationships<sup>225</sup>. By means of thoughtful imagination and extrapolation, Zondi was able to subject past histories to the kind of "coherent critique" and scrutiny which Mbembe claims was absent in the scramble for liberation from foreign rule (2002:249). Exploring internal discord which led to colonial domination, or the renegotiation of social bonds corrupted by destructive rule, requires that basic moral associations be attached to these histories. This includes power wrangling in the present. By means of subjecting these histories to such ethical considerations, an understanding of servitude and its fundamental causes could be explored. It is this kind of enquiry, according to Mbembe, which became subsumed under the aim of emancipation and autonomy, to the detriment of seeking modalities to reinvent a "being-together" (Mbembe,2002:249).

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<sup>225</sup> See 5.2 NARRATIVES OF POWER 6 ZULU ROYALTY p214.

Certainly, by the time Zondi and Bodenstein began their philosophical exchange in trying to foster reconciliation, they grappled with the nature of domination and dissension under white rule. They sought avenues for defining the moral implications of a politics of ‘human care’. This will be further considered below. By recognizing the aesthetic domain’s capacity to foster unity, Zondi was emphatically countering the association between liberation and an armed struggle, or at least the condoning of violence in the process of self-determination<sup>226</sup>. Within the broader scope of South African politics, therefore, the manner in which Zondi sought ways to counter racism and discrimination contrasts significantly with oppositional calls for violence in shedding the yoke of apartheid. His perception of belonging, attached to the *amaZulu*, did not impede his receptive approach towards other cultural paradigms or his looking beyond national or racial identities. Seeking commonalities through art, Zondi’s proudly Zulu stance encouraged and advanced his initiative and ambition to embrace otherness. By means of the aesthetic domain he was able to appeal to human emotions, as the only means of reaching people who, consciously or unconsciously, subscribed to the language of race. Implicitly, he was demanding of particular audiences personal responses that, ideally, would be informed by their individual consciences.

### 3.4 IMAGINING SELF THROUGH OTHER – A PHILOSOPHICAL EXCHANGE

To diminish another human being is the hallmark of primitive and uncivilized behaviour  
(Wolfgang Bodenstein)<sup>227</sup>.

Zondi’s consciousness of self resided in his art which was fundamentally anchored in human experience and relationships of reciprocity. His creativity may be located at the centre of the philosophical exchange between himself and Dr. Wolfgang Bodenstein. Their friendship grew into an intellectual exchange of ideas and actions. The conciliatory nature of this communication anticipated the kind of cultural reciprocity that would be demanded of the so-called rainbow nation three and four decades later, once legislated apartheid had been overcome. Their finding cultural commonalities in values, mores, and art-making, was exemplary of the kind of cross-pollination that would ideally influence others in building metanational statehood. As the two men creatively developed a vision for a new South

<sup>226</sup> This may be related to Jonathan Hyslop’s theory concerning the association of the use of force with the notion of liberation. See ‘War Envy’ in Hyslop (2009).

<sup>227</sup> This was one of Wolfgang Bodenstein’s favourite sayings. Cited by his daughter, Christel Bodenstein (2008a).



African socio-political landscape based on commonalities, they respected the cultural richness of diversity.

Zondi's artistic oeuvre fed into, yet simultaneously drew from, the exchange on a very universal level, related to the 'constant' among human needs, that of achieving recognition from others. Implicit in his creative reflections of being human under conditions of subjugation was the message of how relationships 'ought to be' with respect to shared humanity. This was the premise for the project of reconciliation and modernity. Both men realized the privilege of finding someone who shared their vision for shaping their lives in a modern world beyond racism. By means of engaging the intellectual capacity of imagination, each man discovered in the other a way of re-positioning and re-defining himself.

At the height of state intransigence in the mid-1970s, Zondi and the Bodenstein brothers, together with other friends, would look back on a decade of consciously working towards reconciliation (1977:57). Their endeavours embraced not only a superficial bringing together of people. On a more profound level, they were contemplating ideas about values and mores from diverse ideological standpoints. In their view, these should serve as the basis of a 'new order' a democracy in which their consistent re-evaluation would remain a vigilant sentinel. Rendered 'in a spirit that is 'tenacious, patient, gentle' 'ö, their labours were directed towards solving the dilemma of South Africa as a 'place of pain' (Bodenstein, 1977:8)<sup>228</sup>. While their challenge lay in opposing the racist ideology expressed in forms of governance and manifest in everyday life, their pragmatic efforts were enacted outside politics.

Zondi was introduced to Bodenstein by Sven Eriksson in 1956 (Bodenstein, A., 1998c:1, script). Bodenstein had just begun to serve as a medical doctor at the Swedish mission at Ceza, where Zondi had recently created the *Christ on the Cross* for the Lutheran Church (Figs.44;45 opp.p171). Their life-long friendship would exemplify the brotherhood which Herbert Dhlomo invoked on the eve of his death around this time, and they would grapple with the humanitarian values that the playwright believed should be carried into modernity<sup>229</sup>. Their philosophical pursuit would embrace theoretical aspects pertaining to an understanding and knowledge of truths regarding 'the family of man' and human aspirations.

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<sup>228</sup> Bodenstein was quoting, and using the concept of working towards a 'new order' as envisioned by Teilhard de Chardin (1977:57). In his paper 'The Role of Human Care as a Catalyst in Transcultural Communication', he especially mentioned among the friends Dr. Molly Walker and Michael Zondi.

<sup>229</sup> See H.I.E. Dhlomo writing under 'Anonymous' 'Thoughts At the Close of The Year: Recapitulating Events of Importance' in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, December 24, 1955 'ö in Masilela (2007:152,153).

Seeking mutual ground would require an intellectual flexibility and criticality towards their own values and moral tenets. Luthuli comes to mind, with the idea of using imagination with regard to others<sup>230</sup>. The critical inquiry of the two men was directed at the state's favouring of a particular ideology, the divisive tenets of which were firmly entrenched in institutions reflecting and implementing politics of discrimination.

Foremost in their critical inquiry was the legacy of segregation, as they envisioned social reform for a new integrative communality among all South Africans, beyond apartheid. While moral assumptions and beliefs may be founded in received tenets, it is these tenets that require critical examination on the basis of their ethical sustainability in contemporary practice, for endorsement or possible rejection (Gyekye, 1997:60,61). For a society to function a consensus is necessary, on at least a dominant set of values, not necessarily bound to a specific class or interest group but reflective of public conceptions of the nature of 'common good'(Gyekye, 1997:166). In the context of the multi-cultural foundation of the South African population, Bodenstein asserted that there was the need to embrace the tenets of values and mores that were of Africa<sup>231</sup>. The institutions of governance translating apartheid ideology were clearly not fulfilling the mission of ensuring the well-being of all citizens. Therefore, those concerned with the practical pursuit of the ideology of race and difference required conversion. While Zondi's pieces began 'speaking' to the conscience of individual white patrons in their homes (Deane, 1978:201), Bodenstein and Zondi embarked on creating a philosophical base for their vision. Their shared faith became one foundation. It was enhanced more specifically by the practical values and wisdoms from each of their received cultures. From within the confines of partial bigotry of white Lutherans in rural Natal of the 1950s, it was Bodenstein's bold bid to turn away from those values, because his frame of reference, in his view, had become irrelevant (1977:52). He called for a complete embrace of 'the changing facets of seemingly new, but actually eternal realities'. In this venture, he invoked the resilience of the human spirit, which he felt was 'invested with a vastly underrated capacity for creative adaptation and regeneration' (Bodenstein, 1977: 52). The proviso he set was for Whites to turn their backs on the notion of 'Paradise Lost' which he described as 'an empty shell of fond illusions, self-deception and wishful thinking' (1977:52). Although formulated into a formal lecture only one and a half decades

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<sup>230</sup> Studs Terkel quoting Albert Luthuli in Kader Asmal (2006:xx).

<sup>231</sup> See 'Value systems : relativity and universality' in Bodenstein (1977: 4,5).

later, these ideas were aspects of his thinking which he imparted to Zondi from the time they met.

Early correspondence between the two men reveal how Zondi shared information about his work, about progress in individual pieces, and about patronage. More significant were reciprocal notes of appreciation and thanks for their meetings as friends, written in highly evocative language<sup>232</sup>. It included appreciation for the encouragement the artist was receiving from Bodenstein for his creativity: ðí my visits to your home are like going to a fountain of living water, for I always come back with a brimming heartö (Zondi, 1960b, letter). Tension and loneliness fell away in the presence of the man whose friendship was forbidden in the context of apartheid. Zondi's letters after their meetings reveal the strength he was able to obtain in their conversations<sup>233</sup>.

The sense of shelter and protection which Zondi and Bodenstein felt in each other's company<sup>234</sup> was conveyed by the artist to his own children. Zondi's daughter today still speaks of the Bodensteins as her father's second family (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers. com.). Their home was a space in which they were protected from the bigotry of some white Lutheran peasant farmers, from the die-hards of the apartheid ideology, and the venom of black radicalism. Here Zondi experienced the kind of caring ethos beyond any material concerns, expressed in romanticized and stereotypical descriptions of an African -extended family. Speaking of the union of friendship with the Bodensteins, and the great sense of security which it had afforded him, Zondi looked back on it as one of God's öbest and richest blessingsö, one in which he found öguidance through life, securityí ö, and a place for sharing joys and sorrows (Zondi, 1977c, letter). Other mentors and friends also received written thanks from Zondi, for their engagement in fostering his talent<sup>235</sup>. As an old man he named particularly Bodenstein and Dr. Kurt Strauss as friends who öbrought me so farö

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<sup>232</sup> In very emotive prose Bodenstein wrote to thank Zondi for time spent together in August 1959, probably at Appelsbosch, where Bodenstein had taken up his post as medical superintendent. öThat my friend was the privilege we had on Friday night. And I have no words to thank you (and above all, our Heavenly Father) for this great blessing. And I pray that we may cross many valleys and mountain ranges of Life at each other's side before God parts our waysö (Bodenstein, 1959a, letter).

<sup>233</sup> öI'm writing to express my sincere thanks for the most lovely week end I had in my lifeí öI can not find suitable phrases to describe it but I know God will teach my tongue as well as my hand how to utter or do something to show my thanksö (Zondi, 1959b:1, letter); öWords are insufficient to express my thanks for the few hours we had together. They are recorded down in my mind book as time or hours to rememberö (Zondi, 1960i, letter).

<sup>234</sup> The German expression -Geborgenheitö seems untranslatable in its deeper meaning as a concept reflecting security, protection and well-being.

<sup>235</sup> Letters to: John Nixon, August 1963; Joe (sic.) and Jim Thorpe, December 1965; Agnes and Wolfgang Bodenstein, September 1977.

remarking further, "all friends, I take them as the greatest treasure which God ever gave me & that's why I even learnt a poem "Friendship is a happy thing, making both men and angels sing" (Zondi, 2002b:4,6 pers. com.).

Zondi's other most important patrons during the 1960s were white progressive thinkers, like Strauss, living in and around Pietermaritzburg. Some of them, who became his partners in discussions, were members of the Liberal Party. Choosing white South Africans as his artistic audience, Zondi should have been able to presume in their presence, attitudes, values, and philosophies based on classical liberal rights born of the European Enlightenment and ancient Greece. These values were imbibed and accepted by the black intelligentsia through their western education. Yet, from the inception of white settlement, a white elite propagated differentiation and exclusion. Nevertheless, the reciprocal nature of Zondi's interaction with particular liberal thinkers like Bodenstein, Hooper, Strauss and Berglund contradicts Biko's unmitigated accusation towards Whites that they displayed arrogance and underhanded methods, as they tried to bring about racial integration. Biko was critical of both the self-appointed guardianship of "white liberals, leftists, etc." towards Blacks, and of Whites who involved themselves jointly with Blacks in the struggle against oppression and who, in his view, claim to "have black souls wrapped up in white skins" (Biko, 1988:34).

There was no reason for Zondi to doubt the integrity of the individual white educators who mentored his first years of art-making. Within a paternalist framework mentors like Eriksson, Nixon, and Grossert had affirmed Zondi's creativity and learning and were able to guide his art-making with encouragement and pragmatic assistance. While Zondi respected these white educators with whom he shared employment under Bantu Education, he found in individuals like Hooper, Strauss, and the Bodenstein brothers liberal thinkers with wider visions of fundamental change for South Africa. Therefore, among these trusted friends, Zondi's discussions about topics that had socio-political relevance were controversial and turned into impassioned arguments (Bodenstein, Hans, 2008 pers.com.). From the later 1950s, Zondi and Bodenstein spent "endless" nights of discussion (Bodenstein, A., 2004 pers.com.), shaping their vision of South Africa beyond the white state's racial categorization and paternalistic development aid.

These two men met both as friends and intellectuals. Their friendship was sustained around an exchange of philosophical ideas. Bodenstein was evidently profoundly aware that he had

discovered a friend in Zondi, who imparted to him an integrity linked to his own claims on being African (1977:53). From his school days, Bodenstein was perceived as being highly intellectual, moving in a world of his own (Bodenstein, C.,2008b pers.com.). Also, the missionary Karl Bünjer speaks of Bodenstein as having stood out from the rural white communities, as an intellectual known for his association with black artists and communities (Bünjer, 2009 pers.com.). From the outward stance of 'white male privilege', then, the honour Bodenstein felt in meeting and befriending this particular man has two facets. Zondi's endowments were an amalgam of creative talent and intellectual prowess. At the same time these were synthesized in a man deeply committed to serving his community and God.

Possibilities for creating African modernity have been explored, both from a technological viewpoint, and in terms of governance which transcends ethnicities. The latter concerns the reconciliation of various differing communcultural groups<sup>236</sup>, whose interests require to be subsumed under one nation-state. From among the positive cultural features emerging from African communality, Gyekye proposes that 'the humanist moral outlook' should be integrated into the goal of establishing an African modernity, parallel to technological development (1997:259,260)<sup>237</sup>. With a pragmatic emphasis, he declares moral life to be 'an enterprise more of *practice* than theory or mere knowledge of moral beliefs or rules' (Gyekye, 1997:214). It was from within this practice that Zondi and Bodenstein could formulate their mutual striving. Initially, together they served the community at the Church of Sweden Mission at Appelsbosch, the one as general manager, the other as the medical practitioner. Both men were firmly committed to pragmatic concerns of development as their point of departure. In the interest of fostering communication, they integrated into the practical every-day concerns ethical and philosophical aspects of working and living together in a community with diverse cultural backgrounds. Zondi dreamed of fostering and teaching creativity in a school for art education (Zondi, 1965a, letter) and was active in rural development. Bodenstein's career was in state health care, which he viewed from the stance of 'a truly comprehensive community health care delivery system' anchored in inter-cultural co-operation (Bodenstein, 1974:45)<sup>238</sup>. It may be presumed, therefore, that in their mutual efforts to be 'bridge-builders' (Zondi, 1974; Bodenstein 1977:53), both men were effectively able to give each other ideas and plan strategies of co-operation.

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<sup>236</sup> Gyekye uses the term 'communcultural' in lieu of 'ethnic' (1997:287).

<sup>237</sup> See 5.1 CULTURE AS SELF-NARRATIVE p209.

<sup>238</sup> At the time, Bodenstein was Head of Section Liaison, Department of Strategic Planning and Cooperation, in the state Department of Health in Pretoria.

Zondi, with his roots in a rural community, would have been an effective sounding board for Bodenstein, for ascertaining what the medical practitioner called the more elusive factors in the process of successful delivery, beyond systematic and scientific knowledge. These obvious components of development needed to be augmented by meaningful knowledge and understanding of the people in whose process of developmental change he wished to cooperate creatively (Bodenstein, 1974:45). Therefore, most important, in his eyes, was self-knowledge, which had to be factored into creative co-operation. He asserted that our cultural attributes and value systems should be viewed with enough objectivity so as to allow us to transcend our strongly conditioned and profoundly entrenched ethnocentricity. In his most emphatic message to his employer, the state, he explicitly refers to communication and principles of teamwork between cultural groups and on an interdisciplinary level (Bodenstein, 1974:45).

Human beings share basic ideas, needs, and aspirations that are often expressed as ideologies or programmes. Therefore inherent values and ideas that serve a normative and moral purpose are thought to be mostly reconcilable (Gyekye, 1997:164-168). Zondi's African humanism was sourced in the socio-ethical thought of received communalism<sup>239</sup> in which humanism and brotherhood are described as twin values (Gyekye, 1997:290). Notions of consultation, consensus, and reconciliation are thus held to be the foundational tenets of the social ideal of solidarity in the African traditionalist context (Gyekye, 1997:130).

The artist spoke of both Wolfgang and Eckhard Bodenstein as being his brothers<sup>240</sup>. In African cultures the use of the word brother may be used by persons unrelated by blood ties i.e. people are lifted up from the purely biologically determined blood-relation level onto the human level (Gyekye, 1997: 290). This is part of the African view of humanity, in recognition of all persons, irrespective of their racial or ethnic background, as brothers (Gyekye, 1997:290)<sup>241</sup>. Zondi was thus using the term beyond the various and complex family relationships linked by blood ties (Gyekye, 1997:290). Gyekye calls for cherishing this lofty ideal in which the essence of humanity is held as transcending the contingencies of human biology, race, ethnicity, or culture and for making it a feature of African modernity (1997:290).

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<sup>239</sup> See Socialism or Humanism in Gyekye (1997:158-163)

<sup>240</sup> Personal communication, Michael Zondi, Edendale, Pietermaritzburg, KZN.

<sup>241</sup> There is no word for race in most African languages (Gyekye, 1997:291). Instead, other concepts are used, e.g. person, human being and people or used as in black people instead of the black race.

Given their diverse cultural backgrounds, the capacity of Zondi and Bodenstern for empathy, and to imagine the other, conflated in humanism. This is a philosophy which locates human needs at the centre of actions, thought, and institutions, with the aim of ensuring human welfare (Gyekye, 1997:158,159). The idea of one universal family of humankind should, ideally, constitute a legitimate basis for the idea of universal human brotherhood (or unity) (Gyekye, 1997:290). In African moral thought, humanity, as a creation of God has been linked to the conception of the intrinsic value of human being and its worthiness of dignity and respect (Gyekye,1997:290). The ideal of the brotherhood of people, by reason of our common humanity, should be, in Gyekye's view, a bulwark against developing bigoted attitudes toward peoples of different cultures or skin colours who are also members of the one human race (1997:291). According to Hopkins, enhancing the humanity of those who differ, especially the marginalized, the poor, and the working class is a practice of freedom. (2005:131). The primacy of the individual, in a philosophical sense, is thought to create the basis for human worth and dignity, where our humanity, not our particular ethnic background, should constitute our fundamental identity (Gyekye, 1997:103). This counters the favouring of groups of people according to constructed ethnic designations. In the sense of forming a large cultural community with shared goals, perhaps Gyekye's post-modern metanational conception of the nation-statehood seems appropriate<sup>242</sup>.

The *ubuntu* philosophy, then, confirms the self in relation to the other, the deep friendship between the artist and the medical practitioner may equally be located in the mutuality of the concept of *agape* in the Christian faith. To be a self requires the self and Other woven together in mutual interaction via *agape* (D. Tracy in Hopkins, 2005:21)<sup>243</sup>. A Christian, brotherly love is intimated by this concept, an other-oriented divine love that takes the foundational existence of God's love of *agape* for granted (Hopkins, 2005:21). Hopkins' challenge of *agape* or mutual love in another geographical context is appropriate with a view to the inequities linked to resources and power which persisted within Lutheran witness in South Africa. Such inequities lose their validity within the utopian conflation of the Zondi-Bodenstern alliance.

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<sup>242</sup> See Chapter 3 'Ethnicity, Identity, and Nationhood' and 'Beyond N<sub>2</sub>: Towards Nationhood' in Gyekye (2005: 77ff).

<sup>243</sup> Hopkins (2005: 21) citing D. Tracy (1987): *Plurality and Ambiguity*. San Francisco, Harper and Row. pp435-436.

Apart from their intellectual sparring, the deepest bond between the two men was their Christian faith which characterized their friendship. They were guided by the power of this faith and their belief in finding direction and sustenance through prayer. This played a central role in the manner in which the two men approached their self-appointed task of bridge-building. Zondi described his own depressions and his ability to work through them<sup>244</sup>. His invocation of God as a source of strength echoed Bodenstein's similar faith:

To us who have received the light through the grace of God, troubles and sufferings should bring us nearer to God and strengthen our faith in Him. Like the saying of Job "God giveth and God taketh away but bless His holy name. The suffering and even the passing away of our loved ones though it is great pain to our weak selves, the hope and promise of resurrection and the world beyond, should be able to heal our wounds and wipe off our tears" .

(Zondi,1960h:1,2, letter)

Their spirituality created a protective shield for their friendship. Alluding to the South African situation, Bodenstein could speak of his "privilege and agony" to be "totally and irrevocably involved in so much turmoil, dilemma, ferment, despair and hope" (1977: 55). Bodenstein was inspired for his communal ideals by the humanist theories of the French pragmatist philosopher, and religious, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. This theologian and "evolutionary thinker", who has been compared to Marx and Darwin (Jones, 1975:15), was his foremost inspiration for affirmative visions of the future, despite despair in the present. De Chardin highlighted the human capability of reflection and its corollary, self-criticism, of which only humans are capable (Jones, 1975:22). Teilhard's love for "the world" inspired confidence in it (Jones, 1975:12). His world view, according to Gareth Jones, is a reconciliation between his "love for God" and "love of the world" causing a conflict between his temperament (being fully a man) and his intellect (being truly a Christian). He solved this dilemma by "constructing a vast synthesis incorporating the whole of reality" based upon an all-embracing evolutionism and an all-penetrating Christianity" (Jones, 1975:13,14). Bodenstein thus draws on concepts of human caring from de Chardin, the notion of absorbing evil, and having trust and faith (Bodenstein,1977: 56,57)<sup>245</sup>. Ultimately, Bodenstein likens his more scientific term of "human care" to theology's "Christian love" in its function to foster an interaction between cultures in South Africa (Bodenstein,1977:57).

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<sup>244</sup> "I am only grateful about one thing. That all this does not affect my mind and my work of Art. The more depression I get the harder I work" (Zondi, 1960d:1,2, letter ).

<sup>245</sup> See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1975).



He described a vision for the future which implicitly he and Zondi would be able to share: "And blessed indeed is he who by the grace of God is privileged to share this inspiring experience with a trusted friend close at his side." Using landscape as metaphor for "the Past, the Present and the Future"<sup>246</sup> he invoked "God's plan":

if we can do nothing except to kneel down in humility and place our entire self into the hands of our great and masterful Father above, and then to receive our minds and bodies back as mere tools in His hands. . . . And singing praises to our God, we arise and go forth with renewed and strengthened minds and bodies on our ordained path. From the Eternity of the Past to the Eternity of the Future" (Bodenstein, J.W., 1959a, letter ).

Within the confines of the utopian inter-racial space which they created for envisioning modernity, Zondi and Bodenstein engaged their criticality and re-evaluation by means of so-called "authentic conversation". Such exchanges have been embedded in theological thinking and are believed to be able to lead to understanding the true nature and purpose of human being (Hopkins, 2005:17). These "dialogues of solidarity" are based on critical intellectual inquiry, where the exchange through conversation takes place on the premise of equality, from self to other. In such dialogues, where the other is equal, the subject matter at hand takes precedence over self-interests (Hopkins, 2005:17,18). These dialogues are given theological significance, related to an understanding of God as the "ultimate power". David Tracy uses the term "religious understanding" in the sense of the Christian believer's relation to God "in such a way that we better understand our human selves – that is the pluralistic and ambiguous reality of self" (in Hopkins, 2005:18). It is, therefore, an understanding of the human-god relationship which is seen to enhance an understanding of our "selves". A dedication to critical intellectual inquiry as well as commitment to conversation with the other, the one "different from self", are seen as the "progressive-liberal" stance in effecting a shift to undo "the arrogance and limits of modernity, especially reason" (Tracy in Hopkins, 2005:16). Bodenstein reflected on Western cultural arrogance, which evaluation in some ways relates to the critical evaluation of the European Enlightenment as inadequate, given its emphasis on human reason as an authoritative adjudicator of human experience elsewhere (Hopkins, 2005:16). Similarly, it was Bodenstein's perspective that "humanity's" life experience converges on "a" universally common ground. With this as a premise, he thought

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<sup>246</sup> The past was filled with anguish, "a great wilderness of thorns and stones, of sorrows and passions" and is described as having "brought us to the verge of despair". He speaks of discipline to counter temptation and self-doubt on account of "human weaknesses" and a rededication of their spirits so that they may reach "the promise" which lies in "distant horizons".

that it should be possible to extrapolate a system of basic values, which encompasses all the common ground where all members of the far-flung Family of Man will meet (Bodenstein, 1977:4). In this sense he indicts the West in its disregard for alien values in these words:

It is most certainly the current value system of the so until recently so over-confident West will not be tolerated to continue usurping the self-appointed role of this common meeting ground. It is Western cultural arrogance or the Greek concept of *hubris*...is perhaps the grossest manifestation in recorded history of monolithic disregard and contempt for alien value systems. The fact that Westerners have for centuries imperiously and unquestioningly imposed their own value yardsticks in all situations in all corners of the globe, has now brought or by the law of the pendulum or the predicable and inevitable backlash upon us, and deservedly so. (Bodenstein, 1977:4,5).

As a progressive-liberal theologian, Tracy defends and upholds the basic premises of the Enlightenment, with the proviso that people engage in conversation, interpretation, and understanding (in Hopkins, 2005:16). With similar intent, Zondi was quoted saying that the best way to ensure that people are able to live harmoniously in South Africa, and any other country, is to understand one another, to acknowledge and comprehend one another's weaknesses and differences, and to help one another as much as possible (Rousseau, 1977)<sup>247</sup>. Zondi defended this stance, which he shared with trusted white Africans who shared his visions and values. Emerging from the will and the need of human beings to live together harmoniously, these values are thought to require constant re-evaluation for their validity within changing socio-economic circumstances (Gyekye, 1997:165,166). With intellectual and moral engagement, it was this re-evaluative process that formed the basis of the Zondi-Bodenstein enquiry, as the two men sought to shape the kind of modernity that would enable all South Africans to fulfil their potential and attain well-being.

Zondi insisted that the general public should be politically conversant in order to be able to conduct informed opposition to morally corrupt state policies. Political corruption, when viewed as a fundamentally moral problem in its disregard for common welfare, requires examination in the context of ethical concepts (Gyekye, 1997:193,200, 203,204)<sup>248</sup>. The foundation of moral principles and beliefs inherent in the segregationist ideology of the

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<sup>247</sup> Olga Rousseau (nee Barry) included an image of *Samesyn* in her *Rapport* article (1977).

<sup>248</sup> Gyekye (1997:200) uses this concept from Patrick J. Doherty (1978) 'The Corruption of a State' in *American Political Science Review* 72, No. 3, September 1978 p. 961. For a philosophical analysis of morality behind political corruption See Chapter 7, *Political Corruption: A Moral Pollution* in Gyekye (1997:192-215).

white minority was flawed in the eyes of the majority of South Africans, i.e. the morals and principles did not bear witness to the integrity of most people. Laws like the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act involved the carrying of passes by black people. This meant that unacceptable moral principles and standards became the basis of non-conformity and protest when Zondi was in his mid 20s. And yet, as Gyekye reminds us, success lies in conducting our lives in conformity with the accepted moral principles and standards (Gyekye, 1997:214). In his view, morality embraces on the one hand, a system of moral beliefs, values, and ideals, representing moral *belief*. On the other hand, it involves behaviour, attitude, or orientation, implying moral commitment (Gyekye, 1997:205,206). In this way, moral rules and prescriptions go hand in hand with behaviour, which either conforms with accepted moral beliefs and rules or counters these. Therefore the knowledge of moral beliefs (facts) is prior to moral commitment, but, as Gyekye notes (1997:206), does not determine it. Arguably, fundamental shifts in existing moral paradigms were necessary on the part of many individuals who were privileged by apartheid institutions and policies.

As Christians, Zondi and Bodenstein had to challenge what it means to be human within the Christian environment during apartheid, given that moral belief was countered by the conduct of most congregations in South African churches<sup>249</sup>. Despite their belief in basic tenets of Christian doctrine regarding human rights and the value of human dignity, congregations were nevertheless unable to commit to the translation of these codes into lived reality. In the case of the Calvinist Afrikaner Churches it was the failure to re-evaluate and examine the tenets of their belief and witness for their validity in the present. From a Lutheran stance, Florin spoke of spiritual traffic between individual Christians which was not mirrored in the Churches (1967:84). He invoked ecumenical thinking, suggesting that: 'The function which Lutherans might perform is to act as a bridge across which the divided sections could come anew into a dialogue, not only as individuals but also as churches' (Florin, 1967:90). A Christian socio-political conscience had to be multi-racial. Florin associated the Christian force for reconciliation of what is separated with becoming a political force not by their own definition but by that of the world (Florin, 1967:79).

In the mid-1970s, Dr. Manas Buthelezi augmented the arguments concerning ethics and morality from a Christian stance. Morality, which in his view is firmly embedded within any

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<sup>249</sup> When Zondi resided and worked at the home of Wolfgang and Agnes Bodenstein in Val de Grace in Pretoria, he went to church services in Mamelodi, a black location outside the city (Zondi, 1975a).

human situation, finds its meaning in the worth and well-being of the neighbour (Buthelezi, Manas, 1975:98). This neighbourliness was strongly defended by Bodenstein (1977) and Berglund (2003). Manas Buthelezi's embrace of the concept of God's creative process, prompts him to regard as sinful, anything that detracts from this mutual well-being (1975:99). Most pertinent examples are the divisive statutory laws countering the expression of Christian fellowship, like sharing food and company, or worshipping together, which elicited suspicion and had virtually become criminal offences (Buthelezi, 1975:101,102). He further points to the paradox of peoples of differing European descent being welded together into one nation, while black South Africans were being divided (Buthelezi, 1975:103).

The highly efficacious segregationist policies during Zondi's career fostered the natural proclivity of people to live within cloistered groups that defend received traditions and ways of life. When Zondi lived with his white patrons in 'Whites only' areas, it meant that he and they had to wilfully transgress the Group Areas Act. This may be seen as a disciplined response to moral rules, in contradiction of the law. It was moral insurrection of the kind that demonstrates a change in the attitudes and responses of individuals in a society to extant beliefs and values (Gyekye, 1997:209).

The reformatory moral and idealist enunciations articulated by Zondi and Bodenstein serve as an example of how neither of the partners in discourse was irreversibly tied by particular communal structures. The fact that their religious and philosophical interface was enacted within the confines of apartheid necessitated ideological flexibility or intellectual 'travelling'<sup>250</sup>, both in the sphere of religion and in their political thinking. Their struggle thus reflected a critique of their origins on both sides, but particularly on the part of white patrons with whom Zondi engaged. In order to engage in a cross-cultural dialogue, both Zondi and Bodenstein had to develop a large measure of autonomy from their own groups, even beyond the obvious restrictions of racial prejudice. Theirs was an individuality which, while nurtured within communality, ultimately relied on the phenomenon of cross-cultural encounters for it to influence intellectual and moral horizons. This was the distinctive individualism of the kind defended by Gyekye, in moderation of radical communitarian thought (1997:59). He explores such individual initiative in the context of

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<sup>250</sup> Gyekye (1997: 9,10) borrows the term 'intellectual travelling' from Gilbert Ryle (1966) *Plato's Progress*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press p20.

nation-building beyond ethnic designations. Locating individualism within the milieu from which it emerges, he foregrounds self-critique of the norms by which the group lives, as a requirement for creating a so-called communcultural nation embracing multiple ethnicities. The Zondi-Bodenstein exchange, therefore, in Gyekye's parlance, required of both parties to climb over existing cultural walls and ruminates on extramural matters (Gyekye, 1997:57,58). Their meeting became a microcosmic version of nationhood envisioned as metanationality. Such a form of governance requires citizens to forfeit particularistic sub-loyalties and obligations which effect social and moral evils. Examples given in a neutral philosophical context reflect the South African malaise of discrimination and harbouring low opinions of persons from other groups and suspicions and distrust of fellow citizens from different groups (Gyekye, 1997:102,103).

Zondi's concern within the limitations which he set himself outside active (and corrupt) politics lay in the realm of morality and humane being in everyday life. With his large body of works depicting emotive individual portraits, Zondi sought to engender insight into the necessity for changes in the extant socio-political landscape on the basis of what human beings share. Fundamentally, he was making *moral* statements. Using his portraiture as his vehicle to speak, Zondi was trying to provoke, in each person confronted with his work, a process of thought pertaining to what it means to be human. His was a sincere and conscious individual response to social conditions, born of disillusionment with the conventional morality produced by the divisive system. In part, he presented his work to an audience accustomed to certain patterns of behaviour, which were firmly entrenched into the ethos of white and black society. With his work, Zondi was endeavouring to prompt in his white audience the adoption of a new attitude, to change their orientation with respect to existing morals. By drawing on the life experiences of his people, the artist was introducing patrons to individuals. He purposefully created these portraits to occupy a space in white homes. By doing so, he was simultaneously creating this space for himself and black South Africans. His figures hardly lent themselves to being interpreted in terms of exotic otherness. Zondi will have hoped that among his patrons, there were those that would have been encouraged, through his art, to re-evaluate the norms of South African segregation and make a new commitment to accepted moral rules. Once the portraits became an *alter ego* in these homes, ideally so would the people whose human experience they reflected. In his early correspondence with Bodenstein Zondi mentions his two most overtly political pieces, one of which has been found. *Invisible Bonds* (1960)(Fig.198 opp.p226) is a figure that

characterises the kind of compelling figurative piece which Zondi proffered, in order to prompt attitudinal shifts among the audience for his art. Revealing his intention to give it to a white civil servant and friend, he wrote:

I don't know what you will think about him but I feel he is dynamite in the making. I would have liked very much to see him side by side with *The Prisoner*. I have decided to show *Invisible Bonds* to Mr. Bourquiní . My good friend, there is such a lot to say, but as the saying goes *Zunqunywa amakhanda Zuyekwe* and so be it <sup>251</sup> (Zondi, 1960c, letter ).

The philosophical exchange between Zondi and Bodenstein became the intellectual foundation of their friendship. Philosophical enquiry, as an intellectual activity going back in the Western tradition to Socrates, is held to be a reflective and critical one. The conclusions of this enquiry may be used as a basis for ideological choice, i.e. to be put at the disposal of those concerned with the practical pursuit of ideology (Gyekye, 1997:168). Zondi was able to augment his knowledge of western philosophy, which, initially, he is likely to have touched upon in the ambit of the black intelligentsia, through Bodenstein, and the latter's library. When he engaged with Bodenstein in discussing the relevance of ancient Greek philosophy (Bodenstein, A, 2004 pers.com), the artist was entering an already existing conversation, interpretation, and understanding dynamic of the European dialogical partners (Hopkins, 2005:21). In reciprocity, Bodenstein was able to absorb, through Zondi, aspects of Zulu values, mores, and beliefs that guided the integrity of these African people. In contradiction of Hopkins's pejorative reading of the oppressed's engaging in a western philosophical discourse<sup>252</sup>, Gyekye's stance defends the ability of philosophy to provide insights and doctrines with a relevance which is transcultural, transgenerational, and transepochal (1997:19). He thus affirms and validates for Africa, the applicability of processes and interventions of the philosophical enterprise in human affairs in the western context (1997:24). In his view, in processes of selection, adoption, and adaptation to suit indigenous circumstances, the serious appraisal of foreign ideas, values, practices, concepts, and institutions should be fostered in order to boost African development. Yet Gyekye proposes that originality and creativity should be grounded in indigenous contexts (1997:26,27). He is echoing the fundamental assumptions that were made by the black intelligentsia around Dhlomo, as noted above, who proposed a discerning selection of

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<sup>251</sup> There's more to tell, but so be it. Translation by Nomfundo Zondi-Molefe, SMS, to Kirsten Nieser, 20 October 2009.

<sup>252</sup> See 'Progressive Liberal' in Hopkins (2005:16-23).

values and practices from the past, for constructing the future. When Zondi was implicitly selecting aspects of his received Zulu culture as humanizing components in shaping modernity, which fulfilled the brief of the black literary elite, he was simultaneously realizing ideas emerging from modern African philosophy from two perspectives. Gyekye asserts that 'the humanist essence of African cultures should be maintained and cherished in creating African modernity' (1997:289). Also, Zondi's later engagement in community development, noted above, is reflected in the philosopher's idea that technology is an instrumental human value which is 'basic to the fulfilment of the material welfare of human beings' (Gyekye, 1997:290). These perspectives, of what it meant to be a responsible member of any community, were an important aspect of the philosophical meeting point between Zondi and Bodenstein and of their defining themselves in relation to the other.

Social relationships are constituted and characterized by caring and compassion as the primary moral virtues, rather than by means of justice. Bodenstein's sensitivity to the welfare of others, expressed in acts of love and friendship, went beyond the calling of mere medical practice<sup>253</sup>. He proposed a relational network of co-operation and harmony, based on morality (1977). His ideas were based on the experience of his friendship with Zondi, Dr. Lash Mohlaka, his colleague at Appelsbosch, and the many opportunities he had for engaging in humanitarian practice through his vocation in public health. Emphasising human dignity and respect, which he believed were reciprocally conferred, he regarded human interaction across the colour-bar in the light of mutual enrichment and a 'deepening of a life experience' (Bodenstein, 1977:51). Professing his own African identity, Bodenstein spoke of his experience of 'coming home' on the continent with its 'liberating sense of unifying wholeness' which he understood to be peculiar to Africa (1977:52,53). Such views created the foundation for Zondi's trust in this particular white friend who was committed to his African place of 'belonging', as he put it<sup>254</sup>.

Bodenstein acknowledged trans-cultural communication as 'the most critical factor on which our immediate and long term destiny hinges' (1977:51). Drawing the parallel to South

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<sup>253</sup> Zondi spoke of Bodenstein's popularity as a doctor: 'Dr. Bodenstein became a friend of the people, not only of Zondi – you see the time when he was in Appelsbosch, most of the people used to go to *him* whenever they were sick, even if they had gone to some other hospitals, they would ask to be taken to Appelsbosch because he was there' (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002:19).

<sup>254</sup> Bodenstein was born in South Africa in the same year as Zondi, 1926, about 8 years after his German missionary parents took up residence in Natal under the auspices of the Hermannsburg Missionary Society. His emotional attachment to South Africa as his homeland, is expressed in an opera he wrote as a young man, 'Children of Africa' ó Opera in Three Acts, Durban 1955. The music was written by Jacqueline Martens.

Africa, he reminded his audience at his lecture of the initiative of the Athenians in ancient Greece, who were able to shed the yoke of colonialism with its legislated non-communication. Invoking the phenomenal cultural rebirth of Athens, he spoke of the kindling of dynamic trans-cultural communication and expanding identity. This was, in his eyes, an integral and liberating force in mankind's heritage (1977:2,3). The applicability of this occurrence, to the South African situation, as Bodenstein interpreted it, became the catalyst for his initiating Zondi's enquiry into Greek philosophy. Ancient Greek philosophical speculation was born of a civilization experiencing a crisis of values that was brought about by the intellectual moral, and political situations of the contemporary society, becoming a search for standards (*paradeigmata*) in social, ethical, aesthetic, political, and epistemological matters with a view to reforming society (Gyekye, 1997:19,20). Zondi sculpted prophets and scholars<sup>255</sup>, which included *Socrates* (1974) (Figs.24;25;26 opp.), and the legendary figure, *Orpheus* (1974) (Fig.356 opp.p254). Their significance lies in their contextualization within the social and political landscape which the artist shared with his white patrons. Zondi read the texts of the Greek philosophers in the Bodenstein home (Bodenstein,A.,2004 pers.com.) reflecting this in his figure of the Greek philosopher. His intellectual inquiry into philosophical tenets of ancient Greece, was at once the study of pragmatic guidelines applicable for gaining perspectives on the dysfunctionality of communication between groups in South Africa. Zondi indigenized Socrates as a bearded African man and went so far as to give him a bearing and gesture that strongly resembled his own<sup>256</sup>. This was a covert self-characterisation, suggesting Zondi's acknowledgement of the universal relevance of western philosophical tenets in the context of Africa. In depicting an African *Socrates* Zondi reveals his identification with the critical thinker while at the same time reiterating his own mediatory and leadership role. The truths and convictions put forward, for example, by Socrates, before the Athenian audience of ancient Greece, inspired Zondi to revalidate them for his contemporary audience in a divided South Africa. Zondi portrays the man who challenged the moral values, the form of government, and the belief system of his time and who was willing to die for his convictions. Also, as Gyekye reminds us, from ancient Greece came the plea for rule by the intelligentsia (1997:20). Thus, in their venture to serve their communities and improve the lives of the poor, Zondi and Bodenstein undertook a critical philosophical examination of the basis and

<sup>255</sup> See 5.3 LIBERATION AND LEADERSHIP p225.

<sup>256</sup> This was an observation made by his youngest daughter, Nomfundo Zondi Molefe, when she saw the piece in the context of the exhibition of her father's work in the Tatham Art Gallery in 2004.



goals of life in terms of their faith, morality, and the extant political conditions. The philosophy of humanism, to which human welfare is central, is described as a system of beliefs that is offered to individual people as a guide (Gyekye, 1997:14). This interpretation confirms the assertion that philosophical debate is more than a purely intellectual exercise (Gyekye,1997:3-7). Those aspects of exploration that deal with tangible human experience are, by way of Zondi's interpretation and creative translation, exemplified as valid and beyond restrictions of place and time.

Zondi's own endeavours, to further educate himself and accommodate western modes, required the kind of acculturation which, in turn, he required of a friend like Bodenstein. Zondi's inversion of 'conversion' was noted above. Despite his profound Lutheran faith, their philosophical exchange, for Zondi, implied a reciprocal acceptance of the received spirituality of Zulu cultural tenets. Zondi's receiving Bodenstein into his home and performing a traditional ceremony for him was a sign of cementing his relationship with his white friend<sup>257</sup>.

The slaughtering of a goat and the salvaging of the gall bladder was reported by Agnes Bodenstein to be a Zulu traditionalist custom to ensure protection (2004 pers.com). The ritual *Blessing* (1962) (Fig.22 opp.)<sup>258</sup>, to ensure Bodenstein's safe passage to and from Sweden in 1962, was held in the presence of Zondi's brother, Mandlenkosi (Fig.23 opp.). Fundamentally, the event concerned mutual acceptance. Berglund suggests that ritual slaughter has the function of restoring mutual understanding, good-will and harmonious relationships (1976:246). Yet, initially, the harmony needs to be established with the ancestral 'shades' prior to its restorative power for relationships between people. This is 'an involvement in a communion between the shades and lineage survivors' (Berglund, 1976:246). Only then may this equilibrium be transferred to the people present, by means of 'thoughts in the heart' or speeches reflecting what is 'in the heart' (Berglund, 1976:246). Rousseau suggests that there was disharmony between Zondi and Bodenstein, regarding the artist's received beliefs linked to ancestral presence (1977). This procedure, then, would have been initiated by Zondi in the cause of 'mutual understanding and harmony with Bodenstein. Through the subsequent communion by means of sharing food, a restoration of mutual concerns is assumed, a harmony which allows for no anger, wrath, envy, or suspicion'

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<sup>257</sup> Personal communication with the artist and Rousseau (1977).

<sup>258</sup> Bodenstein made this small charcoal sketch of the event, once he was in Sweden, which turned out to be an unhappy year for him (Bodenstein, 2004, pers.com).

(Berglund, 1976:247). Another sketch by Bodenstein depicts the two brothers, with Michael Zondi holding a mallet and chisel (Fig.23, opp.p151). After the ritual slaughter, Bodenstein requested that Zondi create a sculpture which would immortalize this event. This is Zondi's *Reunion (or Reconciliation)*(1964)( Figs.256;257;259 opp.p241).

Bodenstein subsequently formulated his views with regard to acculturation, when he articulated his notion of cultural objectivity. Bodenstein valued the potential of his profession to practice 'human care', and thus to build the foundation for 'transcultural communication', as he called it (1977). From his stance as a medical practitioner he emphasized moral responsibility in acts of caring. It was the creation of a larger cultural community, based on mutual respect, which he implied when he advocated cultural objectivity in communication. Bodenstein's insistence on this form of objectivity for the purpose of establishing common values is reflected in current thinking on the needs for consensus in the interest of all people. For a society to function, consensus is required on 'at least a dominant set of values', not necessarily bound to a specific class or interest group, but reflective of public conceptions of the nature of 'common good' (Gyekye,1997:166). This involves the exchange of ideas in debate and disputes of the kind that Zondi and Bodenstein conducted. The medical practitioner indicted legislated segregation as the 'veritable climax of anti-communication' (1977:51). He characterized apartheid in terms of its slight of 'the supreme law of universal human dignity'. Calling the ideology 'artificial and unnatural', he thought of it as 'innately temporary and self-limiting'. Bodenstein's condemnation of the purposeful 'one-way acculturation manoeuvre', which was manifested in communication barriers went hand in hand with his welcoming the first signs of 'decolonisation in its widest sense' as the initiator of trans-cultural contact. Invoking a 'highly creative two-way cultural cross-fertilisation experience', he emphasized its potential for reciprocity (Bodenstein, 1977:51)<sup>259</sup>. 'Human care', in his view, involved the efforts of every individual, with the aim of enhancing the other's 'sense of total well-being of 'becoming' and 'belonging' of self-respect and human dignity, of reaching out towards self-fulfilment' (Bodenstein, 1977:50). He asserted cultural objectivity as being essential for a reciprocal interrogation of value systems among South Africans in the project of communication (Bodenstein, 1977:53)<sup>260</sup>. At the same time, he described this objectivity as the essential foundation for 'human caring' in the widest sense, the two being 'indivisible

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<sup>259</sup> Bodenstein's italics.

<sup>260</sup> See '5. The elusive unity : cultural objectivity and human care as catalysts' in Bodenstein (1977) p. 53,54

and absolutely inter-dependent. Bodenstein called for their visible application and that they become the key to integral 'creative adaptation' vis-à-vis a person's own, or an alien, cultural group (1977:53). In the endeavour of 'building meaningful bridges and bonds between individual groups, or all of mankind', the interrogation of value systems, he suggested, required 'intellectual and emotional self-discipline' and respect for others and self. At once an idealist, yet rooted in the pragmatism of his 'trade', he based his ideas on reciprocity, not from the perspective of an ivory-tower, but from 'the furnace of every-day life'. It was here that the white man, in his view, would be able to learn 'to view himself exactly as he appears in the unrelentingly discerning eyes, and in terms of the norms, of his *alter ego*, the black man' and vice versa (Bodenstein, 1977:53).

Both men experienced difficulties and antagonism towards their alliance across the colour-bar. In freeing themselves from a specific cultural ambience and giving direction by exploring wider parameters beyond local parochialism, these two intellectuals gained a pariah status among conservatives from both their cultures. The young Bodensteins' clash with conservative Lutheranism during their marriage ceremony in 1955 has been noted. On many occasions Bodenstein was insulted and called a '*Kaffirboetie*' (Black brother), while Zondi's friendship with a white man was denigrated amongst his people<sup>261</sup>. Zondi speaks of hatred being sown in South Africa (Zondi, 1960j, letter). This was in response to Bodenstein's writing:

It may become even more difficult and at times seemingly impossible, that you and I live as brothers or as brothers in Jesus Christ or in a world which does not want us to live like that. The powers of evil and darkness will try their very best to separate us (Bodenstein, 1960, letter).

Zondi's most overt reference to the difficulty of conducting this friendship across the racial barrier was made in 1960:

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<sup>261</sup> An earlier friendship with a black South African artist, Selby Mvusi, let Bodenstein appear 'radical' in his Lutheran community in Natal. His inviting the black artist and his wife to be present at his own marriage in the German Lutheran church of Hermannsburg in 1955 caused a scandal, and resulted in expressions of extreme bigotry. Wolfgang and Agnes Bodenstein's went down in the annals of the rural community as 'the kaffir wedding'. Later, in Bodenstein's friendship between Bodenstein and Zondi, the white man was pejoratively called a '*kaffirboetie*' (Bodenstein, C., 2008a; Bodenstein, 2008, C., 2008b). 'Kaffir' from the Arabic term for 'non-believer' (of the Islamic deity), came to be used as a derogatory name for Blacks). 'Boetie' is the term for 'brother' in the Afrikaans language. Around the turn of the century the simile 'white man' was used pejoratively for a black person in connection with a sense of betrayal felt by 'natives' towards the poll tax. A local chief encouraging conformity among his people towards government taxation they refused to pay, was termed 'a black man in colour but a white man at heart' (Thompson, 2004:29).

It is true that a lot of things are happening around us; things that turn and twist our souls; things that bring mist between us; things that threaten to pour gall into the honey of our friendship, but like the good book says "It is true that troubles and sufferings will come but woe to that man by whom they come. For me and you our only solution is to pray to God "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil". For God will not load us with something above our power; Yet we should not cease to pray for faith and strength (Zondi, 1960i, letter)

Bodenstein's reply was written within three days, referring to their brotherhood in Christ. He assures his friend : "For we know for sure, my brother, as long as we make God the centre of everything in our lives, nothing, nothing can ever separate us, neither from each other, nor from Him (Bodenstein, 1960, letter). This gave Zondi "strength and new life" when "the struggle within was at its worst" (Zondi, 1960k:2, letter)<sup>262</sup>.

This correspondence testifies to the reciprocal nature of the emotional commitment that served as a premise for their sense of community and familiarity. It developed into a bond that remained with Zondi until his death, more than twenty-five years after Bodenstein died in his late 50s.

The Zondi-Bodenstein endeavour was sustained over the decades of Zondi's career, in which apartheid politics became ever more rigid. The two men were able to translate their own philosophy that was engendered within "utopia" into pragmatic day-to-day encounters. These small projects of reconciliation that functioned across the racial barriers would be vindicated. Within the struggle, these contributed to the many endeavours of covert and overt collective oppositional action against the state. Together, such initiatives constituted the foundation for peaceful change and a new dispensation, with methodologies that offered effective alternatives to the armed struggle<sup>263</sup>.

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<sup>262</sup> "It is true beyond any shadow of doubt that "seek ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you". For your letter came just at the right moment, when the struggle within was at its worst. But the words contained in your letter gave me new strength and new life. Yes, God sent you to write those words. He passed on to you my S.O.S.. Bless your loving heart" (Zondi, 1960k:2 letter).

<sup>263</sup> See Hyslop (2009).

## CHAPTER FOUR: STYLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

### INTRODUCTION

As Zondi gained technical skill and confidence in his art-making, he moved from the representational to an increasingly free emotive expression and conceptualism coupled with the use of metaphor. He thus progressed from skilful rendering in his first recorded pieces of 1954, to artistic expressiveness by 1959<sup>264</sup>. By the end of that decade, his confidence was such that he made a crucial career move away from formal teaching of woodwork skills.

Zondi's artistic skills emerged from cabinet-making and carpentry. He was proud of being self-taught in art-making. Yet, through friends and mentors, various opportunities arose for him to come into contact with western modernist art and receive informal guidance from those versed in it. A brief foundation in the roots of modernist sculpture in particular, serves to elucidate the foundational visual and theoretical education of Zondi's mentors, who conveyed some of the modernist tenets to the artist. Zondi's strong emphasis on his craftsmanship and his material create an obvious link to the British Arts and Crafts Movement. Its liberal humanist tenets reached South Africa, inter alia, via Nordic philanthropy.

The acceptance of sculpture as a recognized discipline in the arts took the route of pragmatism, based on the link between the crafts and art, with artists initially trained in labour-intensive skills. Such was the British training of artists in whose ambit Zondi received important informal tuition. He was given the opportunity to interact with students at the Fine Arts department of the University of Natal on the Pietermaritzburg campus, who were studying under British modernist artists like Jack and Jane Heath and John Hooper, whom Zondi befriended. The Eurocentric modernist outlook of Zondi's mentors did more than affirm the artist in his clear conflation between craft and art-making. More importantly, Zondi was encouraged to pursue the notion that art should be relevant to the location and the circumstances of its production. Crowther's theory of art (1993), concerning the conflation between creativity and *artifice*, serves as an appropriate source for exploring aspects of Zondi's individual creativity, the physicality of his work, and its originality.

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<sup>264</sup> See *Moses* (1959)(Figs..204-206 opp.p229).

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, white South African artists clung to Eurocentric traditions as it was deemed prestigious to gain art training abroad, in Europe and Britain. Artists brought back with them modernist stylistic influences. Their domination of the South African art market from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, reflected preferences and modernist artistic paradigms established in the colonial 'centre'. Many white artists expressed their sense of being a part of Africa merely by depicting an 'exotic other', rather than exploring, investigating, and attempting to understand existing African art.

Zondi was among the pioneer artists who were initially inspired by academic realism with roots in inter alia western liturgical art, until teachers and patrons encouraged the development of his work beyond verisimilitude.

#### **4.1 PERSPECTIVES ON MODERNIST SCULPTURE**

The rationale of connecting Zondi's art-making and European modernism is twofold, linked to his craft of cabinet-making and to the conceptual aspects of his sculpture, and his aims as an artist. Zondi's formal tuition in working with wood occurred within the ambit of Swedish Lutherans, whose training embraced the tenets of design attached to Nordic modernism. The advent of Nordic modernist design, driven by philanthropic as well as commercial initiatives, was considered earlier. European modernism in the fine arts reached South African shores by means of these individual educators trained overseas that staffed art institutions. Among them were modernist artists guiding the curriculum and students in the art course at the Ndoleni Teachers' Training College, attended by Zondi's brothers and also the University of Natal Fine Arts Department, which Zondi briefly frequented as a guest. Of particular relevance was the modernist backgrounds of John Hooper and Jane and Jack Heath, with whose experimental art Zondi was briefly acquainted in the university environment<sup>265</sup>. This occurred parallel to his visual and theoretical engagement in the Bodenstein home, with the work of continental European modernists.

White conservatism in Natal in the 1950s had a preference for an aesthetic derived from a colonial taste which inclined towards romantic academic realism (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:93). This was exemplified in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the art collected by the Tatham's in Pietermaritzburg, which became the founding collection of the Tatham Art Gallery.

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<sup>265</sup> Hooper was trained at the Royal College of Art in London (Rankin, 1989:49 and 1993:134). At Ndoleni Zondi met Peter Atkins, who trained in sculpture at the Slade in London (Rankin, 1993:134).

Zondi had no formal art tuition with either a Eurocentric, or any other, bias. Therefore, in order to adopt new tenets of art-making, Zondi was spared the onerous task of having to re-exorcise and re-demystify any particular styles, the conformity to which school teaching, during his era, might have demanded, e.g. the re-Greek prejudice (Harrison, 1981:221). Perhaps this is what Zondi implied in his search for his own mode, as he frequently reiterated his non-attachment to any particular style. Without too many prejudicial notions, then, he was later able to recognize on his own terms, and for himself, the re-universal in Rodin's work (Zondi, 1977b:4,5, letter ).

Modernism in South Africa was driven by a small European elite, and its consumers were equally exclusive. Zondi's encounters with European modernism were incremental and realized through contact with white educators and friends. Their European background in the visual arts, or their training overseas, enabled them to foster and encourage Zondi. They recognized the talent of an artist who was at once intent on understanding the tenets of modern art, while at the same time retaining his independence to determine the accessibility of his own art for a wide audience, outside elitist thought or ideology. More than this, his espousal of modernism, in the western understanding of it, was arguably prompted by two aspects, that were foundational for the development of sculpture as an autonomous discipline in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first was his own preferred subtractive process of carving, which was central to arguments surrounding early European modernism. The second, more significant, aspect involved conceptual positions that were embedded in humanism. The inspirational origins of these were, in part, described as having been sourced in cultures from outside Europe, which included Africa.

Modernity in Africa is linked to both the colonial experience and African modernism. Art forms and aesthetic ideas are seen to have evolved from diverse colonial conditions on the continent. Ultimately, they are thought to have incorporated processes of decolonisation (Okeke, 2001:36). Yet, Chika Okeke asserts that African modernism "cannot be broached merely by invoking European modernism". He speaks of it as a variegated product of conflating historical and modernization processes, that ultimately transcended European colonialism, rather than thinking of it as representing only another manifestation of 20<sup>th</sup> century European art (Okeke, C., 2001:30, 36). Artistic modernity in Africa is, therefore, seen to have used quotation in a process of engendering critical and oppositional voices.

Zondi's significant shift from furniture-making to sculpture-making occurred during the volatile 1950s. Late in that decade, both Bodenstein and Hooper encouraged Zondi to break from techniques producing highly polished surfaces and attention to detail, with which he attempted to achieve verisimilitude. During this decade, Bodenstein was involved with local creative talent in rural Natal, where he worked (Bodenstein, A., 2002 pers.com.). With his interest in European modernist art, reflected in his love of Auguste Rodin's sculpture and particularly the figurative work of Ernst Barlach and Käthe Kollwitz, he would have been aware of both the expressionism and the conceptualism reflected in the work of black African artists. The modernist liturgical influence has been given prominence as being an important influence in encouraging stylistic and interpretative aspects in the work of contemporary pioneer artists in the region, who were trained in the ambit of the church (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:93,94). The sanctioning of African expressionism, as artists typically emphasized conceptual features of their work, was believed to reflect a similar essential conceptualism that was found in Early Gothic art<sup>266</sup>. It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that, once Zondi had been visually initiated into the work of these two artists, he recognized in Bodenstein's carving the Gothic forms reflected in Barlach's work, which were modified by expressionistic tendencies.

Fundamental to modernism throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the concern whether creative and imaginative capacities should serve to transcend realities and dissociate the artist and his work from life or whether these capacities should proactively facilitate participation in life. Social unrest during the 1950s and the first strike actions against white rule in South Africa, set the backdrop for considering, more earnestly, the role which the creative arts should play in fostering modernity among the masses. The majority of the South African population lived as pre-literate rural agriculturalists. Parallel to this deceptive bucolic bliss, vast satellite cities developed, populated by migrant workers selling their labour. Meticulous control of living spaces prevented a process of urbanization concomitant with booming industrialization. Zondi was as much in touch with rural people and labourers as with the black and white elite. Zondi's knowledge of the concept of creative talent, *uchwephesha*, among Zulu speakers, or Dhlomo's similar perception about creativity as being ineluctably God-given, are concerns that had long been fundamental to arguments concerning modern art. The notion of innate creative capacities among human beings versus a view of artistic creation as a deliberate

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<sup>266</sup> Leeb-du Toit (2003: 99,166 ) in personal communication with Brother George Ostheimer in 2001.



activity, were central to early oppositional concerns in modernist theory. Linked to this are further divergent positions early in the century. These are examples of the dilemma and fundamental conflict which accompanied criticism of modern art throughout its course, namely the measure of non-representationalism or determining of the nature and extent of art's representativeness (Harrison, 1981:118). Ultimately, this question remained a fundamental challenge implicit in the discourse around modernist art throughout the century.

Zondi's justification for choosing to adhere to representational style is located in his understanding of the function of art that concurred with, or was based on notions propagated by the black intelligentsia, as considered earlier. They were concerned about the meaning and relevance of their art beyond the elitism of their distinct class. Industrialization in South Africa set in motion the same processes of change and necessary adaptation in all spheres of life that had challenged the European peasantry a century and more earlier. The alienation of artists from basic values and the debasement of human relationships in processes linked to industrialization, had been addressed in Britain in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In giving Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement a theoretical foundation, John Ruskin affirmed that art should remain allied to political economy, also in a moral sense (Harrison, 1981:14)<sup>267</sup>. Paralleling the experience of the artistic elite in Britain, when the urban black intelligentsia embraced urban life and sought to assert their creativity in the service of fostering modernity, there were chasms between them and the broad masses of marginalized blacks, who were eking out a living on vestiges of rural homestead cultures. In a call for cultural mobilisation, as a means to foster social and political transformation, efforts were made to reconcile the elitism of the black urban bourgeoisie with provincial so-called 'backwardness'. Zondi's agenda was not political but moral, and, as he always remained intimately associated with the poor, he was able to fulfil this brief unpretentiously and without apology.

Central to critical evaluation of modern art in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had been the rivalry between artists who carved and those who modelled. Zondi greatly admired August Rodin, the established modern European master around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, in his own art-making, Zondi felt no affinity towards the additive modelling technique of pliant materials that were subsequently cast that was the foundation of Rodin's oeuvre and that of modern sculpture at the time. Zondi's preferred technique was carving which was linked to a strong physical process of art-making. In early modernist sculptural practice and criticism,

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<sup>267</sup> See excerpts of William Morris's lecture on 'The Lesser Arts' of 1878, in Harrison (1981:14).

subject-matter and conventional means of representation, like figurative detail, were devalued (Harrison, 1981:208,209). Implicit in the rivalry was the reduction of detail by conventional sculptural methods. The pre-eminence of August Rodin's modelled figurative sculpture, which Zondi studied while in Paris (Zondi, 1977b:5, letter), was thus challenged before the first world war, by Constantin Brancusi's highly reductive carved sculpture, made by the direct method of working (Harrison, 1981:209). The criteria of the art critic, Clive Bell, for judging the appeal of a work of art, aimed at establishing its essential permanence. Claims were made for 'the autonomy and universality of "sculptural experience"' (Harrison, 1981:210). Harrison reminds us of the transformation from work like Rodin's, with its heavy emphasis on classical and Renaissance precedents, to Constantin Brancusi's work associated, among other factors, with 'elevation of the status of carving as a way of working' (1981:80). It is, therefore, with the technique of carving that the transformation of the modern practice of sculpture in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was initiated. In contrast to additive methods, direct carving has been described by Read as a means to test the artist's sense of form (1983:175). Brancusi described wood-carving as being a process of 'reanimating matter', something he acknowledged in peasant art created from wood, which was untouched by the sophistication of the Mediterranean civilization (in Read, 1983 [1964]:187,189). As an integral part of Zondi's received visual vocabulary, the sensitive aesthetic forms of the wooden objects of Zulu material culture come to mind as well as Zondi's perception of wood as being animate. He perceived his handling of wood as working with a living thing. He gave it something of the 'mystique of material' which fosters the kind of correspondence between form and content that is thought to have widely influenced the development of modern sculpture (Read, 1983[1964]:192).

The evolution of Zondi's career, to some extent, mirrors that of a sculptor like Eric Gill, whose carving skills were learned in a technical institute and practised 'in the business of earning a living' (Harrison, 1981:212). Zondi's love for his material created and maintained a strong conflation between the craft and his art. A skilful craft that develops into art-making is the kind of modernist background which Zondi shared with his more immediate colleagues and mentors. These included white educators like Grossert<sup>268</sup>. Given Zondi's intellectual exchange with this educator, it is likely that they discussed the technical and aesthetic concerns related to art and craft in early English modernism. The expressive talent of the

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<sup>268</sup> Grossert's two-volume Ph.D. thesis (1968) reveals the educator's calligraphic and drawing skills in numerous illustrations.

profoundly influential Sr Pientia, whom Zondi met in the ambit of Mariannahill, initially also emerged from skills in design and calligraphy (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:94). Most important was Hooper, and more indirectly, the British modernist artists Jane and Jack Heath. Their academic background skills in calligraphy and design form an important aspect of their teaching of students in Pietermaritzburg, with whose work Zondi came in contact.

Zondi's contact with Hooper and the imagery he was shown in books would almost certainly have ensured that he became familiar with some tenets of British modernism. These will have included the 'vitalist' ideals of artists like Henry Moore, reflecting the conflation of form and emotion (Read, 1983 [1964]:181). Together with Hepworth, Moore laid the foundation for the full integration of sculpture as a recognized discipline among the fine arts from the 1920s. The modernist sculptors who studied within the ambit of their creativity, in their turn created an influential diaspora of students. Some of these practitioners returned, or immigrated, to South Africa from Britain, creating a new, albeit mostly Eurocentric foundation for the arts in practice and in education. Zondi came in contact with some of these individuals, directly or indirectly. A link may thus be made, between Zondi's art-making and early modernist sculptors, regarding two aspects. The first is his working-class background, which shaped the non-elitist foundation for his art-making. The two most prominent protagonists of modernist sculpture in Britain in the first three decades of the century, Moore and Hepworth, were, to use Harrison's words, 'distinctly unrepresentative of the main body of those in a position to consider themselves as potential English sculptors' (1981:216). Henry Moore transcended his industrial working-class origins, promoted by his father, who believed in the notion of 'self-help' as well as the young artist's absorption in his studies, in the manner of someone 'determined to make the most of opportunities for self-betterment' (Harrison, 1981:219). This biographical background is mirrored in Zondi's progression from his humble rural origins to becoming an internationally known artist. Parental insistence on education (Rankin, 1993:132), as an integral part of artistic motivation was augmented, in Zondi's case, by the ethos of self-improvement among the black intelligentsia. This became the *Leitmotiv* for his art-making, which thus remained firmly anchored in the social milieu of its origination. This, then, places Zondi's art outside the mostly elitist ideology and creativity not only of white South Africans but also of the generation of black artists who came after him, who sought to disassociate themselves particularly from sculpture.

The second aspect of Zondiq's figurative oeuvre linking it to early modernist sculpture is an embrace of the physicality of the sculptural medium, a truth to materials, and the notion that sculpture could speak a universal language. Young sculptors in the 1920s, like Henry Moore, felt a need to erase received visual and tactile traditions in order to claim new territory for modernist sculpture. With global cultural examples on which modernist practice was drawing, the authority of the 'classical tradition' was being challenged, which had, until then, secured coherence of meaning and style for sculpture in England (Harrison, 1981:221). A new theoretical foundation had to be sought, to defend claims made about the meaning of sculpture as a modernist practice. In short, the modern purpose for sculpture required redefinition (Harrison, 1981:221).

'Special qualities' admired in African and Oceanic art, which was shown in England at the beginning of the 1920s, were suitable examples that implied the overt three-dimensionality of the forms and, as a result, the vitality of the figures (Harrison, 1981:218). Read elucidates the European interest in so-called 'primitive' art, including that of the Romanesque or Gothic periods, in its own Christian civilization (1983[1964]:52). In the symbolic nature of its representation, its serenity and lack of 'intellectual sophistry', spiritual qualities sourced in the metaphysical are reflected (Read, 1983[1964]:53). With regard to modernism, then, Read claims that, in seeking a new language of form, people of the modern urban age sought to satisfy longings and aspirations that had emerged on account of their having become estranged from nature (Read, 1983[1964]:53). Roger Fry extolled aspects of reductionism which created 'an extraordinarily emphatic and impressive sequence of planes', according to him, ostensibly imbuing figures with 'an inner life of their own' (Harrison, 1981:218). Such critique was enthusiastically absorbed by Moore, who extrapolated from it Fry's emphasis on characteristics of 'Negro sculpture' as being three-dimensional *realization* and showing 'truth to material'<sup>269</sup>. The terms of reference for a concept of sculpture during the 1920s were described by Moore as being a distillation from 'the common world language of form'. Moore noted: 'Through the workings of instinctive sculptural sensibility, the same shapes and form relationships are used to express similar ideas at widely different places and periods in history' (Harrison, 1981:219,369). In Moore's monumental classicism, the contradiction between modernist tenets, inspired by 'primitive' form, and the undeniable authority of Renaissance sculpture, is said to have coincided and found reconciliation (Harrison, 1981:224).

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<sup>269</sup> From a statement in *Partisan Review*, New York, March-April 1947 in Harrison (1981: 219).

Apart from the commitment to carving, then, a common cause united those proponents of modernist sculpture constituting an avant-garde, who sought to break the dominance of a small literary upper-middle class elite. This was an assertion of the possible continuity and coherence of all sculpture, embracing an infinitely broader, global realm of reference (Harrison, 1981:223).

The importance of the physical process of carving as distinct from modelling, emphasized by Constantin Brancusi, is equally evident in the art-making of Moore. He too, began with the reductive process of carving wood and stone before moving into other media and casting in bronze (Read, 1983[1964]:173). His many varied techniques, methods and scale of works, in Read's view, nevertheless reveals a coherence and a conformation or *Gestalt* (1983[1964]:176). Moore attributed a universality to shapes, on whose suggestion of form, in his view, sculptors could base their work. He believed that everyone was subconsciously conditioned to these shapes, and that they could elicit a response if conscious control did not exclude them (Read, 1983[1964]:177). Moore differentiates between the expression of beauty as a sensual dimension of art-making including its reception and the power of expression, with a vital, spiritual dimension (Read, 1983[1964]:163). The ability of the artist to imbue the human form with spirituality, the *mana*, or animistic vitality found in all natural form, is attributed to his development in archetypal consciousness (Read, 1983[1964]:176,177). With artists like Moore, sculpture came to embrace an experience and a response to significant form, also related to memory. Sculptural form and sculptural experience were conflated in their work. This experiential aspect of sculpture became relevant, mediating between a subject and references embodied in the completed work (Harrison, 1981:223). The concept was born, that a carver could consult his medium for reinforcement of an idea.

While, during the 1920s, the notion of embodiment was a radical and progressive concept, in the early 1980s Harrison regarded it with scepticism (Harrison, 1981:223). A decade later the art-historian Crowther again addressed the notion of physical embodiment, claiming that various aspects of experience, be they rational, sensible, or historical, cohere inseparably in art, at the level of such embodiment (1993:193). In his view, the ability to convey a symbolic significance by means of creativity is characteristic of those art media whose physicality is most obvious, for example sculpture and architecture. Rousseau (1977) speaks of Zondier's ideal to unite sculpture and architecture, which he realized in the Appelsbosch Hospital

Chapel. As a result, in Crowther's view, the creative embodiment in these media represent the most complete way of expressing human experience (Crowther, 1993:173,193). Parallel to his emphasis on the *craft* of art-making and its physicality, therefore, is the idea of physical embodiment, as the ultimate significance of art. The symbolic significance of the fabric of the artwork, in Zondi's case wood, is prominently retained in sculpture, being an example of an art discipline in which the physical nature of the medium becomes paramount. With few exceptions, Zondi's individual sculptures, when viewed in the context of his entire oeuvre, become very distinctively recognizable as the work of this particular sculptor within his modernist idiom. This reflects his very personal style. When patrons articulated something about the particularities of some sculptural forms in individual artworks by Zondi, they referred to the physicality of the crafted wood. Rather than remarking solely on the act of crafting, they disclosed their acute awareness of his, Zondi's, personal engagement with his material. This is a distinct perception of how a particular artist has chosen to shape something in a very particular manner. The artist's presence is felt in the completed, stylized object, being the art-work itself (Crowther, 1993:172). This personal reference reveals how the message of artwork is linked to the viewer's awareness both of style, and the fact that it is *õmade realityö* (Crowther, 1993:188). Zondi's own emphasis on the physicality of his medium and his artwork is thus reflected in Crowther's notion regarding the process of art-making. The art-historian locates this *õcreative making of sensuousí* material into symbolic form *ö* at the heart of truly creative artistic practice in the course of embodying a human experience. (Crowther,1993:192,193)<sup>270</sup>. Within the context of marginalisation and oppression, it was Zondi's creativity which afforded him at least some measure of freedom. The accent which Crowther places on the pragmatic process of art-making thus becomes highly relevant as he reminds us that *õour capacity to act on the basis of our own volition and exercise of choice is given powerful objective realization by the things we makeö* (1993:166).

Zondi's humanist bias has been amply considered and has reflected a prominent feature of African communality. The ideals of humanism, and the manner in which Rodin centred his work on immersion among people is, for Read, a salient factor in counter-positioning his oeuvre against later modern work, which forfeited and substituted this ideal (1983[1964]:14). He denies Rodin the status of a true originator but attributes to him the restoration of a kind of *rectitude* to the art of sculpture, a *õsense of sculptural valuesö* (Read, 1983 [1964]:

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<sup>270</sup> Crowther's italics. see Chapter 10, *Defining Art: Questions of Creativity and Originality, Part II and III* in Crowther (1993:187-194).

10,19). Both Rodin and Moore, with their insistence on making their art immediately relevant to people's lives, have been located in the tradition of the "image-makers" of the Middle-Ages and the Renaissance (Read, 1983[1964]:14).

The same sense for "sculptural values" that is attributed to Rodin and Moore, is emphasized by Paul Fechter, as "plastische Werte", in the theory and work of Barlach (Fechter, 1961:126). Bodenstein had a preference for Rodin and the German expressionists, Ernst Barlach and Käthe Kollwitz (Zondi, 2002a,:10 pers.com). By the late 1950s, Bodenstein was discussing with Zondi the creativity and the philosophy of these artists (Bodenstein, A.,2002 pers.com.). No doubt Bodenstein pointed to the similar idealistic aims as Zondi's own artistic intention, which was just emerging around this time, namely, to maintain a strong relation between the figurative art and the environment and circumstances which engendered them. Barlach's deliberate rejection of classical art, in favour of the Gothic or Nordic tradition, brings him into proximity to Rodin, with the latter's admiration for image-makers of the Middle Ages (Read, 1983[1964]:25). A certain familiarity with Barlach's Gothic-inspired human forms that were modified by expressionistic tendencies thus enabled Zondi to discover elements in Bodenstein's carving, of "the old German wood sculptors" (Zondi, 2002a:9 pers.com.). Examples are Bodenstein's *Johannes der Täufer (John the Baptist)*(c.1960)(Fig.27 opp.) and *Trauernde Mutter (Mourning Mother)*(1961)(Figs. 28;29 opp.). Barlach (1903) believed in the relevance of art-making to evidence something of its sacred spirit and ignite an "inner fire" of the kind that "art for art's sake" was unable to do. He believed that he had to have empathy (*Mitleid*), even where, due to his own distance from suffering, it prohibited his presence (1911). In this way, he could become a part of this suffering (1911). Zondi's description of his carving of *Christ on the Cross* at Appelsbosch, to be considered below, is evocative of Barlach's sharing of an "experience of the soul". The mutual language in art understood by all people, in Barlach's view, was the human figure or the milieu or the object through, or in, which the human being lives emotions (Barlach, 1911). In this visual language, he believed, the most profound and the most concealed is able to be re-lived (*nacherleben*). Focusing on the physicality of sculpture, Barlach claimed that "sculptural thought" (*die Gedankenwelt des Plastischen*) is intertwined with its manifestation in solid form, the material to be used in its execution (1906a). Zondi's ideas are mirrored in this theory of Barlach's, including his idea that natural objects like trees have sensations (*Gefühlswelten*) which the process of sculpting is able to expose. The character of the material, for Barlach, determined the form which the artist extracts from it. With his

sculptural viewpoint focused in this way, on the eternal, he was able to perceive the world not as it appears, but as it is (Barlach, 1906).

When Zondi spoke of the artistic challenge of portraying movement (Zondi, 2002a, pers.com.), he mentioned the privilege of having seen, in Paris in 1977, *The Burglers of Calais*, and *Monument to Balzac* (1897). He revealed how *Lot's Wife* (1959) (Fig.248-251 before p240), which is his first successful attempt at portraying a dynamic stance, was directly inspired by the ideas inherent in Rodin's monumental works (Zondi, 2002a:10 pers.com.). Zondi's frequent visits to the Rodin museum in Paris gave him the opportunity to study the manner in which the French sculptor made the representation of movement a central concern in his endeavour to create the illusion of life, which prompted Read to call Rodin a realist (1983 [1964]:16,18). Rodin's maxim to have "an absolute faith in nature" would have appealed as much to Zondi's intuitive way of working his figurative sculptures, as humanism would have, expressed in Rodin's romantic words: "The main thing is to be moved, to love, to hope, to tremble, to live. Be a man before being an artist!" (Read, 1983[1964]:14). Perhaps it was such a trust in nature which enabled Zondi to relinquish his initial enslavement to detail and to begin to conceptualize form and mass in space. The body of Zondi's *Lot's Wife* (1959) twists as she turns to look behind her. With heavy limbs revealing modernist reduction, her body has a monumentality in space. Zondi has emphasized her three-dimensionality, the conception of form in depth, and her sculptural values. It is only with an *a priori* knowledge, which the artist demands of his audience, that the position of the woman is revealed as being the instant in which she is turned into a pillar of salt. Her stance could be suggestive of successive movements up to this moment. In this, *Lot's Wife* may be distinguished from *Triumph* (or *Liberty*)(1975)(Figs.226-228 after p235), which figure appears in a flow of movement, prior and subsequent to this position, making it conceptually continuous. The figure is a good example of the depiction of visual subjectivity, something of the artist's known experience, which is nearer to the truth than the arrested movement of photographic imagery.

In understanding the liberation of his work from detail, Zondi was able to embark on revealing in his portrayals of human beings something intrinsically spiritual. Stylistically more free, Zondi's pieces also embodied something fundamentally human. The draped *Sorrowful Mother* (1959)(Fig.194 opp.p211) takes on a role of an archetypal mother, independent of place or time. Zondi has abandoned finer detail. He has conceptualized and



simplified. He uses the cloak in which the woman is huddled to realize the inherent structure of the human form, the essential without particularity. The minimalism he achieved in his work from the late 1960s, in pieces like *Robed Woman* (1968) (Figs.30-33 opp.) and *Looking Back (or Communication with God or Die Eensame)*<sup>271</sup> (1975)(Figs.221-223 opp.p235), are examples of many of Zondi's standing figures that appear quietly contemplative. These are figures in which his simplified form is expressive of human emotion. They possess a certain monumentality, which still reflect the kind of spiritual vitality and power of expression, which does not necessarily require the visual stimulus of movement. Brancusi's and Moore's notions come to mind regarding the numinous quality in art. Brancusi spoke of the spiritual or religious in art, that was achieved through simplification of form. Only then, in his view, could the true meaning of a work of art be exposed. "Simplicity is not a goal, but one arrives at simplicity in spite of oneself, as one approaches the real meaning of things". One might say as one approaches the numinous quality of things. (Brancusi in Read, 1983 [1964]: 187). The shape-consciousness, which Moore describes as Brancusi's contribution to art-making, is evident in Zondi's work at the height of his career.

Zondi's cloaked figures made over three decades reveal an integrity and understanding of sculptural form. In this, a daring parallel may be drawn to the sculpture of Ernst Barlach, with whose work Zondi was familiar through book illustrations. Barlach's sculpture, according to Paul Fechter, reveals an harmonious union between the human body and the fabric in which it is wrapped<sup>272</sup>. These become expressive of the reality of form itself, beyond the subject. Form thus becomes a conceptual feature pertaining to sculptural values (*plastische Werte*) rather than representational ones (1961:126,127).

A monumentality, which Bodenstein (J.W., 1965a, script) had already ascribed to Zondi's work in the mid-1960s, may be seen in figures like *Orpheus* (1972)(Fig.356 opp.p254), *Cello Player* (1974)(Fig.389 after p258), and particularly *Determination* (1978)(Figs.293;294 opp.p248). Short of invoking Jean Arp's ideal of organic form in nature and his concept of "concretion" (Read, 1983:82), in these figures Zondi reveals something of his understanding of the coherence of form, and the *realization* of an integral mass in space (Read, 1983[1964]:82). In the above works of the 1970s, discernible is a wholeness, which differs

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<sup>271</sup> Alternative titles were given to me by Olga Marsay, whose mother, Mrs. Barry, bought the piece from an exhibition in Bloemfontein (Marsay, 2004).

<sup>272</sup> Fechter emphasizes the fact that the figures are not only *clothed*, but cloaked or shrouded (*verhüllt*) (1961:126,127). Rather than seeing the "nude" underneath the fabric, Barlach is shown to have integrated the human form with its cloaked attire.

from the sum of its parts. Such integrity of form was set in opposition to the study of detail, which constituted Matisse's critique of Rodin's work (Read, 1983[1964]:34). By now Zondi had understood to subordinate detail to the creation of a dominant rhythm in his work (Read, 1983[1964]:34). In *Orpheus* (1972)(Fig.356 opp.p254) and a piece like *Woman* (1972) (Figs.61,61a opp.p181) of the same year, Zondi reveals his understanding of exaggeration as a tool for expressiveness, in the sense of Barlach's idea of reality, beyond the visual (1906), and Matisse's much quoted *L'exactitude n'est pas la vérité*. Matisse had encouraged the exaggeration of physical characteristics for expressive purposes (Read, 1983[1964],41,42). The haptic nature of Zondi's work and the most obvious simplification he used to express an embodiment of emotion by using human forms is shown in his *Husband and Wife* (1973)(Fig.81opp.p183). He has subsumed detail in the two figures to the overall rhythmic verticality of juxtaposed and interlocking limbs. Zondi had understood the function of his art as to symbolise activity (Read, 1983[1964]:87) that, by embodying in his work signs or metaphors, could impart a message.

#### 4.2 STYLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

When Rankin speaks of black sculptors 'almost invariably' working in a representational mode, she refers to a 'fundamental' quality in the work of black South African sculptors in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by recalling de Jager's term, 'figurative expressionism'<sup>273</sup>. Claiming that the western influence on black artists has been strong, she comments that, apart from his consistent use of African models, 'there is nothing specifically African about Michael Zondi's sculptures' (1989:49). She suggests that South African artists preferred the use of wood as a working material because it more readily satisfied their urge to identify their work with Africa and wood was the medium used in traditional African sculpture (1989:42,43). When, for abstract artworks, they use titles that refer to Africa, she claims that this is a mode of identifying their material, namely indigenous hardwoods, with Africa (Rankin, 1989:42). On the other hand, she remarks that stylization of form in the work of black artists was 'less likely to have derived from a knowledge of traditional African art or contemporary European styles, than from their own personal vision' (1989:47,49). She regards the 'Zondi family' meaning Michael and Mandlenkosi, as an example of personal initiative (1989:49, 71). However, as was shown, Zondi's stylistic shifts occurred

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<sup>273</sup> E.J. de Jager (1978) 'Contemporary African Sculpture in South Africa', Fort Hare Papers 6(6):421-56, September 1978 p. 431 - in Rankin (1989: 43).

undoubtedly as a result of not only being confronted with visual images of European art but also being the recipient of private mentorship, which afforded him insight into theoretical aspects of modernist art.

Debates about 'authenticity' or 'Africanness' are deemed to be more distracting than critical (Vogel, 1991a:9). Susan Vogel notes that modern African artists have situated themselves and their traditions in relation to Europe and Islam, as they synthesize new media, techniques, and a new patronage base. In the renewal of artistic traditions, new art forms respond to social and cultural situations peculiar to that century. Rhythmic repetition of forms are noted as being 'a minor aesthetic trait' of African works which are a 'reprise' of earlier forms (Vogel, 1991a:20). Visual links to the past are, however, described as elusive, (Vogel, 1991a:14,16). Therefore, by identifying continuities in various so-called 'strains' of African art, she reveals philosophical and aesthetic sensibilities, more than any discernible visual style (1991a:8). Similarities in the *conception* of art, therefore, are thought to unite African artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is linked to the purpose of art, the artist's role, interaction with clients, and the manner of working (Vogel, 1991a:16). As was shown, precisely these conceptual aspects of art, as well as its social grounding, were the foundational concerns for modernist art.

In the light of the above conceptual emphasis in African art-making, the statement that Zondi's work has nothing 'specifically African', while being fundamentally correct, nevertheless requires qualification. Rankin acknowledges that the modernist emphasis of forms, used to enhance the shape and meaning of the objects, is a conceptual rather than a representational mode (1989:11). Zondi's frequent and often pronounced use of this visual tool locates his work within a conceptual visual canon that is widely acknowledged in the work of artists from Africa. Also, Zondi's concept of representation as 'art' was developed in a western context, (Rankin, 1993:135). Yet as his naturalistic style developed from an early interest in making realistic representations of oxen, or drawing images in sand, in Rankin's view, the tendency towards naturalism is not entirely a foreign cultural imposition (1993:135). Significantly, his use of indigenous tools such as the adze and crafted knives in the making of utilitarian objects as a boy, locate him within established African traditions of woodcarving. Zondi's skill in using, in particular, the adze, situates his sculptural woodworking skills among those features of art-making, which have been embraced in theoretical writing concerning African modernity.

Contributing to the visibility of African modernist artists, Sylvester Ogbechie (2008) contests notions of African subservience to western narratives and European modernist practice. He is concerned to counter suggestions on this account: that African modernist artists merely appropriated European artistic paradigms. He attributes great significance to the inclusion of an adze in an early photographic portrait of the Nigerian modernist, Ben Enwonwu, in his studio in London in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. This is interpreted to signify indigenous ideals and interest in the artist persona (Ogbechie, 2008:3,5). Importantly, it is also viewed as a reiteration of the artist's devotion to indigenous aesthetics. Zondi's use of the adze, then, as the basic tool of sculpture in African art (Ogbechie, 2008:3), reflects the use of African techniques in his modern art-making.

Over the years, and into old age, Zondi emphasized both his autonomy from institutional art-making and also the originality of his style, which he believed was unique to him and which nobody had been able to emulate: 'What brings me satisfaction is that I have never seen somebody imitating my style' (Zondi, 2003a pers.com.)<sup>274</sup>. Graham Ellis was more particular, noting that Zondi strongly resisted any suggestion that his style is in the African idiom and was determined not to have been influenced by any particular school, whether it be national, representational or impressionistic (Ellis, 1966:13). Thus, the artist showed pride in what he perceived to have been a mostly self-taught career. Perhaps due to Zondi's lack of formal education in art, he was obliquely deprecatory about institutional art tuition, such as it was at the time, intimating that preferences were imposed on students. Zondi claimed 'an artist must be true to himself. He must not copy anyone. In my art, everything I do comes from within' (Zondi in Deane, 1978:201). Zondi saw travel abroad in terms of the opportunity to taste the culture of other countries but never to copy their art (Zondi in Deane, 1978:202). It is tempting to ascribe his frequently voiced negative comments about formal art tuition to his making a virtue both of the financial constraints that had precluded such training for him and of the lack of possibilities for blacks generally, to study art formally. After all, it seems that Zondi declined offers of scholarships for overseas study on more than one occasion (Zondi, 1961b:1, letter). Yet Zondi's comment probably referred to

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<sup>274</sup> As a wood carver *par excellence* (de Jager, 1992:124), it may be true that nobody achieved Zondi's adeptness with hardwoods, yet the animated surface texture of Duke Ketye, whom Zondi met at Mariannhill, is reminiscent of his style, in de Jager (1992: 136). Patricia Khoza's style of using the chiselled surface on hardwoods, which she learned from Zondi, reflects his preferred method of working wood. Also, Zondi's friend, Eric Ngcobo, who worked with him around 1964 at the Appelsbosch Chapel on the cement mural, in that year carved *uNonkhublwana (Princess of Heaven)* (de Jager, 1992, 20), noted as *Unomkhublwana* in Rankin (1989: 140). Not only has he used Zondi's favourite wood, but his chiselled planes resemble Zondi's style.

the positive association, related to the notion of originality of an artwork, and individual authorship. As Herbert Read cautions, "It is unwise to claim originality for any images or ideas in this age of swift extensive communications" (1983[1964]:85).

Zondi's work was engendered from within the "Zuluness" of his youth. His low-relief carving from the late 1940s and 1950s and his three-dimensional work of the latter decade have been considered in the socio-economic context of their creation. Pre-empting his move to sculpture in the round, Zondi's detailed low-relief carving on kists and pieces like his early *Jewellery Box* (1954) (Fig.9 opp.p87) reveal the artist's attempts to acknowledge three-dimensional space. Scenes on the box reveal particular devices, like the portrayal of three ducks in diminishing size, carved with the young *Warrior* (1954) (Fig.11 opp.p 87). Again, working with relative sizes, in the *Kraal Scene* on the *Kist* (mid-1950s) (Fig.12 opp.p87) he is very obviously aware of creating a sense of space with a foreground, a middle-distance and a far-distance.

Zondi crafted decorative objects, such as masks and utilitarian pieces, of which examples have been sourced from 1954. Small utilitarian items include a *Tray* (1954) (Fig.34 opp.), sticks (Zondi,1961a, letter), and book-ends. In the pair of Book Supports early-1950s) (Fig.35 opp.) Zondi has incorporated stylizations of the busts of Zulu females, who are recognizable by the impressive *isicolo*. By this time, jewellery boxes Zondi had made at Edendale for indigenous patrons became valued by a white clientele. All these items became a welcome source of additional income for the artist, to augment his small salary as a teacher. Thus, a measure of commodification became attached to this art-making, as discussed in letters to Bodenstern (Zondi, 1960e; 1960f, letter), as he explored his medium and gained confidence in carving. With *Nozizwe* (1954)(Fig.37 opp.p) it becomes immediately obvious that Zondi's natural proclivity lay with three-dimensional work. His talent for carving in the round was awakened by one of his pupils, Lazarus Chezi, whom he described as the "boy" who was working with him at the DIBS (Zondi, 2002a:1 pers.com.; Zondi in Tilley, 1965). Zondi claimed that it was Chezi's *Young Woman* (1954)(Fig.37 opp.) which prompted his first piece *Nozizwe* (1954). He understood it as a challenge to see whether he could improve on this figurine. In the comparison, Zondi's superior understanding of the human body immediately becomes obvious. Even in this miniature, the facial features of *Nozizwe* have been carved with a greater skill. Zondi was eliminating all signs of the process of carving, pre-empting the style of his small three-dimensional works during that decade. These three

early pieces are carved with meticulous attention to detail, displaying the extent of Zondi's technical proficiency as a carver. The *Two Figurines with Load* (early 1950s)(Fig.36 opp.p171), as well as in the single pieces, *Girl Figurine* (c1954)(Fig.170 opp.p212) and *Girl with Mielie* (c.1954)(Fig.171 opp.p212) the artist is exploring the human body in a variety of positions and weight-shifts<sup>275</sup>.

Only one example has been found, where Zondi used a foliate embellishment on one of his kists, a motif found typically in Germanic churches (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:83). This is a small flower carved as low relief into the corner of the Bodenstein *Kist* (1960s) (Fig.38 opp.p 171). The artist's relief sculpture, *Landscape* (1955) (Fig.166 opp.p211), is a 'picture' with an inlay strip of darker wood placed into the light wooden frame, which is physically an integral part of the whole work. As an autonomous scene not destined as an inset, it is carved in slightly higher relief, much like the *Warrior* (early 1950s)(Fig.167 opp.p211) and *Khandamdevu* (early 1950s)(Fig.168 opp.p211). Despite improvements since the extremely low incisions of the *Jewellery Box* scenes, Zondi's technique in the *Landscape* (1955) (Fig.166 opp.p211) still shows unfamiliarity with the possibilities of the medium of low-relief carving. Nevertheless, he reveals an adept understanding of three-dimensional space as he works with relative sizes of objects according to their distance from the foreground. It is likely that he found a ready market for decorative 'pictures' such as this one, which refer to the Zulu cattle culture.

As Zondi's carving skills developed from the early 1950s, he was given individual appraisals by those educators and white friends whom he respected. The people that were initially influential for Zondi, while he was at Dundee, were Einar Magni, Jack Grossert, and John Nixon. Zondi received encouragement from his Swedish colleague, Sven Eriksson, the principal of the school who gave him his first set of chisels (Eriksson, 2004 pers.com.). Further, Zondi's progression from low-relief carving to three-dimensional sculpture broadly coincided with the stay of his brothers, Mandlenkosi and Noah, as students at the Ndaleni Teachers' Training College in 1953-1954 (Rankin, 1989:71). Zondi was financing their studies, and he would visit them there (Zondi, 2002a:7 pers.com.). Zondi thus became familiar with the work of the students there, from which some artists emerged, doubtless encouraging his own creativity. Dedicated students from diverse cultural backgrounds doing the art course at Ndaleni explored sculpture, which was mandatory in the art course offered at

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<sup>275</sup> See 5.1 CULTURE AS SELF-NARRATIVE p209.

the Training College. Personal messages were conveyed by means of a conceptual expressiveness (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:17,18).

The European modernist influence of white teachers resulted in consistencies in style without conformity, as the human figure in work from Ndaleni was rendered frequently in solid, truncated forms, with only a schematic indication of details (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:21). Lorna Peirson, who taught for 18 years at Ndaleni, thought woodcarving came naturally to students (Rankin, 1989:31).

Zondi's practice of sculpting free-standing or mounted heads, while linked to technical experimentation, was no doubt motivated by the saleability of these pieces. These meticulously carved heads of the 1950s confirmed his early interest in making representations that were as realistic as possible (Rankin, 1993:135). With *Kadebune* (1956)(Fig.173) and *Nobubele* (1956)(Fig.174 opp.p213), Zondi is seen to be experimenting with various textures which his chisel is able to make, particularly in details like the representations of the hair. These works are testimony to skilful technique and knowledge of physiognomy. The formalistic portraits were mainly of Zulus, marked by dress signage, but also included a figure of a Pondo (Zondi, 1959a, letter). Examples include various *Zulu Heads* from the 1950s (Figs.39-42 opp.), some mounted on roundels. Nixon saw in these specific African types a lack of artistic exploration. He therefore advised Zondi to discontinue making purely physiognomic studies (Nixon,2003 pers.com.). Zondi's response may be seen in a portrait like *Female Head* (1950s) (Fig.43 opp.). While still representational and detailed, this portrayal of an older woman, with hooded eyes and a cloth piously draped over her head, shows Zondi's departure from creating polished surfaces. Zondi's most significant stylistic shift concurred with a thematic change. Apart from covert signage in the form of body adornments in very few pieces from then on, Zondi's figures no longer reflected a specific ethnicity. The people he portrayed were universal figures, rather than representations of Zuluness.

His crucifix figures, which date from 1955 to the 1970s, are also characteristic of Zondi's major stylistic shift. His increasing understanding of the human form in conjunction with his expressive abilities with wood, is well illustrated in these early liturgical pieces. The work, *Christ on the Cross*, at Ceza (c. 1955)(Fig.44;45 opp.p174) is carved in very dark hardwood, smoothly finished, with stylized drapery in four regular folds around the waist of the figure.

A similar crucifix was carved from very dark wood for Eriksson's small hometown in Northern Sweden, Långselet (Fig.48 opp.)<sup>276</sup>. Another figure of Christ on the cross was photographed by Jenny Eriksson (Fig.46;47 opp.), this time the figure was a very elongated man. Compared with these early full-length human figures Zondi displays his profound knowledge of the human form in *Christ on the Cross* (c.1964) (Figs.270-272 opp.p244) at Appelsbosch, carved more than ten years after becoming a sculptor. He had developed the technical expertise to translate the human form. Having learned to display a truth to his material, Zondi made fine, consistent chisel-marks over the entire body, to give the blackwood figure an even worked surface texture, which enhances the rhythmical undulations of the ribs of the torso.

It may be significant that Zondi relegated his endeavour at self-portrayal, the *Self-Portrait* (1961)(Fig.49 after 174), to a pile of scrap in a dirty part of his workshop, (Bodenstein, A.,1998a:3, script). Rankin comments that self-portraiture is unusual among black carvers (1993:135). There are possibly conservative cultural considerations linked to creating personal images of people among Zulu speakers. Yet over the decades of his career, various works seem to embody facets of self-portraiture or suggestions of portrayals of his father or grandfather in their roles as the *pater familias*.

During the later 1950s, in conjunction with the B.I.C.A. group, Zondi met Selby Mvusi, Bodenstein's close friend. Elizabeth Rankin attributes to this artist's work a consciousness of art made outside a western context (1989:47). The sophisticated ideas and literature to which Mvusi and artists like Ernest Mancoba had access, in her opinion, provided knowledge of alternate art styles which encouraged experimentation and gave artists choices (Rankin, 1989:47). Through Zondi's access to the visual stimulus of artistic images in books and at the university in Pietermaritzburg around this time, this applies equally to him.

Zondi's almost dramatic departure from his early style to becoming more true to his material by leaving the traces of his tool marks coincided with his exchanges with Bodenstein and John Hooper, the modernist-inspired sculptor lecturing at the University of

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<sup>276</sup> Sven Eriksson brokered this piece during the time Zondi and he were at the DIBS in the early to mid 1950s. It was made as a commissioned work for the Lutheran church of Sven Eriksson's hometown, Långselet, in Northern Sweden. Being a colour photograph, it could have been taken long after its creation in the 1950s and sent to the Erikssons as a record. The photograph was given to Kirsten Nieser by Dr. Lennart Eriksson.



Natal<sup>277</sup>. By the end of the 1950s, these friends and mentors supplied Zondi with literature on modern art (Zondi, 1960i, letter; Bodenstein, A.(2002) pers.com; Bodenstein, Hans,2008 pers.com.). In Bodenstein's home Zondi was able to familiarize himself, by means of books, with French and German sculpture of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On a less formal basis, than Mvusi and Mancoba did, Zondi saw images of the work of artists like Auguste Rodin, Käthe Kollwitz, and Ernst Barlach. Zondi named Rodin as being Bodenstein's favourite artist (Zondi, 2002:10 pers.com). As noted, the *Burghers of Calais* and the mature Rodin's piece, *Monument to Balzac*, were very inspirational for Zondi, probably from the late -1950s. Apart from book illustrations to show Zondi, Elisabeth Bodenstein, Wolfgang's mother, owned art prints (Bodenstein, A., 2003 pers.com.). Zondi mentioned that his inspiration for *Lot's Wife* (1959)(Fig.248 before p240) to have been engendered by looking at the work of Rodin (Zondi, 2002a pers.com.).

It was no doubt the informal, individualized tuition which Zondi received from John Hooper, that represents the most profoundly enduring intervention regarding style in his body of work from the late 1950s. It was decisive in encouraging Zondi to emerge from his meticulously representational mode at the end of the 1950s to a much more liberal handling of his medium. Facilitated by John Nixon's daughter, Kay Nixon, Zondi's presence at the University of Natal, an all-white institution, was condoned by the head of the Fine Arts Department on the Pietermaritzburg campus<sup>278</sup>. Zondi could interact informally with the white university students, see their work, and have his own pieces appraised (Zondi, 2002b; Hooper,2006 pers.com). His visits were based on reciprocity as Zondi demonstrated his wood-carving technique to the students (Zondi, 2002a:6 pers.com.). Hooper's late-modernist sculpture was typified by a broad expressiveness and conceptualism (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:169). At this time Zondi was still drawing his imagery from Zulu rural roots, among people he knew and whose lives he shared. Zondi's imperative that his art should remain accessible to a wide audience thus determined his mostly representational style. He recalled lengthy discussions with Hooper, which were conducted in the latter's private home (Zondi, 2002a; Hooper,2006). Significantly, Hooper's work, in private and public collections in Canada, became widely admired, particularly for the

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<sup>277</sup> Hooper is mentioned in various letters by Zondi to Wolfgang Bodenstein, in connection with accruing wood (15 February 1960), having given Zondi a guitar (4 March 1960), books (8 November 1960), and taking part in the B.I.C.A. exhibition (29 August 1961).

<sup>278</sup> 'I was just lucky to have friends in places like the university of Natal that helped me, otherwise I wouldn't have been allowed to attend the fine art classes' (Zondi, 2002a:8, pers.com.).

accessibility of his sculptures that conveyed profound messages related to 'social justice and human triumph over adversity' (Klinkenberg, 2006). He was able to encourage Zondi towards a modernist honesty regarding his method and his material. It is likely that illustrations in art books from the Hooper library, which focused on British modernist work like that of Henry Moore, considered above in terms of 'vitalism', would have been meaningful for Zondi. These images opened up avenues for imagining stylistic variations in his own work. The embodiment of Zondi's ideas in particular artworks was thus given the prospect of expression with broader possibilities in the handling of his preferred medium, wood. A week-end workshop was organized at Appelsbosch, perhaps around 1960. According to a sketch drawn by a visitor, Mr. Hertell (Fig.50 opp.), Zondi, Bodenstein, and Hooper were participants. This was possibly in preparation for their joint exhibition in 1961 (H.T. 1961).

Aware of the huge stride he had taken by engaging in the modernist idiom of truth to his material from the turn of the 1950s, Zondi, as an old man, remembered and remarked that for *The Found One* (late-1950s)(Fig.287 after p246) he had not used 'the chisel finish' (Zondi, 2004:6 pers.com.). In its fine attention to detail and its overall smooth, polished finish that contradicts the subtractive chisel process, Zondi designated the *The Found One* to be a 'relative' of *Realisation I* (1960) Fig.288 after p246) (Zondi,1960h:5 letter). These pieces exemplify Zondi's skills with his first definite departure from physical proportions in the human figure to expressive distortion, in this case extreme elongation. *Lot's Wife* (1959) (Fig.248 before p240), with her dynamic stance inspired by Rodin's monumental figurative sculpture (Zondi, 2002a:10 pers.com.), shows a reductive style of disproportionately large and heavy limbs. The glossy, polished finish of the works achieved in the laboured manner of sanding down the chisel marks, was common in much of the student work from the Art School of the Ndoleni Teachers' Training College during the decade of the 1950s. While the students there seemed largely unable to shift from the practice of sanding surfaces smooth (Rankin, 1989:31), Zondi soon understood modernist tenets that enabled not only distortion of human proportions but also a flexible manner of employing his medium. It is likely that once Zondi understood the ability of art-making to be a tool for conceptualizing, he thought that his direct attempt at verisimilitude was superficial.

Zondi's first acknowledgement of modernist alternatives in the handling of surface texture becomes evident in two works of the same year, *Adam and Eve* (1959)(Fig.241 opp.p239),

and the head of *Moses* (1959) (Figs.204-206 opp.p229). These pieces are the first evidence of Zondi's understanding of the notion of truth to materials, in this case retaining the mark which his axe, adze, or chisel left in the wood. This is the stylistic preamble to Zondi's free and bold use of his tools for which he was admired throughout his career. Although the artist deemed *Adam and Eve* to be unfinished, he did no further work on it because Bodenstein deemed it to be complete (Bodenstein,A.,1998a:1, script). This was the modernist outlook acknowledging the roughly hewn piece which revealed the original marks of the axe and animated chisel. Two examples in particular, exemplify how Zondi was influenced, particularly by Kollwitz and Barlach. A portrait of *Sorrowful Mother* (1960)(Fig.194 opp.p226) reflects some of the emotional force of Kollwitz's sculptural work, representing people in similarly oppressive circumstances of social unrest in Europe. Also, Zondi's sketch of *The Scourge* of May 1960 (Fig.51 opp.p177) is a direct homage to Barlach's *Der Rächer* (*The Avenger*)(1922) (Fig.52 opp.p177)<sup>279</sup>.

Zondi's break from the academic realism of early African pioneer art, then, was as a direct result of the informal intervention of educators and friends, who confronted him with a visual vocabulary which would locate his work firmly within a modernist idiom. Particularly the private instruction from Hooper was no doubt well suited to his individualistic spirit. From this guidance, Zondi was shaping his own opinion of the kind of art he wished to create for his South African audience. As Zondi's understanding of the agency of his art developed, notably from this time in the late 1950s, he was able to use his creativity to conceptualize. By means of sculptural representation, Zondi was imbuing wood with symbolic significance. In this way, he was referring to some aspect of the world other than to the object itself, which he was creating. As his art became an inclusive platform, it was to remain a meeting-point for the wide range of people in whose circles Zondi moved. *Orpheus* (1974)(Figs.356-360 opp.p354) would reflect his frequently cited agenda, in his words, to be the 'builder of bridges' through the arts.

Around this time, evidence from Zondi's correspondence with Wolfgang Bodenstein reveals how the young artist valued his friend's opinion about his art and the extent to which he depended on his encouragement (Zondi, 1960b:1; 1960c:1; 1960g:2; 1960j:1, letters ). As a result of these various interventions, Zondi could better evaluate aspects of his own work.

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<sup>279</sup> The figure *Der Rächer* was conceived in 1914, sculpted in lime wood in 1922, and cast in bronze in 1930 (Groves, 1998:67). It was acquired in 1976 and it is in the collection of the Barlach Museum in Hamburg, Germany.

By 1960, during a very productive phase, Zondi was aware of the necessity to measure his own progress against that of other artists and to present his work for critique before a national and an international audience. Seeing the 'Art Competition' advertised in *Zonk!* Magazine, Zondi noted to Wolfgang Bodenstein that this was 'my chance of testing my standard in sculpture and a way of finding out what South Africans as well as outside visitors to the Union think of my work' (Zondi, 1960s:1,2, letter). The large yellowwood sculpture of a 'small boy playing a flute', which he named 'The Dreamer' (Zondi, 1960b:2, letter). *Fluitspeler (Flute Player)*(1960)(Figs.374;375 opp.p256) received a bronze medal award and is his first piece which was bought by a public institution, the National Gallery in Bloemfontein<sup>280</sup>. The other piece he entered was Bodenstein's *Realisation* (1960)(Fig.288 after p246), which he borrowed for this purpose. He received news of the award 'first hand' from Bodenstein (Zondi, 1960g:1, letter). Zondi regretted that in the haste to finish the work, he had omitted 'to carve the title and my name' (Zondi, 1960g:1, letter). It became important to the artist that he should be known as the creator of a piece which, in his eyes, had conveyed a particular message to the judges of the art competition. Although the work of black artists was being brought to the fore, albeit in a separate section of the Festival, it offended Zondi deeply to find that the invisibility of blacks in the white (art) world was implicitly confirmed. This is evident from his comment that what he found worst of all, was that 'nobody cared to ask my name' (Zondi, 1960g:1, letter). In response to the critique of his award winning 'Little boy' *Fluitspeler* (374;375 opp.p256), by means of a letter to his friend, Zondi commented on the intention of his work. Presumably the critique was aimed at Zondi's concern with fine detail of *Realisation*, which is far less pronounced than in his large yellowwood figure of the flautist. This he had already reduced significantly from the sketch he had prepared for Bodenstein (Figs.372;373 opp.p256) (Zondi, 1960b:2; 1960g, letters). Despite his use of expressive distortion, he was still aiming to attain a mode of verisimilitude. The judges' evaluation may have aimed at encouraging Zondi to attempt a greater degree of abstraction. Zondi wrote: 'The criticism passed does not bother me at all. I admit going to superfluous details in my work, but they will fall off as time goes on. My art is made for the people and the world. It is my interpretation of God's creation, and not something specially made for the Art expert. Art should not be a mystery, but should be able to speak to mankind and represent its creator even when he is long gone' (Zondi,1960c:2, letter). This reveals both Zondi's awareness and his confidence that he

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<sup>280</sup> As Zondi failed to sign or name the piece, which he regretted (Zondi, 1960g:1, letter), it is recorded in the archival records of the Oliewenhuis Art Museum under the descriptive name *Fluitspeler*.

would be able to move towards a greater degree of abstraction, or at least expressive distortion, in his carving. Implicit in his comment is also Zondi's resistance to the kind of abstraction which made artworks less accessible to the untrained eye.

Zondi's figurative pieces slowly departed from a strict adherence to formal realism. In the absence of preliminary sketches, he worked from memory rather than from static moments captured in drawings. He was learning to create form, rather than to imitate it. In his *The Prophet* (1961)(Figs.53;54 opp.), which Zondi sketched for Bodenstern once it was almost complete (Zondi, 1960g, letter), *Pilgrim* (Fig.55 opp.), the cloak of the old man enabled the artist to partially avoid detail. More significantly, despite the rather static posture, he reveals an understanding of the relation between the human form and its attire. Zondi's cloaked figures from this time onward reveal an aspect of three-dimensional art-making in which a parallel may be drawn to the sculpture of Ernst Barlach, with whose work Zondi was familiar through art images in books or as loose prints. Barlach's work, according to Paul Fechter, reveals an harmonious union between the human body and the fabric in which it is cloaked<sup>281</sup>. These become expressive of the reality of form itself, beyond the subject. Form thus becomes a conceptual feature pertaining to sculptural values (*plastische Werte*) rather than representational ones (1961:126,127). An example of Zondi's first decisive move away from "superfluous details" (1960g:2, letter) is his *Bearded Old Man with Cloak* (1960s)(Fig.56 opp.). With only fine lines of a toothed chisel as an overall surface texture, the cloaked body, more than its descriptive representation, has become stylized form. Zondi's understanding of form is exemplified by his large *Woman* (1972)(Figs.61,61a opp.p181), whose torso is a rhythmic landscape of ordered chisel-marks, defining a textured surface in the rich red ivory wood. This rhythm energizes the work. Rather than imitating the form he knew from real life, in his figurative pieces he was recreating facial or body features by means of new forms, creating another reality that was the artist's own.

His stylistic exploration and development is further discernible when one compares his many portrait heads of women, a range of which are known from the collection of photographs of the 1960s taken by Heinrich Schlaudraff. Zondi's experimentation with his medium is evident as each piece is highly individual. Hair, head drapery, the tilt of the head, the nature of the chisel-mark to create angular surfaces or surface texture, all these features become part

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<sup>281</sup> Fechter emphasizes the fact that the figures are not only *clothed*, but cloaked or shrouded (*verhüllt*) (1961: 126,127).

of the process of art-making, in which their originator never seems to fall into one stereotypical mode. During this decade, the artist achieved, in his works, a mood of introversion by means of closed eyes or a downward gaze, thus avoiding a particular visual engagement in any one direction. This could convey a Zulu convention of respect, *ukuhlonipa* (Koopman, 2008:440; Denis, 2008:584), where social hierarchies determine the measure of eye contact (Nettleton, 1998:86).

With *Female Torso* (mid-1960s) (Fig.57 opp.) Zondi reveals how he has understood the manner in which his medium could be used to appeal to an audience versed in modern art, rather than to those seeking curios or ethnic portraiture. The most obvious change from the style of the 1950s is the artist's loose handling of the drapery. The blows of the axe as the first marks of the process of reduction are retained without much added refinement. The freedom of technique in this piece is rarely achieved again. But over the decades, numerous robed or draped figures reveal how Zondi used fabric as a device for avoiding detail and, at the same time attempting stylization, that is, for letting the viewer imagine the form beneath fabric.

By the turn of the decade a greater measure of stylization is evident in portraits in which the character of the broad chisel mark is retained. Examples are *Madonna* (1969) (Figs.58;58a opp.), *Female Head* (1969) (Fig.59 opp.), and *Queen* (1969) (Fig.60 opp.). The light is caught by large flat facets, many of which were created in his initial reduction of the log by axe or adze. Facial details are subsumed in large facets also created by means of a broad chisel. *Madonna* (1969), although highly stylized, reveals a richly textured surface created with a toothed chisel. Embodied in these, as in many of his portraits of women, is the common countenance of quiet dignity, or peacefulness. The modest demeanour, or manner of looking downward, could again be a reflection of the custom of *ukuhlonipa*. One of Zondi's most monumental pieces is the large red ivory torso *Woman* (1972) (Figs.61;61a; opp.p181), bought by the Haenggi Foundation<sup>282</sup>. Zondi uses the drape over the shoulders to create an animated rippled surface made by rhythmical chisel marks. The cleft in the drape reveals only one large breast. He used a similar chisel animation in the *Tall Cloaked Woman* (1980s)(Fig.62 opp.p181) and the monumental *Pieta* figure (late-1970s)(Figs.316-318 two after p250). In this large piece of a mother and her two children, the

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<sup>282</sup> Established in 1978, the Haenggi Foundation exhibited work through Gallery 101 and Gallery 21. *Woman*, coming from the *The Pelmama Permanent Art Collection*, was donated to the Oliewenhuis when the collection was disposed of by sale and donation (de Jager, 1992:36).

minimal variation of the chisel marks are monotonous. A year later he used bold chisel work for *Female Head* (1973) (Fig.63 opp.), in a broad, reductive style. Zondi gave a portrait bust shown in Pretoria in 1974, the title *Zola* (1974) (Fig.64 opp.), meaning 'become still' 'quiet' or 'peaceful' which reflects the mood of many pieces. She has a strongly elongated neck, as does the large and striking *Shibiza* (1974) (Fig.65 opp.), shown in the same exhibition. Here the Zulu *isicolo* top-knot signifies that she is betrothed.

Returning to a strictly representative style, Zondi carved the young woman, *Female Head* (Late-1970s) (Fig.66, after p181) which has an equally contemplative countenance, suggested by means of her closed eyes. A *Female Head* (1982)(Fig.67 after p181) of the early 1980s recalls his work of the 1950s, both in the handling of the surface and his return to verisimilitude.

Some experimentation is reflected in Zondi's treatment of hair in his early work, which gave him the opportunity to explore texture by means of chisel-marks. His most striking example of this is *Kadebune* (1956) (Fig.68 two after p181) with the *isicoco* head ring, the *Cloaked Young Man* (1970) (Fig.69 two after p181), in the manner of the *isiguqa*, where the head was shaven but for a tuft of hair in the front, a feature mainly for male children (Krige, 1957 [1936]:371). He also uses this for *Young Man (with Attitude)* (1978) (Fig.70 two after p181). Zondi pointedly depicted strands of long, flowing hair in the monumental portrait of *Christ* (1973) (Fig.71 two after p181) in the Berglund collection, denoting how the artist was upholding the conventional depiction of Christ as Aryan. Female figures frequently include the *isicolo*, rather than the splaying top-knot, the *inkehli*, which Zondi distinguished from it (Zondi, 2006a pers. com.).

Throughout his career he used the Zulu *isicolo* as a symbol to denote full maturity, betrothal, or marriage. Alternatively, by making use of head drapery, *doeks* or hats, he could avoid placing them in a restricting ethnic context. Zondi mentioned the *umYeko* hair style (2006a:6 pers. com.), hair that hangs down (also known as *isiYendane* or *uluPhotho*), as depicted in *Female Head* (1970) (Fig.72 opp.p182). Here the hair is dressed into long greased strings. These cover the whole head (Krige, 1957[1937]:378 citing Mayr). In this example, the strands are highly simplified. The early *Zulu Female Head on Roundel* (late - 1950s) (Fig.73 opp.p182) revealed individual strands in great detail, possibly describing the *iziNwele ezithandiwe* style, which includes fibre wound around strings of hair (Krige, 1957[1937]:371,372,378). In contrast, Zondi's portrayal of a woman *Graduate* (mid-1960s)

(Fig.74 opp.) is fairly roughly hewn. Having dispensed with detail, even the rendering of hair has become relatively untamed, worked into short, thick plaits and more loosely, asymmetrically arranged on either side of the head. The hair parting, as Zondi depicted also in *Ntombi* (1973)(Fig.75) (opp.), was a feature which became taboo under Buthelezi, as it was decried as being too western (Berglund, 2004a pers.comm.).

In contrast to young women bathing or wearing only loose drapery from the waist down, Zondi's robed sculptures are depictions of older male figures, or more mature women fulfilling modes of *ukuhlonipa decorum*. When the full drapery is combined with a head covering of a *doek* or a cap, this may indicate that they are church or parish women in an *amakholwa* context. The experimentation with body form underneath drapery coincides with Zondi's exploration of his chisel marks, as he searched for interesting textures in his surfaces, frequently creating a variety of these in one piece. In early depictions of women bathing, Zondi experiments with loosely draped fabric, as in *The Palm* (1960)(Fig.324 after p251). In the enveloping cloak of *Lot's Wife* (1959) (Figs.248-251 before p240), he uses a large measure of simplification of form, leaving solid reductive limbs apparent underneath the drapery. This is echoed in *Sorrowful Mother* (1960)(Fig.194 opp.p226). She is swathed in a long cloak. The artist suggests that her hands underneath the material are holding it together tightly, as it becomes like the shield of fearful person. The cloak of *Rachel* (1963) (Figs.252-255 opp.p240) is greatly stylized as the artist creates a fine, very rich surface texture by means of toothed chisels. Around the same time, the cloak of his *The Publican* (mid-1960s) (Figs.276;277 opp.p245), carved of the hard dark stinkwood, lends itself to a glossy polish. Many of Zondi's figures have a surface of small, even chiselled planes, like *Elegance* (1975) (Fig.76 overleaf) and *isiHambi* (1975)(Fig.77 overleaf). Long drawn-out, chisel marks emphasizing verticality create another kind of surface, as in *Prophet* (1976) (Fig.78 after p182). Limbs are suggested underneath fabric in seemingly endless variation. e.g. *Umsizigazi (Parish Woman)*(1974) (Fig.79 overleaf) and *Woman* (1975) (Fig.80 overleaf).

One of Zondi's most eloquent abstractions of form, where the distinction between drapery and body becomes blurred, occurs in *Couple* (husband/wife) (1973) (Fig.81 opp.p183). The two embracing bodies become one in the intertwining of vertical human forms. This is one of three figures in which Zondi has omitted to carve facial features, which are all from the collection of the same patron. The artist relies solely on a conceptual expressivity through the



body forms. The other two examples are *Madonna* (1973)(Fig.82 opp.) and *The Virgin* (1974) (Fig.83 opp.)<sup>283</sup>. The latter piece echoes the amalgamation of body and drapery in *Couple* (1973) in a piece that, for Zondi, achieves a high measure of abstraction. In *Madonna* (1973) of the same year, the faceless female form is given only shapes in a play of rounded and sharp edges constituting the body. The third of these faceless works is *Commemorating Death* (1973) (Figs.84-86 after p183), pertaining to his father David Zondi, who had died in 1957. This piece, carved sixteen years after his death, is conceptually by far Zondi's strongest, and his most abstracted human form. It expresses Zondi's memory of his revered father, or perhaps the most metaphorical representation of his *presence*, as an *idhlozi*. The form is shrouded, yet simultaneously it becomes a translation of masculinity in clear allusions to the phallus, as the generative power. Zondi creates an image which has powerful personal associations and at once becomes a statement alluding to masculinity, as does David Zondi's *igama lasekhaya*, or 'home name' (Koopman, 2008:439), Sibembane, which alludes to the covering over the male organ<sup>284</sup>.

The 1960s reveal Zondi's growing understanding of the challenges posed by his natural medium. His defiance of the resistance posed by his preferred hardwoods, which were frequently supplied in only relatively thin logs, may be seen in his use of, with increasing freedom, human proportions. The *Nude with Long Hair* (1967) (Figs.87;88 two after 183) and *Tall Female with Brush* (1970) (Figs.89;90 two after 183) are extremely elongated portrayals of women performing their toilette. Where conceptualisation through stylization and omission of detail would have served him more effectively, it appears that he has forced these nudes into the long format, while yet endeavouring to include physical details. This makes the works seem rather unskilled and contrived.

In contrast, *Vertwyfeling (Despair)* (or *Crossroads*) (1974) (Figs.339-341 opp.p252), despite its otherwise very representational style, successfully fulfilled Zondi's aesthetic requirements linked to balance. He is reported to have explained that, besides other irregularities through elongation, he exaggerated the length of the right arm even further for optical considerations (Veldsman, 2008). A further piece of dark hardwood from around the same time, *Scratch my Back* (1974) (Fig.91 opp.p184) shows how Zondi maximized the movement of his figures

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<sup>283</sup> Alternative titles which the collectors have for *The Virgin* (1974) are 'Dancing Lady'; 'Spring'; 'Life' or 'Vibration'. All three figures in which Zondi omitted the facial features have been sourced in the ambit of one collector. One of them he brokered for Zondi (Personal communication, Jean Allcock, Kloof, and Beverley Glennie, Pietermaritzburg, August 2004).

<sup>284</sup> Communication by sms, with Nomfundo Zondi Molefe, 16 October 2009.

within the constraints set by his hardwoods. It was titled in conjunction with Zondi's humorous explanation, "the more I scratch, the more it itches!" (van Wyk 2003a pers.com). Shown publicly at the same venue was Zondi's *Dancing Woman* (1974) (Figs.92;93 opp.) of *pypsteel* (pipe-stem) wood. Here the artist similarly utilizes the natural growth of the wood to create the movement in the figure. Yet, simultaneously he ventures into a pronounced mode of abstraction in depicting the lower half of her draped body. Then, in what appears to be a tall piece, *The Rainbow* (1974) (Fig.94 opp.), Zondi has let the body of his minimally draped female figure follow the natural curve of the wood in a highly stylized manner, while he included the signage of the *isicolo* in an otherwise nude figure. The thin *umthombothi* (tamboti-*Sirostachys africana*) timber ultimately prompted not only the elongation of a figure like *The Scholar* (late 1970s) (Fig.95, after p184), noted below, but also the omission of his entire right arm. Repeated in *The Young Prophet* (1977) (Fig.96 after p184), this was, for Zondi, a device of artistic freedom he rarely used. The *Bearded Man* (1978)(Figs.97;98 after 184)<sup>285</sup> is also extremely attenuated, but, by using the natural curve of a big log, Zondi was able to create a much more animated figure. This was enhanced by rhythmical chisel-marks, creating a distinctive surface texture very similar to that of the sculpture of a mature man, *isiHambi* (1975) (Figs.217-220 after p234).

One or two bizarre pieces, unusual in Zondi's body of work, have been hewn from hardwood logs where the growth of the wood determined the choices Zondi made in positioning the body. An example is the imposing *Queen of Sheba* (1965)(Figs.189;190 opp.p224). His determination to remain loyal to the representational style is exemplified by the inspiration he allegedly got from a portrait head carved by Eckhard Bodenstern around 1970, when the two men briefly worked together in Zondi's workshop on the Wolfgang Bodenstern property in Montclair. Apart from a very ascetic standing figure in a representational style, of a woman clutching a small treasure (*Das Kleinod*), Bodenstern created a very experimental, highly reductive mask-like *Head*, comprised only of geometrical shapes (Fig.99 two after 184). Although Zondi is said to have used this directly as inspiration to sculpt his *Smiling Woman* (1970)(Fig.100 two after 184) (Bodenstern, Hanna, 2007 pers.com.), reveals no copying such radical stylistic experimentation.

When Zondi's wood was suitable he used it to return to a smooth finish for his pieces, as he

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<sup>285</sup> This large figure of unknown location is only partially visible in the black and white photograph published in Shirley Deane's *Black South Africans, A Who's Who 57 Profiles of Natal's Leading Blacks* of 1978, which shows Zondi working on the piece.

had worked the surfaces in some figures in the 1950s. Just over a decade after initiating his *õchisel finishõ*, as Zondi called it, he created a silky gloss with the polished surface of the relatively very heavy black ivory wood used for carving *Woman* (1974/75) (Fig.101 opp.). Clearly the extreme hardness of the rare wood invited the artist to exploit these characteristics of his medium. Another work carved from his favourite *hardekool* (leadwood) lended itself to being polished, as in *Challenge (Woman after Bath)*(1975) (Fig.102 opp.). Here remnant flecks of light sapwood embellish the drapery of the figure, just as the surface of the pensive *Robed Woman* (1970s)(Fig.103 opp.), where the variegation of the *umthombothi* wood is revealed.

Zondi's strongest stylistic shift occurred after his sojourn in Paris, early in 1977. The use of broad facets was immediately apparent in a number of pieces, one of which is the artist's mother, Eva, in *Portrait of Zondi's Mother* (1977) (Fig.309 opp.p250), which was recognized by her granddaughter, Nomfundo Zondi-Molefe, as being a likeness. As a form of stylization Zondi had experimented with sharp-edged flat planes in creating facial features in the head made of jacaranda wood, *Queen* in 1969 (Fig. 60 opp.p180). This was a way of realizing a mode of conceptualism of the kind Europeans had found as a new paradigm for their creativity at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when African art inspired them. Within Zondi's body of work, this strong faceting seems to have been a stylistic exception at the time. A more distinctively faceted piece after Zondi's Paris visit is a male *Head* (1977) (Figs.104;105 after 185), made of dark, heavy *combretum* ironwood, whose owner thought this piece unique in its strong faceting (Veldsman, 2003 pers.com.) The idea of giving life to objects õby a system of interpenetrationõ embraced the idea that objects inhere in space, and therefore divide it (Boccioni in Read,1983[1964]:126). Zondi spoke of adopting õa style with í sharp anglesõ (Zondi, 2003b pers.com.) or õangular shapesõ (Zondi, 2002a:6 pers.com.). The rhythmic organization of form by means of geometric planes emphasizes not only the form of the motif itself but also its characteristic of being part of the space which it occupies (Read,1983[1964]:128). These were not quite Boccioni's õatmospheric planes that intersect and link thingsõ (Read, 1983:126), yet Zondi's use of facets nevertheless opens the form of the figure to its surroundings. Facets become the so-called -fragmentsø by means of which artists like Archipenko and Duchamp-Villon had called upon the viewer's own associative capacities to reconstruct in their three-dimensional forms, as they translated analytical Cubist painting into sculpture. Despite claims, by the owner, of the uniqueness of the male *Head* (1977) (Figs 104;105 after p185), two further pieces have been found, in

which Zondi uses this mode of letting light reflect off large flat facets hewn out of the wood. The features of *Female Head* (1977) (Figs.106;107 after p185)<sup>286</sup> made of *Rooikrans* acacia emerge from head-gear constructed of broad planes of chiselled wood which reveal no representative definition. On one side, Zondi has left the bark entirely untouched. The hand, however, placed below the chin, has been reduced to a minimal number of flat planes suggesting a fist. The standing female figure, *Standing Woman* (1977) (Figs.108-110 opp.), is one of Zondi's most daring departures from his figurative expressionism into a modernist mode. This departure goes beyond his frequent exaggerations of limb proportions or extreme elongations. Zondi has created small facets in the face, while larger flat geometric components create the readable shapes of the torso. In this way, large surfaces of chiselled wood create flat planes of light, shaping the figure. The juxtaposed flat facets demand viewer interpretation of the stance from the rhythmical play of light over the planes. Edges and the force of lines in this constructed figure evoke characteristics of movement. The human figure thus represented, becomes a different embodiment of energy. This, then, brings Zondi's work closest to what may be termed something "specifically African" in his work<sup>287</sup>. A year later, he recalled the large facets, creating a kneeling figure in *Prayer* (1978) (Fig.111 opp.). Zondi was encouraged to leave the piece as it was, when in the artist's view, it was still unfinished (Strydom, 2003 pers.com.) Dr. Matthys Strydom still possesses one of Zondi's rough axes with a pipe handle, which the artist crafted himself. He remembers the speed and accuracy with which Zondi achieved an astounding measure of completion with this rough tool (Strydom, 2003 pers.com.)

Having experimented with faceting, mostly during 1977, Zondi once again made use of smooth surface texture. One of his strongest images is the portrait of a composed, self-assured *Young Man with Cape* (1978) (Figs.112-114 after 186). The smooth surface texture of the cloak envelopes the torso of the man from the shoulders down. This pre-empts three particular works of 1979 that have entirely polished surfaces. Zondi seems to have enjoyed the quality of the woods with which a glowing sheen may be realized, and which simultaneously enhance the subtlety of shrouded human form. An example is the deep red hardwood of *Serene* (1979) (Figs.115;116 two after 186), and the polished stinkwood piece, *Primadonna* (1979)(Fig.117 previous p.). In the same year, Zondi made a gift for his

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<sup>286</sup> Dr. Werner Wittmann claimed that this was the first piece Zondi did after his stay in Paris (Wittmann, 2003 pers. com.).

<sup>287</sup> This refers to Rankin's comment that apart from Zondi's consistent use of African models, "there is nothing specifically African about Michael Zondi's sculptures" (1989:49).

youngest daughter, *Female Nude* (1989) (Fig.342 opp.p252), in which he created a highly polished surface. Into the decade of the 1980s, the undated *Mother and Child* (undated) (late 1970s) (Fig.118 opp.) of a dark, heavy wood is smoothly finished. It is stylistically very similar to the humorous gift Zondi made within the family of his closest friends in George, the Wittmanns, *Tokoloshi says it with Flowers* (1982)(Fig.119, opp.)<sup>288</sup>. This could have been a spontaneous change from a mother-child piece, into something which resembles a self-portrait by the artist, depicted with flowers. The sculpture implicitly becomes a surrogate for these. One direct intervention by a patron, which prompted a change in the artist's intention, occurred in this family a year later. Zondi changed a mother-and-child figure which Dr. Werner Wittmann thought unsuccessful. It became one of his rare depictions that include an animal, *Boy with Dog* (1983) (Figs.120;121 opp.) (Wittmann, 2003 pers.com). Zondi made a larger piece of this motif which, when it was stolen from the veranda of the Wittmann home, Frida Wittmann recalls that it was "like a death in the family" (2009 pers.com). Once again this is testimony to the value which patrons attach to Zondi's work.

Zondi seems to have experimented with extreme distortions of the human form in humorous characterisations of children. *Tit Bit* (1974) (Figs.122;123 after p187) alludes to a boy with fruit in his hands. A similar piece is *Thokoza* (be grateful, happy)(1974) (Fig.124 after p187), which was shown in the same exhibition in Pretoria in 1974. From the same show is *Apple Thief* (1974) (Figs.125-128, two after p187). In all three figures, Zondi creates an elongated torso with a hollow back, a distended belly with a pronounced navel and legs being suggested as rounded or simply truncated forms. As an old man, he recalled *Apple Thief* as one of his favourites (Zondi, 2002b pers.com.). Rousseau (1977) had commented that Zondi created no ugly figures, humorously suggesting that this figure might be an exception.

A range of musicians exemplify Zondi's stylistic development beyond verisimilitude. Over the next three decades after carving his low-relief scenes which includes a musician, he reveals his experimentation in three-dimensional work, with highly differentiated ways of rendering limbs holding and playing instruments. These will be considered below<sup>289</sup>.

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<sup>288</sup> Zondi made a gift of this piece when a friend came out of hospital after an operation. He humorously translated the European custom of giving flowers at times of convalescence, saying "Tokoloshi says it with flowers" (Wittmann, 2007 pers.com).

<sup>289</sup> 5.6 ALLUSION TO MUSIC p264.

Very rarely is a lack of representational intention seen in Zondi's work. One of the most animated of his works carved from his favourite *umthombothi* wood is the relatively early *Laughing Duck* (or *Madadeni Duck*)(1965) (Fig.129 opp.). This semi-abstract bird shows how the artist responded subjectively to the natural form of the wood in the manner of a found object (Rankin,1989:40;1993:135). Using an animal as subject matter is also unusual. The artist used a branching section of the tree to create this bizarre creature. A decade later Zondi repeated this mode of letting the wood suggest his forms, when he was given wild willow driftwood from a river. In *Happy Homecoming* (1974)(Figs.130-132 opp.) he has used branches to suggest fragments of intertwined human forms at the top of the sculpture. The narrow central body suggests a torso with breasts. This top-heavy emphasis is framed from below by two highly stylized neck and head forms of animals that emerge and rise up from the base. The title suggests a welcome by howling dogs. But by disregarding this given labeling, a more free imaginary may be conjured, of small antelope, or even birds with long necks. Zondi creates enormously varying tension between the human and the animal forms. The piece invites the viewer to change her perspective and consider it from different angles. In the round, the negative spaces become as animated as the sculpted form.

Another animated stylization of the human form is evident in two pieces using the gnarled shapes of the Cape laurel, stinkwood, in *Contortionist* (1975)(Fig.133 after p188) and *Pain* (1982)(Figs.134;135 after p188). Zondi has used an overall evenly sized chisel-mark to animate these works.

Zondi's last gift to Bodenstein before the latter's premature death was *Sacred Harvest* (acq.1981) (Figs.136;137 two after p188). Stylistically linked to work that Zondi had created two decades earlier, it shows that, after a long career of experimental art-making, he had not settled into one particular mode of carving within the self-imposed restraints of representational art. Zondi, having now passed the zenith of his creativity, shows one that this piece belies the enormous conceptual and representational strides he had made over three decades. He still, or perhaps *once again*, took pleasure in carving simple genre figures located in rural Natal. Also a later piece, *Rural Church Woman* (1979) (Figs.138;139 two after p188), shows appropriate attire of the *doek* and fabric covering the shoulders, worn for attending Christian church services. She wears ankle rings and bangles, to signify that she is from a rural area.

It becomes evident, then, that Zondi never departed from a fundamentally representational style in exploring the human form. His stylistic development was subject to constant shifts. These were often contingent upon the shape, size, or natural grain of his raw material. Yet it would seem as though they were equally subject to the artist's experimental temperament and his endeavour to embody something different in each piece. It is almost as though the artist wanted to prove that he could use the new stylistic mode of faceting after his stay in Paris, before he returned to his own more conventional style of carving, for which he was known before his trip overseas.

The pieces which are the most persuasive testimony to the stylistic maturity of Zondi's work were abandoned by the artist in the 1980s on the farm of the Veldsmans. Two pieces are tall female figures, *Twisted Woman* (1980s) (Fig.140 opp.) and *Woman* (1980s) (Figs. 141;142 opp.). The human forms are suggested by means of minimal intervention with the natural shape of hardwood logs, which show evidence of many years' exposure to the elements in the bushveld. It is speculative to presume that in the case of *Twisted Woman* Zondi abandoned the work due to a particularly prominent knot in the wood above the left breast in the section flowing into the raised arm. A third piece, *Fragment* (1980s) (Fig.143 opp.), equally reveals the artist's intervention, by means of the first few thrusts of an axe. Zondi never claimed these pieces, in addition to a vast amount of hardwood on the Veldsman farm, to which he never returned after the death of his daughter, Khanya in 1988. Particularly, such pieces as these, reminiscent of found objects, reveal the technical confidence of a sculptor after almost four decades of working in three-dimensional wood. Perhaps the fact that he abandoned them is indicative of Zondi's preference, throughout his career, for the representational mode, which in some ways deterred him from pushing his medium beyond the recognizable human form.

Some few critical comments have been taken from newspaper and journal articles to indicate how Zondi's art was being publically received. As Zondi was constantly fulfilling requests from patrons to buy one of his works, only twice was he able to accrue a sufficiently large body of work to have solo exhibitions, one in 1965 in Durban, the other in 1974 in Pretoria. Bodenstein first introduced Zondi's work to a larger audience in the Durban Art Gallery in 1965 (Figs.144-147 opp.p190). Significantly, as one of the few critics to do so, Bodenstein expressed how Zondi's work reflected the human struggle, which he had witnessed since childhood among rural people. He noted that by means of 'representational biblical

characters as well as his impressionistic works, Zondi depicted moods and emotions of people, also their joys. He asserted that his figurative works embodied something of the inalienable dignity of human beings (W. Bodenstein in Bodenstein, 1998:11). From this characteristic, he ascribes a universality to Zondi's work (Bodenstein, J.W., c.1968:2-4, script). Bodenstein (J.W., 1965a, script) noted Zondi's lack of formal art training and mentioned the encouragement he was given by various people. He associated the informality of his artistic development with a resultant 'sincere' very personal or 'individualistic' style, which he claimed the artist developed spontaneously. While his comment about such 'sincerity' no doubt served to reflect the artist's deep emotional engagement in his work, it explains little in terms of style. Arguably it merely states a very obvious trait of any artist that had accumulated a body of work large enough for a major exhibition. Bodenstein (J.W., 1965a, script) further implied that the artist's development of style was unconstrained and without conscious cultivation or manipulation. The above consideration of mentorship which Zondi received, including Bodenstein's own, verifies the extent to which this evaluation of the artist's work (Bodenstein, J.W., 1965a, script) requires qualification.

In the same year, a comment was made by Dr. Matthys Bokhorst, in his capacity as the director of the South African National Gallery, who suggested that Zondi might benefit from 'the theoretical study of sculptural form and volume, both positive and negative & the empty space between positive forms' (1965). He wondered 'whether it would not be possible to let him follow a short course somewhere in Europe' (1965). He suggested organising this. On the other hand, he thought Zondi's architectural form to be outstanding, lauding the light effect shown in the interior photograph of the Chapel at Appelsbosch<sup>1</sup>. He named Zondi and Ngcobo as 'the two most gifted African sculptors at present in Natal (thus excluding Mfuzi)' (Bokhorst, 1965).

Judging from the few newspaper cuttings obtained so far, the critical reception of Zondi's art was rather evasive. To some measure, the 'subjecthood' of which Oguibe speaks is relevant, a denial of self-articulation reflected in hegemonic texts on the work of black African artists, considered above (1999:19)<sup>290</sup>. The focus lay on Zondi's biographical data, rather than on his art. This implicitly denies 'author-ity' and a personal language of articulation (Oguibe, 1999:19). There was, in the sense Enwezor uses the term, a 'critical silence' (1999:245)

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<sup>290</sup> 2.2 CRITICAL RECEPTION p60.



around the content of his work. The alternative, as noted in the case of C. Hagg, was an attempt to negate his modernism and cast his work in the kind of 'ambiguous ethnographic presence', mentioned by Kasfir (1999a:94). Certainly the conceptualism of Zondi's work, or any contextualization or meaningful exploration of his oeuvre within the apartheid state has not been sourced, with one exception<sup>291</sup>.

Bodenstein's written annotations from the opening of Zondi's solo exhibition in 1965 (Figs.144-147 opp.p190), seem to have become a widely used source of information for the public media regarding Zondi's work. Various commentators on the artist's creativity, whether in the form of newspaper reports, magazine articles, or publications drew heavily on his evaluation. Zondi's respect for others was emphasized as was the human and emotional appeal of his work (K.S., 1965). His progress was noted, from his early purely representational style to a more individualistic and bolder approach (K.S., 1965). Zondi's style, his imaginative use of the natural gnarled growth of wood to create his large *Queen of Sheba* (1965) (Figs.189;190 opp.p224), and the humorous *Laughing Duck* (1965) (Fig.129 opp.p188) were described as 'surrealist abstraction' that was thought unskilled and 'gimmicky' (K.S., 1965). In contrast, George How of the *Daily News* deemed the latter piece to be one of the best in the exhibition, in the way it had transformed the gnarled roots 'into fine symbolical carvings' (How,1965). On the other hand, the pieces like those which Zondi carved in a few hours as small gifts, the artist's 'smaller heads and figures', were pejoratively associated with the tourist trade (How, 1965).

George How (1965) gives detailed information about Zondi's understanding of wood, his use of textural nuances and a 'dignity of form and line' employed in four named pieces. His 'amazing creative ability' was lauded, yet no reference was made to the content of his work other than that the pieces reflected his 'inspired' dedication to the portrayal 'of his own people' (How, 1965).

Graham Ellis understood the universality of Zondi's messages in wood and that using black Africans as his models had no undertone of African nationalism, but rather reflected the artist's understanding of his own people<sup>292</sup>. He was understood to be conveying 'a message to men of all races' (Ellis, 1966:13). Again Zondi's resistance to 'any suggestion that his

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<sup>291</sup> An exception is the article 'Presentation to Hospital' in *Daily News*. Durban, 21 February 1964.

<sup>292</sup> This term is borrowed from Zondi's daughter, when she referred to Zondi going to the *Wema* hostels to be with 'his own' (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a:1).

style is in the African idiom is mentioned and so his determination not to have been influenced by any particular school of art (Ellis, 1966:13).

Bodenstein's brief assessment seems to have been adopted in the writing of authors like E.J. de Jager. The anthropologist used the Schlaudraff photographs of Zondi's work, supplied by Bodenstein, as well as the latter's text, as the basis for the passage devoted to Zondi in the first comprehensive publication in 1973, *African Art in South Africa* (de Jager, 1973). His description of Zondi's individualistic style was further propagated through the state Department of Information's publicity instruments in the *South African Panorama* and *Lantern*, in 1975 and 1977 respectively. Reporting on Zondi as the only black among thirteen other South African artists represented in Paris in 1977, Isabel Jooste wrote of Zondi's human figures that they were "portrayed with sympathy and dignity" (1977:19).

Zondi commented that he was able to give expression only to that which he intimately sensed and experienced (Rousseau, 1977). Probably encouraged by the artist's own insistence, Rousseau concluded from this that his work thus remained beyond the influence of contemporary tendencies. The deduction is flawed. As noted above, few artists are entirely able to evade the visual stimulus of other forms of artistic expression to which they are exposed. Possibly influenced by Bodenstein, in whose home she interviewed Zondi, Rousseau claimed that Zondi's art expressed dignity and possessed a universality. She does not qualify what she means when she speaks of his work as having the "form and characteristics of Africa" ("die vorm en eienskappe van Afrika"), as he addressed all of mankind (Rousseau, 1977). She regarded his work as a sub-conscious conflation between indigenous custom and western Christianity as she accurately recognized how, for Zondi, the human body became the vehicle for expressing matters of the soul (Rousseau, 1977). Lorraine Fourie (1979) possibly drew on Rousseau's article of 1977, as she reiterated in English what the journalist had reported in Afrikaans two years earlier. This was the same flawed claim that Zondi's work "remained largely unaffected by modern trends because he can express only what he feels within himself". She reiterates that Zondi worked according to his own standards, which he was required to satisfy, concentrating not so much on detail but on imbuing his figures with harmony and dignity (Fourie, 1979).

Zondi's own impressions about his work were published after his trip to Paris. He spoke of new dimensions in his work and his relief at being able to translate the many impressions from overseas into his sculptures: "I can notice a new richness in my present work. There is

a symbolic dimension which was not there before, which is the result of my experiences in Paris. These experiences have brought me closer to real feeling of art. In Paris, I was rather bottled up. I was taking a lot in, and not letting anything out. Now I am back home, I can put my new experiences into wood.ö (Staff Reporter, 1977). Zondi likened the many different styles he saw in Paris to õí curios they do in Rhodesiaö (Zondi, 2003b pers.com.). Zondi had regretted that there were no other African countries represented in Paris (Zondi, 1977a:3, letter). Yet he may have recognized the modernist influence on soapstone carvings from Zimbabwe, when he saw the exhibits during his visit to the õMuseum of Modern Artö in Paris (Zondi, 1977b:2, letter).

In 1992, the Fort Hare University Press published a more comprehensive version of de Jager's research on the work of black artists, again devoting a section to Zondi. De Jager addressed Zondi's medium, claiming, õwood carving suits him well as it provides an intimate and spontaneous interaction between himself and his materialö (1992:124). Commenting on his style as õdistinctive, personal and honestö de Jager speaks of solid forms, a degree of abstraction and Zondi's use of the chiselled plane. Significantly, beyond the outer appearance of the õneatly finishedö works, de Jager addresses the conceptual aspect of his work as being empathetic, sensitive portrayals reflecting an inner vision of the dignity of people, without idealization or sentimentality (1992:124).

#### **4.3 ART AS COMMUNICATION – AESTHETIC EMPATHY, CREATIVE EXPERIENCE, AND EMBODIMENT**

The implicit reconciliatory function fundamental to Zondi's art relates to serving a common good in the widest sense of South African communality across the racial divide. This is deemed to be a salient feature in all forms of contemporary African art (Vogel, 1991a:16). A number of aspects of Zondi's art-making concur with Vogel's generalizing assertions related to creativity in Africa. His purposeful art-making located among people, the mediatory role he created for himself with his art, and his interaction with clients are all factors which Vogel claims are shared characteristics in the arts in Africa (Vogel, 1991a:16).

Vogel emphasizes a common conception of art in Africa, claiming that content is of prime importance to African artists, critics, and audiences alike (1991a:16). She speaks of a consensus that art must õhonour, instruct, uplift, clarify, or even scold, expose, and ridicule to push people to be what they must be. Even at its most light hearted, it is never

trivialö (Vogel, 1991a:16). The interactivity of the artist and his audience is linked to audience expectation and knowledge as narratives conveying religious, social, and political messages are transmitted (Vogel, 1991a:17,18). Expectations of art thus relate to accessibility of the message. Functionality and interactivity of African art, are salient features of continuity with the past Vogel, 1991a:17).

Vogel recalls the frequently upheld notion of traditional African sculptors that they are freeing a form which already inheres in the uncarved wood. Creativity thus becomes a process of ðmaterializing something that already existsö (Vogel, 1991a:20). Originality, therefore, lies in improvisation skills and the ability to create variation rather than constantly creating something completely new (Vogel, 1991a:20). In Zondi's work this is best exemplified by several versions of a similar theme. The initial image is of a boy wearing his grandfather's jacket, exhibited as *Joy of Living* (or *The Little Dreamer*) (1965) (Fig.148 opp.). The mood of the other examples of figures embodying this idea range from joy to contentment and mischievousness. *De Kleine Johannes* (1969)(Fig.149 opp.) was carved for Bodenstein's son, Johannes. Zondi gave *Umfana Isigangi* (Mischievous Boy) (1969)(Fig.150 opp.) to the father of two sons. The importance of Zondi's interaction with his audience becomes particularly evident in these examples, because the artist personalized these pieces, revealing to his patrons their conceptual message. Vogel's comment comes to mind that even when African artworks appear light-hearted, they are ðnever trivialö (1991:16). *Poor Boy* (1960s) (Fig.151 opp.) was sculpted when Zondi had in mind a particular patron with whom he had discussed harsh social conditions. The poor boy wearing his father's coat thus becomes a conceptual piece, designated for a man Zondi believed was ðsympathetic í to povertyö (Harrison, 2005 pers.com). In this way they were not copies of an original idea but a constantly renewed embodiment of emotions in the act of communicating by means of his art. None of the pieces had been carved in exactly the same manner. The latest two sourced pieces following this theme are *Boy with Jacket* (1960s)(Fig.152 opp.p194) and *Boy with Jacket* (1980s) (Fig.153 opp.p194).

The fact that Zondi's patrons felt that his works conveyed a spirit (Chamberlain, 2004 pers.com.) implies that the artist was able to imbue his wood with an inner force that was being communicated. In a western context this might presuppose that, rather than being stereotypical, his work consisted of highly individualized original art. The reason for Zondi insisting that he never copied anyone's style and his perception that his work was

unique, is related to his idea that everything he expressed with his art came from within (Zondi in Deane, 1978:201). Distinctiveness in Zondi's work must, therefore, be sought in this artist's ability to embody spirit in his hand-crafted figurative sculptures and in their capacity to communicate this to his audience.

One aspect of originality in Zondi's art is present in the making of an artwork, which simultaneously ineluctably links it to its creator. Paul Crowther's concepts of the psychological dimension of artefact-making with regard to self-consciousness has been considered<sup>293</sup>. Originality in the production of an artefact implies that it is skilfully made in the sense of refinement or innovation, beyond existing rules, procedures, or accomplishments (Crowther, 1993:182,183). In linking creativity and artifice, the call for such refinement is aimed at developing notions of creative originality. For an artwork to become a subjective embodiment, Crowther outlines criteria for this originality, which refer to an interrelation between three aspects. The first is the formal configuration itself, in Zondi's case, the individual sculpture. Second, the particular work must function within the artist's entire body of work, and third, both these elements require to be related to the traditions of the medium (Crowther, 1993:183,184).

Whether it be music, literature, or the fine arts, originality in an art form implies that, within a specific configuration, the artist goes beyond customary levels of accomplishment (Crowther, 1993:183)<sup>294</sup>. This is dependent upon talent and the specific historical context in which it occurs. The original artwork becomes a concrete and imaginatively sensuous particular in which the artist creates a formal relation between its individual elements (Crowther, 1993:184,185). In this way, the persona of the individual creator becomes central to the appreciation of the artwork. In the practice of creating, every choice and decision becomes expressive of that particular artist's unique personal history. The specific originator is central to the appreciation of the artwork by others and to their judgement of its originality (Crowther, 1993:185).

Zondi's motivation for his art-making may be sought in the ability of art to overcome antagonisms that may arise from personal or historical circumstances, as proposed by Crowther (1993:175). He claims that art, when it is creative and original, is *needed* for the purpose of conquering antipathy. The highest possibility of art as an idea finds its most

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<sup>293</sup> 3.2 RE-PRESENTING SELF p115.

<sup>294</sup> See Chapter 10, 'Defining Art: Questions of Creativity and Originality in Crowther (1993:180ff).

pertinent application in the context of racial misunderstanding, as Zondi phrased it (Zondi, undated, c. mid-1960s, script). The artwork that is creative and original, then, in Crowther's term, offers a glimpse of redemption (Crowther, 1993:175).

The function of art in fostering the ability to imagine alternative possibilities of experience other than the present and the facilitation of relationships of reciprocity has been considered above<sup>295</sup>. Crucial to Zondi's work is the manner of his communication with others. As Zondi embodied in his artworks something about the human experience, he imbued each of his works with an inner life-force, or spirit. When Zondi released his work for appreciation by an audience in the context of South African segregation, he did so in order that the message of each piece, especially in the home of white South Africans, should engage his audience (Deane, 1978:201). Crowther applies to the presentation and reception of art the notion of a sharing of the artist's vision with his audience, whereby the work is seen as echo of embodied spirit (1993:140).

When, as an old man, Zondi remembered the pieces which he had offered to Bodenstein and Kurt Strauss, commenting that besides Wolfgang, Strauss had the best. He further described his works which the two patrons and friends acquired as representing his whole being (Zondi, 2003a pers.com.). One of his patrons perceived just this message about the figures, this being that Zondi had a spirit for them (Chamberlain, 2004 pers.com.). This is evocative of the notion that an artwork is a stylization of experience, the projection of which is contingent upon the individual history of its maker (Crowther, 1993:172). Something of the artist's self thus thought to remain embodied in the work. With this awareness, it is no wonder that Zondi thus held that each of his artworks in the home of white patrons became a gospel (Deane, 1978:201). This agency which Zondi recognized in his art indicates how he perceived a form as an embodied spirit to be located in his work. This in turn becomes the catalyst for using the artwork to convey something about commonalities which human beings share or which address current concerns. Paul Crowther's exploration of embodied spirit in art, involves the idea of shared human experience, where semantic and conceptual energy in visual and tactile art are directly related to their creator. The sensuous medium chosen to represent the artist's vision, once released, becomes subject to sensual and cognitive processes, which have the potential for revealing to the viewer something about him or herself. Meaning may be gathered through direct perceptual or imaginative

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<sup>295</sup> 3.3 BEYOND RACIAL IDENTITIES p128.

acquaintance with the artwork, which, by drawing on shared experiences, becomes a process of enhancing reciprocity (Crowther, 1993:187,192).

On the other hand, in the context of a country contaminated by racism, Zondi's individualized portraits had the potential, on face value, to take on the role of a racial other by a white audience, while his black audience could discern reflections of self. In this regard, Zondi's endeavour to be creative beyond such racism was considered. It becomes evident, then, how the notion of embodiment and aspects of style may be conflated with the message of an artwork. By means of a process of creation, individual experience becomes manifest in the form of an artwork, which becomes a message between the creator and an audience (Crowther, 1993:188). Art-making is thus a catalyst for communication, for facilitating relationships of reciprocity.

The physical discontinuity of the artist from his work, after its completion, opens up the potential for two alternative readings on the part of the viewer: stylistic-sensual and cognitive-contextual. These interpretations are contingent upon personal circumstances and knowledge, and they are mutually inclusive. As the artist imbues his work with energies, he is creating a distinctive and original work. It was important for Zondi that his personal vision in art-making remained accessible. The reflection of the artist's personal vision was effected by means of a medium that is publicly accessible, in Zondi's case, wood, which has great significance in Zulu material culture.

As one form of communication, Crowther describes a manner of appreciation of art which lies beyond cognitive forms and which relies on specific contextualization. This is a comparative mode of aesthetic enjoyment which he terms "aesthetic empathy" (Crowther, 1993:187). The accessibility of Zondi's medium gives it a general significance and opens up the possibility of eliciting such empathy with the personal vision of the originator (Crowther, 1993:173). Once the work is released by its originator, the subsequent aesthetic appreciation of a particular artwork relies on immediacy, making it a direct perceptual acquaintance (Crowther, 1993:184,185). Through a form of empathy, then, on the part of the audience, the identification of needs, interests, and responses are enabled and shared through a reading of the artwork, but on the terms of the viewer, as noted above (Crowther, 1993:173). The experiences of the originator as well as the recipient can thus serve the latter to promote imaginative development (Crowther, 1993:173). Artwork thus becomes the potential catalyst

for forms of reciprocity between people, as 'aesthetic empathy' thought to be unique to art, or the arts (Crowther, 1993:187).

Further to the sensual response to artwork, the viewer could engage with Zondi's figurative sculpture by enjoying its purely formal qualities. This implies an appreciation of the three-dimensional forms for their aesthetic form alone. Foundational for such aesthetic appreciation and enjoyment is a 'disinterested empathy' (Crowther, 1993:23). This implies that the artist's personal vision *as such* may be compelling, whereby the viewer may appreciate the articulation of a personal experience without considering the artist's ideological or political standpoint which informs the artwork. Nevertheless, aesthetic enjoyment and appreciation of formal structure is mediated by tradition, background knowledge, and belief (Crowther, 1993: 22). Even purely aesthetic experience presupposes that an artwork is culturally and historically embedded. A cognitive-contextual reading, therefore, subjects the artwork to processes of comparison for originality or particularity, where traditions may become the basis for discerning norms of appearance. These norms are thought to be foundational to enjoyment (Crowther, 1993: 22).

The tactile forms which Zondi presented to his rural audience, had little cultural or historical precedent in figurative sculpture, other than stylized figurative embellishment on *izinduku* or sticks. For the *amakholwa*, the Church confronted Christians with forms of representation in the Bible and of interior embellishment of churches in an academic realist mode. Zondi's *Christ on the Cross* (c. 1964) (Figs. 270-272 opp.p244) at Appelsbosch was subject to the gaze of the 'convert' and traditionalists (*amabinca*) alike. The aesthetic experience of Zondi's Christian audience could rely on certain norms known through Biblical imagery or through having seen other examples for comparison. On the other hand, his non-Christian traditionalist audience, who expressed their pride at his having carved this figure (Zondi, 2006c:6 pers.com.) would have had little means of visual comparison. To these friends and neighbours the enjoyment of the human form carved by Zondi could be relatively more disinterested and enjoyed purely as a sensual, aesthetic experience. On the other hand, this, or any representation of Christ, was subject to the conceptual powers of viewers, who would have had little difficulty in associating him with *uNkulunkulu*, the Lord-of-the-Sky (Berglund, 1976:36). In this way the aesthetic appreciation was augmented by cognitive processes drawing on cultural tenets. An example such as this perhaps contributes to an



understanding of Zondi's insistence on wanting to remain within a canon of representativeness.

When Crowther argues that aesthetic responses to artworks involve different modes of disinterested appreciation, he distinguishes among various such forms. The significance of the responses become contingent upon human capabilities, and the way in which these change a viewer's relation to the world (Crowther, 1993: 24, 25). The enjoyment of formal qualities in art is 'disinterested' in that the aesthetic of form is considered without consideration of function or purpose (Crowther, 1993: 21). The response is purely sensuous, as might be the case in the contemplation of Zulu material culture as works of art, regardless of their functionality.

Another feature of a disinterested enjoyment of formal qualities is 'ontological neutrality' (Crowther, 1993: 21). This means that 'the grounds of its appreciation do not logically presuppose any belief in the 'real existence' of the object sustaining the appearance'<sup>296</sup>. Crowther speculates that it is this remoteness from the concerns of real life which 'is responsible for that feeling of 'timelessness' or 'transport to a higher plane' which is so often reported in the context of formal appreciation' (Crowther, 1993: 21). Zondi's depiction of human beings, despite frequent distortion by way of elongation prompted by the nature of his raw material, reveal harmonious pleasing proportions. The viewer is not necessarily prompted to contemplate these artworks beyond such ontological neutrality. A feature such as 'balance' in an artwork is an aspect of aesthetic enjoyment gained from purely formal qualities, which is evocative of the concept of harmony. Zondi consciously modified the figure of a tall woman, *Crossroads* (or *Vertwyfeling*)(1974) (Figs.339-341 opp.p252), for the purpose of 'balance'. This beautiful nude figure could thus elicit a disinterested aesthetic response, with connotations of a 'timelessness'. Yet, once again, background knowledge mediates appreciation (Crowther, 1993:23). Zondi's name for the piece, *Vertwyfeling* (Despair), facilitates a deeper reading, beyond aesthetic enjoyment. This married or betrothed woman, indicated by her *isicolo*, has been sculpted as an anxious South African, prior to the Soweto riots that erupted a mere eighteen months later.

Another aspect of 'reading' an artwork involves 'coding'. Implicit in an artist's choice of subject-matter is a process of reference. This is subject to particular culturally

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<sup>296</sup> Crowther (1993:21) after Emanuel Kant.

conventionalized codes, making of the artwork a "codified medium" whose reading is mediated by culture (Crowther, 1993:139,140). Friedrich Hegel's concept of art as a form of knowledge "midway" between language and tangible matter is expanded by Crowther (1993:139). The personal vision of the artist is transformed by a complex process of mediation into signifiers that are socially intelligible. This augments personal and idiosyncratic stylistic traits which are exclusive to a particular artist (Crowther, 1993: 139, 140). For one particular figure of a concertina player, Zondi used a basically representative style reminiscent of academic realism, understood in a European context. Yet in naming him *Delantaba* (1960)(Figs.376;377 after p256). Zondi is using an Zulu metaphor alluding to missing a person, subjecting this piece to a process of particular "encodings" that are contingent upon cultural and historical mediation (Crowther,1993:139).

It is with the interactive and reconciliatory potential of the arts in mind, that Zondi nurtured creativity wherever he recognized it, even giving away his chisels (Bodenstein, A., 2003 pers.com.). His work as a professional consultant to art teachers and his lecturing activities in secondary schools and universities was considered above. By conveying to learners the potential for the arts to be a very powerful form of communication, as Zondi was employing his own creativity, he was engendering this idea. Yet his own lifelong dream of fostering the arts by establishing a multi-racial school<sup>297</sup> seems to have remained unfulfilled except for a short time "working and teaching in his studio on a plot in Montana outside Pretoria" (Miles, 1997:113). Zondi's dream of establishing a workshop in which the arts could flourish was linked to his pragmatism. He never relinquished his urge to convey skills to people with talent. In a letter to Jim and Jo Thorpe, dated December 1965, he was optimistic that he would be granted a site for a workshop in which various arts would be fostered. He was considering the compatibility of all the arts in a place which he thought would be inspiring for creative souls, perhaps after the model of the Jubilee Centre which he had seen:

Unless things go wrong, it does look like I am approaching the end of my journey. I have now started another building project in the Mahlabathini area (i.e. Chief Buthelezi's district) I have met him and he has agreed to give me a place where I may find my dream realized (ie that of starting an Art Workshop) where if possible I could seek and find local talent who could work together with me. The landscape, the people, the animals and its historical background. they are all most inspiring to the painter, the sculptor the poet and the musician. (Zondi, 1965a:2,3, letter ).

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<sup>297</sup> Repeated personal communication, Michael Zondi, Edendale, Pietermaritzburg, KZN.

Zondi gave a lecture on the techniques of wood-carving, in conjunction with his solo exhibition (*Daily News* 1965a). In the following year, Bodenstein speaks of Zondi establishing a 'studio workshop in the heart of Zululandö (Wolfgang Bodenstein in Bodenstein, 1998:11), something reiterated in 1966 by Ellis, who claimed that his one-man exhibition was 'a fitting prelude to his decision that he should now devote his whole time to the establishment of an Art Workshop in Zululandö (1966:13). It was reported that 'Despite several tempting offers of patronage and employment overseas, Zondi had felt that 'his real mission was among his own people where he might become a teacher of his craft' (Ellis, 1966:13,14). The workshop does not seem to have been a sustainable venture, if, in fact it came about at all. It was Zondi's conviction that 'all men have talents, energies and creative ability. Some use them destructively and some constructively. The man-made wooden figure designed and built to preach and open a man's heart with its message is quite a different story from the man-made steel and wooden form of a machine gun, designed and built to blot out human life' (Zondi in Deane, 1978: 202). After Zondi's visit to Paris, a report, once again, mentioned his dream to establish an art workshop: 'Michael is Looking for SA's Talent' (Staff Reporter, 1977).

In 1974, Zondi commented on the state of art in communities. He invoked the aesthetics as well as the pragmatic developmental and reconciliatory role which art had to play:

There is currently a great stirring amongst Black people ' they are discovering the true nature of their art and the richness it affords the very quality of life. It is becoming part of the actual progress and practical development of our communities. While an increasing number of Black artists are gaining recognition, there is a pressing need for more support for them from a still wider section of their own people. The origin of much of the existing recognition is due to the encouragement and support of our White friends. The growth of interest among the Black population can only be sustained and stimulated by a wider education into the values of art ' not only aesthetic values, but also that of its dynamic role in the actual and comprehensive development of our people; and also for its value in bridge-building among all peoples, all colours, and for all time. (Zondi, 1974).

By this time, pictorial work among black artists was portraying the dehumanizing environment and implicit social dysfunctionality of urban townships (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:87,197). Entirely different means of expression existed within the printmaking

techniques like linocuts, intaglio, etching, and aquatint. These were popular in formal and informal institutions for black students, like the ELC Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift and at 'Polly Street' the later Jubilee Centre, by the time Zondi visited it in 1960. The 'diaspora of social consciousness' engendered in these schools was therefore manifest mainly in the graphic arts. As graduates became teachers and educators in community centres and schools, they became catalysts in developing black art throughout the country. In this way, through the graphic arts in particular, they became a part of the struggle (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:203). Affordability and ease of distribution proved 'the democratic dimensions of print-making', which had created a language of empowerment (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:205). It was at 'grassroots' level, in Thamsanqa Mnyele's words that 'the birth of a new culture, conceived in the hopes and aspirations of the community, nourished by the people's organisation' (in Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:203). In the 1970s, white liberal buyers were touched by these interpretations of poverty, depicted mostly in watercolour. Hobbs and Rankin aptly deride their attraction to the picturesque portrayal of poverty (2003:87). Here the fine line between deep feeling and sentimentality also required careful consideration by artists. Empathy on the one hand, did not exclude complicity in urban impoverishment.

Zondi is cited as being 'an informal teacher and mentor by many artists', among them Smart Gumede (Rankin, 1989:36). During his tenure at Appelsbosch, Zondi was asked to teach art in 'most of the schools' in the area. He also had private students (Zondi, 2002a:19 pers.com.). Zondi mentioned Daniel Mbongwe as one of his students and also Patricia Khoza (Zondi, 2002a:11 pers.com.), to whom he lent some of Bodenstein's tools (Khoza, 2003 pers.com.)<sup>298</sup>. As a graduate from Ndaleni in 1969, during her first year of teaching at higher primary level in 1970, Khoza had some informal tuition from Zondi. It was not unusual for artists to be pursuing some other career while occupied in their spare time with art-making. Informal assistance represented 'an offshoot of the old forms of apprenticeship' (Rankin, 1989:35,36)<sup>299</sup>. Yet it was unusual for a woman to tackle sculpture with hardwoods, which required strength in the carving process. Working informally with Zondi in the Bodenstein garage workshop in Montclair in Durban over week-ends, Khoza recalled: 'I think I became very good. I was nearly reaching his standard' (Khoza, 2003 pers.com.). She emphasized how Zondi helped her with the heavier physical work, using the adze, the axe or a saw for cutting logs, but otherwise he did not intervene. He was very strict, she

<sup>298</sup> He commented 'I have heard quite a number of people who I taught to carve & they are still carving. & somebody thinks that it is a good omen to have one of my tools' (Zondi, 2002a:7 pers.com.).

<sup>299</sup> See 'Informal Art Education' in Rankin (1989:35ff).

noted, but gave her courage and õspiritö. Zondi is described by Khoza as being õhumble, so good, very very good. I thought this was Godø placeö (Khoza, 2003 pers.com.). Zondi believed that to show admiration for anotherø creativity encouraged the maker, in whom he thought õsomething burnsö, making him want to do more (Zondi, 2002a:7 pers.com.). The encouragement Zondi gave, is Khozaø most significant memory of working with him, and the association continued in the form of letters, after their parting (Khoza, 2003 pers.com.). In this way Zondi was disseminating the idea of communication by means of art. At the same time, he was showing the art-makers he encouraged that their creativity could be a strong means of self-realization.

#### 4.4            TECHNIQUE AND METHOD

Alan Paton remarked that Zondiø õlove for wood was to lead to great achievementsö (1979). As noted, Zondi associated a need for carving with gaining a state of õinner balance and peaceö (Bodenstein, J.W., c.1968:2, script). The artistø love for nature and his reverence for wood was expressed in his *Song of the Trees*<sup>300</sup> (Zondi, undated-a). An understanding of Zondiø oeuvre would be incomplete without conveying the enthusiasm with which he revered the South African indigenous hardwoods as the raw material from which his pieces were created. His constant need for the logs became an integral aspect of his friendships with patrons, as they were constantly active in procuring this rare resource for the artist. Given Zondiø emphasis on the physical process in the making, Crowtherø proposed conflation between artefact and art is an appropriate theoretical framework that one can use to consider the work of an artist whose creativity was derived from material culture, and whose art-making emerged from the foundational training in cabinet-making.

Zondi experimented with various media during the course of his art-making. These include clay, stone, linocut graphic art, cement sgraffito, and metal work the last two in conjunction with architecture and building. A pair of small heads made of clay are the only examples of the artist having used an additive medium, namely *Johannes* (Clay Head of a Boy)(1970s) (Fig.154 opp.) and the bearded *Michael Zondi* (1970s) (Fig.154 opp.). He allegedly taught both wood-carving and stone carving (Miles, 1997:113), but his attachment to wood seems to have checked any urge to engage seriously with soapstone or sandstone carving (Fourie, 1979). He only spoke once of having carved a head of sandstone (Zondi,2006c:5,6

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<sup>300</sup> See Appendix II.

pers.com.). During the 1960s Zondi was involved in various building projects, both for the Lutheran Church and on a freelance basis (Tilley, 1965; Miles,1997:111; Zondi 2006c:11 pers.com.). He commented that building took his mind off carving and that it would be very difficult for him just to carve, ðI would find it boringö (Tilley, 1965). For his sculpture, the artist would always prefer wood.

Aware of the visual aesthetics and historical associations linked to the exceptional status of the *ubuchwephesha*<sup>301</sup>, Zondi's three-dimensional sculpture evolved from carving skills learned as a boy, making utilitarian objects, and, as in the case of a number of artists, from carpentry and cabinet-making skills (Rankin,1989:35; 1993:132,135). Preceding his use of commercial tools at high school and at the DIBS, Zondi used an adze and rudimentary home-made implements for producing the useful wooden objects like bowls and spoons. Zondi had a preference for the adze, an axe ðreversed in the handleö (Klopper, 1992:93)<sup>302</sup>, for some of his initial work on a log. As was noted, this places his work in an African context (Ogbechie, 2008). His art-making clearly always retained a strong link to artifice, to the notion of ðartfully makingö or creating. This concurs with Paul Crowther's ideas about the origins of art, which he positions in material culture, in functional forms of artifice, like an ðexemplary utensil or ritual performanceö (1993:170). For Zondi, his skills were coupled with a certain humility and gratitude for his creative abilities, which he perceived to have been bestowed on him by God (Zondi, 2002a:7 pers.com).

Zondi's appreciation for the relationship between nature and his medium to be found in the natural environment is a very literal manifestation of the notion that ðart has the capacity to reflect our relations to natureö (Crowther, 1993:172). A holistic view of nature makes of it a site and a resource of material that is able to ðdeclare its presenceö (Crowther, 1993:172). The concept that ðnature is transformed into raw materialö is exemplified by Zondi's selection and use of logs. A second transformation occurs with the artist's working of the material. This is acknowledged as a preservation of nature in symbolic terms (Crowther, 1993:172).

Zondi's love for his medium and the hard physical labour which he had to put into finding and working his logs set him apart from some of the black artists of the next generation.

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<sup>301</sup> 2.3 ZULU DESIGN AESTHETICS - *UCHWEPHESHA* p66.

<sup>302</sup> The *imBazo* is an axe or hatchet, while the *isAmpothwe* with a triangular blade is the more traditionally used one (Krige, 1957:399).

Contemporary African artists' avoidance of the so-called 'older' medium of wood sculpture has been linked to contact with the West, leading either to a radical change in forms after contact, or complete elimination from the range of art media (Vogel, 1991a:16). The great physicality of the process of creating three-dimensional work in various media, not only in wood, is given as a probable reason for South African teachers not imposing aesthetic concepts on their black students in that discipline (Rankin, 1989: 32). Zulu cultural practices associated particular media with gender (Gowenius, 2003:xii). With few exceptions<sup>303</sup>, women worked clay, while men worked wood. It was considered how students' rejection of labour-intensive manual work in association with craft- or art-making with natural materials and clay in the teaching environment<sup>304</sup>, was associated with 'tribalist' politics and therefore linked to subjugation (Rankin, 1996:32,72). Apart from that, women with a school education, which was associated with Christianity, resisted the absorption of traditionalist practices (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:11)<sup>305</sup>. However, Zondi's thinking was too progressive and in many ways egalitarian, to attach culturally entrenched gender-related restrictions to any specific tasks. He rejected the arrogance of educated people constructing hierarchical class status above that of pre-literate neighbours. At Appelsbosch, as architect and builder, Zondi refused wages above those of an ordinary labourer (Bodenstein, A. 2004 pers.com.) Ultimately, it was the promotion of professionalism, exemplified in the work of Zondi and Sydney Kumalo, that became an important factor in an increased popularity in sculpture as a medium used in art tuition (Rankin, 1996:35,72).

In his urge to convey his skills to pupils, Zondi was very aware of the individually differing preferences in the creative process. Zondi imagined that the creation of a figure from wood required it to be 'freed' from the timber in which it inhered, a conceptualism acknowledged in sculptural practices in Africa (Vogel, 1991a:20). He spoke of visualizing the solid form encased in clay, which could be liberated through a process of reduction 'I see a figure like inside a glass' and what I have to take off is just the surplus' (Zondi, 2003a:5 pers.com.) (Figs.155;156 opp.). Using this concept to which he frequently alluded, he commented on the qualities of a good teacher: 'Some teachers try to force the same medium on all of their students. But this isn't healthy. A teacher must know what medium is nearest a student's

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<sup>303</sup> See Ian Calder, 'Continuing tradition and innovation in KwaZulu-Natal figurative sculpture: Hezekile Ntuli and contemporary Ceramics' in B. Bell, I. Calder (1998).

<sup>304</sup> This is noted by Leeb-du Toit, (2004:11,12) from personal communication with Kerstin Olsson and Pat Khoza.

<sup>305</sup> Leeb-du Toit (2004:11) using Karen Sundén's research of 2005.

heart. Some prefer to build up through the use of clay. Others prefer wood carving to release the figure that is bound withinö (Zondi in Deane, 1978:201).

While Zondi remained largely within the canon of realistic representation during the 1950s and early 1960s, he gradually moved towards a greater acknowledgement of his material, realizing in the nature of his preferred indigenous hardwoods the possibilities for stylization. Within the parameters of the representational style to which he fundamentally adhered, he understood how best to utilize the organic nature of his woods. This is revealed in the way he integrated and juxtaposed the natural growth of the log with the forms he elicited from it. The artist made explicit use of the grain of hardwoods, their colour, and the naturally grown form of the logs. In this way, he could create overall surface texture or different contrasting effects with axe-, adze- or chisel-marks. With these devices of manipulation of his material, he was creatively able to engage in shaping aesthetic works, while imbuing the figures he carved with expressive concepts based in his own experiences. As was shown above with *Laughing Duck* (Fig.129 opp.p188) and *Homecoming* (Figs.130-132 opp.p188), by incorporating natural forms, Zondi achieved some measure of expressive distortion. This is also evident in his large *Queen of Sheba* (1965) (Figs.189;190 opp.p224). Insight into Zondi's carving process of reduction from the original piece of a *hardekool* driftwood log is evident in *Forest Queen* (1974) (Figs.157-159 overleaf), possibly a figure inspired by the artist's memory of his mother (Zondi, 2003a:3 pers.com.). Three photographic images were made of this large portrait that was hewn from a piece of Zondi's favourite *hardekool* wood. Zondi seems to have carved her mostly *in situ* on the banks of a river. A piece like *Pensive Dance* (1976) (Figs.362-364 before p255), reveals how, by seeking the human form, Zondi's work remained short of moving into total abstraction.

Zondi's mode of conceptualizing and embodying his ideas in his figurative sculpture involved two diverse processes. One method was choosing a log suitable for translating a preconceived idea. Implicit in Zondi's report in 1960, that the log from a Mr. Prinsloo was unfortunately í a bit shortö (Zondi, 1960d, letter), is that the artist was still concerned about the ðcorrectð proportions of figures he wanted to carve. Yet, as his oeuvre progressed, he began to exploit the great variety of natural surfaces, retaining especially those gnarled sections of the tree as the stem widens and becomes the roots. Working from the premise of a preconceived idea could require modification during the process of carving, as blemishes in the wood became evident. If he could not mend the wood, as he did in the



case of *Lot's Wife* (1959) (Fig.248-251 before p240), he would change his conception of a figure. This is exemplified in a sketch where he illustrates changes made to the figure due to an unseen defect on the head (Zondi, 1960e:1, letter). The flautist entitled *Dreamer*, due to a rotten part, became *Disappointment*, of a man burying his head in his hands (Fig.199 opp.p228). Alternatively, in the process of engaging with a raw log, Zondi would be inspired by the natural growth or grain of the wood, prompting him to visualize the specific nature or form of the figure (Fourie, 1979), e.g. *Forest Queen* (1974) ( Figs.157-159 opp), above. Rootwood sections, and the multitude of textures he created with his axe, adze, and chisels, increasingly gave his work an integrity and truth to materials which is characteristic of modernist work. Nevertheless, there seem to have been clashes between the way he imagined a figure and the possibilities for translation into the embodied work. Such incompatibility would lead the artist to abandon the work altogether. This will be shown below, as exemplified by three figures made late in his career.

Bodenstein remarked on Zondi's mode of working (c.1968). Drawing effortlessly from his own fund of experience, Zondi was reported to have required no models or preliminary sketches for his work. It was characteristic of Zondi to spend a long time contemplating the piece of wood. Many of the artist's friends recall his method of working, how his initial carving on any log took place with the artist seated on the ground with his chopping block, the wood held between his legs for stability. Then he would begin the process of freeing the figure (Putter, 1977; Veldsman,2008 pers.com). He would tackle it by means of energetic, swift, hard blows of an axe or adze, to reveal an initial rough figurative outline. Many patrons recall this procedure, which inevitably elicited astonishment and great admiration. Bodenstein spoke of an awe-inspiring speed and impulsiveness (c.1968). Zondi's own comment of the reductive process was: "one thing which makes people sort of feel uneasy was the fact that when I really carved it was as though I would break the whole thing to pieces, but no, I have to be so careful, í . (Zondi, 2003a:2 pers.com). This vigorous method of attacking the wood and the discerning selection required in the subsequent subtractive process of carving, leave many of his pieces with a strongly organic quality. R. Cheales (1975) praised about Zondi's work: "...you are aware always of the forceful approach, the fierce determination that brings bold briefness to his carved wood heads and figures. During his process of carving, in which the artist seemed relaxed, he loved to indulge in deep discussionsí ö (Cheales, 1975). Only late in the sculpture would he use the workbench (Veldsman,2008 pers.com) for creating the small articulated planes to augment and

enliven the broader planes. In working on a square block of wood with the intention of carving a head, Zondi would start from the side, draw the profile and then turn it and work on the face (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002:6). Judging from photographs of Zondi's workbench (Figs.155 opp.p206; Figs.127;128 two after p187), he worked on many pieces at the same time. Fourie spoke of the artist working on more than one piece at a time: "When tired of one he would go on with another, each one emerging from a different kind of inspiration" (Fourie, 1979).

Linking the creative process to the handling of the wood, Zondi believed that a good theme demanded good material (Fourie, 1979), that is, the tools and the wood. He considered a good acquaintance with the mechanical tools to be of great importance, and he carved special handles for his chisels and made his own mallets. While in 1957 Zondi was photographed with a commercial mallet (*Bantu Education Journal*, 1957)(Fig.347 opp.p253), in the subsequent decades photographic images show him with his own hand-made ones. He even added his self-made handles onto particular chisels, like a "heavy V chisel with a home made handle" (Zondi, 1977a:4, letter). Zondi had clear preferences for particular hardwoods, like *umthombothi* and *hardekool*, and he was very conscious of the scent of these woods during the working process (Zondi, 2003b:2 pers.com). From 1972, he acquired his hardwoods from two areas. One area was from the *bushveld* near Nylstroom, in the then Northern Transvaal, on the farm of Chen and Piet Veldsman, and their neighbour "Gillie" du Toit. The other area was in the vicinity of George in the Southern Cape (Zondi, 1972:1, letter; Strydom, 1974:1, letter). The Bodensteins, Piet and Chen Veldsman, Dr. Werner Witrtmann and family, and Matthys Strydom all became involved, over many years, in providing accommodation for the artist, and procuring wood for him.

Zondi's expertise in indigenous South African woods and his love for working them was evidently an important aspect in inviting the artist to attend the *L'Homme et le Bois* expo in Paris. He reported how the large variety of hard dark woods made a positive impression on the European public (Staff Reporter, 1977). By likening his artworks to his children, Zondi was implicitly claiming their uniqueness. Speaking about the works that he remembered, or that were recalled by means of photographic images, Zondi always referred to his figurative sculptures in the second person, according to their gender. He thus qualified the reason why he was unable to copy a piece, or work according to other people's specifications (Rousseau, 1977).

## CHAPTER FIVE: NARRATIVE IN ZONDI'S SCULPTURE

### 5.1 CULTURE AS SELF-NARRATIVE

Zondi's strong identification with the Zulu people prompted him to create utopian landscapes invoking the Zulu traditionalist way of life. This early narrative language was augmented within the same ostensibly tribalist paradigm by three-dimensional figurative sculptures. Thus, his art-making of the decade of the 1950s became a form of cultural self-representation. By the time he was ready to promote his art beyond the confines of Zuluness in the new decade, Zondi thought of himself as a 'Zulu sculptor' (1960f, letter). The purpose of Zondi's overt reference to traditional Zuluness in his early imagery reflects how the artist sought to extrapolate the practices, values, and mores constituting communal integrity in regional past. His employment as a liaison officer from the late 1960s, when he was committed to the transfer of technology and skills to rural areas, concurs with his endeavour to contribute to shaping modernity. Kwame Gyekye's proposals for an integration of African economic modes that have proven successful in the past into constructions of modern nationhood provide a framework for Zondi's venture to improve life in rural areas. Culture as a holistic and participatory human experience which embodies a people's way of life in its totality is the product of a community not an individual (Gyekye, 1997:107). Cultural roots, as a basis for identification, such as Zondi found among Zulu speakers, locate individuals not only within some essential social relationships but also within a cultural community with historical traditions and practices. The Zulu ethnic identity and group consciousness which emerged in the decade of his birth was increasingly reasserted during Zondi's career from the 1960s under apartheid (Wright, 2008a: 35).

As Zondi knew only too well through the deprivations his clan suffered into his own lifetime, the integral family life is the foundation for morally sound communal living. The loud call to select values from the past for shaping modernity comes to mind, as considered earlier, which was made public by the black intelligentsia through poetry and prose. The scenes on Zondi's kists, and the continuity he created in his early figurative three-dimensional sculpture bear witness to their idealistic endeavours. In keeping with the purpose of the kists as gifts in marriage from the man to the woman, in the scenes on these items, Zondi created images of gender roles in the process of courtship. Most significantly, he has also incorporated the handshake in marriage. This is a sign of betrothal and, implicitly, of the agreement made

during the ceremony of obligation and responsibility within Zulu communality, e.g. *Handshake* (early- to mid-1950s) (Fig.164 opp.). This exploration of regional history, ethnicity, and social relationships under Zulu patriarchal authority alludes to tribal custom and traditions. Zondi invokes the act of *ukuhlonipa*, the code of social etiquette, and the act of *ukukhonza*, a custom to show respect, which together represent common linguistic and socio-political traditions (Cope, 1993:163,164). *Ukuhlonipa* affirms sexual roles and social rank (Koopman, 2008:440; Denis,2008:584), within prescribed obedience to elders and authority under the *ukukhonza* custom.

The handshake as a sign of agreement and harmony is a theme which Zondi pursued, both in the context of marriage and also with connotations for rapprochement across the colour-bar. A single thick panel, *Togetherness* (or *Love in Bloom*) (1964)(Fig.160 opp.)<sup>306</sup>, further amplifies Zondi's direct allusion to hands in marriage on his kists from the 1940s and 1950s. Also alluding to partners in betrothal is the plaque *Wedding Couple* (1972) (Fig.161 opp.). In the latter piece, Zondi makes the man's hand disproportionately large, in a protective gesture, as it covers the woman's hand. The *Handshake on Kist* Zondi made for the Bodensteins in the 1960s (Fig. 162 opp.) is the kind of gesture which lends itself to interpretation in the sense of understanding and friendship beyond the context of marriage. This is also the case in *Give and Take* (1978) (Fig.163 opp.), carved as a lid for a box made from scarce *pypsteel* wood (*Vitex rehmannii*).

Certainly by the mid 1950s, but possibly earlier, Zondi was using the motif of two clasped hands in the manner of a European handshake, as in *Handshakes* (Fig.164 opp.). It is not known whether, in these early stages of his career, Zondi was aware of the insignia of the *Inkatha* (Fig.165 opp.p210) organization at the time of his birth. Two hands clasped in the manner of a European handshake, were surrounded by laurels and bore the legends ð 'Ukuhlangana ku Ngamandhla' and 'Unity is Strength', the Zulu and English translations of the Latin, 'Ex Unitate Vires' of the South African coat of arms' (Cope, 1993:140)<sup>307</sup>. The reconciliatory gesture of the handshake in the insignia ostensibly signified a reconciliatory spirit towards white governance in the 1920s. This was propagated by an organization under the leadership of a black, educated, Christian elite, whose hopes of finding acceptance into white civil society were rapidly fading. If, as Zondi stated, the clients for his kists were

<sup>306</sup> The alternative title is *Love in Bloom*, No. 35 in the Bodenstein collection.

<sup>307</sup> See image in Cope (1993::xiv). The *Inkatha* leaflet was publicized the 1925 *Inkatha* meeting, a copy of which is in the Archives of the Department of Native Affairs, State Archives (NTS) 7205, 20/326.

predominantly *amakholwa* of Edendale (Zondi, 2002a pers.com.), then it is possible that many of the buyers would have remembered this insignia of the first *Inkatha*, less than three decades earlier.

Another important context in which the handshake is relevant is Zondi's employment in the Department of Bantu Education from 1956, as a black teacher on a staff which also included white instructors. According to a typed script filed by Zondi's friend and mentor, the Organiser in the Department, John Nixon, it appears to have been government policy to instruct white employees to avoid shaking hands with colleagues of other races (Anonymous, c. 1956-1965). The handshake, then, to which images he devoted two of the six available camphorwood inset panels on a particular large kist, which was bought from a *Bantu Show*, takes on a more significant connotation.

While Zondi was carving landscapes on panels for kists, he also created individual reliefs in wood. Two pictures in low-relief are the first individual reliefs that have been found, a *Landscape* (1955)(Fig.166 opp.) with a herder and his cattle and a full length image of a mature *Warrior* (early 1950s), intended as wall ornaments. The landscape is one of typical Natal hills, with a herd of cattle watched over by a rider and his horse. Apart from the significance of cattle as a sign of wealth within the Zulu cultural context<sup>308</sup>, Zondi is making a personal reference to his family's ownership of cattle. His parents made an income from their hides, crafting the leather *isidwaba* (skirts) and whips for a local market (Zondi-Molefe,2009a pers.com).

The relief panel, *Warrior* (early 1950s) (Fig. 167 opp.p211)<sup>309</sup>, sculpted into a concave oval, shows a standing *ikehla*, an elderly man, who wears an *ibheshu* loin covering, while his head is adorned with the *isicoco* head-ring. Oral tradition refers to 'ringed men' metaphorically, to denote experience and seniority. His finery includes items like the plume, indicating leadership, a necklace and brass armbands as well as a stabbing spear, all of which military regalia locates him firmly within the Zulu 'tribal' idiom. Around the same time, Zondi carved the only piece of his own work, which he owned as an old man. This is *Khandamdevu* (early 1950s) (Fig.168 opp.p211), a portrait head of a 'ringed' Zulu man, not very adeptly carved in high relief as a round platter. These two figures, then, are a direct reference to the Zulu

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<sup>308</sup> See Hammond-Tooke (2008).

<sup>309</sup> The image was photographed by Jenny Eriksson. It was reproduced from the family album of the early 1950s during personal communication with Jenny. Taken on 35mm film on 20/21 June 2004, Uppsala, Sweden and subsequently digitalized.

patriarchal order. These men are at once warriors and protectors in the traditionalist context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Zulu kingdom. With them, Zondi is invoking the patriarchal order of the present. These relief studies of men prefigure a number of three-dimensional works, in which Zondi has sometimes sculpted the female counterparts.

Zondi's initial free-standing figurative sculptures from 1954 are thematically contiguous with the carved low-relief work on kists, for the rural homestead economies of the region. Small figurines, like *Drummer* (1954)(Fig.367 opp.p255), were placed on the lids of the jewellery boxes. Inspired by the work of one of his pupils at Dundee, Zondi copied the figure of a young woman by Lazarus Shezi (1954)(Fig.37 opp.p171). With *Nozizwe* (1954)(Fig.37 opp.p171), he was able to confirm his skill in carving. The kneeling girl has a clay vessel, possibly an *ukhamba*, for collecting water, which is work in the customary context, that was allocated to women. Zondi began to carve further figurines with progressively more fluid body movements, and detailed body adornment. An example is a piece, claimed by its broker, Jenny Eriksson, to have been his first three-dimensional work, *Zulu Patriarch* (1954) (Fig.169 opp.), of a bearded *inkhamba*, seated with the tassles of his *ibheshu* hanging down between his legs, a man of maturity and wisdom presiding over Zulu communality. He appears to be about to take a sip from an *ukhamba*, possibly for *utshwala*, a millet and sorghum beer (Armstrong, 1998:41). By alluding to the beer ceremony as an activity that endorses social behaviour, Zondi is also making reference to the cultural aspects associating this beverage with ancestral communication. Other free-standing three-dimensional works include finely crafted miniatures like the two young girls with plaited hair, necklaces and bangles, both wearing reed skirts, *Girl Figurine* (c.1954)(Fig.170 opp.) and *Girl with Mielie* (c.1954)(Fig.171 opp.p212). In these pieces, Zondi is experimenting with more complex positions, showing his understanding of the body and his adeptness in carving.

By 1956, Zondi had begun creating larger portrait busts, for example *Nobubele* (1956) (Fig. 172 opp.), and *Kadebune* (1956) (Fig.173). *Kadebune's* *inkhamba* status alluding to his military history is confirmed by other body adornment. Created as a pair of specifically Zulu figures (Eriksson, 2004 pers.com.), these figures could be suggesting betrothal. The portrait busts mounted on roundels, and three-dimensional free-standing busts, made as pairs with their female counterparts, were considered above<sup>310</sup>. At the same time Zondi was creating fully three-dimensional, free-standing traditionalist figures like *Nobuhle* (1956) Fig.175 opp.)

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<sup>310</sup> 4.2 STYLISTIC DEVELOPMENT p168.

and a few years later, female dancers, e.g. *Dancing Woman* (1960)(Fig.176 opp.) and *Dancing Woman II* (1960) (Fig.177 opp.).

As noted above, by the end of the decade of the 1950s, Zondi was accepting orders for his work under the condition that he could freely choose his subject matter. His pieces reflecting an idiom of Zuluness found a ready market among white patrons. The absorption of a modernist idiom in art, architecture, and interiors for an elitist white clientele at the time, and an embrace of so-called 'African' themes into the design ethic of the 1950s, as noted above, is congruent with a certain popularity of Zondi's ethnic motifs. Indigenous wares and motifs had been assimilated in the period before and after World War II, in a number of ceramic production studios. Prompted by wide-scale immigration by artists and crafters from Europe, the idiom of using 'African' motifs represented a shift in South African design and taste. (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:4, paper). After the war, ethnic imagery established a distinctive idiom which included the depiction of 'exotic' local peoples and fauna, inspired by 'Native Studies'<sup>311</sup>. Leeb-du Toit (2004:4, paper) links the popular appeal of this imagery in post-war South Africa to 'utopian ideals of a more democratic state and interculturalism mooted before the war'. Zondi's scenes on kists, his utilitarian objects, and his initial three-dimensional work may, therefore, be understood within the much larger context of a modernist ethic at the time, linked vicariously, through modernist tenets, to aspirations of liberation.

Zondi's initial narratives thus represent cultural fragments that reflect something about the artist's own heritage. His depiction of a utopian communal integrity that was created at a time of social dysfunctionality and great economic need for black South Africans was simultaneously an embodiment of values. His own art over the next decades would repeatedly allude to 'Togetherness', creating continuity from these early low-relief narratives. Simultaneously, this reflects his belief that these values could enjoy continuity in modern times.

Zondi subverted ethnicity for the purpose of conceptually widening the scope of his art. As considered above, the gradual shift to figures that make little or no reference to Zuluness concurred with his own venture across the colour-bar into the ambit of white patrons. While

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<sup>311</sup> Studios included the *Kalahari Ware Studio*, *Crescent* and *Drostdy*, the latter 'perpetuating this tradition in a range of stylized vessels with African motifs (Leeb-du Toit, 2004:4, paper).

still rooted in Zulu culture, the artist found a new source of inspiration among some of his white friends. Together they encouraged new common forms of being together, invoking cross-cultural relationships in endeavouring to shape a shared future. This exemplified how diverse cultural expressions are able to contribute to a national culture. As Gyekye reminds us, an inclusive broadening of this cultural foundation leaves the marker of individual identification intact (1997:105). Zondi's pronounced affirmation of Zuluness, therefore, and his ability to be among 'all nations' as his grandmother foretold, is exemplary of the potential for cultural pluralism within forms of nationhood that embrace a multitude of cultures<sup>312</sup>.

## 5.2 NARRATIVES OF POWER – ZULU ROYALTY

Very few pieces in Zondi's oeuvre were sculpted as portraits of specific individuals. Notable exceptions are his portrayals of members of the Zulu monarchy. Three portraits of Shaka kaSenzangakhona have been sourced, as well as *Shaka's Mother* (1965) (Figs.183;184 opp.p221) *Mnkabayi kaSenzangakhona* (1965) (Fig.186 opp.p221) or 'Dingane's aunt'. With these portrait busts, Zondi was amplifying his own familial links to the regional past. More significantly though, they are statements about the nature of domination and how it is employed (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com). His trilogy of Zulu royalty may be reliably put in the context of the artist's interest in power relationships. This is consistent with his deep interest in politics and his passionate call for people to be educated and informed about the functioning of affairs of state (van Wyk, c.early-1980s). Zondi's discerning and entirely different manner of embodying the founder of the Zulu nation necessitates exploring these few pieces in greater detail. Their pertinence to the history of the region, in whose turbulent past his forefathers lived, provides an appropriate framework for speculating about the ideals towards which Zondi strove. As narratives of power, then, these works are translations of the past, made relevant for the present, to be projected into something of value for the future.

The significance of Zondi's rare creation of individualized portraiture only becomes evident in the context of the socio-political environment of the Zulu kingdom. With artworks like his images of Shaka kaSenzangakhona<sup>313</sup> in 1965 (Figs.178,179 opp.p219), *Shaka's Mother* (1965) (Figs.183;184 opp.p221), *Mnkabayi ka Senzangakhona* (1965) (Fig.186 opp.p221),

<sup>312</sup> See 'National Culture and Identity' in Gyekye (1997:106-114).

<sup>313</sup> 'ka Senzangakhona denotes King Shaka's paternal lineage (Berning, 1996:56). It appears in *Images of Wood* as *Mnkabayi Ka Snzangakhona*, (Rankin, 1989:72) probably a printing error.



and *The Emperor* (1969) (Fig.182 opp.p219) Zondi makes references to pre-capitalist traditionalist society and thus to his own Zulu heritage. By portraying members of the early Zulu Royal family, he was invoking a Zulu past, weaving it into a western fabric of a sense of history and universality (La Hausse de Lalouvière, 2000:102,103). It is likely that the artist was amplifying his own familial links to the regional past<sup>314</sup>. These narratives of power from the past, then, should prompt deliberation about the use of authority for the future. While these portraits represent a form of continuity with Zondi's particularist focus on Zuluness, he moves beyond this into a geographically neutral context.

Shaka ka Senzangakhona, as the founding leader of the southeast African *amaZulu* kingdom, is an historical icon who has undergone many metamorphoses in the literature. This ranges from depictions of him as the forbidding savage or heroic male satiating the morbid lure of war, to romanticising visions of the warrior king exploited as a tourist commodity. Capturing the imagination of a worldwide readership, legend, myth, and fiction have been interwoven with thorough scholarship, to imagine and create a cult figure of world stature, belying the short tenure of the Zulu kingdom in South Africa's history<sup>315</sup>.

Zondi carved portraits of renowned members of the Zulu royal house a decade after the height of the resurrection of Shaka in the literature of black writers. Both in South Africa, as well as in the context of wider African literary art beyond its borders, the Zulu monarch was appropriated as an ancestral figure legitimating contemporary African ideologies linked to oppositional politics and nation-building. Inventions of Shaka were permeated with specific attributes to create narratives of cultural comparison, especially by white writers<sup>316</sup>. By the time Zondi sculpted the Zulu king for his white patrons, the picture of Shaka among white South Africans had changed, in response to post-colonial African independence (Wylie, 2008:85). A year after Dhlomo's eulogy to the Zulu king, E.A. Ritter's *Shaka Zulu* of 1955 had ended the denunciatory literature on Shaka by white authors, prompting laudatory writing which Wylie terms a swathe of admiring histories of the Zulu, devoid of any factual evidence (Wylie, 2008:85).

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<sup>314</sup> Zondi's two earlier portraits of the legendary Zulu monarch were incorporated into the Kurt Strauss collection. There is another 'Shaka' from the collection of Dr. Kurt and Meg Strauss, now with Liesel Sacco (nee Strauss) in Zimbabwe (Strauss and Strauss, 2007, pers.com.) A later version, *The Emperor* (1969), became the prize piece in Hans Bodenstein's collection of Zondi sculptures.

<sup>315</sup> See Laband (2008).

<sup>316</sup> For an account of literature on Shaka by white authors, see Dan Wylie (2008:82-86).

John Wright (2008b) explores the motivation for, and the perpetuation of, what he terms 'the devastation stereotype' of *amaZulu* aggression. This stereotype is shown to have been uncritically upheld and cemented in the literature from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until after African post-colonial independence in the 1960s. By the time Zondi sculpted specific portraits of Zulu royalty, the stereotyped images of 'Shaka as the ferocious and savage leader' were being diluted and deconstructed (Wright, 2008b:71). While the 'devastation stereotype' lived on in the literature, portrayals of him, nevertheless, coincided with the rescue of Africans, 'from the virtual oblivion to which they had been consigned by colonial historiography' (Wright, 2008b:74)<sup>317</sup>. In the wake of political decolonization of most of the continent north of the Zambezi in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the new 'decolonized African history' was emphasizing African achievement (Wright, 2008b:74). A romanticization of 'traditional African culture' occurred. In the interests of showing continuities in African history (between the pre-colonial past and post-colonial present), colonial rule was revealed by historians to be 'a period of corruption and disruption of African culture and development' (Wright, 2008b:74). Due to Zondi's proximity to B.W. Vilakazi and H.I.E. Dhlomo, their writing devoted to the resurrecting the centrality of Shaka as a nation-builder and symbol of black oppositional power would have been influential in contributing to Zondi's personal evaluation of regional history. Dhlomo's last major work, *Shaka: His Character, Philosophy, Achievements*<sup>318</sup>, was written in his romantic style. Published in 1954, just as Zondi was initiating his small three-dimensional works reflecting Zuluness, the glorification of the Zulu king was used as a device serving the interests of Zulu nationalism (Couzens, 1985:320). In the face of white political discrimination, Dhlomo appropriated attributes of the founder of the Zulu nation, entrenching him also as a symbol of black oppositional power.

At the same time, Dhlomo's support of Natal's ANC leader, Luthuli, as 'the new Shaka' is expressive of the self-appraisal of 'the African middle class', in which their own leadership qualities were invoked<sup>319</sup>. The New African, as explored above, and Luthuli's 'emergent African' were legitimately succeeding the old heroes (Couzens, 1985:322). Vilakazi's

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<sup>317</sup> This was supported in popular literature, beginning in 1952 with T.V. Bulpin's novel 'Shaka's Country' and E.A. Ritter's 'Shaka Zulu: The Rise of the Zulu Empire' in 1955, as well as C.T. Binns (1963) and P. Becker and D.R. Morris (1966). For details see Wright (2008a: 81, footnote 36).

<sup>318</sup> *Shaka: His Character, Philosophy, Achievements* was published in *Ilanga Lase Natal* on 25 September and 2 October, 1954 (Couzens, 1985:320).

<sup>319</sup> Couzens (1985) p.321 draws on A.J. Luthuli, 'The Emergent African' *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 12 and 23 May 1953.

*Shaka's Plan of Freedom and Reconstruction* is also a reassessment of the Zulu monarch (Couzens, 1985:321). Sifiso Ndlovu (2008a) speaks of Vilakazi's research as revolutionary, due to its original oral sourcing in *izibongo*, which general use engendered highly controversial and contradictory historical interpretations among black scholars (Buthelezi, 2008:25,29). In his last article, Dhlomo extols the ANC leader: 'Luthuli is Moses (Let my people go)', Shaka, Christ (Couzens, 1985:322). Just a few years later, Zondi could be said to have affirmed the idea of regional leadership, by indigenising *Moses* (1959) (Figs.204-206 opp.p229).

Yet, as the educated *petit-bourgeoisie* assumed a more oppositional stance on behalf of the marginalized black majority, a paradox developed, dependent on audience interpretation. The tribalism propagated by white rule was being rejected. Extolling Shaka's virtues was an affirmation of his leadership qualities that were required to inspire direction in the present and for the future. For the liberation struggle and its leaders who were calling for a unitary oppositional politics beyond ethnicities, the Zulu king became emblematic of black leadership. Yet, to a white audience not familiar with the attempts by black leadership to transcend ethnic affiliations, these evocations of the past were interpreted as a re-appropriation of the tribal dimension of ethnicity. However, Dhlomo defied, and therefore crossed, tribal boundaries. He did this most explicitly in the drama, *Moshoeshoe*, in which he portrayed the Sotho-speaking ideal leader who unified disparate clans and individuals into a single nation (Couzens, 1985:164). Couzens' interpretation reveals a dual function, that of advising the African National Congress to foster tribal unification and of reminding the repressive white government to be more tolerant and accommodating (1985:166). Zondi's version of the latter admonition was *Isalakutshelwa, Lot's Wife* (1959)(Fig.248-251 before p240), to be considered below<sup>320</sup>.

Dhlomo's literary art and Bhengu's visual art thus acquired subversive associations linked to black national aspirations (Leeb-du Toit,1997:18). In the face of waning hopes of assimilation, on the part of the black literary and political elite at the time, these works were narratives of liberation occurring between the tradition of a glorious past and a redeemed future (Mbembe, 2002: 249,250), noted above. The persona of Shaka served the role of a visionary nationalizing leadership. It is this aspect of the historical figure which Zondi highlighted in his portraiture of Shaka, as in three of his rare depictions of specific

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<sup>320</sup> 5.4 BIBLICAL INSPIRATION p236.

individuals. Herbert Dhlomo excessively praised Shaka. But, arguably, it could have been the playwright's leaning towards a less ethnically motivated nationalism and a vision of pan-Africanism (Couzens, 1985:222), which first prompted Zondi's critical thinking concerning Shaka's hegemony. Also, by 1960, the artist had access to Elliot Zondi's historical drama *Ukufa kukaShaka* (The Death of Shaka) which was introduced into the curriculum of apartheid-era (Bantu secondary) schools and universities (Ndlovu, 2008a: 117).

Strategies that were used by the New African intellectuals in Zondi's circle, in affirmation of Shaka's role as leader and cultural patron and that were invoked for political mobilisation in the present have subsequently been variously challenged. John Conteh-Morgan for example, using post-colonial writings linked to the *Négritude* Philosophy, argues that political tactics of anti-colonial nationalisms are flawed in that aspirations of liberation were anchored in conceptions of nationhood, that exactly replicate those that were being opposed (2001:305). Significantly, then, Zondi desisted from perpetuating the idealized picture of Shaka. His portrayals of the king exemplify the artist's talent in challenging stereotypical thinking and distancing himself from the mythologized heroic cliché of the warrior king as depicted by in the visual art of Gerard Bhengu, which found approval among the literary elite more than twenty years earlier<sup>321</sup>. In keeping with many of his works that suggest human reflection, Zondi found no place in his repertory for the flagrant show of forceful manhood that was being exploited for achieving political mobilisation. Zondi's *Shaka* (or *Shaka Zulu*) (1965) (Figs.178;179 opp.), *Shaka Between Good and Evil* (c. mid-1960s)(Figs.180,181 opp.), and *The Emperor* (1969)(Fig.182 opp.) are very individualistic, almost intimate, portrayals of the Zulu monarch. These sculptures cast the leader in the role of a measured contemplator, the first even suggesting a measure of vulnerability. Perhaps inspired by Dhlomo's transmutation of Shaka, via Moses, to Luthuli, Zondi defies the use of military accoutrements to invoke the notion of leadership in the New Africans. Zondi's portraits of Shaka embody notions of headship as being a burden of responsibility, as something contemplative. Zondi's alternative view of Shaka, then, becomes a specific voice in the post-colonial era, which exemplifies the kind of critical thinking that Mbongiseni Buthelezi claims was suppressed, in the face of the imperative to oppose colonialism collectively (2008:30).

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<sup>321</sup> *Shaka after Angas* (Zaverdinos, 1995:16) or *Portrait of a Warrior* (Leeb-du Toit, 1995:36). European images of the King from the 19<sup>th</sup> century were perpetuated, often in processes of multiple plagiarism. W. Bagg's lithograph of Shaka of 1836, in the British Museum (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1978:614) was published in Nathaniel Isaac's (1836) *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa*. In one of its many reprints it appears in *White Myths of Shaka* (Wylie, 2008:84). This was then copied by Angas, whose image Gerard Bhengu copied. See Leeb-du Toit (1995: 16).

In contemplation of the responsibility inherent in leadership, by positioning Shaka “*Between Good and Evil*”, Zondi places the young leader at a moral turning point, poised between these two binary opposites. The artist sets the respectability and nobility of benevolent chieftaincy against choosing leadership associated with iniquity, malevolent force, and ethical degradation. Zondi denies Shaka the outward accoutrements that signify the militant monarch. He becomes a young man like any other. Another version of *Shaka* (or *Shaka Zulu*)(1965) (Fig.178,179 opp.) shows a slightly older man, but one still in his early prime. This *Shaka* is more pensive than the cocky youth “between good and evil”. It is a compassionate view of the young, thoughtful Shaka. Given Zondi’s own abhorrence of violence, perhaps this is another covert statement pertaining to the Zulu leader’s choices. Four years later, Zondi sculpted one of his most emotive portraits, *The Emperor* (1969) (Fig.182 opp.). Zondi placed this large work with Wolfgang Bodenstein’s younger brother, Hans. Friendship and trust had provided the framework for profound and heated dialogue, pertaining to South African politics, that remained just short of being confrontational (Bodenstein, Hans,2008 pers.com.). This prompted Zondi’s designation of the work to this particular patron.

The first of the recurring discussions and arguments between Zondi, Mseleku, and Dr. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, as a group of intellectual friends, coincide with the sculpting of Zondi’s images of Shaka from the mid-1960s (Mseleku, 2008 pers.com.). The disputes were related to Zondi’s arguments against a centralized political authority in the form of chiefly authority, which he felt harboured too much potential for immoral acts of personal entitlement. As Zondi’s preference lay in a form of federation, the heatedness of their debates no doubt stemmed from the fact that it was just this form of authority that was bolstering Buthelezi’s political career. To this day, an “almost exclusive ethnic/tribal identity” is propagated by the ideology of the *Inkatha* president, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, whose long political career has been constructed on “Zuluness” (Buthelezi, 2008:23,25). As noted above, this rhetoric, which has permeated regional politics for three decades, was constructed by way of extolling the virtues of Shaka kaSenzangakhona (Buthelezi, 2008:23). As a result, regional and global visions of Shaka as “Inkatha’s touchstone leader”, to this day, are influenced by an ideological perspective of the Zulu nation, put forward by a man “whose legitimacy rests on a reinvention of Zulu greatness” (Buthelezi, 2008:24). The artist’s views would be sadly endorsed in the conflicts related to regional Zulu cultural nationalism two

decades later, which, almost 15 years into South Africa's new constitution, Mbongiseni Buthelezi asserts is still complicating the ideal of national unity in the region of KwaZulu-Natal.

The relief panel depicting the *Warrior* (1954) (Fig.11 opp.p86) noted earlier, locates leadership within the specifically Zulu context. Zondi's Shaka images of a decade and more later, although nominally anchored in the Zulu past, have depicted leaders that transcend a specific context. Unfettered by connotations of geography or time, works of the artist consider leadership *per se*. The neutrality of these portraits of Shaka equally exemplifies a neutrality regarding race. The artist has unburdened them from the 'difference' which the politics of his time maintained and re-inscribed. Zondi's portraits are universalist statements, proffered to his audience as a prompt to consider leadership in the present, on both sides of the entrenched colour-bar.

Zondi's daughter remembers discussions in which her father also showed an interest in the role of women in positions of power (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com.). This was no doubt related to the positions of respect which women in his own family enjoyed, like that of his mother, Eva, and his paternal grandmother, Noziwawa. Therefore, apart from Shaka as a dominant male, in the Africa context of political power, Zondi's work focused on women. Sustaining his focus on the Zulu monarchy, these include *Shaka's Mother* (or *Nomngqovu* (Woman in her Prime) (1965)(Figs.183-185 overleaf) and *Mnkabayi ka Senzangakhona* (1965) (Fig.186 overleaf)<sup>322</sup>. Further, he portrayed the prophetess from the region among the Xhosa Bantu-speakers further south, *Nongqawuse*, as *Njilo-Njilo* (or *Xhosa Prophetess*) (1965) (Figs.187,188 opp.)<sup>323</sup>, and from the wider African context, the *Queen of Sheba* (1965) (Fig.189,190 opp.).

*Shaka's Mother* (1965) (Figs.183,184 opp.), carved of heavy *mncaka* (red ivory), depicts a sombre female, with a downward gaze reminiscent of the act of *ukuhlonipa*. Yet, this contradicts the title under which she was first exhibited, *Nomngqovu*, which alludes to overconfidence, perhaps even arrogance, which could even suggest an attitude that involves

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<sup>322</sup> Ndlovu elucidates two variations of the Regent's spelling, namely Mnkabayi and Mkabayi. In my Masters dissertation I used the spelling 'Makabayi' (Nieser, 2003), while the label given the sculpture in the Zululand Historical Museum indicates 'Mkabayi'. I have now chosen to use Ndlovu's older version, *Mnkabayi*, which appears in many archival documents (Ndlovu, 2008a:119).

<sup>323</sup> 'Nonqawusa' as the title used here is a transcript from the exhibition programme. Shula Marks (1978) used the spelling 'Nomqawuse'. This text will adhere to the current spelling 'Nongqawuse' as used in Carton, Laband and Sithole (2008).

bullying people (Zondi-Molefe,2009a pers.com.). Nomfundo Zondi-Molefe emphasizes the resilience of Nandi, Shaka's mother, and her insistence to instill in her son a particular identity in fulfillment of the destiny she foresaw for him, as the future king.

Zondi further portrayed *Mnkabayi kaSenzangakhona* (1965) (Fig.186 opp.), donating it to the museum at Eshowe (Dukuza). This is the former site of the Zulu royal residence, where Mnkabayi had been the head (*ikhanda*) of one of the centrally placed royal homesteads (*amakhanda*), as well as the keeper of the private realm of the king or a chief, the women's quarters, (*izigodlo*), under which title it is displayed. Apart from the *isicolo* indicating her seniority, Zondi has made no sign other than the earplugs that Mnkabayi is a woman from a royal household (*umuzi*). The queen appears in his portrait bust as an ordinary woman, who, despite a certain severity, reveals a covert smile. This attribute, of being a woman like any other, is an important aspect of Zondi's intention, which he expressed in elucidating his *Queen of Sheba* (1965) (Figs.189;190 opp.p224) to its buyer (Stewart, 2004 pers.com.).

Zondi-Molefe recalls how her father was fascinated by Mnkabayi's cunning (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com). This concurs with her prominence in the literature, as the conspiratorial mastermind behind Shaka's assassination, to make the way free for Dingane to ascend the Zulu throne. Herbert Dhlomo had dedicated some writing to the role of women in the construction of African modernity, promoting their role in African liberation (Masilela, 2007:46). Mnkabayi's role as regent places her crucially within indigenous oral history in the form of a praise singer (*imbongi*). Here her powerful role in *izigodlo* is affirmed, presiding over ritual arenas and intervening in matters military and matters of state.

Ndlovu's re-examination of the formative roles of women in the Zulu kingdom in the early and mid nineteenth century concentrates on the Regent Queen, Mnkabayi kaJama<sup>324</sup>. His assertions regarding gender co-operation in the Zulu polity underpin an affirmative concept of African femininity. Most significantly, Ndlovu's concern with female involvement in the political sphere serves to reveal the conceptual limitations of the gender oppression school. Countering its stance, he claims that 'precolonial Zulu women were neither automatically subordinate to Zulu men, nor barred by tyrannical patriarchs from the inner circles of Zulu power and monarchy' (Ndlovu, 2008b:119). Instead, 'traditional

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<sup>324</sup> See Sifiso Ndlovu (2001) 'The Changing Perceptions of King Dingane in Historical Literature: A Case Study in the Construction of Zulu Historical Knowledge in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century South African History'. Ph.D. dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.

gender relationships offered both males and females similar channels to customary influence and power and therefore Zulu women actively participated in the Zulu network of authority (Ndlovu, 2008b:111). Ndlovu extols efforts to achieve gender equality for post-apartheid modern African women in the present. Yet the historian holds the western gender studies paradigm unsuitable for reliable claims pertaining to the nature of women's lives in the early Zulu kingdom (Ndlovu, 2008b:111). He is adamant that feminist scholarship which highlights women's oppression, has little relevance for, and even frequently obscures, evidence of the co-operation between the genders which existed in the Zulu kingdom (Ndlovu, 2008b:111). Leaning on the work of C.A. Hamilton, Ndlovu positions Zulu women as workers and decision-makers with social and political agency and authority. He points to oral traditions and *izibongo* (praises), the study of which have been used to contradict the stereotypes of static portraits that conceal a range of cross-gender obligations (Ndlovu, 2008b:111). These include female participation in the most masculine of male domains – warfare, which is a theme Zondi also discussed with his daughter. In the face of the voluminous oral evidence, Ndlovu thus calls for further scholarly investigations to dispel the gender currents of South African historiography (2008b: 119).

Zondi's exchange with both Herbert Dhlomo and Benedict Vilakazai would have placed him centrally among scholars inscribing historical figures like Shaka and Mnkabayi into modernity by means of oral sourcing. The *Izibongo zikaMnkabayi*, celebrates the Queen's proximity to the people (Ndlovu, 2008b:114,115), allegedly having relaxed hierarchical orders and given them a voice. This approachability attributed to the person of Mnkabayi would certainly have been motivation for Zondi to include her in his sparse repertoire of individualized portraits.

By depicting Mnkabayi kaSenzangakhona, Zondi was thus assimilating Zulu cultural expression into the historical appreciation of his western audience and their idiom of progress (La Hausse de Lalouvière, 2000:100) and progressiveness. He was simultaneously portraying one of the women who, leading up to the white conquest of King Cetshwayo's army in 1879, were recognized, even revered, for their contributions to one of the strongest polities in all of southern Africa (Ndlovu, 2008a:111).

These two female portraits of 1965, then, inspired by history, *Shaka's Mother*, Nandi, as *Nomngqovu*, the woman in her prime and *Mnkabayi kaSenzangakhona* consolidate the



notion of the African female force behind the ostensibly patriarchal throne of the Zulu royal house. Arguably, Zondi addresses a form of equality within the traditionalist context of the region, as Ndlovu intimates, which is rarely visible in his frequent depiction of womanhood in the role of mother and nurturer. Another interpretation of Mnkabayi as the perpetrator of violence allows for another point of strong conjecture. By portraying Mnkabayi, it could be inferred that Zondi was making a covert negative comment on the institution of royal sections over which the Queen ruled. Such sections represented a radical departure from the pre-Shakan past as the importance of the independent clans were reduced. In view of Zondi's disagreement with the monarchy as an institution, this represented a socio-political measure in the Zulu past, which would not have concurred with Zondi's striving for democratic structures and political forms of social equity. Foremost in considering Zondi's portrayals, is the implicit social parity in the daily lives of Africans in the region, which the two royal women symbolise. This is a covert contradiction of the stereotypical view of a patriarchal order and ostensible masculine power.

*Njilo-Njilo* (1965) (Figs.187,188 opp.p221), a tall camphor-wood female figure sculpted in full length, is Zondi's portrait of *Nongqawuse*, the girl at the centre of the Xhosa uprising against colonial powers, the millenarian prophecy, and the Xhosa suicide of 1856/ 1857, with its disastrous consequences (Marks,1978:285)<sup>325</sup>. Zondi's invocation of this historical figure is subject to a number of interpretations. She could function as a reminder of historical struggles between indigenous people and white settlers. In current writing, Nongqawuse is mentioned in the context of the crucial role played by African healers and *umuthi* (medicine) in the consolidation of power among Nguni people (Flint and Parle, 2008:315). More credible is Zondi's contemplation of oral history and the associated speculations of what might have happened according to these sources. The name *Njilo-Njilo*, which Zondi gave this figure, is a significant pointer to the artist's more specific intention. Zondi-Molefe suggests that *-Njilo-Njilo* expresses a deep emotion about a longing for a deeper truth which is not being understood in its totality. The title alludes to a personal longing to know more, without being able to express this. In relation to Nongqawuse, this title given by Zondi points to the controversy surrounding the prophecy, where people believe different things as they try to find the truth (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers. com). Azaria Mbatha, who speculates about the Xhosa Suicide in terms of the way that it dashed the hopes of an entire African nation (2004:135), reminds us: "The impartiality of history depends on the standpoint of

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<sup>325</sup> See Azaria Mbatha's account in Mbatha (2004:134,135).

those reconstructing itö (2004:135). Thus, in this one figure there is a conflation of the metaphysical and communal mores, of historical fact in juxtaposition with conjecture. And the idea remains that authorship and the sourcing of information must always be challenged, be it from oral histories (in the form of praise poetry) or historical writing. Significantly, the *Daily News* of 26 August 1965 printed the picture of Zondi with this *Njilo-Njilo* (Xosa prophetess) (1965), and another of his few historical figures, ð*Nomngqovu* (Woman in her prime)ö, *Shaka's Mother* (1965).

Within Zondi's oeuvre, the mythical *Queen of Sheba* becomes the pan-African counterpart of *Mnkabayi*. Two portraits, sculpted around the same time as *Mnkabayi*, bear the title *Queen of Sheba* (1965) (Figs.189;190 opp.p224) and 1966 (Figs.191-193 opp.p224). The *umthombothi* log of the 1965 sculpture acted as a guide for the artist in deciding on the pose of this unusually tall female figure. It was important for Zondi to tell its buyer, Mrs. Joan Stewart, that this woman had ðí the head of a Queen and the hands of a working womanö (Stewart, 2004 pers.com.). Once again, Zondi emphasized an egalitarian aspect of being human, regardless of perceptions of social standing. The 1966 female bust, *Queen of Sheba* (1966) carved from dark heavy indigenous wood, would become the first of many sculptures which Zondi presented to Axel-Ivar Berglund, after their meeting in the context of the SAIRR in the mid-1960s.

With them Zondi makes direct reference to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC female ruler of the kingdom of Saba` in pre-Islamic southwest Arabia, in the region of modern-day Ethiopia. In doing so, he implicitly creates a link to this queen's association with the Hebrew King, Solomon. Perhaps, more significantly, by making this woman the subject of his portraiture, he chose to depict a powerful woman of distant legend in a region of Africa with a history of Christianity spanning fourteen centuries. At the same time, the *Queen of Sheba* is placed in the role of the mother of Menelik I, the legendary son she have birth to from King Solomon. The namesake of Menelik I, Menelik II, defended African integrity in late-19<sup>th</sup> century colonialism. With Ethiopia's victory over Italy (Greenfield,1978:903) the biblical context of this ancient Christian kingdom of Ethiopia was enhanced, underpinning the foundations for Ethiopianism, perhaps even for ðBambatha's Chaplainö, Moses Mbele among the Zondi people, prior to the Zulu rebellion of 1906. Thus, with the two sculptures of the *Queen of Sheba*, Zondi was possibly making oblique allusions to the slogan ðAfrica for Africansö, an ideology with both a nationalist and pan-African dimension. It is perhaps unlikely that Zondi

was aware of trade between them which shaped the nature of the Queen of Sheba's association with King Solomon, besides the legendary amorous link (Gordon, 1978:1044,1045). But Zondi's intimate knowledge of the Bible and his reference to Solomon's unpopular tax collector, *The Publican* (c.1965) (Figs.276;277 opp.p256), make it probable that he was aware of some of the political factors accompanying the sumptuous reign of the legendary sage. The problematic tribalism encountered by the biblical king in the vast region over which he ruled and his involvement in international trade allegedly resulted in the Solomon's positive attitude towards aliens. This brought in its train intellectual and spiritual universalism, and the first known formulation of international peace i.e. 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore' (Isaiah 2 in Bible, 1999:764,765; Micah 4 in Bible, 1999:1042)(Gordon, 1978:1044,1045). This biblical text, then, in association with the Queen of Sheba's legendary amour, as well as economic liaison, with Solomon, expresses the ethos of conciliatory good-will.

Zondi's response to Berglund's lecture *The Zulus: our Neighbours* noted above<sup>326</sup>, was to present the theologian with the portrait bust of the Queen of Sheba, now renamed *Kwasa* (1966) (It Dawned) (Berglund, 2004 pers.com)<sup>327</sup>. With regard to the interpretation of the good role played by Ethiopia in African resistance and in rejecting colonial power, it is significant that Zondi should have chosen this portrait to give to Berglund, despite its renaming to suit Zondi's more immediate personal concern. Berglund recalled Zondi's naming of the sculpture, when the artist presented it to him, commenting: 'You have given me my humanity' (Berglund 2004 pers.com.), implicitly acknowledging the validation he had experienced through Berglund, of 'other' as equal.

### 5.3 LIBERATION AND LEADERSHIP

During the late-1950s, Zondi carved a few sculptures which make overt reference to political ideals. His pieces were either covertly expressive contemplative portraits or overtly gestural. These latter works are known predominantly through sketches from around 1960. Many of his sculptures permit interpretations beyond the personal or individual to a more universal significance. My reading of such works is greatly facilitated by access to letters, mostly between the artist and Wolfgang Bodenstern. These relate to works which Zondi

<sup>326</sup> 3.3 BEYOND RACIAL IDENTITIES p128.

<sup>327</sup> 'It began to dawn upon him : kwaqala ukumkhanyela' (Doke; Malcolm, and Sikakana, 1971:112).

carved within the first decade of his artistic career, especially those between 1959 and 1961, when social unrest culminated in the Sharpeville massacre. Of particular significance in the letters are select descriptive comments. Most revealing are titles which Zondi attributed to pieces that he sketched, either as informative visual descriptions of work in progress or the sculptures he submitted to Bodenstein, where the selective process in his own mind and alternative choices were still underway. The vibrant reciprocity between the two men must be seen within the context of South African segregation and their *Forbidden Friendship*.

From the late 1950s, beyond the confines of his teaching institution, Zondi became known for his talent in carving. In connection with an order from the state Department of Information, in 1959 Zondi created what he termed "the most touching figure I ever made" (Zondi, 1959a:3 letter). *The Prisoner of Hope* (1959) (Figs.196,197 opp.) was designated for the Minister of Native Affairs, of whom he spoke ironically as "the High One" (Zondi, 1959a:4, letter). At the time, Zondi was meeting Bodenstein and Hooper in their homes, to discuss the volatile politics (Hooper, 2006 pers.com). Implicitly, this male figure represented all human beings under discriminatory bondage. However, the title embraces the notion of hope, implying expectation and desire and suggests, in the biblical sense, promise and trust. This figure was lost on a train trip (Zondi, 1959c:1, letter). To judge from the sketches, Zondi thereafter embodied the same theme in his figure *Invisible Bonds* (1960)(Fig.198 opp.). His own feeling was that this work of a covertly bonded young man, was "dynamite in the making" (Zondi, 1960c:3, letter). He translated the pose of his original "Prisoner" Yet in this *Invisible Bonds* piece, in order to avoid the cliché, he omitted the rope tying the wrists of the young man, and the figure is now clothed. He might be a city dweller, because of his attire: trousers rather than a loincloth (*ibheshu*), a distinction which Zondi would use in 1964, in *Reunion* (Figs.256;257;259 opp.p241). *Sorrowful Mother* (1960) (Fig.194 opp.p 226) was sculpted from the same log, in order to "add another creation to keep company" with the first piece (Zondi, 1960g:3, letter). It depicts the young man's mother, to whom Zondi gave the alternative Latin title, *Mater Dolorosa* (Zondi, 1960f, letter). In illuminating the complex repercussions of apartheid within families, these figures create links of emotional despair to his sketched images like *Disappointment* and *Bitterness*. Significantly, *Invisible Bonds* and *Sorrowful Mother* were presented to Zondi's friend and patron, Sighart Bourquin, who was in the civil service, which was responsible for mass housing for black migrant workers around Durban.

Fulfilling another commission for a government department, he created *The Rising Sun* or *The Power of Light* (1959b, letter). He communicated latent political ideas to Bodenstein as he spoke of the three figures making up the one piece as having a great significance (Zondi, 1959b:1,2, letter). The theme was the depiction of male figures spanning perhaps three generations. Zondi wrote:

The main upright figure dominates with the torch above its head, The middle aged warrior with one hand over the shoulder of the main figure whilst the left hand is half lifting the frail figure of a smallish old man. I call it 'The rising sun' or 'The Power of light' I am sure you'd like it. (1959b:2, letter).

The 'hand on the torch' refers to keeping the tradition of knowledge alive (COD, 1982:1130), a concern to which Zondi readily subscribed with his ethos of learning. The torch-holder in *The Power of Light* could be said to also embody a promise of empowerment, hope, and strength, in economic and political times of great hardship. Just two years after his revered father died, Zondi possibly related this piece to the pyramid of three people in *Family Bond* of the same year. He used a similar title, *The Torch Bearer of Africa*, for a piece sold to the government of Bophutatswana in 1977, which was destined to become a state gift for President Léopold Senghor, on the occasion of the visit of a delegation from the homeland state<sup>328</sup>.

In keeping with Zondi's deep interest in politics and at the end of a turbulent decade of rising oppositional activism, the letters of Zondi around 1960 reveal a preoccupation with liberatory themes and ideas. From sketches in letters, it is evident that his motivation and productivity in early 1960 was substantial (1960g, letter). Highly emotive titles directly associated with circumstances of subjugation include *Disappointment* (Fig.199 opp.) and *Bitterness* (Fig.200 opp.) (Zondi, 1960e, letter), and two months later, *Broken Heart* (Fig.201 opp.), *The Scourge* (Fig.202 opp.), *Hands of Triumph* (Fig.203 opp.p), *Fugitive* (Fig.378 after p256), and *Sorrow* (Fig. 195 opp.p226) (Zondi, 1960g, letter ).

*Broken Heart*, 'a sprawled figure', was planned as a work with which the artist was going to introduce himself to the gallery owner, Mr. Adler, in Johannesburg in 1960 (Zondi,1960g:3 letter). *The Scourge* (1960)(Fig.51 opp.p177; Fig.202 opp.) is a powerful depiction of a

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<sup>328</sup> Invoice dated 22 June 1977, from Zondi (care of the Bodenstein address in Val de Grace, Pretoria) to the Government of Bophutatswana in Mafeking, for 'One wooden sculpture (Cape Yellow wood)' entitled 'The Torchbearer of Africa' costing R220, 'sent to President Leopold Senghor'.

swooping sword-wielding robed figure, levitating horizontally (Zondi, 1960g:3 letter). Although Zondi refuted any influences on his work by other artists, this image is clearly inspired and very minimally altered from Ernst Barlach's *Der Rächer* (1922) (*The Avenger*) (Fig.52 opp.p177) The interpretation of this piece is ambiguous. *The Scourge* could be the whip for chastising persons or the person regarded as [the] instrument or manifestation of divine or other vengeance or punishment, like a barbarian conqueror (COD, 1979:1017). This would make it a warning directed at the white tormenter, an invocation of Divine vengeance or punishment which might be meted out to the oppressor. Equally, it could be a representation of the scourge itself, the barbarian conqueror using his weapon to chastise and oppress. In both cases, this makes it Zondi's most evocative and powerful statement about aggression or retribution. Also with clear allusions to freedom, *Hands of Triumph* (1960) (Fig.203 opp.) depicts a pair of arms only, raised into the air, with the left hand balled into a fist. The *Fugitive (Delantaba)*(Fig.378 after p256) will be considered below<sup>329</sup>.

By late 1960, Zondi was more than ever aware of the rift between South Africans, noting: 'Surely the devil is doing a successful job of sowing hate and cultivating bitterness among the inhabitants of this country' (Zondi,1960j, letter). Despite his statements alluding to liberation and leadership, he would not deviate from his philosophy of reconciliation. Around this time, it is with *Moses* (1959) (Figs.204-206 overleaf) and *The Prophet* (1961) (Fig.53 opp.p179) that Zondi began his account of leadership through wisdom and diplomacy, dependent on the truth being spoken, regardless of selfish agendas (Zondi-Molefe, 2009b). This theme would recur for the next three decades in his oeuvre, by means of prophet figures.

With his prophet portraits reflecting age and wisdom, the artist sought to express notions of progress, learning, and moral integrity and to challenge oppression and the apparent deadlock created by racial misunderstanding (Zondi, c. mid-1960s, script). Zondi used biblical inspiration as much as he drew on his own familial circle of elders. They emerge from the moral fibre of indigenous communality which gave people cohesion and ensured human well-being. Rather than sentimental visual reminders of human degradation, profoundly contemplative human forms were chosen. These forms were perhaps destined to remind his audience that with wisdom, time, and space, race may be transcended. Freeing

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<sup>329</sup> 5.6 ALLUSION TO MUSIC p254.

sculptures from the regional context of Zuluness, these figures that embody values and mores were used by Zondi as he endeavoured to cast a dye for modernity.

With *Moses* (1959) (Figs.204-206 opp.), Zondi began the narrative in which he sought to embody the idea of salvation and liberation. With this early portrait of an old bearded man, Zondi was leaving nothing to chance by assuming *a priori* knowledge, and thus he proffered the alternative title for this work, *Leader of His People* (Bodenstein, 1998)<sup>330</sup>. Pertinently, as an old man, Zondi construed the photographic image of his head of *Christ*, made for Axel Ivar Berglund in 1973, as being the persona *Moses* (Berglund, 2003, letter). The theologian understood this interpretation by the artist, in the light of the enormous pressure and desire of liberation from the apartheid ideology (Berglund, 2003:2,letter). Christ as Saviour, and the truly Divine Liberator, becomes Moses, who liberated the Israelites from Egyptian captivity. Berglund speaks of a contextualization of African liberation theology into a biblical setting (Berglund, 2003:2, letter). The implicit hope of freedom has been associated with the relative autonomy of the homelands, of which KwaZulu was one (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:191), given also, that strong leadership in the Zulu culture implicitly legitimized the use of power (Winters, 1998:92,93). Suffering and subjugation are thus projected into a messianic, biblical context, as people wait for deliverance (Thiel,1984:259). Besides leadership, Moses' role as a social outcast, found to be ethnically foreign and too politically ambitious (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:190), is an additional aspect of the prophet's significance in Zondi's oeuvre. As considered, the rejection which he and Bodenstein experienced was an important facet of their resolve to persevere as self-designated ambassadors of goodwill (Zondi 2003c pers.com.; Bodenstein, 1960, letter).

As the chief of many prophets, Moses is the only named prophet figure among several such portrayals in Zondi's work. Rather than fulfilling prophetic tasks, which are deemed to be an incidental part of the prophetic office<sup>331</sup>, prophets are seen to have criticized wrongdoing, injustice, and oppression, even luxurious worship in the face of poverty (Bulkeley, 1996-2005). As immediate agents of God for the communication of his mind and will to men (Deuteronomy 18:18,19, in Bible, 1999:214), they are seers of the vision of God, who reveals himself to them and speaks to them in dreams (Numbers 12:6-8, in

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<sup>330</sup> In this piece, very recognizable aspects of self-portraiture on the part of Zondi were indirectly confirmed by Agnes Bodenstein, who speaks of a strong resemblance to David Zondi, the artist's father (Bodenstein, 1998:2). Elza Miles asserts that it is a portrait of Zondi's grandfather (1997:113).

<sup>331</sup> Prophet <http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html> (URL 15 Aug. 2009).

Bible, 1999:160,161). By choosing Moses as his guide, Zondi is alluding as much to prophets' tasks, in upholding moral and religious truths<sup>332</sup>, as to his implicitly making a covert indictment of the morality behind white governance. In the absence of state justice, *Moses* is proffered by the artist as the representative of the law, and he is also portrayed in the New Testament. He stands for the voice of reason as he proclaims the rule of action for human beings.

Biblical prophets have been affirmed as proactive people being rooted in communality and concerned with values, mores, and everyday politics rather than being secluded religious figures (Bulkeley, 1996-2005). This provides a basis for acknowledging Zondi's strategy of focusing on old and wise figures of prophets as pragmatic advisers and guides of their people, with whom the artist could identify. Using these figures also creates the link to his use of the Zulu cultural context of reverence for elders, expressed in acts of *ukuhlonipa*. Without contesting the fact that Zondi drew on biblical inspiration, his portrayal of bearded robed prophetic figures of the prophets was simultaneously an invocation of guidance from his own predecessors, accessed by means of dreams. The centrality of dreams and memory among Zulu people, in evoking the shades who may guide their living relatives, has been considered. Zondi's sensitivity and receptiveness to the metaphysical involved dreaming, as a process of transcending the limits of normal perception. "Seeing his mother and grandfather in his dreams, he took them to be his advisers (Zondi, 2006c:3 pers.com). This connected him with these forebears. Dreams inform memory, which in turn has the power to evoke the shades (Botha, in Mbatha, 2004:xiv). Therefore, as Allan Botha notes, dreams are able to impart continuity and are equally a way to elude oppression (2004:xiv).

Zondi conflated the theme of wisdom and pilgrimage, which came to represent an autobiographical aspect of his art-making that included his father and grandfather. Zondi was frequently preoccupied with the latter's prophetic longevity, as noted by Matthew Easton (2009): Maneta lived to be about 106 (Bodenstein, A. 1998c:4, script). A work like *isiHambi* (1976) (Fig. 248-251 after p250), then, or *Die Eensame (The Lonely)* (1975) (Figs. 221-223 opp. p235) invokes a likeness to Zondi's grandfather in the slightly elongated facial features, while his pensive *Male Torso* of the 1980s (Fig. 233 opp. p236) has strong features of self-portraiture. The few writings by Zondi that I have been able to find, reveal aspects of his spiritual, philosophical, and practical concerns. Conflated with personal

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<sup>332</sup> <http://www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/prophet.html> (URL 15 Aug. 2009).



accounts of patrons' impressions, a persuasive argument may be made to assume that Zondi was frequently engaging in self-interpretation and representation, be it as scholar, as humble pilgrim, as a father, or as a leader. Dhlomo's eulogy of Luthuli comes to mind, extolling him as being a *Moses* and thereby invoking the leadership role of the 'New African' whose demand it was to 'Let my People Go'. While it was crucial for Zondi's self-image that he was a man of intellect, his egalitarian ethos ensured that he, too, remained one of 'his' people. He was a practical man, ultimately seeking peace, 'after hard work and having done something for others' (Zondi, 1965a:2 letter). This reflects Zondi's humility, which many of his patrons and friends remarked on. This remained equally an aspect of the way he perceived himself, best expressed in *The Publican* (c1965)(Figs.276;277 opp.p245). Zondi's daughter recounts how her father was convinced that 'in every situation there is a psychologist, somebody with wisdom, somebody people look up to when they want moral fibre and truth. This person will speak the truth regardless of his own popularity' (Zondi-Molefe, 2009b pers.com.). Zondi became such a leader in the wider community. Knowing of his experience and the ease with which he moved among 'all nations' community leaders and chiefs consulted him, eliciting his help in 'difficult missions' (Zondi-Molefe, 2009b pers.com.).

This first head of *Moses* became the precursor for a number of sculptures of prophets, as portrait heads and as full-length figures, carved over the next years of Zondi's career. In 1960, he repeated the theme of leadership in another *Portrait of a Young Leader* (1960) (Figs.207-209 opp.p232), this time a pensive, almost brooding character, to whom he gave the alternative title, *Othello*. The Eurocentric focus of the school curriculum made Shakespearean literature mandatory in the study of English, which Zondi chose as one of his major subjects, concurrently with his technical subjects (Zondi, 1963a:2,letter). With *Othello*, Zondi was creating an intelligible presentation of human experiences and impersonations which command sympathy and invite 'vicarious participation' (Brown and Spencer, 1978:615). He was consciously using, from Elizabethan England, experiences of being human, which he translated and gave pertinence in another art form, centuries later and on another continent. Zondi's sculpture of the black leader exemplifies a reflection on the very 'range of emotions and conflicts', which Shakespeare's play suggested, proving their survival in translation into other languages and cultures (Brown and Spencer, 1978:615). The South African political context mirrored, in part, the complexity and ambiguity of the acts of malice surrounding *Othello*. Characterized as a person of great dignity, reflected

in a natural quiet authority and valour (Brown and Spencer, 1978:625), this tragic figure is used by Zondi to represent the downfall of a person of moral and intellectual stature, this downfall as a result of people's misguided trust in false appearances. Othello's fate is ultimately contingent upon people who allow their passions to guide reason. This calls to mind Veldsman's indictment of Afrikaners as being "sentimentalists, not thinkers" (Veldsman, 2008 pers.com). In the South African political landscape dominated by issues of race, human prejudice had become the foundation for participating in acts of dubious moral substance. Feigned honesty, in Shakespeare's *Othello* becomes a role-play in hiding evil intentions in order to inveigle people into participating in ethically doubtful actions. Leadership and morality, once again, become accomplices. What Albert Luthuli and his generation had perceived as being good intentions at the root of the ideology of trusteeship, were giving way to malevolent discriminatory legislation. Luthuli, whom Zondi had met and whom he admired, may arguably be invoked as being Zondi's *Othello*. Luthuli was a man with great moral and intellectual stature, who remained conciliatory despite being served with banning orders by the intransigent state. Another allusion to Othello is made in *Realisation* (1960) (Fig.288 after p246), portrayal of a traditionalist man, deep in thought, clad only in an *ibheshu*.

Zondi carved *The Prophet* (1961)(Figs.53-55 opp.p179) during a period of considerable anguish (Zondi, 1961b, letter). The relatively tall piece was bought by the Durban Art Gallery. It is clearly one of the seven figures which Zondi sketched as planned works, or pieces in progress (Zondi, 1960g:3 letter), revealing that this figure took shape in Zondi's imagination as *Pilgrim* (1960) (Fig.55 opp.p179). Zondi shared his anguish with Wolfgang Bodenstern, both in letters and in personal communication with his friend (Zondi, 1960j:1; 1961b, letters). A letter gives rise to speculate that *The Prophet* was inspired by the artist's great respect for his father, David Zondi, who had died a few years earlier (Zondi, 1961b, letter). It was Zondi's perception that he was failing family and friends. He had declined offers, including a scholarship for further study. Instead, he was opting to fulfil his duties as a family man, and to find ways of repaying friends that had supported him, instead of displaying, in his words, opportunism (Zondi, 1961b:2, letter). David Zondi seems to have been the artist's role model, as a family man of integrity. The artist compared his father's accomplishments with his own failings. This paternal figure, then, became the yardstick by which Zondi, as a man in his mid-thirties, was measuring himself. In this mood, of perceived failure, Zondi expressed his feeling of loneliness in verse:

Walking by himself in solitude  
 The humble one saunters along  
 The one universal passage of Emptiness  
 With an elevated air and a calm spirit  
 His features gaunt and his bones strong  
 He goes the way alone  
 (Zondi, 1961b:1 letter)

In the tall figure, *The Prophet* (1961) (Figs.53-55 opp.p179), Zondi seems to have translated very aptly an elevated air and a calm spirit. The *Moses* of 1959 and this *Prophet* (1961) reveal some likeness to the artist's father and grandfather. On the other hand, the *Prophet* as the (sketched) *Pilgrim* creates a bridge from Zondi's view of himself as a pilgrim (Zondi, 1965a:2 letter) to the figures of prophets from the 1970s. This places the artist at the centre of his work, with sculptures that thus acquire a strong sense of self-portraiture:

I am a pilgrim, a seeker for a place of peace a place where I can sow the seeds of love and watch them grow till the time of harvest come. The peace I seek is not that of finding a cool shade and dozing off to sleep, but that peace found after hard work and having done something for others. (Zondi, 1965a:2 letter).

Zondi becomes the pilgrim, the humble one who saunters along, the traveller, or person journeying to future life COD (1979:776).

Just over a decade later, in one of Zondi's largest pieces found to date, at over 1100mm, *Prophet* (1974)(Figs.210;211 opp.p233) is given an animated stance. At the core of Zondi's pilgrimage lay service to others. By sculpting the *Prophet* (1974), who is holding a scroll of learning, he created the thinking responsible man in a cultural context which emphasizes the role of the *pater familias*. In the prophet's gesture of the right hand touching the right cheek, a pose suggesting a man in thought, Zondi reiterates the theme of a much earlier piece sculpted in the meticulous and detailed style of the 1950s, *Realisation* (1960)( Fig.288 after p257).

With the three-quarter length, kneeling figure of a bearded pensive man, *Stille Gebet* (1974) (Figs.212;213 opp.), and *Old Man Meditating* (or *Bepeinsing*)(1974) (Figs.214-216 opp.), that has strong features of self-portraiture, Zondi pursues the theme of age, wisdom, and responsibility, as well as introverted contemplation.

Almost fifteen years after his first verse concerning life's journey, Zondi again put a thought fragment into poetic form. This was in conjunction with carving a much less staid version of another tall pilgrim, *isiHambi* (1975) (Figs.217-219 after p234). Unlike in *The Prophet* (1961)(Figs.53;54 opp.p179), the eyes of this lonely pilgrim are closed, suggesting deep contemplation or prayer. With a missionary as its recipient, the verse which accompanied the piece, aptly implies that calling on God would dispel solitude.

***'Song of the Lonely'***

Walking alone in solitude

My humble prayer flutters like

A bird into God's throne

His gentle Voice rings in my ears

And behold I find that I am no more

ALONE

(Zondi, 1975, script)

Photographs of Zondi in 1975 with *isiHambi* in two stages of the carving process, show the artist with a beard. The title and its alternatives, *Pilgrim* or *Solitude*, conflate, once again, the notion of loneliness and life's journey. These names were given directly by Zondi to the recipient of this piece, the Lutheran missionary, Karl Bünjer, who spoke Zulu fluently. Bünjer suggests that Zondi's title, *isiHambi*, implies 'passer-by', 'stranger', or 'visitor' (Bünjer,2007 pers.com.). The *isiHambi* may be likened to the 'Zulu pilgrim' *abantu bendlela*, who was a person on the road (Mbatha, 2004: 312). As part of the socializing process of the Zulu children, a wanderer (*umuntu wendlela*) was entitled to guide children to be 'good citizens', by conveying communal values (Mbatha, 2004:313). The long facial features of *isiHambi* unambiguously suggest a likeness to the artist's grandfather, Maneta, who lived to become very old (Bodenstein,1998c:4). During a conversation about Zondi's non-Christian friends, when Zondi was asked about *umuntu wendlela*, his reply was self-descriptive. He commented he was 'almost a go-between between them and the Whites'. We called it 'í'.with Dr. Bodenstein 'we were bridge-makers' (Zondi, 2006c:7 pers.com.). This gives *isiHambi* the scope to be interpreted as a self-representation. Zondi becomes the 'wanderer' between cultures and the 'visitor' or, in the context of his employment as a liaison officer or social worker, the *umuntu wendlela* who teaches. Embracing the idea that one did not 'walk alone' and creating a link to the idea of *ubuntu*, Zondi evoked this connection

between such a mature wise man and a child, by means of the cement sgraffito at the Appelsbosch chapel, *Prophet and Child* (c.1964) (Fig.265 opp.p243).

Zondi persevered with the theme of solitude in *Die Eensame (The Lonely One)* (1975) (Figs.221-223 opp.), which was sculpted around the same time as *isiHambi*. As in Bünjer's piece, he gave alternative titles to the lonely wanderer, namely *Looking Back*, and, reflective of the artist's profound faith, *Communication with God* (Nieser, 2004-Nov.). This erect and still figure of an elderly cloaked man is reminiscent, in its mood, of *The Prophet* (1961) (Figs.53;54 opp.p179), but reveals even more clearly than *isiHambi*, how Zondi abandoned detail in his work. The deeply pensive figure is stylistically simplified, with no limbs showing. The cloak, as in *The Prophet* (1961), has a wide neckline, from where it falls to the ground. Zondi avoided the depiction of limbs, and made only a very vague suggestion of a left arm hanging at the side of the body underneath the mantle. Similar to *isiHambi*, Zondi closed the eyes of this figure, in *Communication with God*. This is the pilgrim, on a lonely journey which leads him to serve others, as Zondi had intimated (1965a:2 letter).

Few of Zondi's pieces were overtly gestural. This includes the tall semi-nude female figure, *Triumph* (1974) (Figs.224;225 after p235), the first overt expression which addresses the idea of liberation since 1960. A year later, he reiterated the expressiveness in another piece, *Triumph (or Victory or Liberty)* (1975) (Figs.226-228 after p235), which went into the collection of a Swedish art connoisseur<sup>333</sup>. Zondi chose females as activists in his oeuvre, perhaps inspired by the firm stance, by which women in the 1950s contributed to mass protest action against discriminatory legislation.

Parallel to these animated expressive works, Zondi returned to his sagacious figures such as *The Young Prophet* (1977) (Fig.96 after p184), the cloaked *The Scholar* (late 1970s) (Fig.95 after p184), and *Bearded Man* (1978) (Fig.97 after p184). Zondi repeatedly returned to portrait heads of bearded men, some carved from blocks of wood that did not allow the inclusion of a neck for the head, e.g. *Bearded Male Head* (mid-1960s) (Fig.229 opp.) and the deeply contemplative *Head of Prophet* (1977) (Fig.230 opp.). Late works, revealing Zondi's consistent preoccupation with the theme of prophetic wisdom, are *Head of a Prophet I* (1980s) (Fig.231 opp.) and *Head of a Prophet II* (1980s) (Fig.232 opp.). From around the

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<sup>333</sup> The alternative titles were given to me by the owner, Prof. Stig Bengmark in Sweden, who received these from Zondi via Prof. Johan van Wyk (Bengmark, 2004).

same time, a *Male Torso* (1980s) (Fig.233 after p236) once again is strongly suggestive of self-portraiture.

Five years after the two female figures signifying triumph were carved, a male figure, *Undoing Shackles* (1980) (Figs.234;235 after this p), is the last of Zondi sculptures that has been found so far, that overtly addresses oppression. At the beginning of a decade of increasing dissent against white rule, Zondi was showing his optimism. In this full-length portrait of a standing man, holding loosely in his hands the rope with which he had been bound, the artist comes closer to using a liberatory cliché than in any other work found. Given the title, *Undoing Shackles*, the sculpture's expression is not one of exhilaration. Rather, Zondi has portrayed a solemn rather tired man who contemplates the profundity of the event. While the 1970s had revealed the vulnerability of the white state, by 1980, when this piece was carved, the extreme unrest in Natal still lay ahead. Throughout, Zondi remained ostensibly optimistic that changes were being effected for the betterment of black South Africans (Zondi, 1977b:6, letter).

Zondi's vision from the late 1950s, of a spiritual and ideological realignment, would be prophetic, if only in so far as change to a democratic form of government had occurred. His reconciliatory endeavours would be vindicated from 1994, as South Africans began to seek the truth about the past, and to define a process of reconciliation.

#### **5.4 BIBLICAL INSPIRATION**

By advancing Christian perspectives in some of his work, Zondi made statements about shared morality across artificial barriers of culture and race and made gestures of reconciliation and atonement. In the 1950s, Zondi had heard Luthuli's country-wide call, issued through the ANC, that 'The Road to Freedom is Via the Cross' (Luthuli, 2006[1962]:233). From biblical history, Zondi identified the necessity to reconcile. This history relates that, against God's intention, 'nations' became estranged from one another after creation (Rousseau, 1977). Human interdependence, in Zondi's view, made it essential to overcome fear and to cultivate trust in one another. 'Fear develops through lack of knowledge, but we cannot survive without each other, despite the differences in our natures. Reconciliation is a question of rapprochement and we must believe in one another'

(Rousseau, 1977)<sup>334</sup>. He thus conveyed that the strong bond which he acknowledged among all of humanity was central to his artwork. Apart from technical skills passed on by his father, it is reported that he deemed his mother's influence, regarding spiritual aspects of life, foundational for his art-making. The pragmatic and the metaphysical, he felt, were united in his work (Rousseau, 1977). Contextualizing his pieces into the circumstances of oppression, these covert, yet compelling indictments, which he presented to a wider audience, emphasized liberation from bondage, redemptive ideals, and reconciliation. He thus sought to utilize the Christian language which he shared with his audience on both sides of the racial divide. The notion of salvation for both the oppressor and the oppressed encouraged him. More significantly, Zondi saw in Christianity's offer of salvation the reason for the wide adoption of this faith among Africans. He expresses this in *The Prodigal Son* (1965) (Figs.236-238 opp.) Jesus's parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32, in Bible, 1999, in Bible, 1999:1175,1176), teaches concern for the lost, for forgiveness and for the joy of repentance. Arrogance, rebelliousness, and disregard for patriarchal authority are met with forgiveness. Implicit in Zondi's message is the suggestion of responsibility and commitment and that God's love is constant and welcoming. Zondi's embrace of Christianity, therefore, went far beyond Mbatha's suggestion that blacks accepted this faith in order to validate the meaning of their lives within the oppressive circumstances of white society (2005:34,36). Zondi's art-making, coupled with his inter-personal skills, was an act of restoring human integrity that was being compromised by segregation.

Zondi portrayed the act of seeking salvation by means of his large cement sgraffito mural, *Couple in front of Cross* of 1961 (Figs.239;240 opp.). Zondi was the builder of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Bhekhuzulu township of Vryheid. He was most probably not the architect of this structure, but the mural on an outside wall is testimony to his creativity. Here Zondi used only simple incision into the wet cement-plastering, depicting two peasants in front of a large cross. The man is bent over under the load of a large bundle on his back. He is leaning on a stick while the woman is kneeling below the cross, praying. She has unburdened herself, having placed the bundle at the foot of the cross. This image, then, suggests a metaphorical unburdening of this church woman wearing a *doek*. Remembering his discussions with Helander, Zondi may have been alluding to female

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<sup>334</sup> ðVrees ontstaan uit 'n gebrek aan kennis, maar ons kan nie sonder mekaar klaarkom nie, ten spyte van verskille in ons beskawings. Versoening is 'n kwessie van benadering en ons moet geloof hê in mekaar (Zondi in Rousseau, 1977). Transl. Kirsten Nieser.

membership in Christian church communities, while their husbands still clung to their traditionalist beliefs.

Zondi initiated his biblically inspired work with images of Christ on the Cross, e.g. the *Crucifix for Långselet* (Fig.48 opp.p174) and *Christ on the Cross at Ceza*, from the mid - 1950s (Figs.44;45 opp.p174). These were considered above with a view to Zondi's stylistic development. Although Zondi disliked commission work (Zondi 2002a pers.com), he made exceptions in connection with crucifixes, which were ordered by the Lutheran and the Catholic Churches. Zondi's motivation for accepting such commissions must be evaluated beyond the obvious financial considerations. These works relate to his deep connection and his personal identification with the ethics of Christianity and the notion of Christ as the Redeemer. Here Zondi was able to employ the kind of creativity which Grossert (1965) likened to an affinity with the Creator, which the educator argued, individuals with intellect develop. Art becomes the act of giving expression to what is in the soul (Grossert in Leeb-du Toit,2003:123). Zondi's consistent path of interracial rapprochement and reconciliation, then, is implicit in the representation of Christ, whom he regarded as symbolizing a bridge between nations (Zondi, 1975:2, script).

Apart from figures of Christ, which Zondi carved from the mid-1950s, in 1959, he began to make moralizing sculpture based on narratives in the Bible. The Old Testament figure of *Moses* (1959) (Figs.204-206 opp.p229), in his role as sagacious leader, has been considered. In the same year, Zondi carved *Adam and Eve* (1959)(Fig.241 opp.p239) and *Lot's Wife* (1959)(Figs.248-251 before p240). Towards the end of the 1950s, Zondi made small Christmas gifts, figures portraying the *Madonna and Child*.

Three very distinct versions of *Adam and Eve* have been found. In Zondi's small piece of 1959 (Figs.241;242 opp.), the original heterosexual couple, who introduced knowledge into the world, relax with one another in innocent communication. Their body language speaks of a guileless existence, far removed from the self-consciousness and shame after the Fall. This is a nakedness without disgrace (Genesis, 2:25, in Bible, 1999:3,4). In the mid-1960s, with another image of the original couple (Fig.243 opp.), Zondi captured the time of Adam's sleep, when God took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man (Genesis, 2:21,22, in Bible, 1999:3,4). Eve appears with a covert smile. Zondi uses the signage of betrothal by



means of the *isicolo*. This is the moment in which, according to the Gospel, sin comes into the world. It is only in this, Zondi's major, work of 1965, *Adam and Eve* (Figs.244-247 after this p), that the artist covertly hints at the implications of disobedience and breach of fellowship implied in Genesis (3:16.,in Bible, 1999:4). The biblical fig leaf has been replaced by regional rural attire, where Eve wears a reed skirt and Adam the *ibheshu*. From this moment of digression, the integral God-human relationship is disrupted. The purposeful function of the rest of the Christian Bible is seen in the light of trying to regain love and freedom for people enmeshed in spiritual and material slavery resulting from the subsequent exploitation and oppression (Hopkins, 2005:185). Zondi's own thoughts about the pain of apartheid as 'a blessing in disguise' comes to mind, in relation to Romans (5:3-5, in Bible, 1999: 1268) : 'we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he had given us' (Romans, 5:3-5, in Bible, 1999:1268).

*Lot's Wife* (1959) (Figs.248-251 before p240) is a vernacularised figure, consistent with Zondi's oeuvre in the 1950s, of depicting people from Natal. Her ankle rings denote her Zulu origins. She typifies his realist mode with modernist distortion of disproportionately large limbs. This is Zondi's first direct reprimand which he expresses through his art. He has inscribed the first word of a Zulu proverb on the base of his biblical figure: *Isalakutshelwa*. *Isalakutshelwa sibona ngomopho* means 'the fool-hardy learns by the flow of blood' (Nyembezi, 1954:62). It is used in the sense of 'stubborn and obstinate people who will not listen to advice. Such people will do things against better advice, and then find themselves in great difficulties. The hard knocks of life will draw blood from them, and it is only then they will realise the folly of their obstinacy' (Nyembezi, 1954:62). As such, the piece, *Isalakutshelwa*, alludes to obstinacy and becomes a mirror Zondi is holding up to his white audience. This was the decade of ever greater state control of the lives of the black population. Luthuli's voice of reason is not being heard among Whites. They refuse to take the advice of the black intelligentsia, making pleas for sharing power democratically. Zondi makes clear what the consequences of rejecting this advice will be. What is at stake becomes a moral issue. The artist portrayed the woman as she turned around, against good advice, and looked back at the city of Sodom. Surveying the piece in old age, Zondi spoke of the burning urge of *Lot's Wife*, which he tried to embody in the female figure, as she disregards the injunction from Genesis (19:17, in Bible, 1999:19 ). He noted: 'she couldn't help to turn her

head ó one can really see how she had to turn backö (Zondi, 2002a:7 pers.com.). With the movement inspired by Rodin's work, as noted above, the artist captured the moment in which the woman turns into a pillar of salt.

Described by Agnes Bodenstein as one of Zondi's most important works (Bodenstein, A. 1998:3, script), Zondi's monumental *Rachel* (1963) (Figs.252-255 opp.) was carved from red ivory (*umncaka*). This work received second prize at the controversial *Art: South Africa Today* exhibition, held in 1965, under the auspices of the SAIRR in Durban's municipal art gallery. Zondi portrayed the initially barren shepherdess from Genesis, ò lovely in form, and beautifulö (Genesis 29:17 in Bible, 1999:32), whose disgrace was ultimately taken away by giving birth to a son, Joseph (Genesis 30:23, in Bible, 1999:34). She becomes the wife, mother, and household manager. In this tall, cloaked modernist figure, the *isicolo* signifies the woman's marriage status and the legitimacy in bearing children. Zondi's alternative title for this piece was *The Mother of the Sons*, possibly alluding to the difficulty she had in conceiving. This reflects the societal pressure to produce sons, as is the case among Zulu speakers. Her posture denoting deep sadness, anguish, and crying was explained by Zondi as being òRachel crying for her children which were not to beö (Zondi, 2002b:4; 2003a:2 pers.com). The tears could also be an allusion to the dissent within the family among Rachel's descendants and Jacob's children from other women. Agnes Bodenstein recalls Zondi's reference to crying that òwas heard in Bethlehem for the children that are no moreö (Bodenstein, A. 1998:3, script), implicitly involving the entire nation. This becomes a covert contextualization of the biblical story. The artist pre-empted the rivalry between the descendants of the biblical figures, alluding to the often hostile relationships among people in South Africa.

Zondi used the images of *David and Jonathan* (1964)(Fig.258 opp.) to signify the *Forbidden Friendship*, its alternative title, between the artist and Bodenstein. It forms a thematic unity with the piece that was most widely displayed in exhibitions throughout his career, *Reunion* (or *Reconciliation*)(1964) (Figs.256;257;259 opp.p241). As nudes, *David and Jonathan* are able to be evaluated outside the fetters of ethnicity or race. Zondi used biblical inspiration from the first Book of Samuel, the book of the Bible dealing with the theme of faithfulness to God as the bringer of prosperity, while disobedience brings disaster. Using God as witness between them, David reaffirms his oath of love for Jonathan òbecause he loved him as he loved himselfö (Samuel 20:16,17,23,42, in Bible, 1999:319). Salient in this, one of the

deepest friendships in biblical history, is the commitment to God, not just one partner in the friendship to the other, as was the case in this cross-cultural friendship. Various aspects of this relationship showed that these friends let nothing come between them, that they drew closer together when their friendship was tested, and that they remained friends to the end (Samuel, 18:8, in Bible, 1999:354). Pertinently, the newspaper article spoke, concerning Bodenstein and Zondi, of the agony of not being allowed to be friends although they feel they belong together (Daily News, 1964).

Zondi sculpted *Reunion* (1964) (Figs. 256; 257; 259 opp.) as a sign of his friendship with Bodenstein. This was at the latter's request, after the ritual was performed which involved the slaughtering of a goat, as noted above. Zondi likened this piece to the "togetherness" of brothers (Zondi, 2003b pers.com.; Bodenstein, A. 1998:3,4 script.). The two men embrace in the moment of seeing one another after a period of being parted. Both men have bare torsos, while the artist used their attire to signify the diverse social contexts from which they come. The figure of Zondi wears the traditionalist *ibheshu*, while the figure of his brother Bodenstein, is portrayed being from an urban context by wearing trousers. This is a reference to the time since colonial rule, when blacks were not allowed to enter white towns unclothed (Thompson, 2004:36). Contextualizing the piece within the apartheid ideology, Zondi spoke of fulfilling a particular goal when he carved this evocative sculpture. It was his intention to offend them, his white audience, many of whom would not shake hands with a black man (Zondi, 2003b pers.com.). He wanted to show them that social intimacy between white and black people was possible: I had to express my feeling against apartheid in a strange way. It HURT them, I had to make something to really move them. To hurt them, so that they know that it CAN happen (Zondi, 2003b pers.com.). In February 1964, the *Daily News* contained a report about Zondi's Presentation to Hospital (Anonymous, 1964), which was actually marking the artist's presentation of *Reunion* (1964) to Bodenstein. The writer addresses racial estrangement as the content of Zondi's work (Anonymous, 1964). While Zondi was said to be heralding in an age of reunion, Bodenstein's comments that: there is a poignancy evoked by the piece because we are still so far from finding each other as human beings and, because of present circumstances it is really very hard to find the road to this togetherness. And yet it is the only road which we can follow if we are to preserve our cultural identities and yet respect each other's humanity. Once the basic human relations have been put right then the group differences are subordinated and peripheral. Agnes Bodenstein also contextualized the work within the relevant political situation,

recalling ða time of great turmoilö just after the *Sharpeville* shootings (1998:3, script). The publication, *development Southern Africa* (1974) used a portrait of Zondi with this figure in a colour image on the front cover, naming it 'Reconciliation'. In connection with this sculpture, Agnes Bodenstein characterizes Zondi's nature as at once humorous, yet aware of ðthe tragic side of thingsö, commenting that he 'suffered greatly because he saw the oppressed and felt the injustice towards black people'. His empathy lay with black people when they 'were treated inhumanely and he had a strong sense of how things should be' (Bodenstein, 1998:4, script).

Zondi's main liturgical project was the hospital Chapel seating two hundred, at the Swedish Mission at Appelsbosch, near Fawn Leas in the Greytown district of Natal (Figs.260-269 opp.). Zondi was the creative force behind the building. He was assisted by Swedish architect Nyström (Zondi, 1961b:3, letter). It became a holistic experience for him, emotionally and artistically. The spirit in which Zondi built it is reflected on the plaque foundation stone dated 10 February 1962, which includes Psalm 127.1: 'Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain' (Bible, 1999:693). Consecrated by Dean Mhlungu in September 1964 (Bodenstein, 1964:1; Zondi, 1965b:5 script), the building became a symbol of the friendship between Zondi and Bodenstein, who speaks of the 'Chapel Dream' as a 'great work of creation' (Bodenstein, 1964a:1). Zondi was the architect of the chapel, its builder, and its craftsman of the interior structures like the pews (Fig.261 opp.), the altar, and the font stand (Fig.269 opp.), the wrought-iron work of the wall-mounted candelabras (Fig.262 opp.), and the copper work of the font platter (Fig.268 opp.). The director of the South African National Gallery in 1965, Dr. M. Bokhorst described Zondi's architectural form as outstanding, lauding the light effect of the interior (Bokhorst, 1965). Typical for late modernist churches in South Africa the triangular A-frame construction associated with the numeral three and its multiples, alludes to the holy trinity (Zondi, 2002a pers.com). The triangle is echoed in interior features like the pew embellishments and candelabras. In keeping with a modernist idiom, Zondi embraced and incorporated aspects of vernacular architecture. He gave the entrance an African character by creating an arched masonry protrusion (Figs.260;263 opp.p242), resembling the *ikhothamo* entrance of a Zulu hut. This reflects a similar phenomenon around the turn of the 19th century in Europe. 'Modern' design made use of native vernacular architecture and furnishings from past centuries, involving an adaptation of folk and other indigenous cultures. An 'adherence to regionalism' was simultaneously 'a glorification of 'the simple life'' (Kaplan,1995:23). In

using the *ikhothamo*, Zondi was acknowledging the shades (Berglund, 1989:104). This is an invocation of intimate association between departed ancestral kin and their living survivors in relationships of interdependency (Berglund, 1989:29,197). In using this entrance form, Zondi was also making reference to fertility, as such a doorway and the entrance of the womb are the same in meaning (Berglund 1976:168). This reflects the amalgam of diverse religio-cultural influences and aspirations, with the retention of a traditionalist based cosmogony (Leeb-du Toit,2003:15). Zondi spoke of an African feast with ritual slaughter as thanksgiving for the completion of the chapel (Zondi, 2002a pers.com). Two late modernist cement reliefs adorn the arches flanking the apse entrance. On the left is Zondi's image of a gigantic *Prophet and Child* (c.1964) (Fig.265 opp.). This was perhaps an early translation of the notion of guidance, discipline, and even chastisement, implicit in the *Umntu wendlela*. The scene inscribed in cement on the right hand arch was created by Eric Ngcobo, alluding to the *Nativity Scene* (c.1964)(Fig.266 opp.). A reference to Zuluness in this project is an acknowledgement of the local community which the chapel would serve, facilitating their identification with Christianity. With strong stylization, simplification, and distortion of the human form, popular in the 1950s and 1960s, there is evidence that Zondi did at least one more mural in this mode in 1964.

The integration of art, design, and architecture is seen in the chapel's smallest piece which was made by Zondi, a round baptismal font with a central bird motif beaten from copper, surrounded by writing: OKHOLWAYO-ABAPHATHIZWE + OYAKU-SINISWA, "The one who believes and is baptised will be saved" (Msomi, 2004 pers.com.) (Figs.267-269 opp.). As was noted, in the early Cape colony, being freed from slavery was implicit in baptism (Kistner,1968:157). The dove motif is used metaphorically in *The Baptism and the Temptation of Jesus* in the Bible (Mark 1:10). According to his sketches, Zondi envisioned a much more elaborate font structure, possibly hexagonal, which included a lid as well as inset relief carving, *Font Designs* (Fig.267 opp.p243).

Zondi's largest and perhaps most poignant work, one to which he made constant reference in his old age, is his life-sized figure of *Christ on the Cross*, at Appelsbosch carved between 1963 and 1964 (Figs.270-275 opp.). This large blackwood piece crowned his architectural and masonry achievements. It is his most emotive ecclesiastical piece by far. Although it sapped his energy, he spoke of it as his ultimate engagement as an artist (Zondi, 2002a pers.com.). Zondi described his complete immersion in the act of sculpting, revealing how

he developed empathy with the suffering of Christ, to the point of his own physical exhaustion. Bodenstein noted that Zondi changed the facial expression of Christ three times. This was because, during the period of creation, the artist identified intimately with Christ's emotional states, which he visualised, and with which he imbued the figure at various stages of sculpting. Carving such a piece, he claimed, "was like a prayer for him," (Bodenstein, A. 1998a, script). Zondi referred to a certain "spirit" during carving, noting the strange phenomenon, as he perceived it, that the artist always adopts the emotion he is trying to express: "When you carve something, if it is something sad, you feel sad yourself" (Zondi, 2003a pers.com). "When I do the Christ," Zondi noted, "I don't just do a face. I portray a particular emotional moment. His character at that moment that the face reveals" (Zondi in Deane, 1978:201). He described how he wept when Christ wept. When he was depicting perspiration running down Christ's face, he too was perspiring (Zondi, 2003a:2 pers.com.). "The real sweat is just inside my heart because it needs to come out." He noted, that rather than "those magicians who just say 'be alive wood!'", the artist is required to engage his entire being in the act of creating. He would work on the piece until midnight, entirely emotionally drained (Zondi, 2002a pers.com). As was common among black artists, Zondi considered the question of Christ's racial type. The question of whether Jesus was the Messiah, also for black people, is a theological problem which deeply concerned the Zionist Churches where a hunger for revelation was based on the colour-bar (Sundkler, 1961 [1948]:279,280). The image of the white Christ is thought to have "faded away" due to intolerable and discriminatory policies of white domination. In a search for leadership among blacks, the white Christ became "the White's Christ" (Sundkler, 1961 [1948]:337). Significantly, although Zondi indigenized biblical figures like *Adam and Eve*, *Moses*, and *Lot's Wife*, all of Zondi's figures of Christ are bearded Aryan men with long hair and aquiline features. A Eurocentric translation of religious imagery found in biblical figures was common in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century proselytising in Natal when protestant missionaries used romanticized visual material. In often dramatic biblical imagery, the moralizing purpose of an image was emphasized (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:79,80). But by the time Zondi's career was underway, it was common practice for artists to portray Christ as a black man. Yet Zondi was convinced that it would be illusionary to believe that Christ, as a Jew, might have been a black man<sup>335</sup>.

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<sup>335</sup> Personal communication, Michael Zondi, Edendale, Pietermaritzburg, KZN.

In time for his solo exhibition in Durban in 1965, with his portrait of *The Publican* (1965) (Figs.276-278 opp.), Zondi made another biblical reference that showed a hint of self-representation. Spiritual renewal and conversion is linked by the Gospel to a confession of guilt or to repentance (Villa-Vicencio, 1983:69). In the stance of the cloaked old man, Zondi's figure expresses the utmost humility and remorse. This is a characteristic that many friends and patrons observed in the artist. Publicans were seen as traitors and apostates who were defiled by their association with the heathen and for willingly acting as tools of the oppressor<sup>336</sup>. Within his ecclesiastical debate concerning the contextualization of Christian themes in African art, Joseph Thiel (1984: 259) encompasses Zondi's art in his publication, *Christliche Kunst in Afrika*. He juxtaposes the image of his *The Publican* (1965) with Sundermeier's consideration of aspects of Christian conscience. His head is bent and his right hand rests on his chest. The publican uses a phrase which has become a common saying used by people aware of their human weaknesses and failings, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke, 18:13, in Bible, 1999:1179). The notion of humility and of serving the poor characterizes Zondi's life's work. This is expressed: "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke, 18:14, in Bible, 1999:1179). "Sell all whatever thou hast and give to the poor: and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Luke 18:22, in Bible, 1999:1179).

Zondi's most unusual figure of Christ was commissioned (with Bodenstern as agent) by the large Protestant Church, the *Große Kreuzkirche* in Hermannsburg, northern Germany. This is a *Cross-Bearing Christ* (mid-1970s)(Figs.279-281 after this p), to be found in the main entrance vestibule of the church, below the belfry tower. Apart from the positive financial reward for such a major work, it was a challenge for the artist to take on this piece because of its movement as a walking figure bearing a great weight. Only the figure itself was delivered, while the cross was made in Germany, crafted from dark heavy wood according to Zondi's precise specifications. This piece exemplifies most strikingly Zondi's control of colour variations in the wood and their use to the best advantage of the piece. The natural grain of the light-coloured hardwood, used for the face, has red striations. These suggest blood which drips down over the face, from wounds caused by the crown of thorns.

The latest works by Zondi using biblical references are two linocuts of 1968, *Calvary* (1968)(Fig.282 before this p), portraying Christ on the Cross with his two fellow sufferers,

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<sup>336</sup> <http://www.christnotes.org/dictionary.php?dict=sbd&q=Publican> (URL 29 August 2009).

and *Getsemane* (1968)(Fig.283 before this p), portraying Christ and an angel. These images were included in his UNISA exhibition in 1974 in Pretoria.

## 5.5 PORTRAYALS OF GENDER

The way Zondi imagined and portrayed men and women in the 1950s confined them to their traditionalist mode. This reflected patriarchal hierarchies as a social context in which authority was equated with seniority and was conferred through male heroism during conflict. The mature warrior could marry and procreate in the context of self-sufficient communal household economies, in which women performed gender specific roles. The male nude, *Man after Bath* (1957)(Figs.284-286 opp.), is one of Zondi's rare figures of this genre and represents an exceptional piece for this time. Breaking the mould of portraying the male figure in the traditionalist mode, Zondi portrays a rather contemplative kneeling figure of a man wearing a turban-like head wrap, as he leans over touching his left foot with both hands. The figure foreshadows Zondi's departure from the confines of Zuluness.

Consistently over many years, from 1960, Zondi pursued the theme of parenting, the foremost being the *umNtwana nonina*<sup>337</sup> theme, (child and mother)<sup>338</sup>. His madonna figures range in mood from the profoundly happy, even joyful, mother with her infant to the *Mater Dolorosa*, who experiences the suffering of her grown child. Yet significantly, Zondi initiated the theme of parenthood with a very evocative image of a father and his daughter, *The Found One* (late-1950s)(Fig.287 after 246). The two figures were carved from one block of wood. As the protective patriarch wearing only the *ibheshu*, the man stands on ground elevated above that on which the girl is kneeling at his feet. He wears body adornments in the form of ear plugs (*iziviliba*), bracelets (*izigqizo*), and a necklace, which could be the fragrant *umGwxowonthomboti*, (made from tamboti wood), while the young bare-breasted girl wearing a skirt, also has a necklace. With these details Zondi was reiterating the rural context of these figures. Zondi captured the moment when the man finds the girl after she had gone missing (Zondi, 2004:6 pers.com) and when she reaches out for her father's hand. Zondi commented that she was subject to child labour, the little girls who work hard on the farms and run away and disappear (Zondi, 2004:6 pers.com). He was referring to tenant farmers in Natal, the suffering of the children, parental responsibility, and pain. The significance of

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<sup>337</sup> *umNtwana nonina* is Zondi's name for a double portrait of a child with its mother (1971).

<sup>338</sup> Around thirty of these have been sourced, in a body of work that spans over four hundred pieces.



the snake on the ground next to the girl, possibly a so-called *umZingandlu* (Nodolo, 2007) ranges from an allusion to ancestral intervention to a signifier of drought.

Zondi's most overt statement, which testifies to his positive relationship with his children, is at the same time confirmation of the progressive manner in which he conducted his patriarchal role. *The Daughter Speaks and the Father Listens* (1983) (Fig.289 opp.) was carved when Zondi's youngest daughter qualified as a nurse. The male figure is clearly a self-portrait by the artist. A vastly oversized hand emerges underneath the female figure, carrying her in its curved palm in a moment of great tenderness. At the time, Zondi was experimenting with the portrayal of "the hand of God" in a piece, *God's Hand* (early-1980s) (Fig.290 opp.), where the mother's hand protectively covers the infant's head, while yet another over-sized hand holding them both. This same device which Zondi used in the mother-child figure echoes the intimacy of the *Father and Son* piece, (1975)(Fig.291 opp.) and *Eternal Bond* (1982) (Fig.292 opp.)<sup>339</sup>.

When Zondi designated the two pieces *The Found One* and *Realisation* (1960)(Figs.278; 288 before 247) as "relatives", he was arguably referring to more than only to stylistic similarities (1960a:5, letter). The extremely elongated portrayal of a traditionalist man wearing an *ibheshu* loin cloth, shows him deeply in thought. Zondi has inscribed the full title onto the base, at right: "Realisation M. Zondi 24.2.1960 (Othello x2)" (Bodenstein, A. 1998c:1, script). His "realizations" pertain to life, implicitly the dire circumstances of rural economies at the time (Bodenstein, 2002 pers.com.). By inscribing and naming "Othello" again, Zondi refers to, and reminds his audience of, the *Portrait of a Young Leader* (1959) (Figs.207-209 opp.p232), which he had given the alternate title, *Othello*, with implications of injurious action, as noted above. Together, then, the pieces reflect on the circumstances of abject poverty in rural areas since the artist's birth, when his family lived on the barren land of "the Thorns". Zondi's personal anguish concerning his own responsibilities, eloquently expressed in his letter to Bodenstein in August 1961, found expression in the above pieces. The artist's lack of confidence and his urge to do justice to his role as the *pater familias* burdened him.

In later works, Zondi further conceptualized the notion of inner turmoil or deliberation in *Determination* (1978)(Figs.293;294 opp.). The balled right fist held in front of the chest is an expression of the resolve of this young man in his prime. In the same year Zondi

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<sup>339</sup> Alternative titles are *Apple of My Eye* or *Family II*.

worked another piece of dark red, heavy wood into the figure of a contemplative young man. *Seated Young Man* (1978) (Fig.295 opp.) repeats the gesture of the chin propped up by one hand. This was followed by *Realisation II or Problems* (1979) (Fig.296 opp.). The figure's bearing alludes to the same kind of pensiveness which Zondi revealed in the first version of this theme.

While expressions of anxiety or affliction are discernible in a number of Zondi's female figures, only a few portraits of men become expressive of extreme suffering. *Dying Young Man* (1960) (or *Memento Mori* or *Sakubona Kufa*)(1960) (Fig.297;298 after this p) was a very personalized portrait of a patient at Applesbosch, known to the Bodensteins and Zondi. The artist portrayed two expressive manifestations of pain, the stinkwood *The Contortionist* (c. 1975) (Fig.133 opp.p188) and *Pain* (1982)(Figs.134;135 opp.p188). Zondi utilized the contortions of a piece of root-wood from the district around George in the Cape (Bodenstein, 1998:8), to visualize the notion of pain. It was a piece giving expression to human suffering (Bodenstein, 1998:8).

In some depictions of more serious young men, Zondi alludes to their coming of age, which he reveals by means of attire and by portraying them with an *induku*, stick<sup>340</sup>. *Young Man (with Attitude)* (1978) (Fig.299, two after this p) is a rare depiction of a figure in a full suit. The young man has an air of self-assurance, shown by means of his stance and the broad smile. It was mooted whether this young man with his *isiguqa* hairstyle (Fig.70 two after p181) might be a so-called 'tsotsi' (black urban criminal)(Veldsman, 2008 pers.com). Zondi used signage of indigenous material culture as well as attire, in the portrayal of two young men. *Young Man with Stick* (1980s) (Fig. previous p) is a figure which looks grave, while the other young male, *Smiling Boy* (1980s)(Fig.301 previous p), has in his hand, something that seems to amuse him. In the traditionalist Zulu context the *induku* (stick) is a sign of manliness. By giving both figures long trousers, Zondi is suggesting their manhood and perhaps their introduction into an urban and western context.

The cloaked *Sorrowful Mother* (or *Mater Dolorosa*)(1960) (Fig.194 opp.p226) (Zondi, 1960g:2, letter) and the boy depicted as *Invisible Bonds* (1960) (Fig.198 opp.p226) have been considered. It was only through naming her and designating her as the mother of the boy in

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<sup>340</sup> In the Zulu kingdom sticks were a part of the traditional fighting regalia. They denoted manhood and were regarded as very personal items by their owners which were often 'companions' for life. They could be significant as heirlooms handed down from father to son (Nel, 2002:30).

bondage, that this piece becomes a mother figure. Zondi created a dual link, both physical and metaphorical, to *Invisible Bonds* (1960). The artist explained that not only was this *Mater Dolorosa* the mother of the young man in bondage but also she was made from the same log (Zondi, 2003c pers.com). In his letter to Bourquin, Zondi speaks of having created in this draped woman ða counterpart figureö to *Invisible Bonds* (1960f, letter). Without sentimentality, Zondi portrayed her in a huddled stance, with her elbow as a central shield. This conveys a need for shelter or protection, more from distressing truths than from tangible threats. This mother is the figure of a woman seeing her grown child in bondage. Zondi thus contextualizes these two related figures in the South African landscape in the last year of Union, prior to the declaration of the South African Republic. Five years later, Zondi again portrayed the suffering of mothers, making an overt reference to rural hardship in *Famine* (1965) (Fig.302 opp.), specifically addressing hardship caused by a prevailing drought and its consequences for rural communities in Zululand. Photographed from below, it takes on an even more austere appearance, as a *Mother-and-Child* piece (Fig.303 opp.)<sup>341</sup>.

*(Mother) Earth has taken him Back* (1983)(Fig.304 opp.) portrays a small child clinging to its mother. Zondi made this piece in the studio of Sr. Johanna Senn at Mariannahill, on one of his intermittent visits. The piece commemorates the death of his son, Zabelo. He presented the mother and child piece to Sr. Johanna, commenting, ðEarth has taken him backö. Both as a Christian and in the context of the Catholic mission, it is significant that Zondi should have used metaphorical imagery from a non-Christian context. Another of Zondi's later figures in the collection of Sr. Johanna recalls the artist's first allusion to parenthood in the late 1950s. This is another ðfoundöchild, *Another Living Being* (mid-1980s) (Fig.305 opp.p249)<sup>342</sup>. *Long Wait* (1977) (Fig.306 opp.p249) portrays a shrouded, profoundly fatigued, even anxious, woman crouching on the ground. It may seem speculative, but the gesture of one hand cupped over a pronounced bulge suggests that during this ðlong waitö she is carrying an unborn child. It would again be a single figure, like *Sorrowful Mother* (1960)(Fig.194 opp. p226) or *Rachel* (1963)(Figs.252-255 opp.p240), in whose representation the role of motherhood is implicit.

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<sup>341</sup> This is in the SAIRR collection of Jo Thorpe, now in the SAIRR archival box in the Campbell Collections, Durban.

<sup>342</sup> Sr. Johanna recounts Zondi account of the imagery of a young person finding a baby: ðA young girl walks across a field and hears a rustling in the grass. She stops and immediately knows ó OH ! öanother live being!ö (Senn, 2003, pers.com).

Zondi gave artistic expression to the prominent role which his mother, Eva Zondi, played in his life, by repeatedly portraying her. Two portrait heads were created in 1967 and 1970 (Figs. 307;308, opp.), while the two other found pieces were carved after Zondi's stay in Paris in 1977 (Figs.309 opp.p). One of these has the alternative title *Anxiety* (Fig. 310 opp.). These were individual portrait heads of the woman to whom he attributed his own emotional and spiritual growth. He referred to her as a prayer woman, alluding to her position as a church elder in the black Lutheran community of Hermannsburg (Bodenstein, A. 1998a, script). It appears that Zondi divulged the identity of works that portrayed his mother only in the intimacy of friendship and trust, among patrons who were his friends. This implies that he was letting them be privy to a particularly deep emotional bond. In many of his female figures, Zondi used the signage of a western *doek*, or headscarf (COD, 2002:342), to convey her *ikholwa* convert status. While fulfilling 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial prerequisites of neck to knee covering, the headscarf is simultaneously a sign of *ukuhlonipa* in the traditionalist context (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:87).

Zondi created many variations of the ðMother and Childø theme, mainly with the two figures interacting directly. Some are known only from photographs, e.g. *Madonna and Child* (mid-1960s) (Figs. 311;312 after this p) and *Mother and Child III* (mid-1960s) (Fig.313 after p250). The *umthombothi* piece, *Mother and Boy* (early 1970s) (Fig. 314 after this p) pre-empted two more monumental mother-child figures of the mid-1970s. *Tere Beskerming* (Tender protection)(1974) (Fig.315 two after p250) and a mother with two children, *Pieta* (mid- 1970s) (Figs. 316-318 two after p250). *Lullaby* (mid 1980s)(Figs. 319-321 three after p250) shows the child tied to its mother's back in acknowledgment of the traditional way of carrying a child, which Zondi reported to have tried (Zondi, 1960d:1, letter). Perhaps this had been his inspiration for portraying a *Father and Son* (1975)(Fig.291 opp.p247) a few years earlier. A late *Mother and Child II* (1984)(Fig.322 three after p250) shows a tiny infant with a ðchurch womanø wearing her *doek*.

Many sculptures are portrayals of the female physique, as nudes or partially draped women. In exploring the female form, Zondi said he was celebrating ðGod's creationö<sup>343</sup>. Zondi's individual female figures are generally relatively voluptuous women, which, as he explained, is an ideal among *isiZulu* speakers. Throughout his career, Zondi frequently related partially clad figures or nudes to the privacy of individuals attending to personal hygiene. He initiated

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<sup>343</sup> Personal communication, Michael Zondi, Edendale, KZN.

these with an early rather staid portrayal of a *Woman after Bath* (late 1950s) (Fig.323 opp.). *The Palm* (1960) (Fig. 324 opp.) shows greater confidence with the human form. Around 1960, Zondi carved a small female nude for John Hooper, as gift on his departure for Canada, *Kneeling Nude*, c. 1960 (Figs.325;326 opp). The erect, rather stiffly standing figure has a loosely draped sarong-like cloth. In other pieces of females performing their *toilette*, by incorporating fabric, Zondi created an interactive object, for example in *Spiral* (or *Bathing Woman*) (1962)(Fig.327 after this p), the twist in the body is enhanced by means of the cloth fragments. The device is repeated in *Water Carrier* (1965) (Fig. 328 after this p), where a spiraling cloth moves around the legs of the female nude. Zondi's ideal of well defined buttocks is realized in this and some other pieces, like the small *Female Nude* (1965)(Fig.329 after this p) another genre figure of the kind that found a ready audience and patronage among white patrons in Pietermaritzburg. One of Zondi's most eloquent figures in his initial mode of creating a smooth finish, is the tall piece, *The Fountain* (1963) (Figs.330,331 two after this p), which was purchased by the Durban Art Gallery. The female stands in a slight *contrapposto* on uneven ground, as she stretches her arms above her head, where her hands meet. These are celebrations of the female form, depicting unself-conscious nudity. A number of female nude figures from the 1960s are only known from Schlaudraff's photographs. These include *Nude with Necklace* (mid-1960s)(Fig.332 three after this p) and a *Bathing Woman* (mid-1960s) (Fig. 333 three after this p), while the *Female Nude* (1966) (Fig.334 three after this p) in the same photographic series was in the Strauss collection. In *Woman after Bath* (1968) (Figs.335;336 four after this p), Zondi makes use of the form of a fragment of fabric as an added element of interest. In contrast to his portrait heads of women, or many of their robed counterparts, the young women portrayed here show a lightness of spirit and optimism. The artist lets his audience be privy to their moments of privacy in which a certain innocence and freedom, through nudity, leaves no room for melancholy. A decade later, two nudes exemplify Zondi's capacity to retain an interest and joy in his portrayal of the female form, while at the same time revealing his sense of humour. The *Female Nude* (mid-1970s) (Fig.337 before this p) seems to possess a slight self-consciousness. A celebration of the female nude is evident in *Triumph* (or *Victory*)(1974)(Figs.224;225 after p235), in conjunction with *Triumph* (1975) (or *Victory* or *Liberty*) (Figs.226;227;228 after p235), in their overt active stances, considered above. In the same exhibition, with his title *Nadim Lo* (As I am)(1974)(Fig. 338 before this p) for a smiling young female nude, Zondi plainly addresses the notion of an unashamed nakedness.

The sense of pleasure in the figures seemingly enjoying the freedom of being unclothed changes in a piece which, initially, Zondi did not want to exhibit in 1974, because he was not satisfied with it (Veldsman and Veldsman 2003 pers.com). By means of the *isicolo* she is designated as being a married woman. Calling her *Vertwyfeling (Despair)* (1974) (Figs. 339-341 opp.), this nude carries the burden of responsibility. It was purchased and renamed *Crossroads*. This shows a deeply pensive woman, whose gesture mirrors that of the thoughtful *Prophet*, sculpted in the same year, 1974 (Figs.210;211 opp.p233) as considered above. Zondi was deprecatory about a late nude he carved for his daughter, portraying a woman in a contortionist pose, created with a smooth finish, *Female Nude* (1979)(Fig.342 opp.). It was given to his daughter on the occasion of her graduation from nursing college (Zondi, 2003a pers.com.). Zondi had pre-empted this event in a work of the mid-1960s. One portrait of a young female, *Graduate* (1965)(Fig.343 after this p), reflects Zondi's progressive stance towards the education of his children, especially his daughters. The piece is a rare deviation from the more grave, reflective character with which he imbues most of his female figures. Joy and satisfaction are expressed in the young woman's face. The free hairstyle is unusual, as it is not manipulated into regular strands, made into an *isicolo*, or covered by a *doek*. Implicit in Zondi's message could be his adage regarding freedom, which he believed could be gained through learning (Zondi-Molefe, 2008b pers.com.) With her education, Graduate has gained the opportunity to make her own decisions in life. With this figure, then, Zondi was revealing a prophetic vision for that time, one in which, within the next decade, he would see his own young daughters realize. Zondi carved as a counterpart piece, an elongated figure of an erect young man with long trousers, holding a short scroll in front of his chest, thinking of it as a *Scholar* (late-1970s) (Figs.344;345 after this p). His upright stance is enhanced by his long cloak, the *umnweba*, or shoulder cloak, possibly made of skins. This is a reference to the young man's rural traditionalist roots. With the urban clothing, the western long trousers worn by men, Zondi is, perhaps, making an autobiographical comment about himself. He hailed from a rural background and gained various certified qualifications over a number of years, in persistent efforts towards self-improvement.

Various female figures are shown with vessels. While this might suggest a reference to the traditionalist context, in some of the works the vessels become an integral part of the female form, achieving an integrity related to aesthetics. *Nozizwe* (1954) (Fig.37 opp.p171) was the figurine with which Zondi initiated his three-dimensional sculpture. This nubile, kneeling

girl was simultaneously his prelude to depictions of women with vessels. The artist puts the users of *izinkhamba* (clay pots) in the traditionalist context. Simultaneously he is viewing the woman in her domestic role. An early example is *Woman with Vessel* (1957)(Figs.346;347 opp.) shown in the *Bantu Education Journal*. In this rather clumsy piece worked in a realist manner, Zondi was still exploring the basic skills of carving. Another more adept version of the same theme is the tall *Water Carrier* (early 1960s) (Fig.328 after p251). His most significant piece in this genre was the elongated female nude, *Calabash* (1963)(Figs.348-350 opp.). The verticality of the extremely elongated female figure standing in an easy relaxed stance is further accentuated by the tall calabash which she is holding. Zondi was giving prominence to an important article in the life of the Zulu kingdom. A beautiful variety of calabashes as drinking vessels for the regent were especially grown near a river<sup>344</sup>. As a drinking vessel for water, the calabash was held by the *inceku*<sup>345</sup>, an attendant in a king's or chief's household, responsible for the performance of certain domestic duties (Webb and Wright, 1976:xxiv). Calabashes were among the personal belongings buried with a king<sup>346</sup>. Significantly, this piece went into Zondi's first overseas exhibition<sup>347</sup>. With its themes in the Zulu past, it satisfied the Eurocentric conceptions of visualizing the African tribal other. Strauss purchased another tall figure, *Ntombazane* (1970) (Fig.351 after this p). Over the years, although more and more rarely, Zondi consistently portrayed women with vessels on their heads. The highly stylized *Bierpot* (1974) (Fig.352 after this p) was one of two female figures with which Zondi reminded his 1974 Pretoria audience of ethnicity. The other was his modernist *Baca Woman* (1974)(Fig. 353 after this p). One of his finest smaller pieces in this genre of females with vessels is carved from protea wood, namely the small *Woman with Vessel* (1978) (Fig.354 before this p). In 1981, Zondi chose to give the gravely ill Bodenstien the undated *Sacred Harvest* (Fig.355 before this p) when Bodenstien visited him for a last time at Mtulwa, shortly before Bodenstien's death (Bodenstien, A. 1998:7, script). Both having served communal interests, the two men had always understood the importance of rural economy and natural resources. Perhaps Zondi wanted to express this with a piece which, stylistically, recalled his mode of more than two decades earlier.

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<sup>344</sup> Webb and Wright (1976: 36 citing Baleni ka Silwana 1914).

<sup>345</sup> Webb and Wright (1976: 36 citing Baleni ka Silwana 1914).

<sup>346</sup> Webb and Wright (1976: 44 citing Baleni ka Silwana 1914).

<sup>347</sup> This is the piece which was exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1966 as '*African Woman, Calabash*'

## 5.6 ALLUSION TO MUSIC

A relatively small number of pieces have been found in which Zondi depicts people with musical instruments<sup>348</sup>. Zondi considered music, poetry, and the visual arts to be ðí all sheep of the same foldö (Zondi, 1960c,:2 letter). As noted, he was active in all these fields, including the writing of plays (Beyerley, 1965:437; Miles,1997:113). He loved to sing, and it is known that he played the guitar, the flute and the double bass violin. In unison with his friends among the black intelligentsia, he appreciated classical music. Dhlomo wrote a poem invoking the conciliatory power of music where ðhuman souls, like Art, are one in Godö<sup>349</sup>. The article *At a Great Concert* again addresses the unifying quality of music in which ðAll races, tongues, the rich and poor are oneö<sup>350</sup>.

Zondi's philosophical discussions with Bodenstein and the artist's reading of classical literature inspired him to carve a large portrait bust of *Orpheus* (1972) (Figs.356-360 opp.). This is his most prominent figure in which he expressed the meeting of the arts, and implicitly people. The seemingly introverted figure is portrayed with an elongated stringed instrument more like a modern-day violin than the simple lyre. His mouth is slightly open, perhaps in the act of performing the doctrines and myths of his own poetry, which he did by singing (Hammond and Scullard,1979:758). Implicit in this figure is the notion of the universality of human desires and traits and the capacity of the arts to provide a platform where people may converge. This, in turn, provides the opportunity for reconciliation among people of all creeds. Christians referred to Orpheus as the 'Prince of Peace'. The arts, then, become the great leveller, and *Orpheus*, in representing them, becomes the 'builder of bridges'. It is not known whether Zondi also contemplated Orpheus' violent death at the hands of frenzied Maenads (Hammond and Scullard, 1979: 758, 636).

With the exception of two pieces<sup>351</sup>, all players of musical instruments in Zondi's oeuvre are male figures. The stringed instruments he portrays include a traditionalist musical instrument, a harp, and the guitar. Implicitly related to music are Zondi's early dancing figures, like *Dancing Girl* (1957) (Fig.361 before this p.), and the two pieces considered above, *Dancing*

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<sup>348</sup> In over 400 sourced pieces, which include published images and photographs where the pieces have not been seen in the original, there are 23 pieces of people as musicians.

<sup>349</sup> HIE Dhlomo 'Life is Bitter-Sweet' in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 1 April 1944 ó cited in Couzens (1985:263).

<sup>350</sup> HIE Dhlomo, 'At a Great Concert' in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 4 November 1944 ó cited in Couzens (1985:263).

<sup>351</sup> *Woman with Tambourine* (1968); and two *Cello Players* (1968)(Fig.388 opp.p259) and (1974)(Fig.389 opp.p259).



*Woman I* and *Dancing Woman II*, both of 1960 (Figs.176;177 opp.p213). They appear within a traditionalist context of indigenous forms of dress, headdress, and body adornment. In contrast, *Dancing Woman* (1974) (Figs.92;93 opp.p184) is the only later figure of a dancing woman that has been sourced, which is free from a particular cultural context. The only pointer to particularism is the head covering, possibly serving to indicate that she is a Christian woman. Only one figure portrays a dancing male, very stylized, *Pensive Dance* (1976) (Figs.362-364 before this p), considered above for its stylistic peculiarity.

Zondi began his repertoire of portraying people as musicians in a very early low-relief panel on a *Jewellery Box* (mid-1954) (Fig.9 opp.p86; Fig.365 opp.). He included a traditional Zulu stringed instrument, made of a gourd, of the kind he used to make under his father's guidance. In the *umakhweyane*, the bow across the centrally placed gourd is beaten with a stick (Koopman, 2009 pers.com.), as in *Musician* (c.1954)(Fig.366 opp.). On the same box he began his depiction of three-dimensional musicians with a *Drummer* (1954) (Fig.367 opp.). In 1963, the *Natal Mercury* published a photo of Zondi carving a drummer (1963). For his 1965 solo exhibition, the *Daily News* published a photograph of the artist carving a large red ivory piece, *Rhythm* (Fig.368 opp.), an animated dancing man beating a tall drum. Two other large works of kneeling drummers have been found, made within a year of one another, the singing *Drummer* (1982) (Fig.369 opp.) and *Drummer-Boy* (1983) (Fig.370 opp.). The drum is embedded in Zulu material and cattle culture as a product of the hide. At the same time it has been linked to aspirations of liberation, where drums become a kind of radio to broadcast news and secret codes<sup>352</sup>. In Herbert Dhlomo's *Drum of Africa*, the literal descriptiveness of a war-song is transcended, and the work is interpreted as a call to the spirits via the medium of cattle (the drum itself)<sup>353</sup>. As a medium with which to communicate with ancestral spirits, the drum of war is used metaphorically by the poet, to nostalgically invoke African history and the cultural aspect of this instrument (Couzens, 1985:267). At the same time the '...king of battle arts!, Of sacred oxen hide' is used to invoke unity against the oppressor<sup>354</sup>.

<sup>352</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo, 'Three Essays in Tribal Culture: Inkomo in Zulu Life' in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 13 December 1947 ó cited in Couzens (1985:297).

<sup>353</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo's 'Drum of Africa: New Year Clarion Call' in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 23 December 1944 ó cited in Couzens (1985) p298.

<sup>354</sup> H.I.E. Dhlomo's 'Drum of Africa: New Year Clarion Call' in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 23 December 1944 ó in Visser and Couzens (1985:367,368) ó cited in Visser and Couzens (1985:367,368).

A photograph from the mid-1960s has been found which depicts a very sombre kneeling figure, *Boy with Horn* (mid-1960s) (Fig.371 opp.p255). With this indigenous instrument, Zondi again makes the association with the Zulu cattle culture.

Most frequently Zondi has portrayed musicians with the flute and the concertina<sup>355</sup>, as instruments that may be easily transported, and by choice, played in solitude. His *Dreamer* figures, sketched and realized as sculptures from 1960, were the first of several genre pieces of male figures playing a flute, fife, or pennywhistle (Figs.372;373 opp.). Ostensibly, they depict happy, carefree youngsters. But at the time, Zondi disclosed the importance of playing musical instruments for his own equilibrium. Referring to a guitar given to him by John Hooper and the flute Wolfgang Bodenstern gave or lent him, Zondi revealed in a letter to his friend, how he was able to "really blow my troubles away" (Zondi, 1960b:2, letter). This results in a shift in perceptions of well-being and innocence usually associated with figures like the flautists, accordion players, and drummers he sculpted throughout his career. Music becomes expressive of finding respite from the stressful business of life. It connotes relaxation, especially in the context of repression. Related to the escapism he experienced in his creativity (Zondi, 1960d:1,2, letter), Zondi was equally able to find solace in music, as well as poetry (1960c:2, letter). The award-winning "The Dreamer", on which Zondi worked in February 1960 for the Union Festival Art Exhibition in Bloemfontein (Zondi, 1960a, letter), has been considered, as the *Fluitspeler* (1960) (Figs.374;375 opp.) in the Oliewenhuis Art Museum.

The instrument which Zondi's figures most frequently carry, other than the flute, is the concertina. He named an early such musician *Delantaba* (1960) (Figs.376;377 after p256), which he inscribed into the base. Mentioned above in relation to cultural encodings, *Delantaba* is a Zulu expression for missing someone. It uses the metaphorical concept of imagined landscape features which can "see" the person being missed. Zondi spoke of the young man thinking of his girlfriends, and that "the mountains around her place are so happy because they see her every day" (Zondi, 2003b pers.com.). The viewer is required to be familiar with a specifically Zulu metaphor, expressive of a very strong yearning for a person (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com). Yet according to a sketch prior to the completion of this figure, Zondi named the piece *Fugitive* (23 May 1960) (Fig.378 previous p). This

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<sup>355</sup> Flutes: 1960, 1968, 1970, 1979 and 1979; Concertina: 1960, 1962, 1969, 1970 (Wema) and two in the late 1980s.

implies that the sombre *Delantaba*, is fleeing from perceived danger, perhaps justice. In the South African context, legislation made it difficult for blacks not to come into conflict with laws associated with the Group Areas Act. The signage of clothing and the formal western suit, make of *Delantaba* a man of city. The musical instrument becomes his only solace as he yearns for familiarity.

Another early piece is *Concertina Player* (1962) (Fig.379 opp.), which Kurt Strauss sent to his son, then studying in Cambridge, England, in 1962 (Strauss and Strauss, 2007 pers.com). With his *ibheshu*, this is a boy still located in the traditionalist context. He seems to be singing. Zondi has paid particular attention to his hair, which has a plait at the back.

There is a consistency between Zondi's escape into the world of music during times of great distress<sup>356</sup> and his depiction of migrant workers that were hostel dwellers, playing the concertina. Only two male figures have been found, with unambiguous reference to such migrancy, and implicitly, to hostel life. *Mine Worker* (or *Accordion Player*) (1965) (Fig.380 opp.)<sup>357</sup> and *Wema Blues* (1970) (Fig.381 opp.), were sculpted within five years of one another. Unlike *Delantaba*, the three accordion players from 1962 hold their instruments up to their ears. *Mine Worker* (1965) wears a loosely draped long sarong tucked below his stomach, possibly indicating the he is at leisure. By means of the twist in the body, Zondi is perhaps suggesting dance. *Wema Blues* (1970) is one of two male nudes by Zondi, found thus far. Wema was a hostel in the district of Umlazi near the airport, south of Durban. Zondi visited friends and family there when he stayed with the Bodensteins and at Umlazi. His daughter noted: "He would go to Wema and find himself one with his own" (Zondi-Molefe, 2009a pers.com). From his childhood, when Zondi employed his literacy to assist families to keep letter contact by letter writing with men working in urban regions of the country, he was aware of the living conditions of migrant workers. By 1961, Zondi was corresponding directly with friends and distant relatives working on the Witwatersrand (Zondi, 1961b:3, letter). In relation to these people, Zondi was prompted to write some of his most emotive prose. Alluding to the struggle and visions, or "dreams" for the future, he shared this with Bodenstein. Zondi's ideas about retaining mental, as well as bodily, strength is echoed in the voices of migrant labourers. Using the metaphor of oxen

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<sup>356</sup> "I really blow my troubles away; it is shaping out to be Art, Poetry and Music all sheep of the same fold" (Zondi, 1960c:2 letter).

<sup>357</sup> The piece in the Killie Campbell collection is labelled "Accordion (sic) Player" Jo Thorpe speaks of *Mine Worker* of 1965, in the collection of the *African Art Centre* (1994:10).

from oral evidence, Philip Bonner and Vusi Ndima relate the perception of comprehensive disempowerment on the part of migrant workers (2008:378). From celebrating their bullness and their power in their rural homesteads, migrant male labourers undergo the enormous shift, as they are reduced, merely to a favourite metaphor employed by Zulu migrants to reflect their way of handling the disempowering urban milieu is *aziyon inkabi* – an ox perseveres (Bonner and Ndima, 2008:378,379). Self-attributed character traits include patience and obedience (Bonner and Ndima, 2008:378). Zondi's own sustained rapprochement echoes some of these characteristics that were also invoked by Bodenstein (1977:12), with which Zulu labour migrants on the Rand described themselves. In his portrayal of these men, then, once they had entered into this harsh life, Zondi reveals a great empathy. In contrast to the mental and physical constraints experienced by them, Zondi would have been well aware of his relative freedom as the wanderer or *isiHambi* between his home and his patrons.

In three other known pieces of concertina players, *Umshayele* (The Musician) (1969) (Fig.382 opp.), *Concertina Player* (1980s) (Fig.383 opp.), and *Boy with Concertina* (1988) (Fig.384 opp.), Zondi experiments with the position of the instrument in relation to the player. Much like the privacy suggested by the flute players which Zondi designated as dreamers, one roughly hewn image of a kneeling mouth organ player implies a similar solitude with music, *Imfiliji* (The Musician)(1969) (Fig.385 opp.). A year later the artist depicts a boy, denoted by means of the *isiguqa* hairstyle, as a more frivolous *Whistler* (1970) (Fig.386 opp.).

Other musicians with stringed instruments are associated with western music. These include a singing *Guitar Player* (1965)(Fig.387 opp.p259), two images of the cello, *Cello Player* (1968) (Fig.388 opp.p259) and *Cello Player* (1974) (Fig.389 opp.p259), and *Boy with Harp* (1980)(Fig.390 opp.), Agnes Bodenstein's favourite piece. Zondi's experimentation with the rendering of limbs holding, and playing, the instruments is highly individualized in each piece. The juxtapositions of instrument to the musician playing it, the relative length and size of arms and hands, the position and direction of the players' heads, all these aspects become a carefully considered interplay of forms. Finally, the *Boy with Harp* (1980) is the most stylized musician, where the elegant shape of the harp seems to flow upwards from the naturally textured rippled surface of the wood grain.

One of Zondi's very rare named, or designated, pieces is the sombre, roughly hewn mask depicting Beethoven, entitled *Eroica* (1960) (Fig.391 opp.), his third symphony in E-flat major, associated with the maestro's republican sentiments (Bu.,1978). It is likely that Zondi had discussed the context of Beethoven's landmark third symphony with his friend the musician, Paul Martens. Zondi's piece was clearly inspired by the death-mask of Beethoven, of which the Bodensteins and the Martens had a copy in their homes (Martens, 2005)<sup>358</sup>.

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<sup>358</sup> The author recalls the mask in the Bodenstein home in Montclair, Durban, in the later 1960s.

## CONCLUSION

My study of the work of Michael Zondi and his art has been an endeavour to show how his creativity, and the singular way in which he presented himself as an artist, was an effective way of asserting his subjectivity, claiming authority over his art, and defending his own voice. My acknowledgment of his ideological flexibility, and the complexity of his intellectual travelling, has exposed the strategies he employed in using his art to negotiate the challenges posed by the segregationist state.

Through his art, Zondi was able to extricate himself from the perpetual voicelessness and position of inferiority which white legislation foresaw for black South Africans. By situating the artist in the ambit of the New Africans, his early low-relief sculptures were identified as reflections of the encouragement, by the literary elite, to seek inspiration in the regional Zulu past. Zondi's later intellectual proximity to some of his white patrons was shown to have facilitated the acknowledgement of strong cultural common denominators in a politically fraught environment that sought to verify difference. Zondi's friendship with Wolfgang Bodenstern in particular, drew significantly on the Christian gospel. Nevertheless, as the two men created a microcosmic utopia of cultural cross-pollination within the segregationist state, their individual endeavour was one with which they sought to emphasize the fundamentally humanitarian reason for existing together in the country of their birth.

With his early work Zondi was intensifying his hold on the culture from which he emerged, in some ways exacerbating and further complicating the kind of ethnic framing and affirmation of difference that was used for the purpose of segregation. His creative sourcing in his own Zuluness, therefore, could be construed as an embrace of a racial signifier. Yet arguably, only after wholly seizing aspects of his own cultural rootedness was he able to move beyond this signifier and exorcise it, in order to reaffirm the innate dignity of every human being (Mbembe, 2009:90). Once Zondi transcended this imagery, his very individualistic and thematically diverse figurative works became messages to affirm the idea of a human community sharing the same humanity, with an essential human commonality and proximity (Mbembe, 2009:90).

Zondi and some of his patrons thus cast a vision in which being human in the midst of oppression was framed by the ideal of communality beyond racism and political divisiveness. By proffering his works to a white audience it was his intention that these messages should

bring about attitudinal changes. By revealing the manner in which Zondi used his art to present himself as an artist and a humanist who cared deeply about inter-human relationships, it has been shown how he simultaneously used his artistic narratives to foster an understanding between people. In this way Zondi was stimulating the kind of transformation that has remained central to shaping modernity, not only in Africa.

My proposal that Zondi's work is an original contribution to the creation of African modernity was supported by Gyekye's contestation of the polarity between *-tradition* and *-modernity* (1997:217). In this way I have acknowledged its origins in an African context, rather than designating it as something foreign that might be merely *õexpediently adoptedö* (van Robbroeck, 2006:222). My in-depth study of the work of a single artist arguably represents the kind of mediation in re-evaluating modernity, which van Robbroeck proposes as a means to remedy the stereotypical critical inscription by white authors, of cultural production by black South Africans.

I have located a large number of sculptures by Zondi which represent a broad overview of his work spanning the four decades of his career. For the purpose of this study I made a discerning, subjective selection of works for consideration. These were contextualized within the environment of their creation and described for their transformative intent. Nevertheless, any process of selection and interpretation is subject to omission and incompleteness. But rather than using Francis Dane's consideration of omissions as errors (1990:27,28), I prefer to regard this study for the heuristic value it might have. Being aware of the limitations, as well as the provisional nature of this study, I am hopeful that it may become a prompt for further research that will place other emphases, and embed Zondi's work in other texts and contexts.

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Unless otherwise stated, all interviews by personal or telephonic communication were conducted by Kirsten Nieser

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## APPENDIX 1

### THE ORIGINS OF THE AMAZONDI PEOPLE

A.T. Bryant makes mention of the Zondi clan as intruders of obscure origin into the Thukela region. The term 'clan' is used as a magnified kraal or family, with clans of common descent making up a 'tribe' (Bryant, 1929:72). He suggests them to have been of 'Sutu' origin, most likely of Pedi-Tlokwa (ibid.:517)(Bryant,1929: 517). Bryant elucidates the name eNadi for the Zondi people<sup>359</sup>, together with two other clans, a name related to the stream along which they were settled, which is a tributary of the borderline river to the former Zulu kingdom, the Thukela. The artist confirmed this name, which James Bird (1965:134,135) reiterates as 'Tribe of the Inadi Amazondi', noted below. Bryant refers to the army of Shaka kaSenzangakhona of Zulu kingdom, which forded this stream, spreading consternation among the people of the eNadi clan. (Bryant, [1911 and 1913] 1964: 59,60)<sup>360</sup>. Shaka is said to have appropriated the Zondi's whole wealth of stock and that of their people and had them degraded in the twinkling of an eye to a state of abject poverty or vassalage (ibid.). Acknowledging Shaka's authority, some of them were incorporated within his army. Other fled to the Nxamalalas (already secure in Zulu favour) and other surrounding tribes. (ibid.)(Bryant, [1911 and 1913] 1964:60).

Michael Zondi was aware of affiliated clan members of the amaZondi people having moved to the Zwartkop area near Pietermaritzburg, a move which the Bryant dates prior to 1837.

Already in Dingane's reign, numbers of these Zondis deserting from Zulu country or returning from their wanderings in Natal, began to collect in the Zwartkop district, where they still continue to reside under Magqubu, son of Mzimba, son of Dibinyika. Many adherents of the Maqenge section, however, so soon as the way was clear, gravitated back to the beloved Mpanza stream, and built there under the rule of Jangeni, Maqenge's son. (Bryant, [1911 and 1913] 1964:60).

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<sup>359</sup> This information is from articles published between 1911 and 1913 in 'Inzindaba Zabata', a periodical published by the Brothers of the Mariannahill Monastery, Bryant [1911 and 1913] 1964:59,60).

<sup>360</sup> The people living there are described as dwelling in three sections of the Zondis, governed by Nomagaga, along the Badi, the Mpumuzas, under Maqenge, on the upper Mpanze, with their relatives the Madlalas, under Njeje, lower down the same stream. (Bryant, [1911 and 1913] 1964: 59,60).

The people of the eNadi are described as close kindred of the ōlarge Dlamini tribe of Sutoid or Swazi-Nguni extractionö, on the opposite side of the Thukela. Some claimed the house of Zondi was öof more ancient origin than that of Dlamini and further, represented the higher branch of the family, and was therefore the paramount clan in this particular group.ö (ibid.)(Bryant, [1911 and 1913] 1964:60).

James Bird (1965:134,135) mentions the amaZondi people as residing both on -Zulu locationø lands also under tenancy of -white proprietorsø In his -Annals of Natalø Bird summarises the Zondi -tribeø<sup>361</sup> in the context of -Inhabitants of the Colony of Natal during the Time of Jobe, father of Dingiswayo, before the extermination of Native Tribes by Chakaø :

ö18. Tribe of the Inadi Amazondi, or Amampumusa.

Nomagaga ö Inadi Amazondi, or Amampumuza ö ancient residence, the whole of the Inadi River, which is a tributary of the Tugela. Attacked and dispersed by Chaka, cattle taken; portion of the tribe returned to the Zulu country, others went to other tribes; such as Umtsholozzi, who acknowledged the Zulus at that time; but before the arrival of the Boers many of these people deserted the Zulus, and took up residence in the present Zulu location, where they were when the Boers came and are still. They number 2104 (Bird, 1965:134).

21. Tribe of Inadi ö Amapumusa or Amazondi

Magenge ö Inadi ö Amampumusa or Amazondi. Ancient residence, the Mpanza River, both banks, to its junction with the Mooi River. This is a branch of no. 18 and shared its history. Jangeni, son of Magenge lately died, resides with his people in their ancient country, as tenants of white proprietors. They number 1072. (Bird, 1965:135)ö

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<sup>361</sup> Around the time of Michael Zondiø birth, Bryant defined a tribe as made up of clans of common (1929:72). Naming Shaka as the founder of the -Zulu nationø he defined -nationø as a collection of tribes, clans or individuals, not necessarily mutually related, but deprived of independence and subject to a single common rulerö (Bryant, 1929:3).

## APPENDIX II

### *The Song of the Trees*

Listen oh man, hear my humble song.  
I was , I am an shall ever be your friend till the end of time.  
I have served you with patience from generation to generation  
My frame and my foliage, a beauty to your landscape.

I have served as your shelter,  
From the burning sun, the pouring rain and the raging storms.  
Your refuge in the time of trouble.  
I stopped a bullet meant for your heart  
and saved your flesh from the wild canine teeth.

My bones have framed your wagon to trek the trails,  
Your boat to cross the rivers and your ship to sail the seas.  
Your house, your home and a fold for your beasts/

Fences for your fields to protect your growing crops.  
Fences for your land to safeguard your livestock.  
Yokes for your oxen, vessels for your food and drinkl,  
Handles for your tools and utensils for your household.

Fuel for the fires to warm your freezing bones,  
To cook your daily food  
and feed your smelting furnace for all your metal needs.

Your house is furnished with various things of value,  
Seats for your weary frame and beds for your daily rest.  
A table for your meals, a cupboard for your storage and treasures of beauty  
to preserve memories for generations passed and still to come.

Arms for your defence.  
Stocks and powder for your guns, shafts for your spear  
And handle for your battle axe.  
Sticks and staves to ward off the foe,  
Logs for your laager in the times of war.

My fruits and my roots have fed you in times of hunger.  
Their juice a healthy drink to warm your body and soul.  
My flesh and blood a cure for your ailments  
Also figuring deep in your chemical field.

The least I ask of you is to protect our growing young.  
Save us from wanton killers  
Save us from the wrath of veld fires  
for we would rather die to serve a worthy cause  
than to go down in shame from raging flames.  
For us itø an honour to die so that you may live

I have been with you through all walks of life;  
I shall not forsake you when my arms  
shall embrace you to the depths of your grave .  
Alas ! Oh man my song has ended, but the fact shall remain:

I was, I am and I shall ever be your friend till the end of time.

M. Zondi (undated-a)

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