

Transforming Tapestries:

How can the Keiskamma Art Project, its processes and art, be understood in relation to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality?

Submitted by

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the question of “how can the Keiskamma Art Project, its processes and art, be understood in relation to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality?” This study is concerned with women’s experience and expression of the divine through their creativity. It explores how women’s art projects contribute to their aesthetic and creative development and the impact it has on their lives. The study argues that the “Spirit” which manifests as the power of divine creative energy which is released through human creativity can promote full life for women in South Africa. It also explores how the creative process offers a catalyst towards change which affects both personal and communal transformation.

Protest art is presented and examples of its historical use both locally and internationally are cited. The discussion offers an understanding of why subordinates in society need to find a safe place to express their protest. Art projects are presented as ‘safe’ sites for women who find themselves oppressed by their societal circumstances to find opportunity for the exploration of their ideas and personal development. Ecofeminism is presented as a contemporary protest movement and the study engages with some of the work of three key ecofeminist theologians; Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara and Sallie McFague. Themes are developed which best describe the characteristics of an emerging ecofeminist spirituality.

The focus of the case study is on the Keiskamma Art Project, its processes and art, with specific focus on the Keiskamma Altarpiece. The process of dialogue and consultation which preceded the art making and the artwork are discussed in detail. The context of the Keiskamma Art Project is explored in location in the Eastern Cape in the rural and coastal town of Hamburg. The socio-economic context of the Keiskamma Art Project is outlined, indicating the lived reality of women engaged in this Art Project.

In conclusion, the study argues that an emerging contextual ecofeminist spirituality is evidenced through the women’s art, the Keiskamma Altarpiece and the Keiskamma Art Project and has contributed towards the empowerment of local women and helped them articulate a sustainable life giving vision of hope for the future.

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

I,, declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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Signed

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List of Acronyms

ALEPH	The Alliance for Jewish Renewal
GHS2006	General Household Survey 2006
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IES2005	The Income and Expenditure survey of households 2005/06
ITER	Theology Institute of Recife
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
SANG	South African National Gallery
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
WICCA	A Modern Pagan Religion

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Chapter One: Introduction

Can tapestries be transforming? Are they a means by which God's Spirit emerges? Can they stimulate creativity, encourage self-care and awaken Beauty? This study explores through a case study done on the Keiskamma Art Project and in particular the Keiskamma Altarpiece whether the Spirit is present and visible through the creative processes. The title "Transforming Tapestries" was chosen because the study investigates the transformation and change that is experienced in the creating of a large embroidery artwork. Although the Keiskamma Altarpiece is not actually a tapestry it is based on the structure and ideas behind a large European tapestry which was then contextualized.

The key research question asks how the Keiskamma Art Project, its processes and art, can be understood in relation to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality. Sub-questions are proposed which assist in the investigation into ways in which the theory, context, interviews and art contribute to answering the key question. These sub-questions are:- how does the identification of themes in an ecofeminist spirituality support the theory of an emerging contextual ecofeminist spirituality; how does the theory interweave in the process and emergence of an ecofeminist spirituality; how do the women's narratives about the process of creating and marketing the product contribute to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality and how do the images and metaphors within the Keiskamma Altarpiece describe a contextual ecofeminist spirituality? The Keiskamma Art Project was chosen as a case study because of its art and the effect the project appears to have had on its members. It was one of the first women's art projects to emerge and become well known in the Eastern Cape.

This study argues that the aesthetic is a means for the expression of spirituality through visual art (Chapter 2). The research explores the inter-relatedness between Beauty, art, spirituality, feminism and protest in an attempt to describe a contextual ecofeminist spirituality. It argues that Beauty is at the heart of all human motivation and action and that its contemplation elevates the soul towards the spiritual. True Beauty is said to assist in our moral development and transformation. Spirituality is a lived experience of faith in which the theme of "connection" emerges in regards to self, others and the unknown and in a contemporary form is expressed through its context and embraces all of life. Spirituality and creativity are experienced by many as inseparable and the aesthetic offers a "conduit" for the Spirit. This study argues that art offers a tool to assist in promoting change and that artist's play a significant role in expressing and shaping theology. A contextual Christian feminist theology describes a theoretical framework which deconstructs patriarchal oppressions promoted by the traditional Church and supports a spirituality which brings dignity and liberation to women. Feminist theology recognizes that a verbal theology is not enough

to describe women's experience of the sacred and includes the idea of dance, songs, prayers and other forms of creativity as an expression of spirituality.

The aesthetic as a medium of protest is explored and is further supported by the Resistance and Protest Art movements in South Africa (Chapter 3). Art as a vehicle of culture either contributes towards or challenges the hegemony of the dominant in society. It is argued that art can offer culture the critique it needs to bring about transformation. Through the use of art, the challenge to those in power is more subtle and is often tolerated even if it does not reflect the ideology of the dominant. Using James Scott's analysis to explore the relationship between the powerless and the powerful, this study outlines how these encounters are laden with deception as the powerless feign deference and the powerful assert their mastery in a subtle manner. Scott proposes the need to make social space for a dissident subculture so as to better understand the hidden transcript behind their public dialogue. Subordinates are not free to express themselves publicly and only do so in a safe social site. The research argues that Art Projects that work with rural women appear to provide safe social sites for women to express themselves openly.

Ecofeminism, an emerging protest movement which seeks to liberate women and the earth from inherited ideologies from a western, white, male perspective describes a vision for a restored community which embraces its interconnectedness with one another and the earth (Chapter 4). Ecofeminist theologians bring the dialogue around ecofeminism into the realm of theology where they challenge the inherited Christian understanding of God while proposing new metaphors for God. Some of the writings of the ecofeminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara and Sally McFague were selected because of their contribution to themes in ecofeminist spirituality. These themes are Integration and Bodiliness, Experience and Story-Telling, Transformation and Justice, and Hope. These ecofeminist theologians imagine a new community in which members have undertaken radical change towards personal transformation. An ecofeminist spirituality embraces both intuitive and rational forms of knowledge, affirms aspects of indigenous culture and religious practice which are life giving, and seeks liberation for both women and the environment.

Through the fieldwork and research on the Keiskamma Art Project the context of the Art Project is examined (Chapter 5). The context is explored by looking at the geographic location of the Keiskamma Art Project and the historical factors of disadvantage which affect the lives of the Keiskamma Art Project members such as apartheid, poverty, rural locality, poor education, gender and HIV/AIDS. A history of the art of the Keiskamma Art Project is briefly described with particular focus on the Keiskamma Altarpiece which is followed by a reflection on the project.

The methodology for this qualitative research is from an interpretive perspective which seeks to gain new knowledge from Project members regarding the influence of the Art Project on their lives (Chapter 6). The data collection process for the case study of the Keiskamma Art Project adopted a mixed method approach which included exhibitions, a historical investigation into the background and beginnings of the project, informal discussions, semi-structured interviews and trips to Hamburg.

The analysis deconstructs the key research question and the sub-questions investigated the ways in which the theory, context, interviews and art contributed to the answering of the key research question (Chapter 7). The spiritual themes, the theoretical framework, the processes of the Keiskamma Art Project such as talking about creating and marketing, the art of the Keiskamma Art Project such as the the Keiskamma Altarpiece, its images and metaphors, were all examined and discussed in regards to the ways in which they interweave with and express a contextual ecofeminist spirituality.

A short review of the research is described and major conclusions of the study drawn (Chapter 8). Recommended areas for further research are briefly presented.

Chapter Two: Art as an Expression of Spirituality

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the arts will be explored as offering a potential source for the expression of spirituality. Visual art, a medium for the expression of the Arts, has historical links to the depiction of Beauty and women. This study argues that true Beauty has its foundation in the divine; offers the motivation needed to promote liberation and is found in certain aspects of the reality of everyday life.

A new interest in spirituality globally means that traditional religious beliefs are being critiqued and challenged. This study focuses on women's spirituality from a feminist perspective which describes spirituality as embodied and found in all potential aspects of life. It argues that the aesthetic is a tool of spirituality which can be used to explore themes of faith while playing a role in the expression and shaping of an emerging theology. A verbal theology is not sufficient to describe women's experiences of the numinous, the mystical and the intuitive aspects of spiritual experience.

This study uses a feminist lens which challenges patriarchy, which has for centuries influenced theology and the imagery of the Church. Feminist theology is characterized by a theology of relations which replaces hierarchies with mutuality, is community orientated and opens up the realm of everyday life as a legitimate place to begin theologizing. Some key ideas which emerge from themes found within Christian feminist theology and which are useful for the purposes of this study are experience, storytelling, bodiliness, integration, solidarity, community, transformation, justice, liberation and hope and will be explored in more detail in the thesis.

Visual art is a medium which can convey the expression of personal experiences. It expresses emotion and reflects the consciousness of the artist and the society. It has the potential to witness to and support change and transformation as well as offering a vision of a transformed society.

2.2 Understanding Beauty

The concept of Beauty and its elements is part of a dialogue that began many centuries ago. We are exposed to beautiful objects which attract our attention and this allure of Beauty has been the subject of much debate. I argue that Beauty is important to our lives and spirituality and will explore an understanding of Beauty in the works of Umberto Eco, Susan Ross, Elaine Scarry, John Navone, John de Gruchy and Karen Buckenham.

A commonly held understanding about Beauty is that beautiful people can be narcissistic and self-absorbed. This kind of discussion has tended to marginalize true Beauty so that our conception of Beauty is of something superficial and insubstantial. As a result the value of true Beauty has been overlooked.

“ ‘Beautiful’- together with ‘graceful’ and ‘pretty’, or ‘sublime’, ‘marvelous’, ‘superb’ and similar expressions – is an adjective that we often employ to indicate something that we like. In this sense, it seems that what is beautiful is the same as what is good, and in fact in various historical periods there was a close link between the Beautiful and the Good” (Eco 2010:8). Beauty has been associated with God, goodness and truth and in the same way what was ugly was equated with sin and corruption. Umberto Eco in his book *On Beauty: A History of a Western Idea* argues that we define as good that which we like and want for ourselves. Even a good deed is something we should like to have done ourselves and stimulates our desire to possess it. At other times we describe as good something that subscribes to an external principle which may involve suffering and death like the brave death of a hero or a parent who sacrifices their life for their child’s. Although we admire this act of goodness we would not want to undertake it ourselves and yet this kind of sacrifice is described as a “‘beautiful’ thing to do” (Eco 2010:8). “If we reflect upon the detached attitude that allows us to define as beautiful some good that does not arouse our desire, we realize that we talk of Beauty when we enjoy something for what it is, immaterial of whether we possess it or not” (Eco 2010:8). Eco goes on to say that whether we possess the beautiful thing or not it still remains beautiful and the sentiment of Beauty continues despite one’s greed or passion.

Nature is very important to the concept of Beauty as it is the creation of the creator. John Navone in his book *Toward a Theology of Beauty* describes God as the creator of all things and assumes that humanity, as the created, is therefore able to understand truth and goodness as well. Humanity, made in the image of the creator, will delight in the Beauty of all things and will “contemplate Beauty itself in the crucified and glorified/risen Christ” (Navone 1996:v). Jesus Christ is the perfect image of Beauty and motivates our

faith to accept “his beautiful way of being-in-the-world as transfigured and transfiguring beings-with-others under the sovereignty of Supreme Beauty’s love and wisdom” (Navone 1996:17).

Some theological critics such as John Navone (1996) and John de Gruchy (2001) would contend that Beauty without a faith based connection could be thought of as idolatrous because of its great power of allurement. Navone proposes that beauty is associated with contemplation and this act turns towards something “in love and affirmation” (Navone 1996:6). This loving vision of the contemplative gaze draws us beyond ourselves and inspires us to act in a loving and protective way recognizing that whatever is regarded as beautiful is merely a vehicle for the perfect Beauty which resides within the Creator. He argues that Beauty embodies what is good, virtuous and true, guiding our soul further into the mystery of the contemplation of the spiritual and attracts us so that we want to make it “a part of our lives” which the beauty of the “truly good evokes or calls for our joy and delight in it” (Navone 1996:60). In this understanding Beauty is an aid to our relationship and union with God (Navone 1996:25).

John de Gruchy states that Beauty within the context of faith is an aid to worship and is “the manner in which God’s goodness gives itself and is expressed by God and understood by man as the truth” (de Gruchy 2001:104). Beauty understood in this way is redemptive and the revelation of God’s Beauty is the “medium of our transformation” (de Gruchy 2001:105). De Gruchy links Beauty with the power of transformation and proposes that beauty “tempered by suffering and life experience” is a catalyst in this process (de Gruchy 2001:98). Therefore the exposure to true beauty is a source of life and power which offers people the hope of justice and transformation and that a world without this Beauty loses its attractiveness and purpose.

Art is associated with Beauty in that it was artists, poets and novelists who have sought to express it. Inherited ideas about Beauty in Western culture and aesthetic theory have been patriarchal and supported a white, western bias in regards to female beauty where white women with long flowing hair, rounded hips and marble looking skin were venerated. Historically women have been idealized as objects of Beauty and this association has not been good for them as it is patriarchal and asserts that a woman’s value is connected to a male evaluation of her sexual worth. Another outcome of women’s historical link with Beauty has been the fear of the female body because of its projected connection to male sin as “a hindrance to holiness” (Buckenham 2010:243). These are patriarchal interpretations which do not recognize the contributions of women and indigenous peoples to the dialogue around art and Beauty.

Ross states that woman’s contributions to “the beauty of the earth has gone unnoticed and unappreciated” (Ross 2006: x). She makes references to women’s crafts which have not been regarded as art and argues that “more needs to be done to retrieve and restore women’s works of art as ways of glorifying God”

(Ross 2006:x). John Steele in his article entitled “Tackling art/craft nomenclature, again, with particular reference to the potter Alice Qga Nongbeza, of Eastern Cape, South Africa” writes that the use of the art/craft phraseology denies the rights of individuals and societies to make up their own minds on aesthetic issues and recommends that the word ‘craft’ is discontinued in the visual arts context (Steele 2009:181). He says that ranges of thought revealed through binaries such as art/craft have contributed to the marginalization of certain arts mediums and “reflect pejorative attitudes” of stereotyped beliefs that aesthetic practices such as ceramics and embroidery have domestic and household origins and are therefore not as valued for their aesthetic contributions.

Ross explores the relationship between justice and Beauty by pursuing questions about “our desires, feelings and environments and their relation to our senses of goodness and justice” (Ross 2006:x). She proposes that one is drawn to do good because it is true and beautiful and argues that Beauty’s power to draw us in and beyond ourselves is a “necessary element” in our moral development (Ross 2006:5). Ross ventures to say that the Beauty of the world gives us a sense of the care with which God holds and reminds us of the importance of caring in general.

Ross proposes that women engage with Beauty everyday through self care, personal grooming and home design and that this material can be used for theological reflection as women have not been given access to public spaces. She argues that women desire and are concerned with Beauty and that real Beauty in relation to the self and the home “is connected with generosity and self-love” (Ross 2006:7). Ross proposes that it is important to care for and recognize the Beauty in oneself if one is to recognize it in the other. Caring for the Beauty in others is important as a central ingredient to real Beauty is the quality of generosity. Real Beauty “has and elicits generosity” which plays a central role in the Christian moral life (Ross 2006:14). Buckenham agrees that beauty is characterized by “generosity, an attitude of excess and abundance, as a greeting and a welcome, in plenitude and excess and emphasizes its distributional tendency, its extravagance, inexhaustibility, depth, and freedom” which are experienced as “life-giving attributes” (Buckenham 2010:325).

Sensuality and Beauty are linked according to Ross who argues that touch and bonding are important components to the creating of sisterhood between women.

In the home and in a good relationship with one’s own person, a love for beauty includes the joy of tactility and connecting, an appreciation of fantasy and the extravagance of the way nature operates, an overflowing generosity toward oneself and toward one’s family and friends. Real beauty is embodied, involves the senses, facilitates connections, and, in nature, overflows with excess (Ross 2006:25).

According to Ross, real Beauty is grounded in sensual experiences and is seen in relation to women's persons and homes. It is sensual, extravagant and overflows with generosity and connects one to another. She defines Beauty as a "kind of ordering of material, intentional or not (as in nature), in a way that presents a unique vision of sensory experience of some dimension of the experienced world that gives the beholder both pleasure and a sense of deeper meaning" (Ross 2006:27,28). The ability to appreciate Beauty comes from a generous heart that is able to love itself and others.

Ross shows that women's art and craft can serve to promote justice in enlightening ways. She draws on examples of women and Beauty in Africa and suggests that their ways of combining Beauty, practicality and concern for the community are examples of how justice and Beauty are linked in the world. She points out that when the Beauty of the earth is destroyed it is inevitably poor men and women who pay first.

Ross subscribes to the theory of "de-centering" described in Elaine Scarry's book *On Beauty and Being Just*. Scarry proposes that "the moment we see something beautiful we undergo a radical decentering" (Scarry 1999:111). This is viewed as giving up our imaginary position of being the centre of our world and we find that we are "standing in a different relation to the world than we were a moment before" and we willingly "cede our ground" to it (Scarry 1999: 112). Radical de-centering allows us to be adjacent while at the same time able to experience real pleasure. This is a prelude to the ability to enjoy fair relations with others and alters our consciousness in the direction of unselfishness. This act of un-selfing is stimulated by witnessing something beautiful and the mental space that was formerly used to advance the self is free to be of service in another way.

Susan Ross and Elaine Scarry both argue that Beauty and Justice are connected. Ross says that Beauty for women is tied closely to the way they live and act and must therefore incorporate within it a desire for justice. Scarry proposes that Beauty assists us in our attention to justice. "The beholder, in response to seeing beauty, often seeks to bring new beauty into the world" and the fact that when something is perceived as beautiful alerts a desire within one to try to protect and act on its behalf and this is recognized as the pressure that Beauty "exerts towards the distributional" (Scarry 1999: 88,80). Scarry proposes the idea that "beholders of beautiful things themselves become beautiful in their interior lives" (Scarry 1999:88). So Beauty transforms our inner beings calling us to be generous, protective and willing to give more of ourselves.

Buckenham contends that women generally tend to be critical of themselves, lack self-love and the recognition of beauty within themselves but the engagement with Beauty which results in the care for

their environment, their homes and their families promotes a sense of self love which is important to self respect and a sense of being able to make moral choices.

In conclusion, Beauty is associated with goodness, virtue, truth and God. It is argued to be at the heart of all human motivation, action and purpose. The contemplation of earthly beauty elevates the soul towards the spiritual and has the power to assist in our moral development and transformation. It motivates for fairness and justice amongst people..

Historically women have been associated with ideas about Beauty which have been patriarchal and don't recognize the contributions of women and indigenous people to the dialogue around art and beauty.

Beauty assists in elevating the soul and offers the motivation to create, nurture and build. The arts offer a way to express Beauty and in particular the visual arts.

2.3 Spirituality and its link to Art

“Spirituality” has been a popular term used to describe any number of experiences in the last few decades and there appears to be an increased interest in and hunger for spirituality. Previously held attitudes within society of isolation, hostility, domination and colonialism are changing as an appreciation of diversity within cultural and spiritual practices emerge. A further reason for the burgeoning interest in spirituality is the fact that many values and accepted beliefs of orthodox religions are being seriously questioned and the legitimacy of monolithic religious structures are no longer “self-evident” (Kourie and Kretzschmar 2000:10). It appears that the growing spiritual hunger that is experienced by many Christians is not always met by ecclesial institutions.

What is spirituality and what does it mean to people? Spirituality is a lived experience of faith and Simon Cassar and Pnina Shinebourne argue that spiritual beliefs and practices are possible vehicles for reaching higher potential and a deeper sense of meaning (Cassar and Shinebourne 2012:133). Cassar and Shinebourne outline the findings of their research project on spirituality, done as a collaborative project between the Universities of Glasgow and London through their Departments of Counselling and Psychological Services, where they found that the underlying theme from their interview process was connection. The idea of connection was envisaged in these three ways: connecting with self, connecting with others and connecting with the unknown.

In the theme of spirituality and self, spirituality was described as “an internal force” which assists you to discover and develop yourself and once discovered “serves as a basis for self-development and connection to spiritual movements” (Cassar 2012:136). Spirituality was also described as “a process” which was experienced as “a life journey that unfolds and grows with the person” (Cassar 2012:137). It was not seen as something one achieves but was compared to a path which leads and guides a person’s life in a journey of self development. Life improvements were described as coming from “insights gained during periods of spiritual connection” (Cassar 2012: 137). The theme of spirituality in relation to others and the world included the understanding that a living spiritually was seen as “respecting others and maintaining a positive, healthy connection with them” (Cassar 2012:138). The participants said that the outcome of relating to people from a spiritual perspective was that relationships became more harmonious and there was a connection on a different level either from the heart or spirit. They felt that if this connection was missing the relationship felt artificial and superficial and thus living without spirituality was “detrimental to society” and to the natural world (Cassar 2012:141). The participants felt that spiritual connection is an “entirely personal, subjective experience, which is a felt sense rather than an intellectual experience” (Cassar 2012:142).

Despite this emphasis on subjective experience, spirituality is also defined as an academic discipline which contributes to academic discourse. Prof. Sandra Schneiders has done much to lay the foundations for this relatively new academic discipline. She formulated a general definition in which she proposed that spirituality as the subject matter or material object of the discipline is “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives” (Schneiders 2005:5). The formal object of the discipline of spirituality is its focus on “experience” (Schneiders 2005:6). As a discipline it does “not seek to deduce from revelation what Christian spirituality must be, or to prescribe theologically its shape, character, or functioning, or even necessarily to promote pastorally its exercise. It seeks to understand it as it actually occurs, as it actually transforms its subject toward fullness of life in Christ, that is, toward self transcending, life-integration within the Christian community of faith” (Schneiders 2005:6).

Within Christian spirituality, the possibility of transformation for Christians may occur through a spiritual encounter which is directed towards the ultimate fulfillment of a relational experience with Jesus Christ. Unfortunately traditional interpretations of Christian spirituality have “been identified with a radical, world-denying, anti-materialistic” and “ascetic philosophy of life” which resulted in a polarization between the spiritual and material aspects of life which is no longer the case in the study of contemporary spirituality (Kourie 2000:12). Spirituality today includes the body and mind, the social and political and

embraces all aspects of life. The goal of this holistic approach to spirituality is an increased sensitivity to self, to others, to non-human creation and to God.

In the past, the spiritual life has been seen as a form of 'escapism' but contemporary spirituality happens and is described in the midst of life. Art and spirituality share a link as artists share in God's creative power and seek transcendence and integration through the creative process just as a spiritual seeker would. These similarities have the potential to link art with spirituality and the divine. According to Schneiders, art facilitates "self-transcendence" and integration through the creative process and assists in the desire to move towards "the ultimate value one perceives" in God (Schneiders 2005:6).

All people are born with an urge to create and according to traditional Christian theology we are made in the image of God which means that we have the divine responsibility of being a co-creator with God. In this context, to create is to bring something into existence. Karen Buckenham writes that spirituality and creativity are "experienced by many people as inseparable" (Buckenham 2011:56). She states, "Whether God is understood as Creator – as in Genesis – or creativity itself, the divine creative energy that forms the universe is the life force that also flows through human beings made in the image of God" (Buckenham 2010:81). According to Buckenham (2011), artists when engaged in the process of creating feel connected to something much larger than themselves which speaks of God. The experience of creativity is central to the women in her study who choose to listen to the spirit inside them which draws them to live and empowers them with courage. Creating is described as a "divine activity" and God may be "imaged as creativity" (Buckenham 2011:60). Buckenham identifies the theme of "becoming" in which a "process that touches, calls forth and emerges from deep inside" is given the freedom to be explored through creative expression (Buckenham 2011:58). Humans are seen in a process of becoming in which their potential is waiting to be actualized. Many of these persons see themselves as a "conduit" or "channel of the Spirit". Buckenham describes Art as a meditative process as it requires the artist to pay attention, engage in centering and return to "the source" whose origins are God (Buckenham 2011:58). She also states that creativity is being recognized as a "divine gift that affirms life" in the face of "life-denying" forces (Buckenham 2011:59).

The definition of art refers to a range of human activities and the products of those activities and includes the category of the visual arts in which painting, sculpture, photography, embroidery and beadwork are found. Art is both a symbolic and cultural system where human actions and their products acquire significance and interact with other cultural systems (Aguirre 2004:259). Art is described as a language which can be used to symbolically express and represent values or information such as from science, ethics, religion or the everyday things of daily life. Art can be described as an agent of aesthetic

experience where the aesthetic refers to an attitude, experience or judgment in regards to the value or appreciation of an object.

Visual Art is a vehicle of creativity and self expression which can explore ideas from everyday life which is where spiritual experience is located. Chava Weissler describes the Jewish renewal movement ALEPH which works to incorporate women more fully into religious life and thus emphasizes artistic means of spiritual expression such as music, storytelling, dance and visual arts while emphasizing the quest for a more experiential relationship with the divine (Weissler 2007). A Jewish Renewal artist, Jackie Olenick, stated that “Art is spirituality” and argues that an emphasis on the artistic, the playful and the creative resembles other contemporary spiritualities such as WICCA and new goddess religions which are intimately intertwined with art (Weissler 2007). This perspective supports a link between women’s spirituality and creativity.

Spirituality and the aesthetic appear to be linked in the practice of contemporary spiritualities where emphasis is placed on an experiential encounter. Veronica Brady argues that God is the other who breaks into our lives as “an interruption, an experience which ruptures the surface of the common place to reveal new intensities, new splendours and terrors” and “new possibilities within us” (Brady 1998:2). She stresses that spirituality and the aesthetic are therefore about challenge and transformation. A media society depends on the production of mass imagery which encourages “a culture of consumption and instant gratification”. Brady states that this is why art points the “way to a genuine spirituality” as it offers a “radical empiricism” which takes the “raw material of physical existence, rearranges, shapes and intensifies it, concentrating experience into a point, making us aware of the sheer ‘is-ness’ of things” (Brady 1998:2). Brady says that what makes an artist is a “sense of self and life as dialectical, not one dimensional, open to the interplay of what is other, what cannot be fully put into words” (Brady 1998:2). She goes on to say that art reminds us that life is “stranger, more beautiful, demanding, joyous and painful than common sense knows” and gives us a “glimpse of the human condition” and so “a genuine spirituality, like art, is open and dynamic, opening out truer possibility” and is therefore in a sense the “hope of a world” in so much need of transformation (Brady 1998:2).

In conclusion, spirituality is a lived experience of faith in which the theme of “connection” emerges in regards to self, others and the unknown. Spirituality and creativity are experienced by many as inseparable. Creativity is the divine energy which acts as a “conduit” of the Spirit” as artists seek transcendence and integration through the creative process. Traditional understandings of spirituality reflect a patriarchal bias which Christian Feminist theology seeks to deconstruct.

2.4 Christian Feminist Theology and its Spirituality

Gender is an area that has not yet been deconstructed in Christian theology and feminist studies are important to the deconstruction of patriarchal concepts which promote the liberation of women. Feminism offers a lens through which to view the inequalities of women in society so as to promote the health of relationships between women and men. Feminist theologies operate as contextual theologies which explore these inequalities in the realm of everyday living. Contextual theologies make connections that allow “practical and ethical solutions” to emerge, they connect the “individual and societal demands” so as to facilitate relationships built on “mutuality” and encourage the growth of relationships with “the divine” (Isherwood and McEwan 2001:9).

Feminism and feminist thinking touches all aspects of life and is found in sociology, politics, economics, culture and religious practice. According to Gayle Graham Yates in her article “Spirituality and the American Feminist Experience”, feminism is “a new world view, a comprehensive framework of ideas through which all experience and action can be measured, judged, and evaluated” (Graham Yates 1983:59). Feminism offers a challenge to patriarchal norms as it refuses to accept the limits imposed by these definitions as its goal is for the freedom of both women and men by deconstructing ideas which are damaging to all. Patriarchy is an ideology which supports conservative thinking and inherited sexist social structures which give the rank of ‘subordinate’ to women. The influences of patriarchy are still evident in the lives of women and are the reason why women find themselves as vulnerable and poor as they are in the global economy. Rakoczy argues that in “patriarchy the male is the norm and women are understood to be inferior in every way: biologically, intellectually, anthropologically” and “socially” (Rakoczy 2004:10). All women are regarded as of inherently “lesser value than any male human being” (Rakoczy 2004:10).

Patriarchy has been institutionalized in the church for centuries by men in leadership through domination and the establishment of hierarchies over women and others. “Patriarchy can be seen not only as the root cause of sexism but also of the many “isms” which distort and poison human relationships: racism, colonialism, and economic classism” (Rakoczy 2004:11). Patriarchy has been normalized and therefore includes expressed rules and assumed norms such as men being better equipped for leadership and governance of the home. Patriarchy is made up of hierarchical dualisms in which the binaries are either dominant or subordinate such as in male and female relationships. This ideology has distorted all relationships creating gender constructs which became the assumed norm for male and female roles. Joan Chittister writes that “theologians from the time of Augustine, interpreting Scripture on the basis of then-

contemporary understandings, said that men, males, were the crown of creation, the pinnacle of life” and everything else in nature ranked below them (Chittister 1998:22). Women too were regarded as made in the image of God and if joined to a man their status increased but essentially they were “created to give birth” which was an “animal, earthy, natural thing”. Men on the other hand were created for more cerebral activities such as thinking and the rationalization of ideas. The implication of all of these ideas was that “God, pure reason and omniscient creator, had to be male” (Chittister 1998:22).

Chittister argues that “feminism without spirituality runs the risk of becoming what it rejects: an elitist ideology, arrogant, superficial and separatist, closed to everything but itself” (Chittister 1998:42). It needs a spiritual base to call it out and beyond itself for the sake of others. Feminist theology provides the ideological framework from which to explore and construct a contemporary spirituality that no longer perpetuates the ideological hegemony of patriarchy. It challenges traditional theology and the practice of faith offering “a critique of past and present theology and praxis, challenging presuppositions, beliefs, dogmas and the whole of Christian life from the perspective of women’s dignity” (Rakoczy 2004:4). The idea of the restoration of dignity is important to a just and relational world which the feminist theologians propose.

Feminist theology is part of the family of liberation theology. “Third World Liberation theologies” are political as they do not “settle for abstract fact” but consider the “social consequences” as an “integral part of a theology” (Borgman 2003:98). Western theology was accused of being too wedded to “western culture and the capitalist system” which was regarded as being “highly academic, speculative and individualistic” and did not take into account the “societal and structural aspects of sin” (Borgman 2003:99).

Liberation theology which was birthed in the 1960s in the South American context contended that theological reflection developed by male Catholic theologians was not relevant to their people’s contexts of faith which needed to challenge injustice and poverty in their countries. Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest, wrote a ground breaking book on liberation theology called *The Theology of Liberation* in which he offers a “new way” to do theology and argues for the notion of love as justice (Gutierrez 1974:15). Gutierrez proposes that doing theology is attempting to answer questions about God which come out of questions from our situation today. Gutierrez says that theology should “not stop with reflecting on the world” but rather try to be a part of “the process through which the world is transformed” (Gutierrez 1974:15). It is a theology which protests against the “plunder of the vast majority of people” and it offers a liberating love which assists in the building of a new “fraternal society” (Gutierrez 1974:15). Gutierrez argues that to tell people in extreme poverty that God loves them is problematic as how can poor people

expect to experience God's love? Gutierrez's understanding of theology begins with questions generated from within a context.

Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Brazilian liberation theologians, describe a process of three mediations which "parallel the 'see, judge, act' methodology" adopted by the Young Christian Workers and others (Boff 1987:24 -29). Feminist theology uses this methodology which involves a process which empowers one to take a critical stance from which to reflect upon the context. This methodological process asks questions, thinks deeply about the responses, and engages in action which hopefully leads to positive change. The theology which is derived out of this methodology arrives at truths which challenge injustice and promote liberation.

The traditional practice of Christianity has not always been life giving for women and feminist theology argues that women's full humanity needs to be recognized and treated with dignity. According to Rakoczy, women of faith are engaged in the transforming project of ensuring that their "understanding of God, self, and others within the framework of their particular religious commitment" reflects their full humanity (Rakoczy 2004:4). Offering this new perspective comes with challenges as this perspective is not fully embraced by all in the community of faith which means that these women speak from the "margins" and their voices are still being overlooked in "malestream" practices of faith (Johnson 2002:22). Women doing feminist theology share a common social location as they speak from the "margins of the dominant androcentric tradition" (Johnson 2002:22).

In South Africa, women's lives and realities have been "influenced by colonialism, patriarchy and apartheid", which has meant domination, servanthood and enforced labour in both rural and urban life for women (Sewpaul 2008:44). With colonialism came inherited patriarchal and sexist ideas about relationships that compounded those already existing in Africa. The missionaries brought with them their own cultural baggage and domination and Christian converts were expected to break with their cultural traditions in order to adopt a western approach to Christianity. This has meant that women's position in life has worsened as a result of Christianity in Africa. Mercy Oduyoye is quoted as being "critical of the influence of the West on African life and asserts that 'biblical interpretation and Christian theology in Africa have had the effect of sacralizing the marginalization of women's experience, even in African traditional religions' " (Oduyoye 1995:175).

Recognizing the importance of context, cultural differences and challenges, African Women's Theology is critical to the work of feminist theology. African Women's Theology, which is found under the umbrella of liberation and feminist theologies, has developed on this continent and focuses on community orientated relationships in African culture. Mercy Amba Oduyoye argues that in Africa, spirituality is at

the centre of life and culture. Oduyoye states that Africans long “to perpetuate the traditional norms of a caring sharing community” which supports a spirituality which is life-giving, characterized by mutuality and sensitivity to others (Oduyoye 2001:33). Oduyoye states that this longing has led to the “characterization of African women’s theology as a theology of relations, replacing hierarchies with mutuality” and operates in a way that is “society sensitive” (Oduyoye 2001:17).

According to Oduyoye, life in Africa is hard and involves a struggle for survival. The role of women in African society is to maintain and foster life and is characterized by serving others. They demonstrate a spirituality of self-giving and a sensitivity to the needs of others which allows them to be the first to experience “the movement of the Spirit” and yet in traditional religious practice they are ignored (Oduyoye 2001:17). Their traditional religious practices such as those undertaken at special events in people’s lives such as birth, initiation, weddings and death have inherited some adherents of religion from Christianity or Islam which are patriarchal. For these women, experiencing the Spirit often happens through dance, songs or prayers. In regards to their spirituality, African women take the best aspects of Traditional African Religion and Christian traditions and weave them together to create their own creative rituals. Rakoczy maintains that women, “Drawing on the riches of traditional African prayer and their Christian traditions” integrate them in ways which “give them great strength in the midst of suffering and oppression” (Rakoczy 2004:404). According to Rakoczy, this unique and personal spirituality gives them strength to face their suffering and oppression.

To summarize the ideas on Christian feminist theology, feminism offers a lens through which to view society and promotes ideas that support the liberation of women. Feminist theology uses a methodology which encourages a critical reflection upon the context which challenges injustice.

In order to understand a contemporary contextual spirituality, a spirituality born out of the context, we explore themes that emerge through Christian feminist spirituality.

2.5 Themes in Christian Feminist Spirituality

Some major themes identified in Christian feminist spirituality by Sue Rakoczy in her book *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology* have been adapted for the purposes of this study such as Integration and Bodiliness, Experience and Story Telling, Transformation and Justice, and Hope. Rakoczy proposes that “for Christian women these central themes of the Christian tradition must be interpreted in ways which nourish their faith” and do not increase their sense of “alienation” (Rakoczy 2004:377). These themes are

suggested because they assist in the idea of nourishment and support towards women in their pursuit of the spiritual life which will be explored in greater detail below.

2.5.1 Integration and Bodiliness

The theme of Integration refers to an integral spirituality that is shaped by prayer and relational experiences born out of a struggle with life which could be personal, interpersonal or societal. The expression of an integrated spirituality is open to new ideas, centers on relational experiences which recognize “diversity in race, class, culture and age” and inspires a conversion experience of repentance and commitment so as to embrace a new vision of life for all (Rakoczy 2004:385). A conversion experience supports increased personal accountability, awakens new ways of knowing and embracing others and the environment, encourages solidarity against injustice and promotes a new vision of community which embraces ecological spirituality and practice.

Joan Chittister in her book *Heart of Flesh* details the changes in relational behavior that the practice of a feminist spirituality will bring. She proposes that the emphasis on reason will shift to support the importance of feeling because when poets talk about “the human soul, they do not talk about reason; they talk about feeling” (Chittister 1998:50). The desire for power will shift to promote the empowerment of others as our egotism stops us from confronting our own frailty which connects us with others. Aggression will be replaced with non-violence as we have a choice in regards to the way we treat others such as “kicking things out of the way as we go, or we can go softly, moccasined, gently all the way” (Chittister 1998:74). Pride needs to be overcome in favour of humility and “to be immersed in God implies an accommodation with life that is less than perfect, acceptance of a world that is not organized around my ego, satisfaction with self that is not measured by its ascendancy over others” because when God “becomes the core of my soul, the energy of my life, the end of my actions, the measure of my needs, every other relationship, every other perspective shifts accordingly” (Chittister 1998: 90). Authoritarianism will be replaced with dialogue and competition with compassion which “moves beyond words of pity to works for change” (Chittister 1998:137). Strength will be replaced with vulnerability which is “part of the spiritual process” and introduces us to “gifts from the unknown” and the “mystery of life” (Chittister 1998:143). These are the changes that a conversion experience, through an encounter with feminist spirituality, will promote.

Relational behaviours are practiced in community which is important to African women's spirituality as it offers a sense of belonging to a web of increasingly widening relationships. Community is an idea held by feminist theologians as part of the new vision for the future – this is evidenced in the writings of Rosemary Radford Ruether who affirms that the Christian tradition still proposes community as a way forward (Radford Ruether 1992). She envisages a “non-competitive, non-hierarchical” community with “non-dominating” relationships and argues that the Christian tradition has something to offer through communities that do theological reflection daily and who implement this through their spiritual practice which needs to include the ecological community as well.

Bodiliness has been neglected in the Christian spiritual tradition and is now part of an understanding of a contemporary contextual spirituality. Bodiliness, which falls under the theme of integration, includes ideas from body theology such as those articulated by Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart in their book *Introducing Body Theology* where they write that by understanding the potential that bodies hold for revelation and authority, theology will “remain relevant by declaring Christ in the lived experience of real people not plastic saints” (Isherwood 1998:42). They argue that bodies are the sites of revelation and the agents through which all experience is mediated. Isherwood advances the idea that theological reflection begins with the “bodily experiences of life” (Isherwood 1998:43).

Our bodies need to be included in our experience of spirituality. This supports an integrated approach which counters the dualism between the body and the mind that has been inherited from a traditional approach to spirituality. Accepting one's ‘bodiliness’ means celebrating the gift of our bodies and recognizing that we need to be present in our bodies while at the same time understanding their limitations. From this encounter with our bodies we are more inclined to empathize with others which mediates new revelation. An integrated spirituality, involving our bodies reaches out in an empathetic way to care for others and bring wholeness to our society and ourselves.

Unfortunately in the past an “ambiguity” towards the female body has existed (Isherwood 1998:78). Feminist theology maintains that patriarchy has “de-sacralized and demonized women's bodies” and it therefore seeks to re-sacralize them (Isherwood 1998:79). Women's bodies in the patriarchal tradition have been used for voyeurism which associated them with sex. This has denigrated and distorted women's sexuality, limiting their identities and value to those placed on their bodies by men. Patriarchy has distorted views on the female body through its association with sexuality. In the Christian past, sexuality was seen as corruptive power which needed to be denied or overcome.

The work of feminist theology, and its practice of spirituality, seeks to redefine the female body and its processes as a natural and integrated part of our experience of spirituality. It is no longer something to be

feared and subdued but provides for us a source of God's divine revelation. Feminist theologians claim that "Women image the divine in the embodied reality of their daily lives including the bodily changes and processes that patriarchal religion has found so difficult to deal with – menstruation, birth, sexual activity, menopause, aging and death" (Isherwood 1998:79).

In conclusion, the theme of integration supports a spirituality shaped by prayer and relational experiences through personal, interpersonal and societal struggles. It calls forth repentance towards a conversion experience which embraces diversity as part of a new vision of a common life. This new vision supports an integrated approach to the body recognizing the potential that bodies hold for revelation and recognizing it as a natural and integrated part of the human experience of spirituality.

2.5.2 Experience and Storytelling

Experience in regards to spirituality highlights the importance of learning to trust and value one's own experience as a legitimate way of understanding spirituality. In a contextual feminist theology it is important to understand oneself through a reflection on personal life experience. A contextual feminist spirituality rejects the notion of accepting imposed knowledge as authoritative and opens up other avenues of arriving at knowledge such as intuition and emotion. Experience informs knowledge making it open to change and rejecting ideas which uphold eternal absolutes. Isherwood argues, "Feminist theology places experience at the heart of the creation of theology, not the experience of ruling males but of the individual believer" (Isherwood 1998:38).

Experience that leads to empathy and intimacy demands that one should be in touch with one's emotional life. Chittister argues that vulnerability needs to replace the strength that has been forged from emotional disconnectedness (1998). Strength is the ability to show emotion in the face of suffering. It is when one risks vulnerability and self disclosure to others that one builds relationships of intimacy and that "intimacy implies the total exposure of me and all my weaknesses to the one who can handle them reverently" (Chittister 1998:148). She concludes that a "spirituality of vulnerability arises from a feminist sense of union with a gentle, gifting universe and the experience of finally coming home to it with trust and hope" (Chittister 1998:148).

Story telling is part of the theme of experience because telling a story, especially one's own story, is personal. It legitimizes the experience of the person through the narrative form. Mercy Amba Oduyoye argues that "African women accept story as a source of theology" and so tell their own stories as well as

study the experiences of other women through stories (Oduyoye 2001:10). The role of stories in Africa's oral tradition and the role of the story in biblical theology give women the model for this theological reflection. Buckenham argues that "for women in Africa, storytelling is a powerful method for understanding the context and forces that have shaped them, claiming their own identity, their values, aspirations, self definition, power and agency" (Buckenham 2010:63). Storytelling offers women a way to share their struggles and questions about life with one another. It is through stories that women are unburdened, find ways to cope, affirm their faith in God and articulate their future hopes. Stories are located in a context which is historical, social, political, economic, and geographic and is a way of transcending the limitations of one's context. It can describe and offer understanding in regard to the influences of power as well as motivating women to claim their own power and agency. Storytelling develops one's sense of identity and encourages solidarity. Storytelling is a creative pursuit which draws on imagination and myth to add Beauty to its descriptions. "The art of storytelling is seen not only in the content of women's stories, but 'in their texture' and method – the way the writers construct them using myth, poems, dreams, song, dance and proverbs" (Buckenham 2010:63).

Experience emphasizes the value of one's personal experience and encourages one to trust in it as a legitimate source of knowledge. Storytelling is a way of sharing experiences with others which give it value. It is a creative way of unpacking the lives of women as they claim their own identities, power and personal agency.

2.5.3 Transformation and Justice

The theme of transformation begins with an undertaking towards change which starts with the personal and moves outwardly to extend to the society at large bringing with it new ideas and ways of viewing the world. Transformation as a theme of spirituality "starts with a commitment which is simultaneously inward and outward" (Schneiders 1986, 1996:43). Transformation happens when an encounter with God touches the soul and motivates an inward commitment that embraces an internal force assisting one to discover and develop oneself. All change begins with personal transformation that focuses on the development of self esteem and self-knowledge bringing liberation from self-doubt and a growing self-confidence which encourages a new love for others to emerge.

This inward commitment calls for a repentance and conversion from patriarchal behaviors exhibited by both men and women so as to increase mutual support and relational behaviors. This "transforming action

is especially focused on justice and liberation” and “justice as right relationships” is the goal of this undertaking (Rakoczy 2004:387). Transformation extends outwardly into society influencing the quality of relationships and challenging distorted relations between men and women, the rich and poor, humanity and the natural world. A transformed spirituality manifests as ‘life in abundance’ and inspires mutual support in sorrow and joy as well as encouraging the sharing and solving of problems together.

Justice does not only concern the larger society but is present in the everyday activity of people’s lives. It supports life and redistributes power equally. The goal of justice is liberation and it encourages freedom in women to experience their full personhood allowing women to “create new rituals to celebrate their God experience in ways that are participative and life enhancing” (Rakoczy 2004:381). Justice is an active presence in the world which strives to deal with poverty, hunger and exploitation. It promotes economic strategies which decrease the difference between the rich and poor while assisting in the sustainability of the environment and underpins a spirituality of resistance which refuses to surrender to the demands of culture which undermines the dignity of people especially women.

To summarize, transformation is linked to ideas that promote justice and bring liberation. Transformation begins with a commitment to change and a conversion to behaviours which recognize the dignity of all people. It starts with the personal and moves outward to embrace the societal. Justice is implemented through the practice of resistance which brings peace and well being to the whole of creation. Therefore the transformation of society begins with a spirituality of attentiveness to others in which justice is demonstrated through social action.

2.5.4 Hope

The theme of hope refers to a growing sense of confidence. The work of transformation inspires feelings of hope. Hope is being able to glimpse a new vision of a transformed society in which oppressed people experience their liberation; it is a feeling of increasing joy and happiness inspired by just change; it is the expectation of a better future which offers creative potential and fullness of life. “The power of hope” inspires a future “full of possibilities for life to flourish” and holds within itself the dynamism of expectation that the future will be better and that “God’s care and protection are stronger and more certain than any suffering, even death” (Rakoczy 2004:432,434).

According to Oduyoye, African women’s lives are sustained by hope which helps them in their struggle for a better life and keeps them committed and active. These women from economically repressed

communities live lives of enormous self-sacrifice, in conditions of poverty, in which they have to overcome feelings of succumbing to despair. They suffer, risk themselves and endure in the hope of defeating evil. They sacrifice themselves for their children and families in the belief that hope will triumph in a concrete way, bringing their communities wealth, prosperity and harmony. Transformation is birthed through their hoping which is never completed as they refuse to accept defeat, believing with growing confidence that life will be better. They place their hope in concrete realities and refuse to give up hoping in the improvement of life. Hope accompanies their struggle for the recognition of their full humanity as they seek to dismantle negative cultural conditioning and demands. Oduyoye sees African women as having “anchors of hope” which sustain them (Oduyoye 2001:117). These women are anchored by hope which allows them to endure and overcome in the face of possible brutality and oppression.

The theme of hope refers to the growing confidence experienced by people and in particular women as life-giving change emerge.

2.6 A Creative Spirituality Assists in the Work of Transformation

The themes discussed above depict the characteristics of a contemporary women’s Christian feminist spirituality. Karen Buckenham in her Master’s Thesis, *Women’s Experience, Spirituality and Theology for Liberation and Life in Contemporary South Africa as Expressed through Visual Arts with a Focus on the Lives and Work of Two Women Artists-Dina Cormick and Bonnie Ntshalintshali* (2001), argued that contemporary South African women long for more authentic expressions of their Christian faith and spirituality. The conservative patriarchal expressions of spirituality have brought oppression and models of womanhood that are detached from their reality and they long for change to emerge. For many women, the traditional spiritualities offer no room for creativity and growth. Rakoczy states that feminist contextual spiritualities are concretely engaged with the world around them and offer an outward looking perspective in which women can “seek transformation of themselves, their relationships, their cultures and societies” and “their churches” as the status quo feels like “an invitation to death” (Rakoczy 2004:386).

Buckenham argues that women, in their diversity, “express deep longings” as they question and seek to identify these oppressions so as to redefine their spirituality. The spirit nourishes their faith and is characterized by the themes of integration and bodiliness, experience and storytelling, transformation and

justice, and hope. A “deep sense of the spirit-dimension of life is a source of strength for women” and thus the earnest pursuit of the spiritual life through Christian feminist spirituality offers the promise of creativity and transformation (Buckenham 2001:26).

Buckenham argues that the aesthetic is a way in which the spirit can be expressed. Visual art is a creative way of concretizing the expression of new ideas and allows for the creating of images which support women’s storytelling. Visual art can express both personal and societal experiences and can be a form of protest in regards to the everyday injustices that women face.

Artists have the ability to express and construct a vision for society. Buckenham asserts that art has the power to offer prophetic insight and writes “Art can convey a prophetic message, if the artist is listening to his or her emotion and soul” (Buckenham 2001:410). Visual art is a medium for the expression of new ideas for public consumption and can mirror the collective consciousness of people and witness to change and transformation. Any medium of art that promotes life, challenges distorted relationships, gives expression to suppressed longings and works to bring good for all of life is directed and moved by the power of the Spirit. This art offers a vision of a transformed society and is an expression of a contemporary Christian feminist spirituality which inspires liberation and freedom.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined the theme of Beauty. The arts offer a way to express Beauty and in particular the visual arts as Beauty is associated with God, goodness and truth and offers motivation for the pursuit of goodness which is part of the spiritual journey. Visual art is a means of expressing and creating beauty.

The arts were discussed as a medium for the expression of spirituality. They have the power to express creative longings, to transcend daily reality and are a site of theological revelation which includes experiences taken from women’s everyday lives. The arts can be used as a tool for the expression of a bodily and holistic spirituality which includes a range of experiences such as mystical dance, songs and prayers. They create the potential for a spiritual expression which can articulate the longings of a community yearning for a better vision of life in the future.

Christian feminist spirituality is an expression of everyday life which supports relationships of mutuality which deconstructs patriarchal biases imposed on women through traditional religious practice. It seeks to bring liberation for the whole of society and women in particular.

Themes in Christian feminist spirituality were identified, such as Integration and Bodiliness, Experience and Story Telling, Transformation and Justice, and Hope. There is a lack of women's authentic expression of spirituality which allows intuition and creativity. Transformation and change are assisted by protest which has historical links to visual art.

The following chapter explores the notion of protest and its relationship to the visual arts. It proposes that visual art has the potential to provide a "safe" way of expressing ideas that are threatening to those in power.

Chapter Three: Art as an Expression of Protest

3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with exploring the notion of art as culture and a vehicle of transformation. The concepts of art and culture are defined and explored as well as their relationship to each other. This study argues that art as a system of culture offers a vehicle for social transformation.

Protest and resistance have been expressed through the medium of visual art throughout the world and this has been evident in the history of protest and resistance art in South Africa.

In South Africa, art has been identified as a useful tool in the support of activism and has been employed in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The social theories behind the hidden and public discourses between the powerful and subordinate in society are described by James Scott who proposes the location of a safe site to aid in this process.

The aesthetic is presented as a medium in which to give expression to the voices of the subordinates where women's art projects or craft groups offer a safe place to explore ideas removed from the oppressions in their lives.

3.2 Art as Culture and a Vehicle of Transformation

The term culture is derived from a latin word "*colere*", which means care (Adorno 2009:145). *Colere* originally referred to the occupation of the peasant and their relationship to nature, specifically its tending. Generally one could say that culture describes "an area in which people confront nature" (Adorno 2009:145). It refers to the domination of the external forces of nature which oppose the human being as well as the threat of internal forces, in other words "the control of civilization over human urges and the unconscious" (Adorno 2009:145). The area of culture is essentially the moulding of reality which refers to "the shaping of society as a whole, the reciprocal relationships of people, the taming of nature, and the control of its resources" such as through technology (Adorno 2009:145).

John de Gruchy defines culture as being the “artistic and intellectual” side of civilization and is the “customs, achievements, products and outlooks of a group” as well as the “way of life” they adopt (de Gruchy 2001:191). He supports the notion that art and culture are connected, as art is created in a context and is “an expression of a culture, a means of its memory, representation, enrichment and hope” (de Gruchy 2001:191). This connection is important for the appreciation of the artist and their work and in understanding the artist’s role in shaping “corporate and personal identities” in the public arena (de Gruchy 2001:191). Culture refers to the ability of people to understand meaning in pictures, poems, melodies or drama and is “a product of a collective experience” (de Gruchy 2001:191). He describes the participation in the general system of symbolic forms as culture and the participation in the particular as art. The relationship between art and culture means that the way in which art functions in and serves society is specific to a historical and cultural location.

Theodor Adorno in his article “*Kultur* and Culture” warns against allowing culture to be limited to aesthetics as a sort of game and proposes that culture needs to be critical and evocative, allowing for a process of internalization and self reflection which assists in transformation (Adorno 2009:145). Jennifer Sandlin writes about a practice of cultural critique known as culture jamming which is an activity that counters the continuous barrage of the dominant consumerist capitalist ideology which perpetuates the values of “racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, machismo, and violence” and opens up a transitional space to critique and query the dominant culture, thus bringing to consciousness the hidden and compelling messages it seeks to promote (Sandlin 2008:324).

These perspectives on the understanding of culture highlight the importance of critique within culture and raise a question as to the purpose of art. Should it communicate the oppressed reality of people allowing us to better understand and experience solidarity with others or is it something to entertain and adorn the homes of an elitist group of people adding to the extensive hegemony of consumerist culture? Townsend argues that “contemporary art largely exists, through its market value, as one of those exclusive niches for conspicuous consumption that guarantee status to the newly enriched” and demonstrates the fulfillment of the capitalist promise (Townsend 2007:8). In this way, art for the purpose of status loses its communicative and critical power and is limited to an aesthetic game. Townsend expresses concern that most art in the contemporary world does not achieve the task of “making a rent in the fabric of culture” and that the forms of culture which allow this critique tend to be marginal and regarded as relics (Townsend 2007:9).

Imanol Aguirre argues that in a post modern context we need to view “art as a cultural system and an agent of aesthetic experience” (Aguirre 2004:257). When we conceive of art as an agent of experience we

are able to overcome the dichotomy between artistic processes and aesthetic processes where the former is understood as the action of producing a work of art and the latter as the action of contemplating it aesthetically. Aguirre identifies culture as a “field of conflicts” which sees the production of art as a social process where the purpose of art is to link the aesthetic experiences of others with our own through the amplification of the “spectre of us” making our solidarity with others effective (Aguirre 2004:264). To identify ourselves with another is to make them one of ourselves creating an open identity in order to accept the other person. It is “effective for social transformation and reconstruction because this type of identification with other leaves us predisposed to feel their humiliation as our own” (Aguirre 2004:264). According to Aguirre, the post modern understanding of the purpose of art is to create an aesthetic experience which allows us to identify with others.

In Africa, culture has been used historically as a means of oppression for many and in particular black women. Mercy Oduyoye states that in African women’s language, ‘culture’ is a broad concept used to describe “what human beings have made from nature”, as “all that is not nature has been ‘cultivated’, devised, dreamed up, and given shape and meaning” by human minds and hands (Oduyoye 2001:13). African women describe how culture has been used as a tool of domination perpetuated against them such as is seen in women’s roles being limited to domestic chores and the caring of the family. Despite this, they propose a hermeneutic of liberation to find the positive aspects of their culture to promote. The paradigm of liberation that these women support is one which readily critiques culture and seeks to identify and maintain aspects of it which support and sustain life. They do not believe in throwing away all of their cultural inheritance but rather those aspects which are oppressive to them. They see “culturing” as “a continuous activity of the human community” which needs to be recognized as the “locus of resistance” (Oduyoye 2001:13).

Culture is constantly changing and needs to be critiqued and challenged so as to ensure that what it promotes is life sustaining and positive for those who have experienced exclusion and marginalization from its powerful influences. From a post modern perspective, art is viewed as a cultural system and an agent of aesthetic experience where the experience of the other is facilitated through art allowing for solidarity with just causes. This engagement with the aesthetic creates a potential locus of social transformation as not all aspects of culture have been good for humanity such as has been experienced by women limited by culturally prescribed gender roles. Visual art is a field of the arts, which is an important tool in the expression of culture and the forging of its identity.

3.3 Protest and Resistance through Visual Art and its Expression in South Africa

Open communication is an important mechanism for change, and those who find themselves trapped in oppressive systems struggle to find ways to communicate their protest. Protest is an expression of objection by words or actions to events or situations. It appears in different forms from individual objection to mass demonstrations and involves the undertaking of action to bring about desired changes for themselves when forms of self-expression and protest are restricted by those in power. These restrictions can come in the guise of government policy, economic circumstances, religious orthodoxy, media restrictions or social structures.

Forms of protest are varied and often expressed through the medium of the arts. Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes the power of protest theatre as a powerful instrument in a people's struggle for liberation (Goldblatt 1989). "Enacted on the stage for the audience to see are the experiences of their daily lives: the shame, the attacks on their dignity, the failures, the traumas, the triumphs, the joys and laughter. That catharsis is a vital thing. People come to the forceful realization that they are not entirely the impotent playthings of powerful forces....And so they come away....and they feel better inside themselves, knowing deep down that it will be okay one day" (Williamson 1989:7). Archbishop Tutu describes the arts as offering a way of expressing the circumstances of the oppressed as well as offering the potential for a vision of hope.

Visual Art has played a role in the struggle for liberation and transformation throughout human history. An example is Francisco Goya's *The Third of May* painted in 1808 where he depicts the French firing squad butchering the citizens of Madrid after the fall of the city. In painting it, he protests the insignificance of human life in war (De La Croix 1980:732). Another example is Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* painted in 1937 in his Paris studio in response to the German bombing of Guernica in northern Spain which was designed to provoke outrage at the events of the Spanish Civil War (1936-9). He used jagged shapes and screaming mouths to evoke the nightmare of war and this evocative work demonstrates the effectiveness of art as a tool of protest.

In South Africa, there is also a long legacy of visual art used as a tool of resistance and protest. John de Gruchy writes that the legacy of San rock art has provided "the foundation for an art tradition in South Africa that is rooted in the environment, marked by resistance against injustice, and expressive of hope and healing" (de Gruchy 2001:203). From this foundation, South Africa has been associated with a history of liberation art.

During the Struggle against apartheid Protest Art expressed the reality of life in the townships and the struggle that people of colour experienced in trying to have their identities recognized within a dehumanizing political order. The quality of the art was spoken of in a speech in 1986 by the writer Menan du Plessis who described it as “not the morally self-conscious art of liberal protest” nor “the defiant art of outrage” but as diverse, complex, rich and “rooted directly in the context of struggle” (Williamson 1989:9).

Protest gives voice to the silenced and powerless and the arts offer a means for their expression. Visual art is a component of culture which offers iconographic power for protest and the stance of resistance. It can be used as a tool of protest while imagining a vision for a better future and has been used to support the struggle for liberation and transformation throughout human history.

3.4 The Emergence of Resistance Art

Resistance Art emerged after 1976 which was a defining year for South Africa when the peaceful protest of children was met with police gunfire in the Soweto Uprising. New organizations emerged in opposition to the state and the apathy which had frozen South Africans, black and white, for so long disappeared. Artists caught up in the events around them recognized the truth of black oppression and began to address political issues through their art. Breyten Breytenbach argued that “the artist who closes their eyes to everyday injustice and inhumanity will without fail see less with his writing and painting eyes too” and their work will become “barren” (Williamson 1989:8). Artists addressing political issues demonstrated that art was not an elitist activity but was part of popular cultural resistance and had an important role to play in the life of the community and the struggle for freedom.

Two conferences in particular helped to focus the attention of artists on the importance of resistance through art to the injustices being perpetuated against people of colour. The first was hosted by the University of Cape Town in July 1979 and was titled ‘The State of Art in South Africa’ and the second, some years later in July 1982 with better representation from black artists, was hosted in Gaborone in Botswana as part of an art festival. The title of this second conference was ‘Art Towards Social Development and Change in South Africa’ and it explored culture and resistance. Williamson said the debate had been opened up and in “the years to come, there would be a growing realization amongst anti-apartheid forces that cultural resistance was a tool of immense power” (Williamson 1989:9).

Included in the emergence of Resistance Art was the acknowledgement by white art institutions of their lack of acknowledgement and inclusion of black art in the mainstream establishment. Acts of restitution then followed, an example of which is the exhibition in 1988 in the Johannesburg Art Gallery which was called "*The Neglected Tradition*" and showcased the work of black artists. It sought to include and represent the work of artists who expressed the reality for blacks and people of colour in South Africa under the Apartheid regime through their art. It took courage for black artists to finally stand up to the State and the struggle against apartheid and this produced much art. Nadine Gordimer, the celebrated South African novelist, described visual art as being "at the heart of liberation" (de Gruchy 2001:204).

Sydney Holo is an example of a black resistance artist who created art to express his sense of injustice. He grew up with his mother who was an activist forced to spend long periods of time away from her home to avoid police brutality. His linocut "*No Life*" depicts "the anguish of township families unable to protect their young men being arrested" when "approximately 5000 people were detained" under the emergency regulations (Williamson 1989:134).



Fig 3.4.1 *No Life* (1987)¹

Sydney Holo

29 x 34cm

Linocut on paper

Resistance art was not limited to men, as demonstrated through the work of a female resistance artist Helen Sebidi. She drew “mass portraits of the disrupted society created by exploitative legislation” which treated black Africans as “labour units” (Williamson 1989:37). In her charcoal and collage on paper called *Tears of Africa* (1988), the entire surface of the artwork “is covered with bodies. They’re jammed up against the edges” and “push and shove in the struggle to survive” much like she observed in township life (Williamson 1989:37).

¹ <http://www.asai.co.za/gallery/112-cap-prints/detail/3979-sydney-holo-no-life-linocut-on-paper-29x34-c1987.html?tmpl=component>; accessed 12/07/2012.



Fig 3.4.2 *Tears of Africa* (1988)²

Helen Sebidi

200 x 800cm

Charcoal and collage on paper

Sydney Holo and Helen Sebidi are two examples of the many resistance artists who produced visual art to communicate their struggle for life against the dehumanizing Apartheid forces. Resistance artists emerged from various race groups and used visual art to communicate their protest. The Resistance artists entered the public arena to give voice and identity to people needing to voice their opposition to the injustices perpetuated against people of colour in South Africa and thus Resistance Art has become an aspect of the historical culture of South Africa.

² <http://library.thinkquest.org/18799/hseb5.html>; photographer Athol Franz; accessed 12/07/2012.

3.5 Art Activism in South Africa in the time of HIV/AIDS

Rika Allen argues that art activism plays an important role in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In the past number of years the South African National Gallery (SANG) has staged exhibitions in which artists were invited to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The activist strategies of SANG draw on two traditions when fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic by means of visual art. The first is the Resistance Art movement used in the fight against apartheid and the second is in the resources of its networking strategies with the HIV/AIDS activist movement in general and specifically the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). “The discourses of protest and resistance art still play an important role when planning and taking part in interventionist strategies” (Allen 2009:397). These strategies have gained the attention of the art world and encouraged a response to the effects of HIV/AIDS but the landscape which characterizes the epidemic is constantly changing and so new strategies are being called for as well as an ethics of representational practices.

Allen argues that by focusing on visual art’s societal function as transporter of meaning it is effective in its capacity to be instrumental in activist strategies that bring about social change. Marilyn Martin, the director of SANG, is also “a firm and committed believer in the potential of art as a transformative power” and the way in which SANG employs HIV/AIDS art is similar to the resistance art movement where the artwork transcends itself offering artists a platform from which “to engage with difficult issues, and challenge public opinion and action” (Allen 2009:403).

A ground breaking exhibition by artist Gideon Mendel in 2001 called *A Broken Landscape* changed the way in which HIV/AIDS art was done. Mendel involved people living with HIV/AIDS in the creation of his exhibition which moved them away from being seen as passive victims to survivors with a story. This was viewed as a successful social art project which created a platform for other activist activities and events. Outside the walls of formal art exhibitions many organizations and community initiatives began to implement art in their activist strategies. Even though the artworks being produced were not ‘high art’³ they allow people affected by HIV/AIDS to participate in and tell their own stories.

³ ‘High art’ is otherwise known as Fine Art which is a category of art developed for its aesthetic and conceptual appeal. Aesthetic theories about what constitutes Fine Art abound and the debate around fine art versus craft continues. It is argued that “Fine art is a construct that cannot be separated from power and class relations in society” as it is born out of the aesthetic history of Western development (Steele 2009: p181). Historically, categories which define fine art have been very particular and have excluded craft. The term “craft” has had a cultural and gendered distortion as indigenous people and women have been excluded from the historical development around the central debate of aesthetic theory and as a result in the past the creative work of women was

The community based initiatives that emerged in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic used art as part of their strategy recognizing that African women have for centuries been actively creating art through their crafts with media such as beadwork, basket making and pottery. Their art making has been undervalued in terms of its aesthetic potential and a process of re-identifying, renaming and relocating indigenous peoples' and women's art has been undertaken to redress injustices of the past in order to attribute greater recognition to their art making. Although these community-based initiative activist strategies were to communicate the affects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic they have also succeeded in challenging the art/craft debate and highlighting the aesthetic value of indigenous women's art making.

3.6 Finding the Hidden Discourses of Oppressed People

Finding a safe place to explore ideas where one feels comfortable, secure and able to talk freely and without the fear of the judgment of others is important to people who feel marginalized in society through the hegemony of political and social ideology. Being able to speak freely is not straightforward because of the unequal distribution of power which operates against people who are subordinate in society and who fear the consequences of their self- expression. Finding the voices of the severely marginalized and understanding their expression is complex as described by social theorist, James Scott, in his study *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990) where he examines the public and hidden discourse in the engagement between the dominated and those who dominate.

3.6.1 James Scott on Hidden and Public Transcripts

James Scott argues that “acting” has “been imposed throughout history on the vast majority of people” (1990:2). By this he refers to the “public performance” of both those in power and the dominated which is necessary to ensure that these unequal relations of power remain intact (Scott 1990:2). Scott uses the term ‘public transcript’ to describe the publicly visible interaction between the dominant and subordinate groups in society. The public transcript is unlikely to describe the whole story about power relations “as one of the key survival skills for subordinate groups has been impression management in power-laden

most likely in the production of domestic items that were dismissed as craft. Contemporary feminist art historians and artists have worked at reclaiming “craft” which was limited to the purely functional and domestic sphere.

situations” (Scott 1990:3). This means that subordinates do not reveal their true feelings in a public space. “The greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate” groups and the more arbitrarily or menacingly it is applied, “the thicker the mask” (Scott 1990:3). The term used to describe the discourse which takes place “offstage” away from the observation of the power holders is referred to as the “hidden transcript” (Scott 1990:4). “Power relations” are not so straightforward that it can be said that what “is said in power-laden contexts” is false and “what is said offstage true” (Scott 1990:4). What is true is that the ‘hidden transcript’ “is produced for a different audience and under different constraints of power than the public transcript” and “by assessing the discrepancy between the hidden transcript and the public transcript” one can “begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse” (Scott 1990:5). “It is clear that the frontier between the public and the hidden transcripts is a zone of constant struggle between dominant and the subordinate – not a solid wall” which means that the subordinate group continually pushes to express more of their needs publicly but is equally able to withdraw when they sense opposition (Scott 1990:14). When it is too threatening for the dominated group to express themselves publicly, they resort to “a wide variety of low- profile forms of resistance which dare not speak in their own name” (Scott 1990:19). This realm, known as “infrapolitics” is situated between the hidden and public realms. This third realm of subordinate group activity is described by Scott as the “politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors. Rumor, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes and euphemisms- a good part of the folk culture of subordinate groups - fit this description” (Scott 1990:19).

In situations of extreme oppression, the oppressed group is likely to have revolutionary thoughts but opportunities to act upon those thoughts are rare “as the former cannot openly avow its goals” (Scott 1990:199). Scott opposes the idea that the subordinate group’s level of thought is curtailed through ideological hegemony but supports the idea that these groups are less constrained at the level of thought and more so in the area of “political action” (Scott 1990:199). The daily exercise of power over the subordinate group limits their options and moves the group on to use a strategic form of resistance such as “dialogical engagement with the dominant” where the group largely observes the rules even if it is their objective to undermine them (Haddad 2000:342).

Scott proposes that much of “the active political life of subordinate groups has been ignored because it takes place at a level that we rarely recognize as political..... I want to distinguish between the open, declared forms of resistance, which attract most attention, and the disguised, low-profile, undeclared resistance which constitutes the domain of infrapolitics” (Scott 1990:198). Within the domain of infrapolitics are found hidden ideas and knowledge which oppose dominant ideology. The term used to describe these ideas are ‘subjugated knowledges’ which is a term first introduced by Michel Foucault, the

French philosopher and social theorist, who described them as a series of knowledges that have been disqualified as “insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition and scientificity” (Shawver 2003:7).

James Cochrane similarly argues in the South African context that local communities possess “a theologically and socially relevant wisdom” about their situation and context which “questions assumptions and offers new insights” into communities which would otherwise be unknown (Cochrane 1999:22). This means that what local communities know is often a reflection on hard-won life experience and that this “socially relevant wisdom” needs to be captured and explored and not merely dismissed as being inferior knowledge because it does not subscribe to the modern western scientific principles of knowledge (Cochrane 1999:22).

Beverley Haddad, in her PhD thesis (2000) *African Women’s Theologies of Survival: Intersecting Faith, Feminisms, and Development*⁴ argues that the “every day practices of life are ‘arts of resistance’ that prevent the community from falling into despair” and have been used to keep communities “alive and hopeful” (Haddad 2000:340). These ‘arts of resistance’ used by African American women have for centuries been found in their commitment and love for their children and community and centre around acts of devotion where they use the “art of care” to help sustain and maintain life in their communities (Haddad 2000:340). The implication for South African women is that these same arts of care have been employed to sustain life in a survival context under apartheid. According to Haddad, marginalized black South African women have throughout the period of colonization, apartheid, political violence and the threat of the AIDS pandemic through their faith and in locating safe sites resisted images which reflect their “victim status” (Haddad 2000:339).

3.6.2 Creating a “Safe Space” for Women

There appears to be a “tremendous desire and will to express publicly what is in the hidden transcript, even if that form of expression must use metaphors and allusions in the interest of safety” (Scott 1990:164). The boundaries continue to shift and in time the ‘hidden transcript’ becomes more visible. The ‘hidden transcript’ may eventually erupt into the public realm, although this is rare and in order for this to

⁴ University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2000.

happen the oppressed group needs to find a safe place to meet and agree on the ‘hidden transcript’ through ‘enactment’.

The social sites of the hidden transcript are those locations in which the unspoken riposte, stifled anger, and bitten tongues created by relations of domination find a vehement, full throated expression. It follows that the hidden transcript will be least inhibited when two conditions are fulfilled: first, when it is voiced in a sequestered social site where the control, surveillance, and repression of the dominant are least able to reach, and second, when this sequestered social milieu is composed entirely of close confidants who share similar experiences of domination. The initial condition is what allows subordinates to talk freely at all, while the second ensures that they have, in their common subordination, something to talk about (Scott 1990:120).

Scott describes the conditions needed to allow the ‘hidden transcript’ the opportunity for expression. He proposes that there needs firstly to be a place for people to meet known as a ‘social site’ that is hidden away or removed from the power or interference of the dominant. Secondly, he argues that the ‘hidden transcript’ will emerge most easily when people “in their common subordination” who find themselves in that safe site together (Scott 1990:120).

West agrees with Scott and says that subordinate groups will speak safely in their own groups and be far less careful (West 1996:30). Similarly Haddad suggests that the ideas behind the ‘acts of resistance’ are only revealed in what is felt to be a safe site by the concerned group (Haddad 2000:334). Haddad further maintains that the women of faith with whom she has engaged located safe sites to reshape images that reflected their victim status (Haddad 2000:339). Safe sites have given women an opportunity to re-imagine their world away from public view.

3.6.3 The Medium of the Aesthetic offers Art Projects a Locus for Safe Expression and Empowerment

Ulrich Oslender argues in his article entitled “Revisiting the hidden transcript: oral tradition and black cultural politics in the Colombian Pacific coast region” (2007) that oral traditions be considered as a manifestation of subaltern cultural politics. He draws on James Scott’s conceptual framework on the

public and hidden transcripts of social interaction and argues that these poetic forms described as the hidden transcripts challenge dominant “representations of space” and can be used as powerful political tools in the struggle for “cultural and territorial rights” (Oslender 2007:1103). He describes oral tradition as a set of cultural practices that are constantly being reproduced and reconstructed to create the collective memory of a population group through the spoken word. This tradition is neither stable nor fixed and is being developed throughout generations. His study focuses on the transition from hidden to public transcript and argues that this is only possible if a space is created in which “the acts of resistance are imagined, planned and take on shape” (Oslender 2007:1108). He maintains that the emergence on to the public stage of the previously hidden and disguised discourses has an empowering effect on marginalized groups and that existing power relations may be significantly altered through the process.

This study argues that by using the medium of the aesthetic, hidden discourses are given public space which assists in the transition from hidden to public transcript thereby empowering the marginalized group. As in the case of protest and resistance art in South Africa, the aesthetic is given a certain amount of freedom because it falls under the umbrella of culture. Society’s understandings of what constitutes culture are constantly in flux and it therefore creates a platform for the free expression of alternative discourses. Under the guise of culture, ideas that might not be tolerated in mainstream social structures may be explored and expressed. An effective aesthetic medium for the expression of protest is visual art. An exhibition of visual art may not be regarded as an overt challenge as the conventions involved in the making of the visual image do not have to comply with the prescribed conventions of literary specifications and are not easily interpreted by many. Visual art may challenge injustice but it does not rely on a specific canon of interpretation like literacy and can be interpreted in various ways as visual literacy is a product of art education not readily available to everyone. This ambiguity may camouflage its intentions making them covertly operative.

Groups that meet regularly and which include people with similar concerns, create a site for the emergence of the hidden discourses. An example of such is the Mingle Group which meets in Oxford in England offering support to people with learning disabilities who identify as lesbian, gay, transgender or bisexual. Members of this group state repeatedly that it is “a place where they felt comfortable, safe, secure and able to be themselves. All spoke of being able to talk freely without fear of judgement” and found a space that was “free from prejudice and abuse” (Elderton 2011:14). Women’s art projects or craft groups appear to offer a similar safe place to express their fears and concerns through the medium of visual art. These art projects offer spaces somewhere out of the reach of the direct influences of the oppressors in their lives and create a space in which to explore the prophetic as women exercise their visionary ability and articulate the longings of their community in an imagined future.

Describing the history of the emergence of art projects, Annette Blum in her article entitled “Public Memory, Private Truths: Voices of Women and Visual Narrative in Post-apartheid South Africa” argues that since the end of 1994, South Africans have been dealing with the traumatic legacy of apartheid which has left hidden histories of domination and oppression. She proposes that one of the most significant attempts to create collective memory for South Africans was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which “set up public hearings to offer victims of Apartheid the opportunity to establish historical truth, and give legitimacy and authority to previously silenced voices” (Blum 2011:13). Blum argues for the significance of rural art initiatives in “enabling narrative expansion to the restrictive testimonial practices of the TRC in utilizing a different form of testimony, functioning as ‘public expressions of trauma and memory’” (Blum 2011:14). Whereas the TRC used oral confessions and testimonies to reconstruct public memory, the women in these art initiatives used printing, painting, beadwork and embroidery to give voice to their experiences of violence. Although the intention of the TRC was to restore human and civil dignity to the victims it largely failed to do this for women as the testimonial practices were “inappropriate for expressing the experiences of women during apartheid” as its narrow focus was on “individual physical forms of harm” and it underestimated the dangers for women in public testimony (Blum 2011:17). Researchers and activists argued that a different kind of social intervention was necessary to allow the stories of harm told by women about women to emerge. In response to the need for women’s voices to be heard, Andries Botha, a recognized South African artist who after attending the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, developed a creative methodology as a means “for women’s memory to be recounted and held in trust as part of the memory archive of South Africa”⁵. The Project that he initiated is called *Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women-* and has been running for more than a decade. The project ran many workshops in different provinces throughout South Africa in which women were given cloths of various colours and encouraged to use beadwork and embroidery to tell their stories depicting the subject of “A Day I Will Never Forget” (Blum 2011:20). This provided them with the opportunity to give voice to their experiences of trauma and violence under apartheid. These small cloths, each about 10 inches x 12 inches, tell the personal histories of the everyday struggles of women to survive under apartheid. The initiation of this art project created a foundation for art projects and their initiatives as a safe and effective forum for women to tell their stories through art forms such as beadwork and embroidery.

⁵ Amazwi Abesifazane- Voices of Women Museum; <http://amazwi-voicesofwomen.com/about-us>; accessed 08/07/2012.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter began with looking at Resistance art as a tool of protest and argued that the aesthetic can provide a means of this expression. Recognizing the historical legacy that art played the fight against apartheid it has been commissioned as an activist strategy in the fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The relationship between art and culture was explored and art was defined as a cultural system and an agent of experience. Aesthetic experiences may awaken empathy within one and therefore link people in solidarity with the suffering of others which contributes to social transformation.

James Scott's social theories argue for the location of a safe site for marginalized people to express subversive discourse away from the hegemonic power of the oppressor. This study proposes that the aesthetic and in particular visual art provide a medium for expression which is less threatening to those in power.

In South Africa, Andries Botha initiated an art project that had far reaching impact as a tool for the discovery and safe keeping of black women's traumatic experiences under apartheid and which provided a foundation and a model for other art projects.

Ecofeminism is the topic of the next chapter and is a form of contemporary protest. It is the articulation and critique of the double oppression that women and the environment have experienced through ideological oppressions such as colonialism, militarism and patriarchy. Ecofeminism critiques these oppressions and envisages how a future without them would appear.

Chapter Four: Ecofeminisms

4.1 Introduction

Ecofeminism is a form of contemporary protest and some of the writings of three ecofeminist theologians, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara and Sally Mc Fague, have been selected to contribute to themes on spirituality. The themes have been identified as Integration and Bodiliness, Experience and Storytelling, Transformation and Justice, and Hope.

4.2 Ecofeminism as Protest

Ecofeminism is a growing movement which unites ecology and feminism into a new dimension of thinking which begins from the perspective of the oppressed and identifies a link between the oppression of women and the natural environment. “In its broadest sense, *ecofeminism* is the coming together of ecology and feminism – a coming together brought about by those who seek the link between the domination of women and the domination of nature” (Rae 1994:23). Both women and the natural environment have been exploited and have been given no intrinsic worth. Patriarchy is the cause of this exploitation as women and the natural environment have been evaluated in regards to their usefulness as male resources.

According to Carolyn Merchant “the term *ecofeminism* was first used by Francoise d’Eaubonne in 1974 and signifies women’s potential for bringing about an ecological resolution to ensure human survival on the planet” (Rae 1994:23). Merchant says there are “three strands” which have contributed to the development of ecofeminism. The first is through “the study of political theory and cultural history”, the second is “through the exposure to nature-based religion” where scripture is found within nature itself and the third is through “the involvement by feminists in environmental issues such as Green politics” (Rae 1994:23, 24). The link that has been developed between feminism and ecology is natural as both share common goals and see the whole earth community as interconnected. Ecofeminism offers a bridge between these two radical positions. Environmentalism is a significant location for radical politics today because of the seemingly apocalyptic nature of our ecological crisis and the ways in which environmental problems affect people’s daily lives. As a feminism, ecofeminism reworks “a longstanding feminist

critique of the naturalization of the inferior social and political status for women” to include the effects on the environment because of its feminine identification (Sturgeon 1997:24).

The goal of ecofeminism is the radical transformation of “how we as human beings view ourselves, our relationships with other people and the earth itself” (Rakoczy 2004:302). Ecofeminism is therefore a contemporary political movement with goals which protest against the oppression of women and the natural environment while seeking to bring an end to these oppressions and articulates a vision of what the world would look like with the implementation of liberative praxis.

4.3 An Introduction to Ecofeminist Theology through some Ecofeminist Theologians

The three well-known ecofeminist theologians which have been selected are Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983; 1992; 2005), Ivone Gebara (1999) and Sally McFague (1987; 1989). All three have written extensively on the subject of ecofeminism and give insights into the identification of an ecofeminist Christian spirituality.

Radford Ruether was born in 1936, in St Paul, Minnesota in the United States of America and comes from a Catholic Christian tradition. She holds a Ph.D. in classics and patristics and her doctoral dissertation was entitled *Gregory Nazianzus Rhetor and Philosopher*. She is presently at Claremont Graduate University in the Claremont School of Theology where she teaches. Ruether has had a very successful career as an academic and holds honorary degrees from many different institutions.⁶ She is well known and recognized for her contribution to theology, especially Feminist Theology through her book *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983) and is a first world feminist theologian who has been exploring and writing ideas about ecofeminist theology since the 1960's. She was one of the first Christian theologians “to perceive clearly and articulate forcefully the interconnections between liberation theology” and a “theology of nature” (Bouma-Prediger 1995:12). She looked for links between the two and developed an ecofeminist theology which expresses the connection between these two theologies with “issues of social justice and liberation as its central focus” (Bouma-Prediger 1995:13).

Ivone Gebara is a Brazilian Catholic sister of the order of the Canonesses of St Augustine. She holds doctorates in philosophy and religious studies and has taught for many years at the Theology Institute of

⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether; http://www.cst.edu/academic_resources/_faculty.Ruether.php; accessed 04/08/2011.

Recife (ITER). Gebara is one of Latin America's leading theologians and has taken up ecofeminist theology and re-interpreted it within her own Latin American context. In her book, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*, Gebara deconstructs theological and philosophical ideas about knowing, the human person, God, the Trinity and Jesus in order to promote a new understanding of religion from an ecofeminist perspective (Gebara 1999). Gebara describes an 'urban ecofeminism' which combines social ecofeminism and holistic ecology and which is shaped by her experiences of working with poor Brazilian women who live in the slums. She contends that ecofeminism is born of 'daily life' and therefore considers garbage in the streets, inadequate health care and other daily survival crises, especially as they affect poor women trying to provide for family sustenance, to be the central issues in ecofeminist liberation theology.⁷

The American theologian Sally McFague is a Christian feminist who was born in May 1933 at Quincy, Massachusetts, in the United States. She completed a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English literature from Smith College in 1955 and a Bachelor of Divinity from Yale Divinity School in 1959 and then gained a Master of Arts degree at Yale University in 1960 and was awarded her Ph.D. in 1964. She is best known for her analysis of how metaphor is at the heart of how we speak about God and searches for new metaphors which support an ecological perspective and which are able to better describe God.

These three theologians have each contributed significantly to the development of ecofeminist theology. Rosemary Radford Ruether has been one of the first theologians to articulate a theology which challenges the double domination of women and the natural world which evolved out of ancient Greek philosophy. Her writing "is recognized for its critical insight, thought provoking creativity and prophetic power" (Bouma-Prediger 1995:24). Ecofeminist theology is an extension of her continued interest in the restoration of human relations and her gifted contribution lies in her ability to examine the history of theological thinking while remaining within the Christian tradition⁸. Ivone Gebara's contribution lies in her understanding of philosophy and theology and her ability to critique the ways in which knowledge has been constructed. She holds the belief that truth and transformation come out of an experience of suffering and proposes that the suffering of women and the earth have come from the male dominated view of reality as a hierarchy based on dualisms which continue to be perpetuated by the Christian church. McFague argues ^{that} images of God are constructed from metaphors which best delineate the concept of God and as such need to be understood as an interpretation and not as an absolute. McFague

⁷ Ivone Gebara *Longing for Running Water*; www.clas.ufl.edu/users/bron/pdf; accessed 01/06/2010.

⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether; http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Rosemary_Radford_Ruether; accessed 18/10/2011.

understands that the language of Christian theology is constructed and therefore has limits in regards to its understanding of God. As a construction there is room to imagine God in new knowledge structures and she argues that new metaphors can help to enrich and enhance our understandings of God and add substance to new ways of conceiving God appropriately for our times. Her contribution is her challenge to out-dated patriarchal and triumphalist metaphors for God and the implementation of new metaphors which support an ecofeminist vision which looks at how to better sustain life on the planet.

4.4 Exploring Ideas that Contribute to the Themes in an Ecofeminist Spirituality

Ecofeminism is a set of contemporary feminisms which extend not just to the restoration of justice to women but for all of creation. It proposes new ways of viewing the world so as to offer greater sustainability to all of life through mutuality in relations. These ecofeminist theologians state that the Christian faith needs to be challenged and engaged with so as to construct new ways of understanding and being in relationship with God which supports life.

An ecofeminist spirituality involves the implementation of these ideas through forms of faith practice. It seeks to bring hope “out of collective and personal trauma” and wrestles to find a hopeful way forward (Manning 2008:96). It has the power to reawaken “dreaming and imagining” where “violence gives way to symbols of life and flourishing” (Manning 2008:97). It is grounded in prayer and a relationship with the spirit but impels us towards “concrete action to combat injustice, challenge structural sin and engage politically for the marginalized” (Manning 2008:97). It is a spirituality of the “here and now” which engages with the struggle for peace and justice and shares the burdens of suffering while challenging the dominant powers in its expression of faith (Manning and Grey 2008:97).

In a study of selected ecofeminist theologians a number of themes identified in feminist Christian spirituality emerge. Ideas which support the themes will be extracted and explored so as to construct a framework that assists in the identification of a contemporary ecofeminist spirituality.

4.4.1 Integration and Bodiliness

Integration and bodiliness are themes taken from feminist theology which apply equally to ecofeminist theology. Integration suggests the union of both the “vertical and horizontal” dimensions of a women’s

relationship with God and others (Rakoczy 2004:379). Integration supports relational experience and the struggle personal, social and political that evolves from it. In order for integration to happen, Ruether argues that humanity needs to alter their way of viewing and participating in the world so as to replace their dreams of power and wealth with ones that recognize the limits to the earth's physical capacity so as to retard the culture of ever increasing expansion and domination. This calls for a conversion experience for all people in which they recognize the double domination and damage that patriarchy has wrought upon the earth and change to embrace new practices within relationships which affirm interrelatedness, mutual respect and appreciation. Bodiliness affirms our bodies and the role they play in our expression and experience of the world. It counters spiritual practices that have denied the full expression and recognition of our bodies and the role they have in informing our experience of the world and relationships.

In the struggle to find new ways to relate to one another, humanity needs to re-examine its religious world views. The Christian perspective has conceptualized God as a monarch of absolute power who condones the use of domination which sanctions the domination of nature and women. McFague calls attention to titles and ways of addressing God such as "King of kings and Lord of Lords"; "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth"; "God, the almighty Lord and King of the universe whom none can defeat" which venerate God's omnipotent power and which by implication infer that we too are undefeatable and should relate in this manner (McFague 1987:64). McFague proposes that the image of a powerful, wealthy sovereign needs to be replaced with one which promotes egalitarian relations. McFague explores new metaphors for God which will support this new Christian perspective.

Ruether supports the idea of changing the Christian constructions of God and proposes an organic metaphor for God known as primal matrix. She sees it as "the root image of the divine" and imagines it as "the great womb within which all things, Gods and humans, sky and earth, human and nonhuman beings, are generated" (Ruether 1983:48). This image of the cosmic womb is a feminine one which suggests God as the source all life. Matrix is the medium of the womb in which life is nurtured and sustained. This image supports the idea of a united centre from which all life evolved. It recognizes interconnectivity, process, change, development and transformation as the cosmos evolves.

According to Ruether, a new understanding of relational experience will promote the idea of a conversion experience which promotes the reawakening of wonder and awe at the natural environment evoking from one a response to its beauty and intrinsic worth. She stresses that "Western consciousness must heal itself of its split off divisions that have separated knowledge from wonder, reverence, and love before we can

learn how to tell the cosmic story in a way that will rekindle an ethic and spirituality capable of calling us to the tasks of healing and sustaining the earth” (Ruether 1992:58).

Gebara proposes an understanding of God as ‘relatedness’. She argues that the concept of ‘relatedness’ is the basis of existence in the world and “speaks of God as possibility, as opening, as the unexpected, the unknown; as physical and metaphysical” (Gebara 1999:103). Relatedness recognizes the mystery of existence but affirms God as continual presence in the mystery and the unknown. It expresses itself as “utterance, word, attraction, flux, energy and passion” and is the materiality and spirituality of all (Gebara 1999:103).

Gebara argues that humanity’s understanding of God needs to equip us for the contemporary world. Any model of God needs to take into account recent scientific findings so as to remain relevant and able to promote healing and justice. If God is relationship then God works to improve relationships and it is through relationships that we speak of and affirm God. She says that humanity is entering a new moment in human and cosmic history and needs to “re-examine” its experience and “reconstruct” its meanings (Gebara 1999:144). Gebara re-examines the traditional Christian metaphorical images for community such as the Trinity which in our inherited experience has been reduced to “an old man, a young man and a bird” (Gebara 1999:144). She proposes a broader reinterpretation of this symbol to suggest multiplicity. She understands multiplicity as the acceptance of differences in order to create new relationships which promote love, mercy and justice. She argues that in a multiform world people need to accept differences as God transcends difference to unify all creation in its diversity. She argues that a limited view of ourselves in relation to others encourages evil as it results in a “narrow affirmation of our personal, racial, religious, and even class identity” and she states that we end up “creating systems to protect ourselves from one another, systems based on greed or the perceived superiority of those who regard themselves as the ‘strongest’ or ‘the finest’ ” (Gebara 1999:166).

Gebara argues that when culture exalts the individual, it creates imbalances in the networks of relationships within the earth. Individualism leaves little understanding in regards to the collective nature of life; it does not support any reflective or transformative process essential to faith and remains superficially engaged with the world. This way of being in the world does not support faith as it does not support life for all. According to Gebara, faith can be summed up as the essential values which support life such as those that encourage risk and in the experience of Jesus are “made flesh in behaviours such as solidarity with the poor, defending life in spite of the many threats against it, condemning oppression, sharing, forgiving and expressing mercy and praise” (Gebara 1999:147).

Ruether proposes that the sacramental tradition in Christianity is valuable (Ruether 1992:229). Once stripped of its patriarchal bias it holds themes for ecological spirituality and practice that are relevant today. The sacramental tradition “regards Christ as the cosmic manifestation of God, appearing both as the immanent divine source and ground of creation and its ultimate redemptive healing” (Ruether 1992:229). The tradition affirms the presence and manifestation of God found in creation thus emphasizing God’s immanence. It introduces the concept of panentheism which is ‘viewing God in all things’ which implies interdependence and interconnection through all of life. The immanent presence of God is pervasive, sustaining and celebrates bodiliness. It does not recognize any eschatology which devalues the earth and opposes any doctrine which supports fleeing the physical world. This emphasis on bodiliness is emphasized by McFague in her metaphor of God as “the world as God’s body”.

McFague’s metaphor for God as ‘the world as God’s body’ emphasizes the immanence and vulnerability of God. In the same way that we care about our bodies and are made vulnerable by them we must attend to their well being. It implies God’s willingness to suffer with the world, thus affirming that the world and all it contains are worth loving. The suggestion that God cares about the world as one cares about one’s body with sympathetic concern does not mean that the future is assured, for inherent in the metaphor of God’s body is the vulnerability of the world to physical deterioration, implying that God too is at risk of this deterioration. It does suggest, however, that to trust in a God whose body is the world is to trust in a God “who cares profoundly for the world” (McFague 1987:74). It highlights the consequences of damage to the earth and supports the notion that bodies are worth loving and their needs important. This is a metaphor which challenges a traditional image of God. McFague feels that metaphors of God need to recognize humanity’s interdependence with all forms of life as well as promote God’s sense of responsibility and nurturing of life. She experiments with metaphors which describe aspects of God that go beyond the gender stereotyping of the traditional models, which encourage detachment and distance from the world through their “triumphalist and transcendent themes”, and proposes being open to religious change which promotes community for all life (McFague 1987:72).

Christianity has inherited a bodily tradition and uses body language such as Jesus’ body as the sacrament and the church as the body of Christ. The advantage of the new metaphor that McFague proposes is that it includes more than Christians and more than human beings, opening up salvation to the whole earth. The only risk with this new metaphor as the earth as God’s body is that it has the potential to metaphorically limit God to the world, but one needs to remember that we are more than just our physicality. This model challenges conventional thinking and promotes integration between God and the world suggesting that God is in constant touch with the earth.

McFague proposes another metaphor of “God as mother”, a metaphor that promotes powerful images of the birthing and feeding process for the expression of the interrelatedness of all life. McFague uses this image “for an understanding of creation as bodied forth from the divine being, for it is the imagery of gestation, giving birth, and lactation that creates an imaginative picture of creation as profoundly dependent on and cared for by divine life” (McFague 1989:106).

In summary, integration in spirituality means changing the way humanity views and relates to the world. Any faith praxis which supports relationships of diversity and multiplicity while encouraging new ways of relating to the earth promotes a spirituality of ecofeminism. The task of healing and sustaining the earth recognizes the importance of challenging constructs and metaphors for God which promotes transcendence above immanence. It is a spirituality of activism that challenges and confronts constructs of domination. It embraces compassion and the awareness of others while encouraging love, mercy and justice for all creation. It awakens wonder, reverence, and love for the cosmic story and yearns for a holistic new reality where divisions between people are minimized such as the gap between men and women, rich and poor, old and young, and heterosexual and gay. Bodiliness in spirituality emphasizes the importance of bodies as a primary vehicle of our experience and explores new ways to use women’s bodies in the expression of their faith.

4.4.2 Experience and Storytelling

The theme of experience supports the idea that knowing comes from personal experience through bodily encounters with life. It explores the importance of abandoning previously held western, rationalistic approaches to the assimilation of knowledge and lends credence to knowledge gained from the use of alternative senses such as one’s feelings and intuition. Storytelling is the meaningful articulation of experience for the storyteller and their listeners which can be passed on from one generation to the next.

Our experience of God is often transmitted to us through metaphor and imagery from stories. Ruether argues that the religious imagery of ‘God as father’ has impacted on the earth negatively and “legitimized hierarchical divisions” within humanity which have been extended to include the whole earth community (Ruether 1983). Ruether challenges traditional images of an exclusively male God and describes them as idolatrous as they imply that God is literally male. She states, “God as father and king can be assimilated back into the traditional patriarchal relationships and used to sacralize the authority of human lordship and patriarchy” (Ruether 1983:66). These western, patriarchal images of God have encouraged the

perpetuation of dominance and exclusion such as “Almighty King” and “Lord” which legitimizes ancient feudal practices of dominance.

Ruether states that in Christianity, the Holy Spirit has been given feminine qualities through Sophia. She argues that despite there being both male and female images of God within the Christian tradition the female images are rarely used and are often in submission to a dominant male image. She states that the image of God “falls easily into an androcentric or male dominant perspective” and as a result the female side of God then becomes a “subordinate principle underneath the dominant image of male divine sovereignty” (Ruether 1983:60).

Ivone Gebara looks at the concept of epistemology and its contribution to our inherited knowledge and proposes ecofeminist ideas which promote being open to new ways of knowing. She suggests experience as an important link which allows us to recognize our kinship and mutuality with all beings. Gebara sees knowing as a process people engage with in order to perceive, to understand and to assimilate into meaning. This process is ongoing and “needs to be open to change” as it is upon this basis that humanity builds its understanding of itself and its relationship with others (Gebara 1999:68). Understanding therefore needs to be open to new concepts and correction.

An ecofeminist perspective drives a growing awareness of people’s relation to the cosmic whole. Previously this perspective has been confined to a western, rationalistic, male and white consciousness which offered only one way of viewing the world. Gebara expounds on how it gave credibility to scientific objectivity at the expense of bodily experiences of intuition, attraction, memories, forebodings and common sense. This western perspective was associated with rationality and men, and was regarded as superior to knowledge associated with intuition, emotions and feelings. Gebara challenges this perspective and embraces a unitary and holistic understanding of reality which encourages all avenues of knowledge.

Gebara advises multiple ways of knowing and assimilating knowledge as she upholds the importance of ‘affection’ as an emotional and intuitive realm of knowledge. The concept of affectivity opens up emotion as a source of knowing which releases creativity and recognizes a range of emotions and feelings in all men and women according to their characters. She states that “bringing the affective dimension into the realm of knowing appears likely to frighten even the most coolheaded philosophers” as affection is related to seduction and involves “a passionate approach to other people and to the things we want to know” (Gebara 1999:63). Affection is related to “eroticism”, “to the senses”, “to emotions” and “gut feelings” and evokes a passionate involvement leading us to discover things that would normally pass unobserved in the “act of knowing” (Gebara 1999:63).

An ecofeminist perspective in regards to the concept of knowledge is inclusive, sets no limits on knowing, recognizes a diversity of experience and accepts new ways of arriving at knowledge in a manner that supports and affirms nature. The inherited and patriarchal understanding of assimilated knowledge supports a concept of eternal truths. These belong to a body of unquestionable truths which are regarded as true knowledge such as God as “absolute being” and “creator of the world” (Gebara 1999:40). These eternal truths cannot be altered and do not recognize socio-cultural contexts, they are not open to process and change and thus prevent new revelation. This concept is the opposite of Gebara’s ecofeminist understanding that knowing should come first from experience and evolve in association with all living beings. According to Gebara, experiential learning increases universal consciousness and helps us in kinship with others thereby increasing our interdependence with one another, nature, the earth and our cosmic realities. This perspective supports change, recognizing that we are part of a greater body which exceeds our individual egos and needs and that change is a way of bringing balance to the whole body. She stresses that “Each new generation must rediscover, through mutual aid and surely also by learning from its past, new forms of shared living that will permit, to the greatest possible extent, the flourishing of the life of all beings and the development of each individual” (Gebara 1999:98).

This new ecofeminist perspective affirms the nurturing of positive interrelationships with the whole earth community especially with indigenous people. Indigenous cultures value storytelling and use it as a tool to pass on knowledge from one generation to the next. This knowledge is based on the experiences of the older generation and in order to find value in these cultures we need to recognize that indigenous cultures have been the victims of colonial processes in which white, masculine ways of viewing the world have judged them as inferior. This judgment has been imposed partly because of the western notion of knowledge which does not recognize experience, intuition, and change. Gebara argues that “This perspective opens us to the world of natural human experience and at the same time to supernatural revelation, which is a gratuitous gift of the goodness and mercy of God” (Gebara 1999:40).

In concluding the theme of experience and storytelling in an ecofeminist spirituality, we see that experience is the basis of the act of knowing, either through personal bodily encounters or through being open to new ways of assimilating knowledge. Christian religious patriarchal imagery such as ‘God as father’ has lent justification to a model of knowledge that sets itself up above other knowledges. This understanding of knowledge does not support egalitarian relationships which promote kinship with all beings. Therefore ecofeminist theologians propose multiple ways of knowing and uphold bodily experiences such as intuition, attraction, memories, emotions and feelings as contributing to knowledge, thus opening up the emotional and intuitive realm of knowledge which releases creativity and new revelations. Storytelling is found in indigenous cultures and is a tool to pass on personal experiences and

experiential knowledge to the next generation. It conveys affection, emotion and intuition in a meaningful and interesting way and is an expression of an ecofeminist spirituality.

4.4.3 Transformation and Justice

The themes of transformation and justice affirm that ecofeminist spiritualities are engaged directly with the world around them. From this outwardly looking perspective women seek transformation of themselves and their relationships. In support of justice they need to experience within themselves a new freedom from their self doubt and forces that limit their opportunities.

Patriarchal anthropology has legitimized the hierarchical ordering of social offices which has left women in subordinate positions and limited their full and free evolvment. The inherited system of office determines that God commands, man rules and woman obeys. In traditional church communities men lead and women serve which continues to perpetuate gender stereotypes. Elizabeth Johnson comments on the image of the Trinity and proposes that “this symbol is used to sustain the patriarchal subordination of women. It does this through both its male imagery and the hierarchical pattern of divine relationships inherent in the structure of reigning models of the symbol itself” (Johnson 2002:193). Ruether argues that “the subordination of women to men is not an expression of inferiority either in nature or in fallen history” but “reflects the divinely created social order by which God has ordained the rule of some and the subjugation of others: rulers over subjects, masters over servants, husbands over wives, parents over children” and proposes that this hierarchical ordering is not a reflection of differences of human nature but of “appointed social office” (Ruether 1983:98). She critiques this anthropology by affirming that all humans are full and equal in nature and personhood and proposes a plan for egalitarian access to social roles so as to transform these culturally imposed stereotypes to encourage relationality. Therefore the manipulation of relationships in social engineering will end as the work of transformation begins.

In the worldview that places humanity over the natural world and devalues non-human creatures, the exploitation of anything identified with nature - such as women – is sanctioned. In this hierarchical dualism it follows that human history is placed over natural history thereby sanctioning damage to the environment while denying that nature has a history which is continually evolving through evolution. Ruether explains that “The domination of nature is seen as infinite expansion” and the “eschatological flight from the finite to the infinite has been turned on its side and converted into a doctrine of infinite progress, as both rational knowledge of and control over nature” (Ruether 1983:83). Ruether presents a

theme for ecological spirituality and practice through the covenantal tradition where there is the recognition of “an intimate unity between justice and right relations to nature” (Ruether 1992:214). The unified covenant between God and all creatures demands the “establishment of justice and right relations on earth” (Ruether 1992:214). It speaks of finitude and limits to human power where humanity will exercise humility and stewardship. This covenantal tradition has potential for a future ecological vision. A covenantal vision of the relation of humans to other life forms acknowledges the special place of humans in this relationship as caretakers who “do not absolutely own the rest of life” but “accountable for its welfare” to God (Ruether 1992:227). Ruether proposes the concept of “ecojustice”, a term that advocates justice for the environment (Ruether 2005:72). Humanity must act as caretakers for the welfare of the ecological community, put right relational distortions and the historic lack of respect for non-human parts of the environment, encourage respect for all living things, recognize the bodily and finite characteristics of the earth and promote transformation and justice.

Gebara reflects on the ecological destruction to the world and comments on the gap between reality and the construction of our traditional religious symbols. She says that “the symbols we use to name our dreams have been defiled and are too feeble to impart energy to our lives” (Gebara 1999:197). She feels that symbols that were important to humanity are now “bankrupt” and calls us to reflect on our Christian symbols and the value they purport. Gebara proposes that transformation begins with the acceptance of biodiversity. Biodiversity in religions, according to Gebara, begins with “an attitude of respect for diversity” in terms of the way religious language is used and extends outwardly (Gebara 1999:205). She says that “when religious language shows signs of claiming imperialist universality and struggles to impose itself and eliminate others” then it opposes biodiversity and the flow of life (Gebara 1999:206). Therefore the acceptance of biodiversity is the key to transformation.

McFague presents the metaphor “God as mother” as a way of promoting a religious model for transformation and justice. It highlights maternal imagery for God, not limiting it to the stereotypes that society places on female qualities such as ‘mothering’ (McFague 1982:176). Traditional masculine activities in which God creates, redeems and establishes are used for God but in this new metaphor they are included under mothering. In this way they do not sanction the gender stereotypes that have been created in human society and as a mother the issue of justice is raised in regard to the fair distribution of resources. “God as mother, on the side of life” doesn’t mean “on the side of only one species or on the side of every individual human birth” but looks at managing the earth as a whole (McFague 1989:103). Through the metaphor of God as mother, the interrelatedness of all life is emphasized, producing a holistic view of the world which promotes a vision of a just society. The image of a mother promoting justice goes beyond the stereotypes and opens humanity up to exploring the concept of God in new ways.

A mother would establish justice in order to see life's necessities shared in the larger ordering of the cosmic household. McFague states that "in the picture of the mother-creator, however, the goal is neither the condemnation nor the rescue of the guilty but the just ordering of the cosmic household in a fashion beneficial to all. God as mother creator is primarily involved not in the negative business of judging wayward individuals but in the positive business of creating with our help a just ecological economy for the well being of all her creatures" (McFague 1987:117).

In conclusion, under the theme of justice and transformation, we argue that the divinely legitimized hierarchical ordering of social offices has sanctioned the exploitation of women and nature. The domination of nature has been assimilated into humanity's desire for ever-increasing expansion. Transformation begins with the recognition of multiplicity and kinship which prompts a future ecological vision. Justice for women begins with overcoming self doubt so as to have the confidence to overcome the forces that have opposed and limited them and for the natural world when we understand our relationship differently and this understanding is supported through our religious understandings too.

4.4.4 Hope

Hope is the positive feeling that oppressions and injustice can be overcome. It holds the desire for the end of suffering and a vision for new ways of relating. Ruether's theology promotes an ecofeminist hope as it envisions the transformation of society through an egalitarian worldview that recognizes the humanity of each person and encourages the flourishing of others. In order for this to be realized, Ruether opposes corporate globalization and advises that the control of local communities be returned back to the community so that they can "define their own relationships to the land in a just and life sustaining way" (Ruether 2005: 155-168).

Ruether sees all life as being sustained by relationality, which contributes to hope. According to her, all communities, human and ecological, are sustained through relational behavior. 'Sin' breaks down these good relations; this is why humanity needs to think about the way in which our motivations and actions affect others through the misuse of freedom. "What is appropriately called sin belongs to a more specific sphere of human freedom where we have the possibility of enhancing life or stifling it. It is the realm where competitive hate abounds and also passive acquiescence to needless victimization" (Ruether 1992:141).

Gebara sees relating to God as an important source of hope and says that “God is always the greatest reality, a hope that exceeds all our expectations” as “God is the possibility of paths that open even when some of the paths we hoped for have closed forever” (Gebara 1999:134). Gebara affirms that our relationship with God in prayer and liturgy offers the possibility of positive change.

In order to promote relationality, Ruether proposes that humanity challenges cultures of domination and deceit, and welcome practices of critique and compassion so as to promote the principle of equity. The concept of equity begins with the righting of relations between men and women and extends to all human communities and all members of the biotic community. It takes into account the needs of those alive now and those to come and Ruether proposes that we “begin by envisioning something of the goal that we seek, not in the sense of a static ‘once-for-all’ future perfection, but in the sense of healthy societies that can be sustained from season to season, which are no longer building up toxicities of destruction” (Ruether 1992:258).

Gebara challenges a contemporary neoliberal economic model and supports an enlightened attitude to the world in which the rich do not grow richer at the expense of the poor and vulnerable. She critiques inherited knowledge which has allowed the justification for this behaviour and suggests women form small nourishing communities to live out their faith. In such communities questions will be welcomed and an open attitude to change adopted where previously held convictions are challenged. She states, “Community appears as a constructive and creative place that not only supports us in living our lives but affirms our convictions, sustains us in moments of doubt, and gives us the energy to persevere” (Gebara 1999:200).

Ruether proposes that we build strong faith based communities of “celebration and resistance” which use corporate liturgies to encourage this new consciousness (Ruether 1992:269). These communities will become the bases upon which to build political action that realizes this vision of ecojustice. She suggests that these communities need artists and poets to tell the story of the cosmos in such a way as to promote awe, wonder and the reverence of all life as artists create spiritualities which explore new ways of being. She advises that we need “healing therapies and spiritualities of inner growth” to let go of fears so as to open up to each other and the world around us to learn to just be without striving (Ruether 1992:269). Hope is created when people within communities direct their intelligence to act as caretakers of the earth. According to Ruether, an enlightened community affirms the mysterious origins of the cosmos and accepts an evolutionary process allowing nature its own intrinsic value and history.

McFague proposes a model of God as friend. She sees friendship as the most elemental bond, established through free choice and bearing hope (McFague 1989:166). Friendship is reciprocal and holds a hidden

responsibility to the other. Friends share common interests and visions and yet retain their individuality. True friendship exhibits adult characteristics in which each person faces up to their responsibilities and is not overly dependent but mutually interdependent. In the ecological context, becoming an adult means interrelating with other forms of life as well as sustaining oneself and others while taking responsibility for the earth. If God is friend, then God is committed to working towards the fulfillment of a sustainable ecological vision. In this model of God's relationship with the world McFague argues that we do not belong to ourselves and stresses our mutuality, commitment, trust, common vision and interdependence. This model of God provides hope as God is with us immanent in the world as our "friend and co-worker" and in the community of friends called the church who are committed to the vision of a healed and liberated world (McFague 1989:166).

In conclusion, hope is what sustains us when we fear and encourages us to believe in a future. Relationships and relationality are the sources of hope as a vision of equity begins with the righting of distorted relations. Relating to God offers a source of hope. Ecofeminist theologians propose new communities which will practice equity and justice while defining their own relationships to the land in a just and life sustaining way. Within communities of faith, liturgies of celebration and resistance will be created and built upon that will promote responsibility for the earth. Hope from within an ecofeminist spirituality is not based on an infantile expectation of everything going one's way but rather in the adult recognition of the interrelatedness and mystery of the God.

4.5 What Characterizes an Ecofeminist Spirituality?

An ecofeminist spirituality is characterized by a challenge to conventional Christian patriarchal understandings of God and faith. It seeks to reinvent and reconstruct new religious understandings and concepts. It proposes a theology that supports a life affirming spirituality which while it embraces critique seeks to be inclusive of the whole earth community. Within a faith community it works to create and design liturgies of resistance and celebration.

This spirituality centers on relationships and promotes ways of relating which awaken compassion for others while at the same time holding the other accountable. It is open to change and is willing to embrace new ways of knowing such as through either experience or intuition.

An ecofeminist spirituality recognizes the apocalyptic nature of our ecological crisis and its impact on people's daily lives especially the poor. It promotes biodiversity to bring balance and self limitation to the

impact on our natural resources. It creates awareness around the importance of having rules and boundaries to be upheld by members of the earth so as to keep it in good repair for future generations.

It calls for a conversion experience in order for transformation to begin. Transformation embraces change and is motivated by a future ecological vision for humanity. This conversion needs to be experienced both personally and corporately and calls for the sacrifice of one's desires for more luxuries and leisure.

4.6 Conclusion

The chapter began with the premise that ecofeminism is protest and was followed by an introduction to ecofeminist theology through three ecofeminist theologians: Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara and Sally McFague. Some ideas contributed by these ecofeminist theologians were explored in the context of the themes defined as: Integration and Bodiliness; Experience and Story Telling; Transformation and Justice; and Hope. These themes which outline an ecofeminist spirituality express transformation through a conversion experience.

The next chapter presents the Keiskamma Art Project and the Keiskamma Altarpiece as a case study for this research.

Chapter Five: The Keiskamma Art Project

5.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the Keiskamma Art Project as the focus of the case study of this research. It describes why the Keiskamma Art project was selected, its history and its current work.

It explores the context of the research by surveying the geographic location of the Keiskamma Art Project and the historical factors of disadvantage which affect the lives of the Keiskamma Art Project members. These factors are apartheid, poverty, rural locality, poor education, gender and HIV/AIDS.

A history of the art of the Keiskamma Art Project is briefly described with particular focus on the Keiskamma Altarpiece which is described in detail followed by a reflection on the project.

5.2 Selection of the Keiskamma Art Project

The Keiskamma Art Project was selected as the focus of this study because of my personal exposure to its early major art works which I viewed at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2010 and found both fascinating and beautiful. Regular exposure to their exhibitions stimulated my interest in the Project and its people. As a student of art, artist and Anglican priest who lives in Grahamstown, I made a regular effort to follow their art at the Grahamstown Festival and was especially delighted with the exhibition of the Keiskamma Altarpiece in the Cathedral of St George and St Michael. The cathedral is home to my experience of Church in Grahamstown as I am presently licensed to the Anglican Diocese of Grahamstown and serve as a self supporting chaplain at a girls' school.

5.3 The Context of the Keiskamma Project

The context of the research is described by locating it in its larger historical, social and economic contexts. This study begins by narrating the history of Hamburg, looking at the impact of apartheid and its legacy of poverty in the Eastern Cape, describing the rural location of Hamburg which contributes to its

economic disadvantage and educational limitations which have impacted heavily on women, describing the role of gender in rural Xhosa communities and explaining the HIV/AIDS situation in South Africa with particular reference to Hamburg.

5.3.1 The History of Hamburg

The village of Hamburg and its neighbouring villages of Ntilini, Bodium and Bell are found in the Eastern Cape Province near the coast between Port Alfred and East London. “Hamburg is reached via a nine mile gravel road off the R72 coastal freeway” (Schmahmann 2010:35). In the nineteenth century this area was involved in a confrontation between the Xhosa people moving south and the Boer and British moving north. The conflict arose over land for grazing cattle and Hamburg, along with the neighboring villages Bodium and Bell, was founded by the British government to protect the then frontier of the colony. “In 1857 and 1858 the British government sent soldiers from the German Foreign Legion to settle in the area. Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape Colony, persuaded 2362 of these legionaries to settle within or just outside British Kaffraria”, known as “the region between the Kei and Keiskamma Rivers and the Amatola Mountains” (Schmahmann 2010:35). Under the leadership of Captain Baron Johan de Fin approximately 100 men settled in Hamburg. These settlers found the conditions extremely harsh and many of them drifted into towns and others volunteered for service in India. Some stayed and are remembered by the elderly people in Hamburg to this day.”⁹ A second round of German immigration in 1859 resulted in only five immigrant families prepared to settle in Hamburg. Some remains of the original German houses and gravesites can still be seen.

“From the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1970's Hamburg grew into a popular white holiday resort and fishing mecca.”¹⁰ From the 1970's the South African Nationalist Government bought out nearly all the white-owned properties and gave them to the Ciskei government. Hamburg became part of this self-governing homeland established by the apartheid government in 1972. Over the years, Xhosa farmers moved into the area and took over the allotments left by the Germans and there are “some black families that have owned land for more than a hundred years.”¹¹ The Xhosa population was poor and many families depended on family members employed as migrant laborers. The agricultural production was

⁹ The Keiskamma Art Trust; www.keiskamma.org; accessed 08/08/2011.

¹⁰ The Keiskamma Art Trust www.keiskamma.org; accessed 08/08/2011.

¹¹ The Keiskamma Art Trust www.keiskamma.org; accessed 08/08/2011.

mostly at subsistence level and there were few businesses or industry. Its popularity as a white holiday resort waned which diminished the wealth of the village. In 1994, with the new South African democracy, the homelands were once again included into South Africa and Hamburg fell under the Eastern Cape Province.

5.3.2 Apartheid and its Legacy of Poverty Particularly in the Eastern Cape

Apartheid was a system of racial discrimination, institutionalized in 1948, whose race laws touched every aspect of life including economic life. It is purported that “strategists in the National Party invented apartheid as a means to cement their control over the economic and social system” of black South Africans.¹² Land ownership was limited to the small African reserves known as ‘homelands’ and according to statistics on the disproportionate treatment between whites and blacks taken in 1978, a white person’s earnings were 14 times higher than that of a black person, and whites owned 87% of the land as opposed to black ownership of 13%.¹³

South Africa’s apartheid imparted a strong and stubborn racial character to the country’s poverty level and distribution of income and wealth. In 2005/06 – more than a decade after democratization – the incidence of poverty among black and coloured individuals remained dramatically higher than among whites (Armstrong 2008:12).

Poverty in South Africa is well documented and confirmed by Statistics South Africa which claims that the experience of most South Africans is of outright poverty or continuing vulnerability to being poor as the distribution of income and wealth is one of the most uneven in the world (Armstrong 2008: 5). More recent findings on poverty, according to the International Labour Organization, state that “there are 77.7 million young unemployed people in the world” and “the global jobless rate for young people stands at 12.6%”. In South Africa the unemployment rate for youth “stands at 35.9%” and the figures are even

¹² *The History of Apartheid in South Africa*; <http://www-cs-students.stanford-edu/-cale/cs201/apartheid.hist.html>; accessed 20/04/2009.

¹³ *The History of Apartheid in South Africa*; <http://www-cs-students.stanford-edu/-cale/cs201/apartheid.hist.html>; accessed 20/04/2009.

higher for the Eastern Cape where “in 2011 more than 60% of youths between 15 and 19 years and more than 50% of youths between 20 and 24 years “were unemployed.”¹⁴

Poverty is defined as the inability to attain a minimal standard of living which is measured in terms of the “basic consumption needs” or “the income required to satisfy them”.¹⁵ Three poverty lines are used: an 'upper' poverty line, a 'lower' poverty line and an 'ultra-low' poverty line of which “the values were set in the year 2000” and increased each year in line with inflation.¹⁶ Two poverty lines have been proposed by Statistics South Africa which are the lower-bound poverty line which provides for essential food and non-food consumption and “amounts to R322 per capita per month in 2000 prices” and the upper-bound poverty line which includes “an additional R271 for non-essential non-food items” and amounts to “R593 per capita per month” (Armstrong 2008: 8). In 2010 the lower bound poverty line per person per month was R575 and the upper bound poverty line was R1060¹⁷. Poverty is concentrated among blacks where three children in five live in poor households and are often exposed to public and domestic violence, inconsistent parenting and schooling.”¹⁸

The poverty levels in the nine provinces of South Africa as well as the rural and urban areas differ considerably. In the survey done by Statistics South Africa, the three provinces with the highest poverty rates were KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and the Limpopo. At the time of the Income and Expenditure survey of households 2005 (IES2005), poorer provinces housed 60.1% of the poor. According to the Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council in 2010 the rate of unemployment in South Africa was 25.93% and for the Eastern Cape it was 42.82%, showing that the Eastern Cape remains a poor province in the country. Poverty is therefore a contributing factor to the legacy of disadvantage inherited by the people of Hamburg.

¹⁴ Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council; <http://www.ecsecc.org/news-article/42/37-unemployment-rate-among-youth-in-the-Eastern-Cape>; accessed 25/09/2012.

¹⁵ Poverty and Inequality in South Africa, Summary Report 13 May 1998.

¹⁶ “Statistics on Children in South Africa”, Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town; <http://www.childrencount.ci.org.za/indicator.php?id=2&indicator=14>; accessed 25/09/2012.

¹⁷ “Statistics on Children in South Africa”, Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town; <http://www.childrencount.ci.org.za/indicator.php?id=2&indicator=14>; accessed 25/09/2012.

¹⁸ Poverty and Inequality in South Africa, Summary Report 13 May 1998.

5.3.3 Rural Location

Living in an urban or rural area affects one's experience of poverty according to statistics documented in 2006. Armstrong argues that the incidence of poverty is much higher in the rural areas of South Africa where the poverty rates of households and individuals were recorded as 54.2% and 67.7% respectively, which is more than double the corresponding rates for urban areas at 21.9% and 32.7%¹⁹.

The people of Hamburg therefore rely heavily on their natural resources such as the Keiskamma River which runs alongside the village of Hamburg and plays a central role in the livelihood of the local people who use subsistence fishing to supplement their diets. There is little opportunity for income generating activities and most families depend on small scale farming. People rely on firewood for cooking and heat which results in the erosion of the indigenous forests. There is also a continual removal of oysters, cockles and abalone which denudes the coastline. Abalone poaching which promises quick cash rewards "is attractive to many despite serious risks of fines, imprisonment and drowning".²⁰ Attempts at business enterprises are limited by a lack of infrastructure and access to potential markets because of its rural position and as a result the majority of the villagers are unemployed and their main sources of income is perlemoen poaching or government grants. With the villagers relying heavily on the natural resources of the area, the pristine and beautiful environment surrounding this community is in a process of constant deterioration as resources are over used. Perlemoen poaching is illegal but may be all that families have to rely on for income as this rural life style in Hamburg tends to encourage petty crime and alcoholism.²¹

Schooling and educational opportunities are limited in Hamburg where the number of schools provided by the government is fewer than in urban areas and the quality of their education questionable. Poor educational opportunities continue to promote poverty especially among women. There is a strong correlation between the level of education and the standard of living achieved and according to the findings of the IES2005²², 'people with "low levels of educational attainment are more likely to be poor than well-educated ones. Poverty (as measured by the 'lower-bound poverty line) affected 66.3% of those who had no schooling and 59.9% of those who had not completed primary schooling" (Armstrong 2008:19) which demonstrates the importance of increasing educational opportunities to combat poverty

¹⁹ Recorded through the *Income and expenditure survey of households 2005/2006*; Armstrong 2008:8

²⁰ The Keiskamma Art Trust; www.keiskamma.org; accessed 08/08/2011.

²¹ The Keiskamma Art Trust; www.keiskamma.org; accessed 8 August 2011.

²² *Income and Expenditure survey of households 2005*; Armstrong 2008.

which is especially prevalent in rural villages where traditional culture predominates and gender has predetermined roles. In Xhosa culture women are expected to do all the domestic chores that pertain to the running of the home while men would be more likely to participate in public leadership roles in the community (Sewpaul 2008:44). This means that women's education is viewed as secondary to the needs of their labour in regards to domestic chores. They may well be expected to miss school in order to fulfill the expectations placed on them by their families.

5.3.4 Gender

Gender is a social construct which identifies the sexes in terms of power relations and influences the differences in poverty levels between men and women. Because social institutions such as the family, religion, culture and education discriminate against women and in many parts of the world, laws and traditions are biased in favor of patriarchal power structures, demonstrating that poverty is not gender neutral but determined by the influences of these structures. According to the IES2005 23 report, 45% of all female headed households in South Africa live below the "lower bound" poverty line, compared to only 25% of male headed-households (Armstrong 2008:13). This shows sadly that "female-headed households are greatly overrepresented among those below the "lower-bound" poverty line" (Armstrong 2008:13).

There is a gendered dimension to rural women's lives in Africa which is exacerbated by the influences of the patriarchal reinforcement of the West through institutions such as the church. In rural culture, women hold subordinate positions in relation to their husbands and their in-laws. Vishanthie Sewpaul's article "Transforming gendered relationships: Rural women in Africa" demonstrates that there is a distinction made between women's subsistence production and men's cash crop production as well as access to land labor and agricultural inputs which means that women's labor and time is undervalued even though rural women work longer hours than men (Sewpaul 2008).

Black rural women experience a triple jeopardy- they are discriminated against on account of their race, their gender and on account of their working class position. As a result of centuries of discrimination, black women in rural areas are often the poorest in the world with decreased access to markets, credit, land, health and education. While Africa suffers devastation from civil

²³ *Income and Expenditure survey of households 2005*; Armstrong 2008.

wars and conflicts, corruption, debt repayments, floods and droughts, deforestation, climate change and malaria, tuberculosis and HIV and AIDS, that affect both men and women, women are more vulnerable to absolute poverty and food insecurity than men (Sewpaul 2008:44).

Rural women in general do most of the domestic tasks in the home such as caring for the children, the sick and the elderly; they fetch and purify water, gather firewood and cook. They often do this alone and without a male partner. In a post-apartheid, post-colonial context in poor South African communities, alcohol and unemployment are rampant which puts increased strain on women's roles as they care for and feed their families with little power and resources. Female headed households, which are common in rural areas as men migrate to urban areas in search of employment, "tend to be poorer than male headed or two parent households with women being prone to food insecurity" (Khan 2000 quoted in Sewpaul 2008).

The 'feminization of poverty' means "that women suffer a greater incidence of income poverty than men". The term 'feminization of poverty' is associated with development theories (Chant 2007:4). At the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995, eradicating the 'persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women' was adopted as one of the twelve arms of the Beijing Platform for Action. This followed the result of research that has found that women are the majority of the world's poor and "their disproportionate share of poverty is rising relative to men's" (Chant 2007:1). Women experience a 'greater depth severity' of poverty than men which means that more women are likely to suffer extreme poverty than men. This feminization of poverty is found to be linked with the feminization of household headship and it is widely cited that women-headed households are the 'poorest of the poor'. Households with female heads and dependent children experience the "worst afflictions of poverty" as women face more barriers in lifting themselves out of poverty" and these impoverished households can transmit poverty to children (Chant 2007:2). According to the Asian Development Bank, "households headed by women are particularly vulnerable" as large numbers of women among the poor "pose serious constraints to human development because children raised in poor households are more likely to repeat cycles of poverty and disadvantage" (Asian Development Bank 2003:11). This is known as the 'inter generational transmission of disadvantage" which increases during global economic downturns that press heavily on women-headed households in the rural and urban areas, as well as in developing and industrial societies. Women are therefore more vulnerable to poverty than men and this is seen especially in the rural Eastern Cape Province where women face so many layers of structural oppression.

5.3.5 HIV/ AIDS

South Africa has the largest number of people living with HIV (Schmahmann 2010:34). Various circumstances have made South Africans more susceptible to the pandemic such as Thabo Mbeki's lack of leadership (1999-2008) as he and his health minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, questioned the link between AIDS and the HIV virus and consequently did not support the introduction of a government sponsored anti-retroviral medication. In response to this neglect the Treatment Action Campaign took the health ministry to court so as to make the drug Nevirapene available to prevent mother-to-child transmission and the "rollout programs were finally approved towards the end of 2003" (Schmahmann 2010:34).

In an effort to understand the reasons behind the high levels of HIV transmission amongst women in South Africa, Sewpaul proposes that "women might be left with little or no choices over reproduction and sexuality (e.g. inability to negotiate the use of a condom)" and are "often subject to partner or marital rape all of which render them vulnerable to HIV infection" (Sewpaul 2008:45). Curtailing the disease can therefore be enormously complicated as there are unequal power relations between men and women. Women may avoid disclosing their HIV-positive status for fear of being ostracized and suffering retribution from their partners and are frequently unable to insist on the use of a condom without facing the threat of domestic violence. "Amnesty International (2008) documents how rural black women who are HIV+ see themselves at the lowest end of all" (Sewpaul 2008:45). Therefore the impact of HIV infection on rural women and their households is enormous, complex socially and has social impact factors such as stigmatization and marginalization from others.

HIV/AIDS impacts on labor and food production and contributes to "lower labour supplies on farms and compromises food production" as women take on the role of carers for the sick within their families. It is also common for "terminally ill urban family members to return to the rural home to die" (Sewpaul 2008:45). HIV/AIDS is believed to have found its way to Hamburg through returning migrant laborers as migrant labour provided the social disruption to families that created the "classic conditions" for the spread of the disease (Schmahmann 2010:39). The stigma associated with the disease made disclosure rare and families in Hamburg were reluctant to recognize the death of their loved ones through AIDS related illness. People were ignorant of the cause of infection and described it as being bewitched. With the community's losing economically productive adult members of the household through HIV/AIDS the responsibility of raising a family often returns to the grandmothers.

In response to this situation in Hamburg, Carol Hofmeyer, who trained as a medical doctor began working in rural clinics in 2002. She met and collaborated with Eunice Mangwane known as “Mama AIDS” in Hamburg and its surrounds. She is a widow and AIDS counselor with family members who suffer with HIV/AIDS. In 2004, before the government retro-virals were available, Hofmeyer sourced them privately in an effort to distribute them to those in most need. In 2005, Hofmeyer set about finding a locale for a hospice which met with opposition but was eventually founded in the centre of town and is known as the *Umtha Welanga* (“Rays of Sun”) Treatment Centre. The anti-retrovirals only became available to Hamburg in 2005.

5.3.6 Summary

This section described the factors of disadvantage that the members of the Keiskamma Art Project inherited with the impact of apartheid and its legacy of poverty, its rural location and the economic disadvantage and educational limitations which its location imposed, the role of gender in rural Xhosa communities and the HIV/AIDS situation.

These factors contributed to the overall impoverishment of Hamburg and the Keiskamma Art Project, an arts initiative with an interest in HIV/AIDS education, was initiated to empower women in the hopes of creating an income generating activity.

5.4 An Introduction to and History of the Keiskamma Art Project

Rika Allen describes the Keiskamma Art Project as a community initiative that used art to implement its activist strategy by allowing people affected by HIV/AIDS to participate in and tell their own stories. She goes on to describe the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* in particular as a tool of communication which “symbolizes the communities struggle with poverty and the effects of HIV/AIDS on their members” (Allen 2009:412).

In the context of the worsening crisis around HIV/AIDS and its potential threat to development, a number of initiatives were launched to “harness the visual arts as a mechanism for negotiating the impact of the disease” an example of which is the Keiskamma Art Project (Schmahmann 2010:35). The Keiskamma

Art Project (KAP) was initiated by Dr Carol Hofmeyer (nee Baker). After settling in Hamburg, she was “struck by the scope of poverty in the region and the plight of women who found themselves unable to support their children” and recognized the potential for an art initiative as a tool to foster hope, health and self respect amongst local people with the purpose of generating regular income for the local community (Schmahmann 2010:35). Hofmeyer was influenced by the Paper Prayers project, where she had been a trainer prior to settling in Hamburg. It was organized by the Art Proof Studio in Johannesburg where embroidery was used to engage with the topic of HIV and she undoubtedly thought to use this model to promote AIDS awareness. She chose to implement its intentions through the Project for “participants to visualize their newly acquired understanding of the disease” and to “articulate anxieties about the disease that they felt unable to express in everyday discourse” (Schmahmann 2010:39). It was out of a background of fine art and activism that the Keiskamma Art Project was initiated.

Hofmeyer began by teaching local women to crochet plastic bags into hats and placemats but soon realized that these items had limited marketable potential and decided to try needlework instead. Jan Chalmers and Jacky Jezewski, who were friends of Hofmeyer, assisted her in helping to get the Art Project up and running through the introduction of embroidery techniques to approximately thirty women.”²⁴ Hofmeyer recognized that there was a history of needlework in the region in which an appliqué technique with beading, buttons and material on leather was “common among isiXhosa speakers” and is documented from the arrival of the first Europeans. This gave the medium of embroidery a feeling of “historical relevance” (Schmahmann 2010: 37). In the search for a greater historical and cultural connection for the project Hofmeyer consulted local historian Des Kopke who identified cattle as a motif to be explored. The cattle killings of the isiXhosa, prompted by the prophetess Nongqawuse’s vision, which had happened around the time of the establishment of Hamburg, interested Hofmeyer and gave the project its early impetus which was seen in the individual embroideries of cattle and one of the first group artworks, the *Keiskamma Tapestry*.

When the Project first began in 2000, the participants questioned its sustainability and saw it as “short-term jobbing” (Schmahmann 2010: 37). The term ‘jobbing’ is a local term which refers to temporary work. Despite the skepticism around its sustainability, the Project currently has about 130 members from Hamburg and the neighbouring villages of Bodium and Ntilini. It employs approximately twelve people in management positions who receive a monthly salary and others receive a salary when working in groups on a large scale project or from commissions in the studios which are situated in Hamburg,

²⁴ The Creation Altarpiece Exhibition 2007.

Bodium and Ntlini. This means that women can work at home on small items while taking care of their domestic chores and can embroider at night when their families have been taken care of.

As the project progressed it focused primarily on the collective production of large works and the participants were encouraged to contribute their “input in the development of subject matter and designs.”²⁵ The project works with the history and stories of people and its intention was “to make embroidered works with meaning for these women.”²⁶ Later, artists emerged through the Project and this forum offered them the opportunity to communicate their art to the rest of South Africa and the world. The Project sponsored four people, two men and two women, the opportunity to have formal art training through a three-year diploma in Fine Art at Walter Sisulu University of Technology in East London. The women, Nokupiwa Gedze and Nomfusi Nkani and the men, Cebo Mvubu and Kwanele Ganto all graduated in 2006 and now couple their work with management duties and drawing.

The Keiskamma Art Project falls under the umbrella of the Keiskamma Trust, founded by Hofmeyer in 2001, which began as an NGO (non-governmental organization) and involved about fifty members of the local Xhosa community. The Trust has a board of trustees and a management team that oversees three areas of focus: arts and culture, early childhood and youth development, and health and livelihood development. Today, the Keiskamma Trust seeks to promote “health and hope through art, music, HIV/AIDS treatment, poverty alleviation projects and education initiatives.”²⁷ It incorporates the Keiskamma Art Project, the Keiskamma Aids Treatment Program and the *Umtha Welang* HIV and AIDS Treatment Centre, the Keiskamma Gardening Project, the Keiskamma Heritage Initiative and other social development programs in which local children are enriched through environmental education, bird watching, music, *capoeira* (a Brazilian fighting style), techniques of growing vegetables, museum and cultural visits and a bursary fund. All these different subsidiaries have contributed to the overall well being of the community.

The main studio and shop is situated on property acquired for the project which overlooks the mouth of the Keiskamma River and provides a space for the production of commissioned and large scale works, a venue for workshops and talks which include weekly support groups for those living with HIV and a place of work for the many members of the project who arrive daily to embroider. The shop sells embroidered cushion covers, bags, beadwork items and greeting cards. The beadwork items come from

²⁵ The Creation Altarpiece Exhibition 2007.

²⁶ The Creation Altarpiece Exhibition 2007.

²⁷ The Keiskamma Art Trust; www.keiskamma.org; accessed 12/08/ 2011.

the beadwork group headed by Caroline Nyongo in Ntlini and the greeting cards in linocut from the second studio in Hamburg which Mvubu and Ganto manage. It also markets these products through different retailers who specialize in arts and crafts in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town as well as smaller locations that specialize in tourism. The Keiskamma Art Project provided rich research material for a case study.

5.5 A Focus on the Keiskamma Altarpiece

The history of the Keiskamma Art Project's exhibitions documents the vast amount of work produced and which was successfully received by the broader public between 2002 and 2011. The first tapestry created by the Keiskamma Art Project was the *Keiskamma Tapestry* which was completed in 2003 after having been given funding from the National Department of Arts and Culture. (See Appendix 3 for the full list of Keiskamma Art Project's exhibitions.) The *Keiskamma Altarpiece* followed on from the *Keiskamma Tapestry* and was the second of their large group art exhibitions created in 2005. It was an ambitious project which came out of a very productive time for the Project and explores the idea of using embroidery to facilitate HIV/AIDS education as well as "creating an arena in which women might articulate their anxieties about the disease that they felt unable to express in everyday discourse" (Schmahmann 2010:40). Because the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* is an 'altarpiece', an object that facilitates the spiritual journeying of worshippers, it created a spiritual climate for those who viewed it which was further enhanced with its exhibition in the Grahamstown Cathedral and other churches or cathedrals which follow a tradition of liturgical worship. The *Keiskamma Altarpiece* was used as an aid for contemplation and reflection in a service in the Grahamstown Cathedral that I attended. The combination of its focus on the education around HIV/AIDS, its use as a tool of activism, its direct spiritual links as an altarpiece, the art process and skills training that were undertaken, its articulation of the experiences and hopes of the community for a better future and its remarkable beauty made it an object of interest in this case study which now seeks to identify, explore and define the spirituality that emerges through it.

The *Keiskamma Altarpiece* offers a "message of hope" for people who are contending with the devastation that HIV/AIDS has wrought in their lives "in the midst of poverty and other hardships."²⁸ It celebrates the strength of the grandmothers who bear the responsibility for the orphaned children and uses images that are applicable to Hamburg and the surrounding villages.

²⁸ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

The Altarpiece is a triptych of hinged panels which stands 4.15 x 6.8 meters (13.6 x 22.3 feet) and was created by about 130 people, mostly women, in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in their community. It is composed of materials from embroidery, beadwork, and wirework to photographs. The artwork took seven months to finish and was completed in 2005. It opens up to reveal different scenes attached to the sides of the panels which depict “the annunciation, crucifixion, resurrection, and other events from the New Testament from the point-of-view of the Keiskamma Region.”²⁹

The Altarpiece’s shape and dimensions “replicates those of the multi-paneled format of the famed *Isenheim Altarpiece*”, now part of the Musee d’Unterlinden in Colmar, France where it was commissioned for the high altar of the church of the Monastery of St Anthony in the sixteenth century in Isenheim.³⁰ Hofmeyer, who saw the *Isenheim Altarpiece* during a trip to Europe in November 2004, used it as a source of inspiration in which one could substitute the struggle with ergotism to the struggle of HIV/AIDS. The *Isenheim Altarpiece* appears to have had “a special function in addressing the needs of the ill” and comprises of two sets of folding wings and three different views (Schmahmann 2010:42). It is 6.5 meters wide open and 4.2 meters high and is displayed in Colmar in Alsace Lorraine. It was unfortunately disassembled during the French Revolution when it was moved from Isenheim to Colmar and some of its ornate framework was destroyed. All the paintings on the altarpiece were created by Matthias Grünewald except for the inner section which originally incorporated sculptures by Nikolaus Hagenauer. It was painted for a hospice in Germany to give hope to terminally ill patients suffering with ergot poisoning. Ergot poisoning was caused by a simple grain fungus but at the time no one was able to identify the causes of this poisoning which was commonly known as Saint Anthony’s fire. This mysterious disease caused much panic, fear and death throughout Europe just as HIV/AIDS is doing for contemporary South African society. Grünewald’s work shows the image of the crucified Christ covered with the stigmata of ergotism. There are a number of panels depicting the annunciation, nativity and resurrection which include statues of saints with healing power. The images emphasize “affliction” and it “seems to conveyed a message to sufferers of ergotism that enduring pain and misery brings one closer to God” (Schmahmann 2010:42).

²⁹ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

³⁰ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

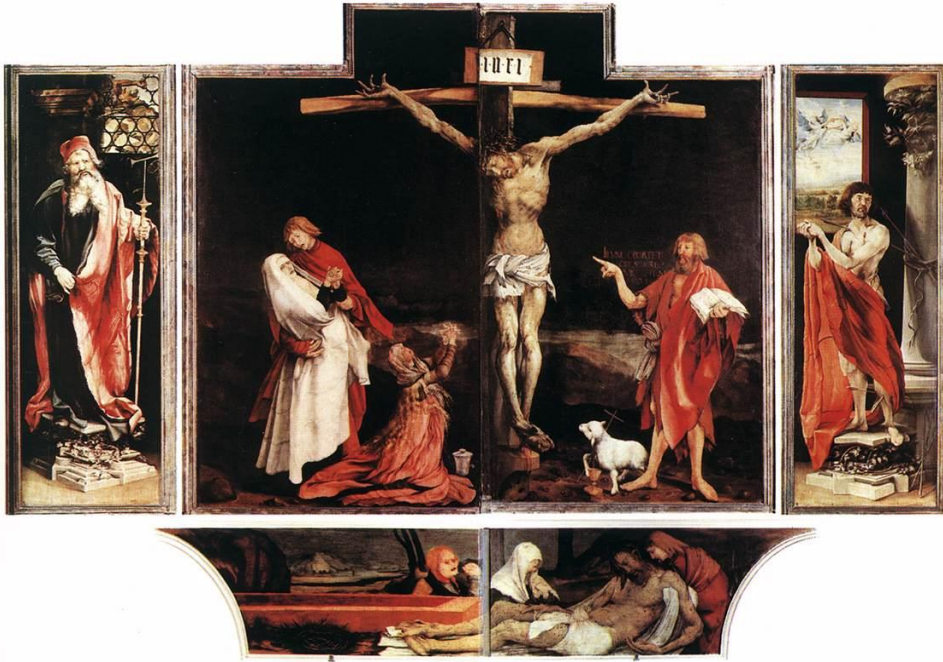


Fig 5.5.1 Isenheim Altarpiece (1512-1516, the closed altarpiece.)

Matthais Grunewald (b. 1475-1480, d 1528)

Oil on wood; center panel: 298cm x 326cm; each side wing : 250cm x 93cm; predella : 75cm x 340cm.

Originally on the high altar of the church of the monastery of St Anthony in Isenheim.

Collection of the Musee d'Unterlinden, Colmar. Inv. 88.RP.139

PHOTO: ©MUSEE D'UNTERLINDEN, COLMAR.



5.5.2 Isenheim Altarpiece (1512-1516, Reconstruction of the first opening of the altarpiece.)

Matthais Grunewald (b. 1475-1480, d 1528)

Oil on wood; center panel: 298cm x 326cm; each side wing : 250cm x 93cm; predella : 75cm x 340cm.

Originally on the high altar of the church of the monastery of St Anthony in Isenheim.

Collection of the Musee d'Unterlinden, Colmar. Inv. 88.RP.139

PHOTO: ©MUSEE D'UNTERLINDEN, COLMAR.



5.5.3 Isenheim Altarpiece (1512-1516, Reconstruction of the second opening of the altarpiece, revealing center shrine by Nikolaus Hagenauer.)

Matthais Grunewald (b. 1475-1480, d 1528)

Oil on wood; center panel: 298cm x 326cm; each side wing : 250cm x 93cm; predella : 75cm x 340cm.

Originally on the high altar of the church of the monastery of St Anthony in Isenheim.

Collection of the Musee d'Unterlinden, Colmar. Inv. 88.RP.139

PHOTO: ©MUSEE D'UNTERLINDEN, COLMAR.

As a result, the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* and the *Isenheim Altarpiece* embody similar themes as they were both "created in the face of a terrifying plague wreaking havoc on their communities."³¹ The *Isenheim Altarpiece* was designed to comfort the diseased by revealing to them the possibility of an afterlife that would be free of suffering thanks to the sacrifice of Christ while the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* speaks to those both infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and offers redemption in this life as well as the life to come and is described as offering "solace, strength and inspiration"³². All three of the panels are each designed to present a different message of hope and comfort.

It is difficult to document exactly how the imagery for the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* was established. Brown (2006) suggests that Hofmeyer showed the group of women who were going to undertake the project a large number of reproductions of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* which was followed by a number of open-ended discussions that broadly explored how to adapt the images from the *Isenheim Altarpiece* to suit their context. Nozetti Makubalo "made a preliminary set of drawings based on these images and discussions reached by the group" and thereafter the four members who were training in art in East London spent their summer holidays "translating the design onto panel cloths" (Schmahmann 2010:42). The cloths were sent to embroiderers who worked in groups of ten and assembled all the needlework once a week to check that styles and colours were in harmony with one another. Photographs of local people were used as source material for imagery. Local member of the Keiskamma Art Project Nokupiwa Gedze said that Hofmeyer had described what she first imagined and suggested ideas of people that could be included asking for ideas from the group so that everyone had the chance to contribute. It appears that Hofmeyer directed the process asking for contributions and when consensus was reached and she had some idea of content she gathered photographs of local people for the work and presented them to the design and management team. Then Nozetti Makubalo is said to have drawn up a general schema and the other designers translated these onto cloth panels and added detail and motifs to areas where no content had been stipulated. Makubalo and the production team then showed the embroidery groups the overall design and focused specifically on the area that the group was going to embroider providing reference photographs when needed.

The work uses various media and techniques such as stumpwork³³ and appliqué which was taught to the embroiderers by Chalmers and Jezewski and which "resulted in an altarpiece with richly textured

³¹ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

³² Kota(newspaper article); written 11/05/2005.

³³ A form of raised embroidery.

surfaces” (Schmahmann 2010:44). Each layer of the altarpiece is thick with “embroidery, appliqué, and beadwork, with the last layer a combination of sculptural wire beadwork and photographs”.³⁴

In the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, the sculptures by Hagenauer were a dramatic contrast to the paintings of Grunewald and in the same way the photographs by Tanya Jordaan³⁵, which are found in the centre of the second opening of the *Keiskamma Altarpiece*, are an interesting contrast to the embroidery, beadwork and appliqué. The beadwork, undertaken by the group headed by Caroline Nyongo, approximated the limewood lattice work of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*. The frame of the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* was made by Justus Hofmeyer, the husband of Carol Hofmeyer.

The first panel in the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* (see fig.5.5.4) is a reflection on suffering of the Hamburg community and in particular the women and children. It is inspired by the original *Isenheim Altarpiece* in which the first panel depicts a scene of suffering through the crucifixion of Christ. In the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* the design and image choices have been contextualized to depict “local Xhosa imagery” of men, women and children from Hamburg and the surrounding region.³⁶ The images of Christ and his disciples are replaced by a widow, who had lost her husband to AIDS, with a cross, the symbolic image of faith, behind her surrounded by orphaned children who had lost their parents to AIDS. The central figure was based on the photograph of a woman in the village of Bell who was in mourning for her husband. The identity of the woman is not known by the Project members but she serves as a symbol of all the women in the region and across Africa that have lost spouses, children, grandchildren and friends to AIDS. This story tells the women’s own experience of a journey through crucifixion and resurrection drawn from their experience with the HIV/AIDS pandemic.³⁷ Hofmeyer, speaking for the group, said that they wanted to show that suffering today is the same as it has always been and that an understanding of the meaning of the crucifixion can bring hope to those who suffer.³⁸

On the two outside panels are two old women considered stalwarts of the community who have endured much suffering over the years. The elderly Leginah Mapuma, on the left, is a widow whose late husband worked on the mines. She is wearing the formal dress of the Anglican Church which is a testimony to her faith. The red of her blouse “reminds one of the colour of an AIDS ribbon” (Schmahmann 2010:45).

³⁴ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

³⁵ A graduate student of the University of Cape Town who was assisting the KAP.

³⁶ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

³⁷ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.keiskamma.org; accessed 12/09/2011.

³⁸ Kota; (newspaper article); written 11 May 2005.

Susan Paliso, on the right, was the mother to a son named Dumile who died of an AIDS-related illness in 2002 and has now taken on the care of her grandson. They are in the place of the saints, St Sebastian and St Anthony, depicted on the left and right of the original *Isenheim Altarpiece*. St Anthony founded the Antonite order in the twelfth century to care for those with ergotism and St Sebastian was associated with protection against the plague and the “repelling and warding off” of general bodily harm (Schmahmann 2010: 45). Susan Paliso’s son’s funeral is depicted in the very bottom panel known as the predella which remains visible when the altarpiece is opened. It also depicts the hospital ward where Dumile spent his last days. In the *Isenheim Altarpiece* there is an emphasis on wounded and ruptured skin to show how the body was ravaged by the disease and this is also seen in the left-hand section of the predella where the body of an AIDS sufferer is “overlaid with pustules” (Schmahmann 2010:47).

The second panel (see fig.5.5.5) offers ideas of “hope, redemption and restoration” through images of the natural environment, the church and familiar cultural practices.”³⁹ This panel is vibrantly coloured with images such as trees, birds, fish, cattle, spiritual worship and traditional village life. Included in the images is a large figure of a local Xhosa prophet Gabba who wears a red skirt and “runs in the sand to make decorative prayer patterns with his feet.”⁴⁰ This panel depicts an idealized vision of a future resurrected Hamburg.

In the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, the first opening shows scenes of the “Annunciation” with Mary bathing Jesus to the accompaniment of an angelic choir and the resurrection (Downs 2005). This section of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* incorporates imagery of the magical, miraculous and revelatory used to combat evil spirits. This scene suggests that Jesus was destined to overcome this world and offer others this hope too. The women of Hamburg create this hope through envisioning a new way of being in their present environment. They do not describe escaping from their present reality but look for images of hope in local features such as the natural resources, the beauty of the environment, their community, their spiritual practices and colorful characters from the community such as the eccentric Vuyisile Funda known as Gabba the well known prophet and holy man. Gabba runs along the dunes on the beachfront each morning and makes patterns in the sand with his feet which he describes as a daily response to God. On the left-hand side are women wearing formal church uniforms and a church is also depicted. Below this people are gathered in customary dress for the ceremonial slaughtering of a bull. The inclusion of both conceptions of faith is important as local people rely on the practice of both for their sense of well-being. In the far left panel is a large leafy tree in Hamburg which provides shelter to birds, humans and cattle

³⁹ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

⁴⁰ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

which signifies continuity. The panel on the far right includes a spiral of animals, flora and fauna which appears to be charged with supernatural energy and substitutes Grunewald's representation of the incarnation and departure from human life with reference to an ongoing cycle of life.

In the second opening of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* are the sculptures of St Anthony and the fathers of the church St Augustine and St Jerome by Niccolao Paganino, the originals of which were lost during the French revolution (de la Croix 1980:606). In the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* the statues have been replaced by photographs. In the *Isenheim Altarpiece* the images depict the scene of "the temptation of Saint Anthony" and the "meeting of Saint Anthony with the Hermit Paul" suggesting the hope of salvation through the sacrifice of Christ should earthly cures fail. The second opening of the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* (fig.5.5.6) is displayed in a mixed media format which includes life-sized digital photographs printed on canvas of three local grandmothers and their grandchildren taken by photographer Tanya Jordaan. Some of the children have been orphaned by AIDS. In the left position, Susan Paliso appears with her arm around eight year old Lihle. In the center is AIDS counselor Eunice Mangwane depicted with nine year old Akona and three year old twins Lithemba and Thabo. On the right is Caroline Nyongo who appears with two year old Nomaxabiso, three year old Siphamandla, four year old Siphosetsu and seven year old Aziwe. These photographs convey a sense of the weighty influence of the grandmothers in the lives of their grandchildren and the community as a whole. They imply that the vitality of the community is nurtured through their concern. The photographs are framed in beadwork and the panel's theme is "the wisdom of the old and the hope for the new generation."⁴¹ "This beadwork was planned and made by Ardwork Jange from the Cape Town organization known as Streetwise, along with local Ntilini women."⁴² Besides the photographs the panel also includes large images of the beauty of the Keiskamma River which is regarded as a source of new life.⁴³ Above the photographs is *umnga*, a green tree which leaks golden liquid. "The shiny beads and wire are used to suggest angels" and surround the communities "saints with a celestial blessing."⁴⁴

⁴¹ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

⁴² The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

⁴³ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.

⁴⁴ The Keiskamma Altarpiece; www.saintjamescathedral.org; accessed 18/06/2008.



Fig. 5.5.4 *Keiskamma Altarpiece* (2005, The Closed Altarpiece.)⁴⁵

Keiskamma Art Project

Mixed Media: center panel: 298cm x 326cm; each side wing: 250cm x 93cm; Predella: 75cm x 340cm.

Photographer: Robert Hofmeyer

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE KEISKAMMA ART PROJECT

⁴⁵ www.keiskamma.org/index; accessed 18/06/2008.



Fig. 5.5.5 *Keiskamma Altarpiece* (2005, Detail of the first opening of the altarpiece.)⁴⁶

Keiskamma Art Project

Photographer: Robert Hofmeyer

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE KEISKAMMA ART PROJECT

⁴⁶ www.keiskamma.org/index; accessed 18/06/2008.



Fig. 5.5.6 *Keiskamma Altarpiece* (2005, Detail of the second opening of the altarpiece.)⁴⁷

Keiskamma Art Project

Photographer: Robert Hofmeyer

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE KEISKAMMA ART PROJECT

⁴⁷ www.keiskamma.org/index; accessed 18/06/2008.

5.6 Reflection on the Keiskamma Art Project

When reflecting on the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* and other artworks created by the Keiskamma Art Project one observes that many of them make reference to European works which are many centuries old. The ideas behind these European works have been contextualized so as to engage directly with complex contemporary issues in South Africa. The process used to introduce these European artworks was one of collaboration in which the original European images were presented and the community artists and embroiderers engaged in lengthy open-ended discussions to decide what the original images would mean for them today.

The process of creating art opened up a forum for discussion and learning in which new ideas were suggested and some adopted. The group appears to create a safe space for expressing, learning and implementing ideas. The artworks are valued not just for their beauty or interpretation of European ideas but for the process they guided in giving the women a safe space to express themselves. It facilitated a forum for the sharing of ideas and a place to reflect on the process.

Jewish Renewal artist Elizheva Hurvich, a quilter and fabric artist, who is currently the principal of the Hebrew school of Kehilla Community Synagogue in Piedmont in California, states that quilts are a kind of “women’s constitution” which is a repository for women’s wisdom and community. She describes quilting as very feminist act and values its repetitive and modular form (Weissler 2007). One can argue that the embroideries created by the Keiskamma Art Project such as the *Keiskamma Altarpiece* are repositories of women’s wisdom, their voices, their stories and a documentation of their history.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter described the context of the Keiskamma Art Project and its members. The Keiskamma Art Project has lasted over a decade and the outpouring of creative work has been prolific. It has earned respect from the South African art community and its members have worked consistently to produce artworks both large and small. Their success, both financially and creatively, has done much to bolster the economy and self-esteem of Hamburg and the surrounding community. The *Keiskamma Altarpiece* is one example of their many exhibitions which demonstrates the process used to create an artwork of that size. It demanded the knowledge of many new skills and pushed the women to explore their creative limits.

The Keiskamma Altarpiece toured South Africa in 2005 to 2006 and was also part of an international exhibition in Canada in 2008.

The next chapter describes and outlines the methodology used for the design of the research.

Chapter Six: Research Methodology

6.1 Introduction

The study begins with an introduction to the theoretical framework which supports the case study of the Keiskamma Art Project and the Keiskamma Altarpiece. The research question and its sub-questions probe the results of the theory building, the interviews and knowledge gained through association with the organization, an analysis of the research findings and a review of the research.

6.2 Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen as it offers a “common sense perspective” which recognizes that it will be difficult to know in advance “what the variables are, which ones are important, or how to measure them” and engages in “kinds of open-ended, inductive exploration” (Terre Blanche 2006: 272). Qualitative research cuts across all the disciplines and accepts multiple sources of influence including the arts and the humanities and even suggests that there is much in the way a critic “writes about a work of art that can be used by qualitative researchers” (Willis 2007:191).

The research design “articulates a rationale for the choices one has made” and requires a research question to emerge from a theoretical domain (Schwartz-Shea 2012:2, 9). The design of this research is undertaken from an interpretive perspective which involves “taking people’s subjective experiences seriously as the essence of what is real for them, making sense of peoples’ experiences by interacting with them and listening carefully to what they tell us and making use of qualitative research techniques to collect and analyze information” (Terre Blanche 2006: 274). Interpretive research puzzles draw on areas of knowledge that the researcher will not always be able to anticipate and for this reason the conduct of the research is “dynamic” and “flexible” which is echoed in the research design which for all its planning “must remain open” (Schwartz-Shea and Yarrow 2012:34). An interpretive approach involves two key principles namely “understanding in context” and positions the researcher as the “primary instrument” by means of which information is collected and analyzed (Terre Blanche 2006: 274). Understanding in context means that subjectivity is not the enemy of the truth but what makes it possible to understand

social realities empathetically. This interpretive research design plans for “concept development” to take place during fieldwork and not before it (Schwartz-Shea 2012:50).

Interpretivists “focus on meaning” and see it as a “component in the construction and understanding of social reality” (Wilkinson 2010:962). They do not deny the existence of an external reality but what they have difficulty with is the notion “that it is an independently knowable reality” (Willis 2007:96). Interpretivists do not accept the postpositivism approach which argues that “the scientific method is a way of objectively learning about the world” and instead they argue that all research is “influenced and shaped by preexisting theories and world views of the researchers” and that research is a socially constructed activity and the reality it describes is also socially constructed (Willis 2007:96). This approach rests on a belief in the existence of multiple constructed “truths” about social, political, cultural and other human events which can only be “accessed , or co-generated, through interactions between researcher and researched as they seek to interpret those events and make those interpretations legible to each other” (Schwartz-Shea 2012:4). Interpretive researchers believe that participants in the research possess local knowledge which is valuable (Schwartz-Shea 2012:50).

The research undertaken on the Keiskamma Art Project is qualitative feminist research which seeks to gain new knowledge directly from the Project. A case study into the Keiskamma Art Project is both a “process of inquiry and a product of that inquiry” which concentrates on “experiential knowledge of the case” and plays close attention to “the influence of its social, political and other contexts” (Denzin 2005: 444). Case studies “include multiple sources of data including observations, structured or non-structured interviews, analyses of documents, historical data and quantitative data” (Willis 2007:241). Qualitative research uses three common data generating methods: observing, talking to people and the close “reading” of “research-relevant materials” (Schwartz-Shea 2012:5). It facilitates the conveying of experience and does so through “narratives, situational descriptions of the case activity, personal relationship, and group interpretation” (Denzin 2005:454). It theorizes on the basis of knowledge and makes clear its “connections to specific human beings in specific, historically and culturally understood settings” (Schwartz-Shea 2012:47).

6.3 Research Questions

The key research question of this study is; “How can the Keiskamma Art Project, its processes and art, be understood in relation to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality?” A number of sub-questions emerged which relate to the theory, context, interviews and the art:

- How does the identification of themes in ecofeminist spirituality support the theory of an emerging contextual ecofeminist spirituality?
- How does the theory interweave in the process and emergence of an ecofeminist spirituality?
- How do the womens’ narratives about the process of creating and marketing the product contribute to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality?
- How do the images and metaphors within the Keiskamma Altarpiece describe a contextual ecofeminist spirituality?

6.4 Literature Review

The literature review section of the research design formulates a theoretical framework which explores a number of topics such as art as an expression of spirituality and understandings of beauty. Christian feminist theology deconstructs and challenges patriarchal and traditional Christian theology while art is explored as an expression of protest, a vehicle of transformation and a site of activism to challenge HIV/AIDS stigmatization while offering a safe social site for transformation and change. The literature review is significant in the “formulation and discussion of the research question” and frames “the domain of the research project” (Schwartz-Shea 2012:35). Some form of hypothesizing and conceptions are central to scholarly endeavours from an interpretivist approach (Schwartz-Shea 2012:46).

6.5 Data Collection

Qualitative studies offer a variety of methods that could be used in the study and allows for the adoption of a mixed method approach. Data collection is the process involved in gathering material and creating texts that form “the information base of qualitative study” (Terre Blanche 2006:286). “A text is any record of life held over after the moment of its production for later comprehension and interpretation” (Terre Blanche 2006:286). The process of data collection for the case study of the Keiskamma Art Project involved personally viewing a number of major exhibitions of works of the Keiskamma Art Project from 2003 until 2011 at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival, understanding the background and beginnings of the Project, informal discussions with people familiar with the Project, semi-structured interviews begun in March 2008 and finally completed in August 2011, at least three trips to Hamburg and more informal semi-structured interviews with artists and crafters from the Keiskamma Art Project in Grahamstown during the National Arts festival. The interviews were undertaken in a conversational manner and interviewee’s responses and narratives documented. The responses to the researcher from the interviewees were transcribed by the researcher in writing.

6.6 Participants

The current ethical approach in regards to participants is to adopt an open approach and inform them about the purpose of your research understanding that regardless of whether you tell them or not, the “act of coming in to the environment” influences it in some way (Willis 2007:209). To this end an informed consent form was drafted which explained the purpose of the research and the participants of the research signed it.

Questions that related to the key research question of this study were drafted and conducted in an interview scenario with members of the Keiskamma Art Project. Although the interviews were planned as a series of questions much like a questionnaire, in practice they became much less formal as interviewees deviated from the questions as they chose to elaborate. The interviews were posed to members of the Keiskamma Art Project, all of which were female with the exception of one young male. They varied greatly in level of education, language ability and age. The women ranged from teenagers to grandmothers, and differed in marital status and in stages of life. The majority of the study participants were married with children and extended family members for whom they were responsible and many of

the elderly women were the providers for their grandchildren. Some younger women were not married and some were childless but the majority had grown up in Hamburg and had known no other way of life. Some of the Art Project members were artists who had been trained by the Keiskamma Trust in East London at the Walter Sisulu University of Technology.⁴⁸ The majority of the Keiskamma Art Project members were women with no formal art training other than through their apprenticeship to the Keiskamma Art Project where they specialized in embroidering, beadwork or felting⁴⁹. In total, twenty-two interviews were conducted in English which varied in length from five minutes to forty minutes. The interviews were conducted in Hamburg in the various buildings which make up the Keiskamma Trust and others were conducted at the Grahamstown Festival on the Village Green where members of the Art Project were selling their embroidery work. (See Appendix 1 for questionnaires and Appendix 2 for the full list of those interviewed and dates of the interviews).

6.6.1 Data Analysis of the Case Study

“The key to doing a good interpretive analysis is to stay close to the data” and to interpret it from “a position of empathic understanding” (Terre Blanche 2006:321). The research should be perceived as holistic and within “the larger context in which it resides” (Willis 2007:211). The purpose of interpretive analysis is “to provide ‘thick description’ of the characteristics, processes, transactions, and contexts that constitute the phenomena being studied” as well as “an account of the researcher’s role in constructing this description” (Terre Blanche 2006:321). The purpose of the analysis of the case study is ‘to place real-life events and phenomena into some kind of perspective’ (Terre Blanche 2006:321).

The complexity of the Hamburg context was kept in mind as the data collected from the interviews was analyzed through the various steps of interpretive data analysis which are ‘familiarization and immersion’; ‘inducing themes’; ‘coding’; ‘elaboration’; ‘interpretation and checking’ followed by an analysis of the data. The first step, ‘familiarisation and immersion’ proposes that by the time you have completed your data analysis that your personal analysis should be well under way. This refers to the development of theories and ideas which have emerged out of the theoretical framework constructed to support the research. A theoretical idea that emerged from the framework raised questions about the issue

⁴⁸ Their training offered them a degree of professionalism in design and so will be referred to as artists in future.

⁴⁹ These women will be referred to as members of the Keiskamma Art Project.

of power and dialogue in the interviews. James Scott's theory of the hidden transcript⁵⁰ identified power as a factor which influences the ability of the researcher to engage in easy and open dialogue with the interviewees. This was noted and contributed to the analysis. The next step of inducting themes out of the material from the interviews and other processes of data collection was followed. Reading and reflection on the texts and the use of brightly coloured markers allowed for the thematising and coding of the material into their relevant themes. Theoretical texts identified characteristics for each of these themes which assisted in the identification of an ecofeminist spirituality. The art of elaboration was employed to capture the finer "nuances of meaning" opening up and allowing for a fresh view on the phenomena (Terre Blanche 2006:326). The final step involved the process of interpretation and checking where the researcher relooked at the interpretation with a critical eye and reflected on her role in collecting the data.

6.6.2 Validity, Reliability, Reflexivity and Triangulation of the Research

"The concepts of validity and reliability are based on the assumption that you are looking for universals" so as to conduct research that is "generalizable and replicable" (Willis 2007:218). In order to contribute to validity, considerable care needs to be taken by the researcher to clarify concepts. Doubt in regards to the trustworthiness of the research is "fundamental to understandings of science" but commonly accepted standards for assessing research are limited (Schwartz-Shea 2012:91). The reliability of a given variable rests on the idea that a measurement process can be reproduced to achieve the same results. The utility of reliability and replicability rests on the understanding of the social world as "relatively stable" and therefore the criteria of measurement are ill suited for interpretive research as a data collection process repeated at another time cannot guarantee the "production of the same data" (Schwartz-Shea 2012:95). In an effort to increase the reliability of the material gleaned from the interviews, the findings were written up and submitted to my research supervisor who critiqued them thus adding to their value.

Reflexivity refers to the "researcher's active consideration of and engagement with the ways in which his own sense-making and the particular circumstances that might have affected it, throughout all phases of the research process, relate to the knowledge claims he ultimately advances in written form" (Schwartz-Shea 2012:100). Interpretive researchers with a focus on meaning-making emphasize some of the following in their research such as in-situ concept development; the relevance of researcher identity and the need to improvise in response to field conditions.

⁵⁰ Chapter Three, (3.6).

Triangulation states that you need to support the conclusion drawn from more than one angle of the research. There are several types of triangulation but methodological triangulation involves confirmation across three different data collection methods (Willis 2007:219). Triangulation contributes to the reliability of the research and prevents one from drawing unsupported conclusions. This study makes some attempt at triangulation⁵¹ by collecting materials from a number of different sources and using it to better the scope and reach of the case study.

It is regarded as important to continue to check researcher sense making through data generation and analysis of the research. The primary concern of the researcher should focus on articulating different perspectives on the topic under investigation in order to understand “its nuances more fully” and not to rush too quickly towards an interpretation or answer (Schwartz-Shea 2012:105).

In regards to the field research, the first problem a researcher faces is bias and contamination due to their presence. As an interpretive researcher, I entered the research setting with care and tried to engage with participants in an open and empathetic manner so as to “not disturb the context unduly” (Terre Blanche 2006:287). Through the interview process an awareness of the nonverbal environment was apparent. I recognized that there were “other domains of meaning besides that which is accessed through listening to words” (Terre Blanche 2006:306). “Speaking is more than just the production of words” as bodies speak through gestural language and it was important not to limit my understandings to that which had only been filtered through “conscious cognition” (Terre Blanche 2006:306). The realm of feelings and intuition can’t be easily documented through an interview process but are important to the study. The study of the “phenomena in a naturalistic way” is necessary where the observation of the research participants is regarded as equally important to what they are saying (Terre Blanche 2006:308). This theory supports the idea that interpreting research is complex and one needs to keep in mind a whole range of potential influences on the research.

I was also aware of social location and its influence on the construction of knowledge and interpretation of data. As a privileged white woman, I was conscious that my construction of pre-existing knowledge and social location influenced the relationships with the interviewees in regard to the kind of knowledge that was shared. The range of people interviewed varied in their backgrounds, cultural orientations, gender, education, language abilities and social locations which meant that the power differential between us, the researcher and interviewee varied significantly. Where there were “smaller power differentials in

⁵¹ Triangulation is “the process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning to verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Denzin 2005:454).

the research situation”, such as was experienced when talking to the young women who were qualified artists and able to draw on their educational experience, the dialogue was easier to establish and the interviews were lengthy and informative interspersed with the interviewee’s personal stories and narratives. Where the power differentials differed significantly such as when the interviewee had limited education, little language and her age determined her as a product of the apartheid system the interviews were short with little elaboration. Questions arose for me as to how much had the interviewees tempered the reality of what they shared with me in an effort to please me and tell me what they thought I wanted to hear? Did they think of the interview process as an opportunity to market themselves and the Keiskamma Art Project, and if so how would this have affected the efficacy of the data collected? This became more apparent after the second set of interviews in 2011 where the members of the Keiskamma Art Project were more reluctant to give interviews. This is possibly because of the number of interviews that had been requested from them previously as they had become better known and respected through their artworks and achievements, whereas in 2008 they were more enthusiastic and interested in doing interviews.

6.6.3 Ethics

Ethical responsibility was kept in mind through the research process and once the research ideas were conceived as a potential research project an ethical clearance form was submitted which was approved and the fieldwork for the study was given ethical clearance by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

In the interests of ethical research an informed consent form was drafted which described the background of the researcher and the purposes and intentions of the research. Each interviewee had the form explained and agreed to sign the form authoring their consent to the interview.

Feminist research promotes an ethics of activism that contributes to positive change in the lives of those who are studied. These research ideals can lead to “intractable dilemmas”; “exhausted cynicism” and even “despair” as researchers are not always able to live up to them (Bloom 2009:334). Despite this, they need to evaluate their research actions and relationships so as to formulate practices which will put in place an ongoing development of “responsibility ethics” (Bloom 2009:334). Bloom recommends that through the research relationship the goal of the social research is to “give women tools to end their own oppression” and women’s voices and experiences need to be captured to identify sites for social change and activism (Bloom 2009:333). To make a difference with those we study, we need to use our position

and its power on behalf of disadvantaged groups. In a roundtable discussion on feminist methodology, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the research should be placed in “conscious partiality” and spell out commitment and challenge to our colleagues. Feminist researchers need to “impact the historical reality of women in the past, present and future” where the integration of the research process into the liberation struggle implies changing the status quo and facilitating the conscientization of women (Schüssler Fiorenza 2012:77).

I hope that through the research process the lives of the Keiskamma Art Project members were affirmed and their art documented, admired and acknowledged. The interviews were an inquiry into the positive and life-giving changes that were apparent in the lives of the community and its members. There appeared to be an activism at work from within the project which has and continues to lend support to rural women in the Hamburg district. The intention of the research was to enquire into and document the changes in the women of the Keiskamma Art Project.

6.6.4 Fruitfulness

The interview process appeared fruitful and what emerged from some of the interviews with the women were their personal narratives. Qualitative research sees narrative as an important contributor to research and describes it as “present in every age, in every place, in every society” (Denzin 2005:651). Feminists resist the idea that narratives are primarily useful for information gathering but are more interested in the idea of women as social actors in their own right and in the “subjective meanings that women assigned to events and conditions in their lives” (Denzin 2005:655). Some sociolinguists have argued that the interview itself is a particular kind of “communicative event” in which narratives can either be encouraged or discouraged. If narratives are encouraged in the interview process then the interviewee is able “to construct events” through narrative rather than simply referring to them which allows for “retrospective meaning making” or the shaping of past events into a meaningful whole (Denzin 2005:656). Stories are the way people create meaning out of the events of their lives and narratives are described as verbal action which can confirm, lament or challenge the status quo. In the research relationship, the interviewee may break through the structure of the interview to offer their stories. Some researchers contend that the act of narrating a significant life event facilitates positive change.

This process was apparent in the interviews undertaken with the members of the Keiskamma Art Project where some members used the research questions as a stimulus for an elaboration of their story. The

narratives that emerged through the interviews were very interesting and appeared to affirm changes to the women's lives. They appeared to construct new meaning out of these changes. I think that the Keiskamma Art Project offered the women a safe place to share their stories which helped consolidate them for themselves. I think that in regards to the women who shared their stories with me that they thought of me as safe being an outsider to their community and would understand something of their empowerment.

The next chapter answers the key research question through an argumentative build up using the sub-questions to support the conclusions.

Chapter Seven: Analysis of the Research Findings

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the sub-questions of the research are explored and their findings add to the analysis of the key research question. Evidence that supports the concept of an emerging contextual ecofeminist spirituality is presented followed by a theological interpretation of the research findings.

7.2 Structuring the Analysis

The analysis engages the key research question of this case study: “How can the Keiskamma Art Project, its processes and art, be understood in relation to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality?” Further sub-questions investigate the ways in which the theory, context, interviews and art of the Keiskamma Altarpiece contribute to the key question.

The sub-questions are addressed in an effort to support the argumentation of the key question. Firstly, the analysis looks at ways in which the themes identified in an ecofeminist spirituality support the idea of an emerging contextual ecofeminist spirituality. Secondly, the way in which the theory interweaves in the processes and art of an ecofeminist spirituality are explored. Thirdly, the women’s’ narratives about the process of creating and marketing their product and its contribution to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality are detailed. Finally the contribution of the images and metaphors within the Keiskamma Altarpiece to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality are expressed.

7.3 Themes in support of an emerging contextual ecofeminist spirituality

This section answers the first sub-question which asks how does the identification of themes in an ecofeminist spirituality support the theory of an emerging contextual ecofeminist spirituality? The themes offer evidence through the identification of characteristics which support the emergence of an ecofeminist

spirituality that are identified through the interview process and categorized into the four themes: Integration and Bodiliness, Experience and Story Telling, Transformation and Justice and Hope.

7.3.1 Integration and Bodiliness

The theme of Integration supports the coming together of people in relationships and communities through worship and celebration enabling practices which are life-giving and nurturing. Bodiliness promotes the recognition of the body's contribution to worship and experiential knowledge.

In regards to the notion of relationship, the members of the Art Project appeared to be part of a process that created a space for learning about positive social interactions. Working on the Keiskamma Altarpiece during the year 2000 meant that the women could spend more time with one another which gave them the opportunity to share. They claim to have learnt a great deal both socially and spiritually through sharing.⁵² It appears that the project guided them in their interactions as Embroiderer 4 says, "Workshops were organized to teach the project members how to be kind and caring."⁵³ Embroiderer 2 describes how she also learnt the skill of sharing and support, actively using these when anyone in the project was bereaved.⁵⁴ Embroiderer 6 says, "The project has taught women to be kind to one another as the managers have to be kind when they ask you to do this or that and you have to be kind to say yes I will do it."⁵⁵ The Felt Maker shares, "The Project has taught the women to be kinder to one another as when someone hasn't got anything to do or to eat we provide."⁵⁶ The group often shares food at lunch time where the women put their food together so that no one knows what different members have contributed. The Assistant Manager, who is also an artist and embroiderer, shared that "We learnt to support one another while sharing skills."⁵⁷

The skill of sharing and dialogue has been fostered through the project and the Design Manager says, "When they begin a new project they all sit down together, speak and share ideas. Information is then

⁵² Manager of Embroiderers, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

⁵³ Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

⁵⁴ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 29/06/2008; 21/07/2011.

⁵⁵ Embroiderer 6, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

⁵⁶ Felt Maker, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

⁵⁷ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

collected and put together so that it becomes a combination of their work and effort.”⁵⁸ It is evident that the Project has played an important role in drawing women together regularly and in assisting them to develop their relationships with one another.

Ecofeminist spirituality works to nurture and sustain life through the deconstruction of patriarchal metaphors such as “King of kings” which contribute to destructive hierarchies. The spiritual manifestation of two ecofeminist metaphors of God are presented and explored below which express the nurturing creativity of God. This spirituality embraces bodiliness when the women describe their bodily and intuitive experiences of God. Their understanding of and relating to God is based on their experiences.

The metaphor of God as primal matrix is one which supports the notion of nurturing and sustaining life. Although the women have not thought about God as primal matrix they do support a spiritual outlook which encourages a nurturing, life-sustaining spirituality. “As women we feel we are the only ones who can bring hope because we have within us this nurturing ability,” shares the Assistant Manager.⁵⁹ “Women are kind hearted and God is kind hearted therefore women are nearer God because they are the ones which care”, adds Embroiderer 4.⁶⁰ Embroiderer 5 says, “God loves women very much and has given them work, children and a family.”⁶¹ These statements from the Project members show the value placed on nurturing as a way of understanding and drawing close to God.

The metaphor of God as mother and friend is present in the spiritual experiences of the women. Embroiderer 4 tells a story about her house being damaged through the rain. She asked God as a friend and mother to help her; God heard her and as a result the project got an order for a tapestry and she used the money she earned to renovate her house.⁶² Embroiderer 2 says, “God loves women because they know what it is to nurture life and give it birth and women are very blessed to take care of life.”⁶³ The Design Manager says, “I experience God as a mother and friend because when I am cross or hungry and don’t know how to feed my kids I pray to God to make a plan and a plan just comes. It might be a friend with a food parcel or some money and this is how God is a friend and mother to me.”⁶⁴ These comments

⁵⁸ Design Manager, Hamburg, 21/08/2008.

⁵⁹ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

⁶⁰ Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

⁶¹ Embroiderer 5, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

⁶² Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

⁶³ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

⁶⁴ Design Manager, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

emphasize the women's experience of God as a friend and a mother, who nurtures, hears and answers their prayers.

The category of relatedness includes creativity which is like a channel for the outpouring of God's presence and energy. The women associate their creativity and its direction with God. Embroiderer 1 describes how she has a strong sense of God as guide even though she doesn't go to church.⁶⁵ The Assistant Manager states, "The group involves God in their ideas as many of them are church going and everything they do involves God. They know that their success comes from God."⁶⁶ Embroiderer 4 says, "God is where the women get their power and God is present in our creativity because of the way the Art Project has grown."⁶⁷ Embroiderer 2 says, "God is providing me with more ideas through my art. I wake up thanking God because now I can do and create more and wouldn't have had these powers without God."⁶⁸ The Finance Manager says that art is related to God as when we do art we too create.⁶⁹ The women who are members of the Art Project have a strong sense of God's continual presence and outpouring which they feel directs their creativity.

Relationships have been challenged between men and women through the Project as it provided a safe place for women to get away from the patriarchal influences of the men in the community in order to discuss the difficulties they encounter as women. They cannot talk about these problems at home but when they get together there is a new sense of freedom. The boundaries between men and women have been decreasing since the Project began.⁷⁰ An example of the ongoing changes in the way men in the community see women is demonstrated by events at the June 16th Youth Day 2008, when the Assistant Manager was asked to organize an event. This is different to the past when women would have been excluded.⁷¹ From a male perspective, the ceramist who is one of the few men who works for the Project

⁶⁵ Embroiderer 1, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

⁶⁶ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

⁶⁷ Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

⁶⁸ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

⁶⁹ Finance Manager, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

⁷⁰ Manager of Embroiderers, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

⁷¹ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

said, “I found it difficult to mix with the women in the beginning as some were either older or younger than me but now I don’t feel shy and have got better with talking to people generally.”⁷²

Multiplicity and the acceptance of difference are witnessed through the project. Gaba is an eccentric male character who is seen as an unrecognized *sangoma*. He is depicted in the second panel of the Keiskamma Altarpiece as a sign of hope. “He makes prayer patterns on the sand and is seen as a weird loner but is still respected for his individuality,” describes the Assistant Manager.⁷³ He has been incorporated into this community and his odd rituals are seen as creative prayers.

Is a conversion experience taking place in the lives of some of the project members? Is their awareness of the beauty and awe inspired by the natural world prompting change? Does a change in attitude to the environment prompt the recognition of humanity’s interdependence with all forms of life? One can argue that a new interest in the environment is visible through the Project as the Art Project shop is now filled with cushions covered in birds and other animals. The Stock Controller/Embroiderer reports that the women are being exposed to many new ideas about the environment and it has changed the way she feels about it.⁷⁴ Embroiderer 6 shares “I feel wonder for the environment as I embroider the plants, the river and the animals from Hamburg.”⁷⁵ Embroiderer 1 states that they did not talk about the environment but doing the embroidery of monkeys and animals has made them think about them.⁷⁶ Embroiderer 2 describes, “The artists copy birds from books and as a result have learnt to identify them in their environments like herons and pelicans.”⁷⁷ Embroiderer 4 expresses that doing the drawings of cows and the environment has helped her think about it. She enjoys its quietness, unlike the noise of cars in the cities, and enjoys watching the river and the sea.⁷⁸ The Design Manager says, “I feel wonder and awe for the environment. When I wake up I hear the birds singing in the forest and I feel a sense of gratefulness to God for what has been created.” She draws birds, Keiskamma River fishes, crabs and prawns and is amazed by the diversity and beauty of nature. Nature conservation had previously taught her something

⁷² Ceramist, Hamburg, 20/07/2008.

⁷³ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/07/2008.

⁷⁴ Stock controller/Embroiderer, Hamburg, 20/08/2008.

⁷⁵ Embroiderer 6, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

⁷⁶ Embroiderer 1, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

⁷⁷ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

⁷⁸ Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

about the environment but the Project has restored to her this great sense of wonder.⁷⁹ The ceramist says that he has been inspired to think about trees differently and now he understands that it is important not to just chop them down.⁸⁰ The Project Manager described how one of the embroiderers had commented on the richness of the bird life to her pointing out both a heron and a bulbul.⁸¹ Through the comments of the project members, it is apparent that there is a new interest and compassion that has been awakened for animals.

The theme of Integration and Bodiliness explores ideas and attitudes associated with relationship and the experience of relating to the other through physical and bodily encounter. The compassion that emerges in the interviews between the Project members and for the environment is a manifestation of an ecofeminist spirituality.

7.3.2 Experience and Storytelling

The theme of experience supports the idea that knowledge needs to be grounded in experience and evolve in association with all living beings. Storytelling promotes an awareness of the cosmic story and emphasizes the inter-relatedness of all life. It humbles humanity reminding them of their short history in comparison with the cosmos.

Do the Art Project members experience the environment in new ways because of their increased knowledge? The Art Project Manager states that the members now recognize breeding seasons and have a deeper understanding of their environment.⁸² Embroiderer 2 shares: “I smelt and identified a flower when I was walking in the evening which, in the past, I would never have noticed.”⁸³

Experiential knowing increases kinship with others and our interdependence with one another. The Art Project has provided the women with time to talk and discuss their problems together. Has this opportunity increased their compassion and kinship with one another? It has been a time to learn from one

⁷⁹ Design Manager, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

⁸⁰ Ceramist, Hamburg, 20/08/2008.

⁸¹ Project Manager, Hamburg, 20/08/2008.

⁸² Art Project Manager, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

⁸³ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

another says Embroiderer 1. The Assistant Manger talks about the Keiskamma Altarpiece where she tells how the bottom panel is of the funeral of Susan's son. He was HIV positive and was forced to go to work in Humansdorp where it was very difficult for him as it was very cold and he lived in impoverished circumstances which affected his health. It appears that through sharing and working together on the Project, the embroiderers and artists know each other's stories and show empathy for one another.

An ecofeminist spirituality supports the idea of being open to new ways of knowing, recognizing that there are multiple ways of assimilating knowledge and embraces the emotional and intuitive. Within this realm of knowledge is self-knowledge. The Assistant Manager talks about her experience of learning about herself, saying "I realized that I have an artistic element in my blood." She says that feelings about herself have changed and she is glad to know that she is an artist as she feels capable of many new things.⁸⁴ Embroiderer 3 shares, "I have learnt that sometimes I have to accept the consequences of our lives."⁸⁵ Embroiderer 4 says, "I didn't know that I could do beading before the project began and others learnt that they were clever at drawing. The project has brought out our creativities."⁸⁶ Stock Controller/Embroiderer describes, "My ideas have changed and this has changed the way I see myself. Now I feel like somebody. In the past I was suffering with poverty and was more self-centered because of my suffering but now I feel differently and am interested in the youth."⁸⁷ The Design Manager states that she feels independent and no longer dependent any more. She is now herself and not just a housekeeper. This has affected her self-esteem and she feels respected.⁸⁸

This understanding of self-knowledge also extends to the wider community. The Assistant Manager goes on to describe the community's feelings saying that they are very positive. This is seen, for example, in new perspectives that people have learnt regarding HIV/ AIDS - that you can still live a good life with HIV /AIDS. She asserts that this new knowledge and positivity has brought change to the men who have become more flexible and open to using condoms.⁸⁹

Ecofeminist spirituality promotes the idea of being open to new knowledge. It values the experiences of bodily encounter, intuition, attraction, forebodings and common sense. In the Keiskamma Altarpiece,

⁸⁴ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

⁸⁵ Embroiderer 3, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

⁸⁶ Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 21/07/2001.

⁸⁷ Stock Controller/Embroiderer, Hamburg, 20/08/2008.

⁸⁸ Design Manager, Hamburg, 21/08/2008.

⁸⁹ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

Gaba the prophet creates prayer patterns in the sand following his intuitive knowledge. Gaba wakes up every morning and likes to run next to the sea where he creates patterns in the sand on the beach.⁹⁰

The Keiskamma artworks tell both personal and communal stories. Embroiderer 2 says, “Art can tell a story on a quilt or a hanging.”⁹¹ The Keiskamma Altarpiece is about the suffering that the community has endured in the face of the HIV/ AIDS pandemic. It tells the community’s story, but it also includes the specific stories of the women and what they have had to endure. It is a way of documenting the history of the community. The Assistant Manager describes how the figure in the centre is of a widow whose husband passed away from an HIV/AIDS related illness. The old lady in the Methodist Mothers Union outfit has now died and Susan is the old woman on the other side panel.⁹²

An ecofeminist spirituality includes the assimilation of knowledge from indigenous culture. Indigenous cultures value storytelling and use it as a tool to pass on generational knowledge. In the Art Project stories emerge and are captured through art. The Manager of the Embroiderers says that the Art Project wants to make a bigger place for art and heritage so as to use art as a way of keeping their stories together. “This way we can have pride in our Xhosa heritage.”⁹³ The Finance Manager says that the members of the Art Project have created artworks such as the Keiskamma Tapestry which show the history and culture of the Xhosa people including their cows. This has helped her to learn about her Xhosa history as it was explained to her and she was given books to read about it. The older members of their community were also questioned about their knowledge of the past.⁹⁴ Embroiderer 6 says “I learnt about the Xhosa prophetess, the Mfengus and the AmaXhosa and lots of other history about the Xhosa people through the Project.”⁹⁵ The ceramist says that people often ask him why he draws cows and he replies “They are important to my people as this is the way my father’s earned money through the selling and buying of cows. It is how they educated their children and so drawing cows is a way of valuing my history.”⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

⁹¹ Embroiderer 2, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

⁹² Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

⁹³ Manager of Embroiderers, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

⁹⁴ Finance Manager, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

⁹⁵ Embroiderer 6, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

⁹⁶ Ceramist, Hamburg, 20/08/2011.

The theme of storytelling affirms the use of stories as a way of transmitting knowledge. The knowledge used to explore an ecofeminist spirituality needs to be birthed out of experience.

7.3.4 Transformation and Justice

Transformation and Justice are about change and restoration. Transformation describes a change in perspective which is life-giving. Justice is the rectification and restoration of the balances of power which have contributed to the inequality and injustice towards women and the earth.

Is gender justice witnessed in the Project? I argue that gender stereotypes have been challenged through the involvement of men in the Art Project. Some men undertook to do embroidery which helped to break down gender stereotypes that viewed embroidery as being women's work like Artist/Ceramist/Embroiderer.⁹⁷ Artist/Ceramist/Embroiderer found it difficult to integrate in the beginning but shares "I have become more comfortable working with so many women."⁹⁸ Embroiderer 3 argues that the Art Project has lessened the boundaries between men and women.⁹⁹

The Finance Manager describes how she feels that the Project empowered women. "The Project has helped me recognize that women have power. In the past only men were working and now I feel like I can stand on my own and be powerful." She states that previously she agreed with the stereotyped thinking that expected a woman to stay home with her husband but the Project has taught her to think independently.¹⁰⁰ I argue that the Art Project appears to have challenged the way women in the community view their relationships with men and that increased exposure to the wider society has allowed some women to imagine more egalitarian relationships. Embroiderer 2 says "Relationships are not like what they used to be and my husband can't expect everything from me. It is time for the world to accept women at the same level as men." She tells the story that her father was a builder and taught her how to do bricklaying and roofing. "Growing up in this crazy way is like the Project which has given me strength." She tells a story as an example of this new strength. In East London she put up an exhibition for the project on her own and when the men walked past they asked her "Hey Sisi, where is the man

⁹⁷ Project Manager 1, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

⁹⁸ Artist/Ceramist/Embroiderer, Hamburg, 20/08/2008.

⁹⁹ Embroiderer 3, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

¹⁰⁰ Finance Manager, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

working with you?” and she replied that she was doing it on her own.¹⁰¹ The Project Manager states, “The Project has empowered local women and I have seen them taking on new leadership roles within their community and this is especially true with older women.” Illustrating this, she shares that the other day she saw a younger woman voicing her concerns in a meeting and it was encouraging to see the confidence with which she presented her ideas.¹⁰²

In extending justice beyond humanity’s needs it is evident that ecojustice is the next step to humanity’s recognition in its role of stewardship and caretaking of the natural world. One of the main incomes in this very poor area has been perlemoen poaching off the coast. The women in the community once saw this as a viable way to make an income but through their educational exposure linked to the Project they now see it differently and have become much more aware of poaching and its danger to the environment.¹⁰³ Environmentally the Project has made a difference as it has been able to support some of the key women perlemoen poachers.¹⁰⁴ The Assistant Manager argues that the community has changed its ideas about harvesting and poaching perlemoen as they now recognize the importance of sustaining the natural resources for the future well being of the community. “They don’t just walk into the forests and cut down wood anymore but have learnt to negotiate with nature conservation for wood,” shares the Assistant Manager.¹⁰⁵

The image of God as mother, with the emphasis on justice in regard to the fair distribution of resources, can be imagined by some Project members. The ecofeminist image of God as ‘Mother-Judge’ who manages the earth as a whole and is concerned for all its parts emerges through the interviews in ideas like those from Embroiderer 2 who describes God like a mother hen cares for all her chickens. She says that “God has a soft heart, listens and hears and that is like a mother.”¹⁰⁶

Transformation and change underpin an ecofeminist spirituality and I argue that transformation is happening in the Project through skills development. The development of skills provides an impetus for change in other areas of their lives such as socially and emotionally. Members of the Project have assimilated new skills that are being used in the running of the Art Project such as embroidery, appliqué,

¹⁰¹ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

¹⁰² Project Manager 2, Hamburg, 20/08/2008.

¹⁰³ Art Project Manager, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

¹⁰⁴ Head of Fine Art Dept, Grahamstown, 25/06/2008.

¹⁰⁵ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

¹⁰⁶ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

beading, feltmaking, design, drawing and managing. The development of skills has contributed to both personal and collective transformation. Four people were sent for formal art training through a three-year diploma in Fine Art at Walter Sisulu University of Technology in East London and were later employed by the Art Project as artists.¹⁰⁷ The Assistant Manager states “I have gained lots of skills and learnt that if you work as a group you can bring change as well as earning respect from your community through working in the Art Project.” This sense of change ripples outwardly to affect all aspects of life. Embroiderer 2 states, “Art can bring change.”¹⁰⁸

There are many other ways in which change is witnessed. Embroiderer 4 says “The Art Project has changed the way the community feels by providing work as bad things happen when there is no work. The Project has helped to redirect the youth as they were breaking into white people’s holiday houses and now that has stopped.”¹⁰⁹ Embroiderer 4 says the Art Project has challenged poverty and transformed women’s lives. She describes, “Lots of women are single parents and when a family is suffering you can see it written on them but now you can’t see it in the community.”¹¹⁰ Embroiderer 5 adds, “The Project has helped women because they now have salaries, are going to art exhibitions and have experienced lots of new things.”¹¹¹ Embroiderer 3 shares, “I have learnt about marketing and how important it is to market one’s work. This means that one needs to talk to people in order to help them understand the meaning of the art and the workings of the project.”¹¹² Embroiderer 2 shares how she has changed: “I pick up litter lying around even though I know it puts me at risk because I don’t have gloves but I don’t want people to see Hamburg as an untidy place.” She says that she has increased her knowledge in new areas such as accountancy and the economic market through the project and adds that the project connects with something within her and brings out something which was always there.¹¹³

The ex-Embroiderer/Writer describes “Before the project I had become depressed, I suspect this was because I had grown up poor and was unable to realize my ambition which was to write. I loved writing stories and tried to publish them but gave up hope but through the Art Project and Carol (Hofmeyer) I was

¹⁰⁷ Head of Fine Art Dept, Grahamstown, 25/06/2008.

¹⁰⁸ Embroiderer 2, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

¹⁰⁹ Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

¹¹⁰ Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

¹¹¹ Embroiderer 5, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

¹¹² Embroiderer 3, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

¹¹³ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 21/08/2008.

able to go to East London to study journalism and have had a film based on one of my stories for SABC 2 and a radio broadcast in which another of my stories was broadcast through thirty different episodes.”¹¹⁴

Embroiderer 2 has experienced a major transformation story which has been facilitated through the Art Project. When she began working on the project she was overweight and frustrated with the restrictions placed on her life as a married woman. Through her time in the Project she has dropped from a dress size 44 to dress size 32 and her self confidence has improved. She describes “I have developed a new interest in sport and now encourage the younger women to exercise and go jogging.”¹¹⁵ She has also walked out of her difficult marriage giving her more freedom and as a result she now lives in a conflict free home. She says that the Project employed a woman counselor from Grahamstown who shared her knowledge with her and gave her the chance to talk through things that were happening in her life. She shares that she would not have had the courage to leave her husband without this woman’s support.¹¹⁶

The Project Manager 1 says, “Since the Art Project there appear to be more children better fed and riding on bicycles. Bicycles are a luxury item and as such gives a good indication of where the community is economically.”¹¹⁷

I argue that transformation and change have emerged through the Project. The introduction of new knowledge and skills caused the project members’ lives and in particular the women to flourish. I argue that their testimonies describe their liberation from captivity which began with skills development and subsequent economic empowerment. This transformation appears to have lifted them out of their self absorption and tunnel focus on survival allowing them to encounter and embrace new ideas that have emanated from the project.

¹¹⁴ Ex-Embroiderer/Writer, Hamburg, 21/08/2008.

¹¹⁵ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 21/08/2008.

¹¹⁶ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

¹¹⁷ Project Manager 1, Hamburg, 20/08/2008.

7.3.5 Hope

The theme of Hope is an important aspect of an ecofeminist spirituality which looks for it in the present and works for a sustainable future. This project speaks distinctly of hope in all that has emerged through the research.

The women experience hope through the immanent presence of God. The Design Manager shares, “We see God as hopeful, helpful and living with us. God looks after us as we continue to hope for God’s guidance.”¹¹⁸

Hope is found when traditional understandings of sin are challenged and it is seen in regards to the potential to enhance or stifle life. The understanding of sin in regards to HIV/AIDS would be the neglect, marginalization or rejection of those who suffer with it. One of the managers says that now she knows that people do not just die of HIV/AIDS and that having HIV/AIDS is not the end.¹¹⁹ Embroiderer 2 shares, “I have learnt that to combat stigmatization one needs to be honest and realistic with others.”¹²⁰

Hope encourages the flourishing of others. Embroiderer 4 says that before she joined the project she was suffering with poverty, having no work, and depending on a grant. But now, as a result of the project, all five of her children have passed matric and one of her sons went to Fort Hare University for two years.¹²¹ The Assistant Manager says that she did not know that they could use their art to create something which gave so much hope to people.¹²²

Hope is relationship which supports and nurtures through times of suffering and loss. In the community, many of the parents of the children have died from HIV /AIDS related illnesses and the grandmothers are left to bring up their orphaned children. In the Keiskamma Altarpiece, in the third and interior part of the altarpiece are photographs of grandmothers and their grandchildren. The first is of Susan Paliso and her grandson; then Eunice Mangwane, the counselor, and her grandchildren and finally of Caroline Nyongo, the manager of the beading studio, and her grandchildren. These images are all about hope because they

¹¹⁸ Design Manager, Hamburg, 21/08/2008.

¹¹⁹ Manager of Embroiderers, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

¹²⁰ Embroiderer 2, Grahamstown, 29/06/2009.

¹²¹ Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

¹²² Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

emphasize the next generation and show that there is still life after struggle.¹²³ The courageous suffering of others inspires hope as Stock Controller/Embroiderer says, “Susan is a role model for us in the way that she was able to honestly face up to her circumstances.”¹²⁴

The Assistant Manager stresses that the community’s hope comes through creativity and that the Keiskamma Altarpiece was about hope.¹²⁵ The Manager of the Embroiderers described the Keiskamma Altarpiece as offering hope and comments on the images of the mothers going to church saying, “This was hopeful as women looked at them and thought, even if I don’t go to church maybe one day I will.”¹²⁶ The Manager of the Embroiderers comments on the Keiskama Altarpiece saying, “Everyone is happy to see it and all think it is very beautiful.”¹²⁷ “The second panel is about hope and the hope is that we will find a cure for AIDS,” adds the Assistant Manager.¹²⁸

Is hope found in art? When asked how creating the Keiskamma Altarpiece affected one, Embroiderer 1 expresses, “It gave us new hope and a feeling of pride to the whole community.”¹²⁹ The Design Manager says “The Altarpiece asks questions about hope, such as where is hope found within us? It is also a prayer to God that more hope will come.”¹³⁰ Embroiderer 2 feels “I can express my feelings through art and that art is a gift of God inside a person.”¹³¹ Another way in which art offers hope is through the symbolic representation of the images chosen to be reproduced. Most of the cushion covers in the shop at the time of this interview had images of cows on them and when questioned Embroiderer 2 said that cows symbolize life. “An example of this is when a cow has a baby it gives milk which your baby can share.”¹³² Ex-Embroiderer/Writer says that the women in the project have learnt about art appreciation

¹²³ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

¹²⁴ Stock Controller and embroiderer, Hamburg, 20/08/2008.

¹²⁵ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

¹²⁶ Manager of Embroiderers, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

¹²⁷ Manager of Embroiderers, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

¹²⁸ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

¹²⁹ Embroiderer 1, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

¹³⁰ Design Manager, Hamburg, 21/08/2008.

¹³¹ Embroiderer 2, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

¹³² Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

and that she is seeing women put wall hangings in their homes. “People are now making art for themselves. I now love art where previously I had no time for it.”¹³³

Hope is linked to healing and restores what is broken and irregular to its former beauty. Embroiderer 4 says, “By creating art we were bringing healing to our colleagues through hope as many are HIV positive. They experience this healing because we are able to show them that there are still things they can do with their lives and in this way art is a tool used to heal.”¹³⁴ Healing is also linked with rituals such as with the ancestors and the Keiskamma Altarpiece depicts numerous rituals associated with healing and hope. Stock controller/Embroiderer describes how rituals appeal to the ancestors and are a way of presenting one’s prayers before God.¹³⁵ The community embraces spiritual power for healing through their numerous beliefs and accepts that all of these sources of faith offer hope which is in keeping with an ecofeminist spirituality.

Hope offers purpose affecting their daily lives transforming their despair and hopelessness into possibility. “We believe that God has given us purpose and we need to make a difference. It is God who helps us to find this purpose” states the Manager of the Embroiderers.¹³⁶ Embroiderer 5 says that God has given her embroidery to do which has brought her strength and she likes to embroiderer at night while she thinks about God.¹³⁷

Hope is sustained through relations that cause the whole earth community to flourish. Hope encourages a conversion experience where people undertake to live differently and take practical steps to promote the transformation of their society. One of these steps encourages artists and poets from within the community to tell the story of the cosmos so as to promote awe, wonder and reverence for all of life. In the Keiskamma Altarpiece, the artists designed the second panel with the image of the Indian Ocean with its rich resources surrounding the community which was depicted as a circular image emphasizing the

¹³³ Ex-Embroiderer/Writer, Hamburg, 21/08/2008.

¹³⁴ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

¹³⁵ Stock controller/Embroiderer, Hamburg, 20/08/2008.

¹³⁶ Manager of the Embroiderers, Hamburg, 28/03/2008.

¹³⁷ Embroiderer 5, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

community's inter-relationship with ocean.¹³⁸ In the third panel is an image of the Keiskamma River that flows in front of the art studios, which symbolizes the celebration of environmental beauty.¹³⁹

Hope is experienced through a vision for a sustainable future. Embroiderer 4 states, "The Keiskamma Garden Project has taught me gardening skills. It makes me happy because I do not have to buy lots of things and it helps feed my grandchildren when the Project runs out of money."¹⁴⁰ Embroiderer 2 says that they are trying to get people in their community "To make a project out of fishing by creating a fish shop for the community. This will mean getting the fisherman and women who collect mussels to supply the shop. Another idea I had is to make mother of pearl buttons by collecting perlemoen containers." She adds that this is also a way of recycling waste which she learnt about through a felt making project where Magda, the Felt Maker, taught them how to make artworks out of off-cuts.¹⁴¹ Embroiderer 5 says the project has taught her to grow vegetables and has brought health care into the area as the children are being checked at school for disease.¹⁴²

Hope is composed of emerging ideas which are in keeping with an ecofeminist spirituality that seeks to define itself in the present and encourage practical actions to assist in a sustainable future.

7.3.6 Contributions to an emerging contextual ecofeminist spirituality

The themes describe ideas that emerge from the interviews which are located in a context and suggest that an ecofeminist spirituality is being encouraged through the work of the Keiskamma Art Project. The Keiskamma Altarpiece serves as an example of the art and its processes. The Keiskamma Art Project is promoting change and increased awareness through their educational programmes and the space created for the purpose of doing art. The Project has empowered its members with new skills and given them hope through economic possibility.

¹³⁸ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

¹³⁹ Assistant Manager, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

¹⁴⁰ Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 20/07/2011.

¹⁴¹ Embroiderer 2, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

¹⁴² Embroiderer 5, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

The interviews offer evidence of new behaviours being promoted through the Art Project such as compassion, love and justice. It has provided a regular forum for them to share their stories allowing for their emotional and intuitive knowledge to emerge. The interviews demonstrate that many of the women believe in God and strongly associate God with hope. They describe God's presence as immanent and motivating. Some women appear to be challenging destructive behaviours of the past. They see relationships as a source of hope to the community and their challenge to behavior will serve to better the quality of relationships within the community although it may escalate conflict initially. There is also evidence that the Art Project has encouraged new relationships from outside the community allowing for new experience of other people. The new ideas that have emerged give support to the leadership and emergence of women adding to their self-confidence to take up leadership positions. There appears to be a growing environmental awareness from Project members and thus there is some evidence to support that the dialogue around the environment promotes ecojustice through a new appreciation of the natural realm and an undertaking to think about the responsibilities of stewardship.

7.4 The Theoretical Framework

The sub-question of how the theory interweaves in the process and emergence of an ecofeminist spirituality is explored. The theory provides the background to support the structure of the research. The processes refer to the ways in which an ecofeminist spirituality is at work.

This study uses various concepts to interpret the findings of the research. These are the meaning of Beauty, the interface of art and spirituality, Christian feminist theology, culture as a vehicle of transformation and James Scott's theory of the "hidden transcript". How do these theories contribute to the research? I argue that Beauty offers power: the power of transformation and the motivation for justice. It epitomizes all that is good and truthful and is an expression of a higher way of life. Spirituality and the aesthetic strive for the experience of self-transcendence and rupture the surface of the commonplace to promote challenge and transformation. Christian feminist theology supports the liberation of women and deconstructs the distorted relations between men and women which the Christian tradition has imposed. Culture as a vehicle of transformation may contribute to change and transformation through the expression of art. Protest and resistance art as a tool of protest still remains useful as an activist strategy in the fight against HIV/AIDS. James Scott's social theories argue that the hidden knowledge and discourse of people in subordinate roles is only ever likely to emerge in safe social sites..

How do these theories add to the research on the Keiskamma Art Project? I argue that the art created by the Keiskamma Art Project can be described as beautiful. In the Keiskamma Altarpiece, although the subject matter depicted is a reflection of a troubling reality the art created out of it is done so with care and consideration reflecting harmonious combinations of colour and a balanced composition. Beauty is also witnessed in the environmental surroundings of Hamburg. I propose that the exposure to and pursuit of Beauty through art has impacted on the members of the Keiskamma Art Project in a positive way. The practice of spirituality offers the members a vehicle for reaching their higher potential and is the internal force behind their journey of self development. The art of the Keiskamma Art Project offers a conduit for the spirit. Women in the Keiskamma Art Project live in an African context where all women experience the triple oppression of colonialism, patriarchy and apartheid. Their exposure to feminist thinking through women from outside their context has assisted some of them to find personal liberation. Exposure to Christian feminist theology is evident in the work of the Keiskamma Altarpiece as women from their own context are elevated as examples of spiritual inspiration. The art of the Keiskamma Art Project and in particular the Keiskamma Altarpiece both challenge and contribute to culture. This art describes local culture through its images while challenging negative aspects of its processes. I argue that the processes in the Keiskamma Art Project have aided in the resistance to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the Hamburg community. In the Keiskamma Altarpiece, protest and resistance are expressed by the members of the Project to the devastation wrought upon the community by oppression especially through the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Keiskamma Art Project offers women a safe social location to explore and express their ideas which are removed from the patriarchal influences of their community. This is similar to the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project initiated by Andries Botha which offers a model of an art project as a safe social location where African women expressed through art, such as embroidery and beadwork, their experiences that were personal and traumatic with a measure of safety.

Beauty interweaves in the process and manifestation of an ecofeminist spirituality in that it inspires goodness and prompts one to act in a loving and protective way. It is a reminder of the importance of caring, elicits generosity, promotes un-selfing and acts as a catalyst in transformation. It is sensual, embraces bodiliness, has a distributional tendency, promotes balance and symmetry in relations while inspiring self love and respect and pulls one into the mystery of the spiritual. Spirituality creates an increased sensitivity to others and the non-human world. Art is the process that allows this transformation to emerge in the Keiskamma Art Project and the art such as the Keiskamma Altarpiece offers a vision of the communities' spiritual yearning. Christian feminist theology contributes to the processes and manifestation of an ecofeminist spirituality in that it offers a theoretical framework that deconstructs patriarchal oppression and describes the characteristics of a contextual spirituality born from the context

of the members of the Keiskamma Art Project. It offers legitimacy towards the women's search for identity and personal liberation. The art of the Keiskamma Art Project, which has been publicly successful, contributes to a new and changing understanding of culture which supports the liberation of women and a greater reverence for the earth. Protest and resistance via the medium of art promotes the justice and the restoration of relationships. HIV/AIDS activism through art transforms victims into survivors who are empowered to tell their own story. Their hidden discourses are explored and emerge in a safe social location removed from the oppressions inherent within the community. This safe location allows for the experimentation of ideas that contribute towards an ecofeminist spirituality that promotes life and well being for all.

The exposure of the members of the Project to Beauty has inspired change arousing within them the desire to create more Beauty. Women are becoming interested in art and putting embroideries on their walls to improve the interiors of their homes. This is evidence of a new energy at work within the community bringing life and creativity to all. They are more cognizant of the Beauty that surrounds them. Beauty is therefore an important component to the emergence of an ecofeminist spirituality. I argue that spirituality is visible in the work of the Keiskamma Art Project and is the basis for self-development. The Keiskamma Art Project expresses this spiritual connection through their art as in the example of the Keiskamma Altarpiece, which expresses the connectedness of the community in life, health, suffering and death. Although the members of the Art Project have never been formally exposed to Christian feminist theology one can argue that some implicit exposure to feminist thinking has driven the images and ideas which support an ecofeminist spirituality. The understanding of culture as changing has assisted members to challenge the limitations that an unchanging understanding of culture has imposed on them. The Keiskamma Art Project has exposed its members to culture through art which has created a new interest in cultural activities. Protest and resistance through art has given women a legitimate way of communicating their oppression and struggles in the hopes of future justice. The opportunity that the Keiskamma Art Project offers has contributed to a manifestation of an ecofeminist spirituality through the art and the Project.

7.5 Talking about Creating and Marketing

One of the sub-questions of the research explores how the women's' narratives about the process of creating and marketing the product contributes to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality. I argue that the women's conversation about their art processes in an effort to market their products does contribute to a

contextual ecofeminist theology. It was apparent that members of the Keiskamma Art Project were frequently interviewed either by the press or interested people. During the first interview process in 2008 I found Project members very responsive to the interviews because it was one experience that they engaged with regularly as a way of marketing their products. Embroiderer 3 shares “I have learnt about marketing and how important it is to market one’s work. This means that one needs to talk to people in order to help them understand the meaning of the art and the workings of the project.”¹⁴³ I argue that the process of talking about their art to new people consolidated the women’s stories in their own minds, promoted confidence and encouraged them to go on trips beyond Hamburg. Embroider 5 shared that the Project has helped women because they now have salaries, are going to art exhibitions and have experienced lots of new things.”¹⁴⁴ This growing confidence in their own experiences connects them to the world at large and contributes to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality.

In 2011, when I returned for the second round of interviews I found it difficult to find women willing to be interviewed. It appeared that the women were now more dubious as to the success of the interviews as a form marketing. They still continued to do their embroidery but some of the optimism that I witnessed earlier on in the Project was lost. I discovered that the Project had been struggling and the foreign donations which had been partially subsidizing the Project had been withdrawn. Possibly the women felt a measure of betrayal, exploitation or manipulation from outsiders as if they had been set up and then dropped. Their weariness was understandable. Does this reluctance contribute to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality? I would argue that a real response to the complexity of relating to others is important along with the recognition that relationships need to be undertaken nevertheless.

7.6 The Images and Metaphors within the Keiskamma Altarpiece

The sub-question of how the images and metaphors within the Keiskamma Altarpiece describe a contextual ecofeminist spirituality are answered below. There are many images in the Keiskamma Altarpiece which operate as metaphors. A metaphor compares two ideas with one another, one literal and the other figurative, and most images in the altarpiece operate not only literally but figuratively too.

¹⁴³ Embroiderer 3, Grahamstown, 29/06/2008.

¹⁴⁴ Embroiderer 5, Hamburg, 21/07/2011.

In the first panel of the Keiskamma Altarpiece (see fig.5.5.4) there is the image of the widow surrounded by orphans below the cross. As a metaphor the widow's suffering is being compared with the suffering of Jesus which suggests that her suffering is redemptive. The orphans can be seen literally as the children left behind after their parents have died of HIV/AIDS and figuratively as the vulnerability of the community to the HIV/AIDS.

The two elderly women on either side of the panel are chosen because of the example they offered the community in their suffering. They are compared to saints who offer spiritual assistance to people in need of hope and suggest the embodiment of spiritual and transforming power that others may be able to claim too.

In the second panel (see fig.5.5.5), Gaba, the eccentric man from the community, is depicted as walking on the beach creating patterns with his footprints. This image symbolizes the creativity, spirituality and resilience that reside within the community. The creative pattern making of Gaba can be compared to the creative ways in which the community finds hope in suffering through local spirituality and prayer. The image of a church with women dressed in their Church uniforms symbolizes the diversity of Christian religious practice within the community that offers its members spiritual nourishment. Below this image are local Xhosa huts and community members dressed in traditional African religious outfits participating in a traditional rituals and celebrations which symbolize the traditional African religions and their practices which operate within the community offering spiritual support and nourishment.

On the left of the panel is a large wild fig tree with big roots known as *umtombe*. The strength of the tree and its large root system are a metaphor for the strength needed from the community to overcome the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Under the image of the tree is a group of local community members talking to one another which suggests the connectivity and relationships within the community which are a source of strength.

On the right of the panel is a large ball which looks like a planet and is surrounded by an ocean of fish. This image is a metaphor for the Hamburg community which is fortunate enough to be surrounded by valuable and plentiful natural resources.

The third panel (fig.5.5.6) contains three large photographs surrounded by brightly coloured images of the Keiskamma River which flows in front of the art studios. The photographs are each of a grandmother and her grandchildren. Above the photographs is umnga, a green tree which leaks golden liquid, and some golden beads. The brightly coloured river symbolizes the beauty and life giving qualities of the natural resources of Hamburg. The photographs of the grandmothers and their grandchildren speak of the hope that the enduring, motherly qualities of grandmothers bring to the future generation in the time of the

HIV/AIDS pandemic as many parents are dying. The golden liquid and beads represent life which is still visible in the struggle against the pandemic.

The images within the Keiskamma Altarpiece are understood both literally and figuratively and describe the real experience of women within the community. This experience is born out of the suffering of daily life under the oppression of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and describes ways in which women find hope and spiritual nourishment through traditional Christian and indigenous practices of ritual and prayer. It presents images of hope found in the role models of local women who have suffered and survived with dignity. In this way the images and metaphors within the Keiskamma Altarpiece contribute to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality which is a spirituality defined in a local context, able to embrace diverse spiritual sources such as traditional African spirituality and which articulates a vision of hope for women by women and grounds this hope in environmental sustainability.

7.7 The Key Question

All the information gleaned from the sub-questions help in contributing to the answering of the key question which is how can the Keiskamma Art Project, its processes and art, be understood in relation to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality?

A contextual ecofeminist spirituality is a spirituality birthed through the everyday life experience of women. It is characterized by hope, not just for women but the environment too. It inspires protest and promotes just relations. It recognizes other sources of knowledge such as feeling and intuition, draws on indigenous religious practices, is open to change and promotes the affirmation of life in all its diversity and multiplicity.

The theoretical framework of the research provides an interpretative tool for analysis. The theory supports the idea that Beauty is a source of power that motivates transformation and justice and is visible in the art of the Keiskamma Art Project. A spirituality emerging through the art processes is visible in the life of its members and in the art of the Keiskamma Altarpiece and the use of the theory demonstrates that spirituality is the key to the experience of self-transcendence and personal development. I argue that the Keiskamma Art Project operates as a conduit of the spirit which challenges relations between men and women and supports the selection of images of local women as a source of inspiration instead of traditional saints. The work of the Keiskamma Art Project supports change and transformation in culture,

offers a form of protest and resistance through its art and provides women with a safe social location to explore and express their ideas.

The Keiskamma Art Project was initiated as a way to assist women so as to empower them economically but the Project has challenged women and the community in other ways too. I argue that the Keiskamma Art Project, its processes, such as the space it provided for dialogue, art making and educational discussions, and its art, such as the Keiskamma Altarpiece and other artworks have and are transforming many lives especially those of the women of Hamburg and the surrounding villages.

Another factor influencing the lives of the women was the economic power that came with the success of the project and brought with it a sense of personal power. Art Project members were able to better support their families including extended family like aunts and uncles.¹⁴⁵ Project Manager 2 described this increased economic situation through a description of the number of new bicycles seen within the community.¹⁴⁶ This empowerment dispelled the sense of hopelessness that many women had become resigned to and motivated particular women in unhappy marital circumstances to change them by leaving their husbands which in turn fed their growing feminist consciousness. Economic empowerment dispelled the community's despair offering the hope of a new beginning.¹⁴⁷

Through the forum of the Art Project, a wide range of educational topics and ideas were introduced such as environmental awareness, health care, child care, gender empowerment, skills training, sustainable gardening, environmental education and bird identification training. This has contributed to a new interest and admiration for the natural environment with an increased knowledge in the ability to identify birds and other animals. A number of the senior members of the project now take it upon themselves to pick up litter and generally police the environment. They are proud of the fact that they are no longer poaching perlemoen and understand that the possibility of a sustainable livelihood lies in their ability to maintain the pristine beauty of their area. In this way, the educational topics and ideas have contributed to the process and emergence of an ecofeminist spirituality by challenging narrow understandings of the world and opening up concepts of the acceptance of diversity and multiplicity within the world.

The Art Project has contributed to the building of relationships which promote love, mercy and justice by challenging destructive behaviours. Examples of this are evident through the shift in attitudes toward HIV/ AIDS stigmatization where previously people did not want to be approached about their status but

¹⁴⁵ Embroiderer 1, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

¹⁴⁶ Project Manager 1, Hamburg, 20/08/2008.

¹⁴⁷ Embroiderer 1, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

through the work on the Keiskamma Altarpiece many of their misguided fears and ideas were challenged.¹⁴⁸ Petty jealousy which arose out of poverty appears to have been dispelled with an increased level of sharing and support among the women. New relationships between men and women have emerged allowing women to lead and be admired. The empowerment of black rural women, who are regarded as South Africa's most vulnerable in society, demonstrate that a measure of justice has been restored to the Hamburg region. This has impacted on the relationships between people within the community where some of these relationships have been strengthened and others have not survived the transformation of these women's lives. Some women felt that their husbands were not happy to see their wives emerge as individuals and begrudged them their success. They preferred their wives' vulnerability giving them increased security and confidence. These relationships were imbalanced and fed off the helplessness and unhappiness of their wives, rendering them abusive and needing to be challenged. In this way the project has brought about a number of challenges to relationships which have promoted justice if not peace.

The value attached to women being able to talk firstly to one another and then to people outside the community is evident through the Project allowing women the chance to articulate the changes in their lives and create meaning out of their experiences. This process consolidates the change and assists in personal development. Narrative was encouraged as a process of the Keiskamma Art Project contributing to the expression of an ecofeminist spirituality.

The model of management used in the development of the Keiskamma Art Project supports a process towards the emergence of an ecofeminist spirituality. Dr Carol Hofmeyer was a key factor in the development of the Keiskamma Art Project as she offered a role model of an educated and independent woman who showed initiative and creativity and the embroiderers and designers all mention her in their interviews. Her capacity for genuine friendship created a welcome space for her leadership and ideas. Although the project relied on a collaborative approach from the women, it was gently steered by Hofmeyer who introduced many new ideas that contributed to the development of a feminist consciousness. The Writer/Manager of the Keiskamma Art Project described the model of management adopted by Hofmeyer and proposed that it had been run in a holistic way as Hofmeyer pays attention to the people around her and listens to their stories. The Writer/Manager explains that she has been inspirational in promoting the development of others and says that the development of the Art Project was done in a sensitive way.¹⁴⁹ This collaborative approach to the management of the Project which listens to

¹⁴⁸ Art Project Manager, Hamburg, 25/03/2008.

¹⁴⁹ Writer/Manager, Hamburg, 21/08/2008.

and desires to include others, values the input and opinions of the others offers a model of engagement which supports an ecofeminist spirituality.

Having explained how the Keiskamma Art Project, its processes and art, can be understood in relation to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality, a question arises as to its sustainability and long term prospects. I can't answer this as it depends on so many factors such as economic markets, the drive of the women behind the project and the rootedness of creative expression. Will the changes to the lives of the women and their community last? I think that for some members of the Project the changes touched them deeply and changed who they are and as a result its influence will last on beyond the Project not being limited by the Project. For others the influences and change brought about through the Project were negligible and may fall away in regards to their lives which I suspect is especially so for the older less educated women. I do think though that a core group of women remain in the Project and they influence others especially the young women of their community by providing role models for them. This was apparent to me when I returned to the Project in 2011 and witnessed a few young women employed in the shop and as marketers. I think that the influence of a contextual ecofeminist spirituality will live on in the lives of the young women who find the Keiskamma Art Project a sanctuary of hope.

7.8 Theological Interpretation of the Research Findings

The findings in this research are interesting and raise a number of questions. What is of note is that conventional understandings of God which have been inherited from the patriarchal tradition have failed these women. They comment on the fact that in their local Christian church they are unable to challenge gender stereotyping and their role within their churches is marginal. If they have a leadership role within the church community it is limited to leading women. When asked what they believe about God, they provide rhetoric that they have been taught from their Church experience which is both traditional and patriarchal. What is interesting to note is that the women who have experienced the most liberation through the project are now open to change and have a far more creative approach to their understandings of God. They are able to imagine her as a mother and a friend. They attribute their transformation to God and have adopted a far more egalitarian approach to life. This has, in turn, influenced their understandings of God.

Another theologically significant point to note is the cultural approach to God and the supernatural. Despite the colonial influences of Christianity and the image of God as a transcendent Lord, these women

experience God as immanent, surrounding them in all they do. There is no separation between their experience of the supernatural and their everyday lives. In this way, although Christianity has been imposed on them through colonialism and its mission approach, they have not necessarily taken the theology to heart. They are governed by a far more intuitive response to God than a cerebral, rationalistic understanding. The Art Project provides a new community in which to better explore their intuitive responses away from the patriarchal influences of their Church communities and traditional African religion.

The women's understandings of God are linked to creativity. Some of them see themselves as an extension of God's creativity and take delight in being creative. As a result, a new creativity emerges from the women which manifests not only in their embroidery but also in their thinking which allows for creative and expansive thinking that promotes the sustainable livelihood of the community.

The Keiskamma Art Project has opened up a space in which to explore new metaphors for God. The images of local women as potential saints suggest that their intuitive understandings of God are of a deeply nurturing God that sustains life. The women chosen as saints have experienced physical pain and sacrifice as mothers. The idea of women willingly sacrificing themselves is not supported in feminist theology but despite this, the bodily experience of maternal sacrifice in an effort to support and care for their children is respected within the community. Their understandings of God are born out of their physical experiences of the world. The metaphor of God, proposed by Radford Ruether, as primal matrix is intuitively experienced by these women in their relationships and connection. Their sense of hope and future is experienced through the care and empowerment of their children which is a bodily experience and one which they assume God understands. In this way the Keiskamma Art Project has created a safe site to explore feminine metaphors for God which come naturally to many of the women because of their understanding of God as immanent, bodily and living in and through them.

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter answered the key research question, how can the Keiskamma Art Project, its processes and art, be understood in relation to a contextual ecofeminist spirituality? The sub-questions investigated the ways in which the theory, context, interviews and art contributed to the key question. The spiritual themes, the theory, the processes of the Keiskamma Art Project such talking about creating and marketing, the art of the Keiskamma Art Project and its images and metaphors in the Keiskamma

Altarpiece were all examined and discussed in regards to the ways in which they interweave with and express a contextual ecofeminist spirituality. Add a sentence about the theological conclusions.

The final chapter focuses on the recommendations and conclusion, comprising a brief review of the study and describing its trajectory and content.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Brief Review of the Research

The notion of the aesthetic and its links to spirituality was examined and important links which connect creativity and spirituality presented. Visual art therefore offers a tool for the expression of creative longings, the sacred and hope and therefore contributes to the expression of a contextual ecofeminist spirituality.

In Chapter Two, Art was proposed as part of the expression of an integrated spirituality which includes others forms of creative expression such as mystical dance, songs and prayers. Art, as a creative medium, holds the potential to express the spiritual longings of a community presenting a vision for a possible future. Christian feminist theology provided the theoretical framework behind the research which included a presentation of Christian feminist spirituality which highlighted major elements that define it in its expression through relationality in everyday life. Feminist theology deconstructs patriarchal influences imposed by traditional religious practice on women and proposes a new form of spirituality which brings liberation and life for women and society. Themes in Christian feminist spirituality were identified which describe key factors which both contribute to the manifestation of the Spirit in the lives of women and encourage transformation and change.

In chapter three on Art as a Safe Expression of Protest, the notion of protest was defined and presented through the Protest and Resistance Art Movement in South Africa. The research introduced evidence which links protest and art, which has been well documented in South Africa. Art is proposed as a vital part of the construction and revision of culture through its public power, making it an effective tool to assist in transformation. The aesthetic, because of its link to culture and protest, creates a safe medium for the communication of controversial ideas. James Scott's social theories on the notion of the hidden and public transcripts outline why powerless people are not free to express themselves publicly but choose to do so only in a safe location. This research further proposed that creativity, through the use of the arts and in particular visual art, provides a medium in which expression is regarded as acceptable and therefore safer than other forums. It follows that women's art projects provide a safer forum for the hidden transcript to emerge, removed from influences of the dominant group's ideologies.

In chapter four, ecofeminism was introduced as a contemporary form of protest. The contributions of three ecofeminist theologians - Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara and Sally McFague - were

outlined. Themes which were identified and proposed as significant in the building of a contextual ecofeminist spirituality are: Integration and Bodiliness; Experience and Story Telling; Transformation and Justice; and Hope. The themes highlight the elements which contribute to the development of this spirituality and support the ideas that stress the importance of a conversion experience to facilitate the work of transformation.

In chapter five, the Keiskamma Art Project was introduced as the focus of this research. The Project adopted a collaborative management style where project members were encouraged to articulate and contribute their ideas towards the development of an artwork which was meaningful to their lives and context. The Art Project created jobs and economically empowered the local community which promoted considerable change within the community. A wide range of skills training and educational topics were introduced through the forum of the Art Project. These impacted strongly on the women in that the training and education developed their skills base and exposed them to contemporary ideas around education, such as the importance of environmental education. This research proposes that these new ideas, which reflect twenty-first century thought, have been assimilated through the art making process, and manifested in the women's lives bringing with them change and a sense of liberation. The research further shows that general art appreciation emerged as women chose to adorn their homes with their work. The research demonstrated that a new Spirit is evident and visibly alive and at work within the Hamburg community, bringing life and creativity to all the women working with the Art Project.

In chapter six, the methodology of the research design is outlined and begins with an introduction to the theory and its theoretical framework which supports the case study of the Keiskamma Art Project which includes the Keiskamma Altarpiece. The research is qualitative taken from an interpretive perspective and focuses on making meaning. Data collection used a mixed method approach and was analyzed from a position of empathic understanding. Validity, reliability and reflexivity look for universals so as to ensure that the research is generalizable and replicable. Triangulation states that you need to support the conclusion drawn from more than one angle of the research so as not to draw unsupported conclusions. Ethical responsibility was also kept in mind through the research process.

In chapter seven, the research question and its sub-questions probe the results of the interviews and the knowledge gained through association with the organization and an outline of the analysis of the research findings are drawn. The sub-questions add context and content to the answering of the key question by describing how processes of the Keiskamma Art Project such as talking about creating and marketing, the art of the Keiskamma Art Project as well as the images and metaphors within the Keiskamma Altarpiece interweave to express a contextual ecofeminist spirituality.

8.2 Major Conclusions of the Study

Women in South Africa yearn for a fuller expression of life and the aesthetic offers a medium for this expression. Visual art can be described as a conduit for the Spirit which helps to restore brokenness and develop potential. It can challenge and mobilize a community to describe a better vision for the future. The power of visual art and the dialogue around creating it is an important catalyst for the transformation of the personal and communal in the lives of the poor, especially rural women.

Art in South Africa has a history of being an effective tool for protest and was used against apartheid. It remains a useful way to communicate protest and is a more accepted means to convey controversial ideas to the public as art is regarded as part of culture which is constantly changing and being reconstructed.

Art projects in general and the Keiskamma Art Project specifically, provide a safe place to explore ideas removed from the influences and oppressions of the women's lives. Women in the project have found a place to belong where they meet regularly and express their struggles with one another. They are exposed to educational ideas which contribute new ideas to their lives which facilitate in the construction of a vision of hope expressed through their artwork.

Ecofeminist spirituality proposes change and challenges injustice. The protest nature of the spirituality which motivates for just relations through interconnectivity emerges out of their everyday lives. It encourages, nurtures and liberates from past oppressions bringing with it new life. It propels one towards a conversion experience where transformation begins which calls for people to use their intelligence to help prosper the earth. One could argue that the Keiskamma Art Project acts as a catalyst which encourages a conversion experience driven by a contextual ecofeminist spirituality.

Being open to change is an attitude to life and an outcome of a conversion experience. Embracing the possibility of change allows one to explore our inherited knowledge challenging our thinking so as to promote the well being of the entire cosmic community which centers around just relationships.

Christian ecofeminist theologians believe that there are concepts and ideas worth saving and reconstructing from our inherited Christian tradition. They search for positive aspects of the tradition to use in its reconstruction from an ecofeminist perspective. In the Keiskamma Altarpiece, new contextual images and interpretations of faith emerge which are life affirming, compassionate and Christian.

An important factor which contributes to the community's transformation is economic empowerment. It has brought self-confidence and self-esteem to local women in particular. As mothers who are nurturing

children and families, targeting women for empowerment means that all children within the community are better nourished and cared for, thereby providing future hope for the entire community. This has challenged traditional Xhosa culture where women's labour is taken for granted but through the Art Project it is now visible, valued and admired.

In the past, educational opportunities have been few but the Art Project has brought with it new ideas which have aroused a curiosity and interest in education as women sense that the world holds more possibility for them. Apartheid left a legacy of helplessness and disempowerment but women who work in the Keiskamma Art Project appear empowered and full of self-worth. Some are able to think independently and propose new and creative ways of generating income such as in making mother of pearl buttons or in opening up a fish shop.

Women's lives and values have changed through their exposure to the Art Project. Some women have been so completely transformed that they struggle to fit in with the community's customary expectations for their lives. For some, transformation and self-discovery have meant breaking away from their community norms which has been very hard and at times heart-breaking. Despite this struggle, they now offer new role models for younger women as they have better self knowledge and expectations of how they deserve to be treated. They are no longer prepared to put up with abuse, whether physical or verbal, and have willingly undertaken to challenge their community's gender oppressions.

The Keiskamma Altarpiece gave women the opportunity to talk about role models within their community. They identified with older women who showed honesty and courage in the face of their helplessness. Previously role models appear to be women strong enough to endure but I imagine that new role models are emerging who will be admired for their strength and the challenge they offer their community.

Conventional church practice has not changed much and is still regarded as the most difficult place to challenge culture. The Keiskamma Art Project created a community which was able to experience and create a spirituality removed from conventional church structures. Ecofeminist spirituality allows for traditional religious customs such as female sangomas believing that indigenous culture has something to contribute. In indigenous practices a sangoma has increased strength and recognition within the religious structures.

8.3 Recommended Areas for Further Research

There is potential to study other group artworks by the Keiskamma Art Project such as the Guernica exhibition.¹⁵⁰ The Guernica exhibition, which was sold to the Red Location Museum in Port Elizabeth, was a memorial to the many members of the community who have died of AIDS related illnesses. Apart from the large Artwork, many embroidered containers which held items of value belonging to their deceased owners covered the walls. Their art exhibition in the hall in the Grahamstown Settlers Monument provided a liturgical structure for the commemoration of the departed and the recitation of liturgy. This Art Project offers the potential for further research into art and liturgy.

There is more to be discovered and understood in the relationship between spirituality, art, healing and transformation. This is an area of potential study for the future.

Karen Buckenham reminds us,

For women in South Africa, as they yearn, struggle for and envision full life for themselves and others, the aesthetic is an important means for this expression – as a language, a process, an embodiment, a means of communication, a process of solidarity, community-making, an ethical process of transformation, and a way of beautifying the world (Buckenham 2010: 330).

¹⁵⁰ The Guernica Exhibition, <http://www.keiskamma.org/art/major-works/keiskamma-guernica>, accessed 20/11/2011.

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Appendix 1

First Set of Interview Questions in 2008:

How did the Art Project begin?

How did you get involved in the Art Project?

Did working on the Project give you opportunities to discuss ideas about God?

Did you work by yourself or alone on the Project?

Has the Art Project given you opportunity to discuss what it is like to be a woman with other women?

How did doing the Keiskamma Altarpiece affect you?

How did the Keiskamma Altarpiece begin?

How did you come up with a design for the Altarpiece?

Did working on the Altarpiece give you opportunity to talk about God?

Has it helped people think more about the environment?

Have new ideas about your communities relationship to nature evolved?

Have women's roles in this community changed since the "Keiskamma Altarpiece" and the Art Project?

Has the Art Project helped you be recognized as a leader?

Have you learnt more about the natural environment through the Art Project?

What ideas do you see emerging through the images in the Keiskamma Altarpiece?

Art has played a role in the struggle for liberation and transformation. What do you think of this statement? Do you see this as an emerging theme in the Keiskamma project?

What role do you think the process of art making has contributed to the liberation and transformation of the women?

Have feelings about yourself changed through this Project?

Have feelings in your community changed since the Project?

The Second Set of Interview Questions 2011

Please tell me something about yourself, the art you make and how you joined the project? How do you feel when you are creating your art?

Natural Environment

How do you feel about the natural environment?

Do you feel wonder and awe when you look at the natural world, or other feelings? Has the project contributed to these feelings and how?

Being a Woman

How do you feel about being a woman in Hamburg?

Do you think God loves women and why?

Has the Art Project changed the way you feel about being a woman?

Has the Project encouraged women to stand up for themselves?

Your Ideas about God

Do you attend a church and which denomination is it?

What have you thought about God? Art and creativity?

When thinking about God can you imagine God as a mother and a friend?

Have you experienced change or freedom through the project and how?

Do you pray when you work?

God in your Community

Do you share stories about God with one another?

Is God at work in your community and how?

Has the project encouraged women to be kinder and more supportive of one another and their community?

Intentions and outcomes

Does your art celebrate life?

Has the Art Project helped you to rediscover your own culture and value it?

Appendix 2

Fieldwork Interviews

1. Art Project Manager, Hamburg, 25 March 2008.
2. Manager of Embroiderers, Hamburg, 25 March 2008.
3. Embroiderer 1, Hamburg, 25 March 2008.
4. Head of Fine Art, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 24 June 2008.
5. Assistant Art Project Manager, Grahamstown, 27 and 29th June 2008; Hamburg, 4 July 2008.
6. Embroiderer 2, Grahamstown, 29th June 2008; Hamburg, 21 August 2008, 20 July 2011.
7. Embroiderer 3, Grahamstown, 29th June 2008.
8. Stock controller and embroiderer, Hamburg, 20 August 2008.
9. Artist, ceramist and embroiderer, Hamburg, 20 August 2008.
10. Project Manager, Hamburg, 20 August 2008.
11. Project Director (Dr Carol Hofmeyer), Hamburg, 21 August 2008.
12. Aids Counselor, Hamburg, 21 August 2008.
13. Embroiderer 4, Hamburg, 21 August 2008.
14. Design Manager, Hamburg, 21 August 2008, 21 July 2011.
15. Writer, embroiderer, journalist, Hamburg, 21 August 2008.
16. Writer, Manager of the Trust, Hamburg, 21 August 2008.
17. Project Manager of Ntilini, Hamburg, 20 July 2011.
18. Embroiderer 5, Hamburg, 20 July 2011.
19. Finance Manager and Artist, Hamburg, 20 July 2011.

20. Embroiderer 6, Hamburg, 20 July 2011.
21. Felt maker 1, Hamburg, 21 July 2011.
22. Felt maker 2, Hamburg, 21 July 2011.
23. Felt maker 3, Hamburg, 21 July 2011.

Appendix 3

Exhibitions of the artworks of the Keiskamma Art Project (<http://www.keiskamma.org/>)

2002: July –Grahamstown Arts Festival with the Vuselela garments.

2002: National Awards Exhibition in Newtown in Johannesburg.

2002: Exhibition in Cotswolds and Oxford, United Kingdom with hand-made dolls.

2003: Finalist at the Brett Keble Awards for the Keiskamma Tapestry.

2003: The Keiskamma Tapestry at Grahamstown festival, exhibited as part of Eastern Cape Arts and Culture.

2004: F.N.B Craft Now Exhibition: overall Gold Price for the Keiskamma Tapestry.

2004: The Keiskamma Tapestry on permanent show at the Houses of Parliament in Cape Town.

2005: The Keiskamma Altar piece created for Grahamstown National Arts Festival.

2005: The Keiskamma Altar piece at Constitutional Hill in Johannesburg.

2006: Game Auction Exhibition.

2006: The Cream Tapestry in East London Museum.

2006: The Keiskamma Altar piece and Icons at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

2006-2008: The Keiskamma Altarpiece is touring Canada and the United-States.

2006: Tapestries about Johannesburg and Icons on show at Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg.

2007: Grahamstown National Arts Festival with Creation Altarpiece.

2007: First felt piece at the Fibreworks Ten Exhibition in Cape Town.

2007: Embroidered patterns from Pakamani on exhibition in Barcelona, Spain.

2007: The Creation Altar piece and Bird friezes on show at Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg.

2008: Take me also for your child Altar piece on permanent show at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, Port Elizabeth.

2008: Saint George Cathedral in Cape Town with the Creation Altarpiece and Felt Tree Panels.

2008: The Creation Altar piece and Felt work in the SASOL hall in Johannesburg.

2008: The Keiskamma Altar piece in Southwark Cathedral in London, United Kingdom.

2008: Brazil through the Department of Arts and Culture.

2008 – 2009: Set of 26 double-sided tapestries for Murray and Roberts Ltd.

2009: Keiskamma Altarpiece in Make Art/Stop AIDS exhibition starting on the 25th of February in Durban, co-curated by David Gere and Carol Brown: Durban Art Gallery, Museum Africa (Johannesburg).

2009: Confection of the Trophies for BASA competition 2009.

2009: Finalist at the 12th Business and Arts South Africa (BASA) awards 2009 through the Murray & Roberts Women's Art Project in two categories: First Time Sponsor and Single Project.

2009: The Creation Altarpiece at UNISA Art Gallery (Pretoria).

2009: 'Children playing games', triptych made of textile art, wire and bead work and photography is commissioned by Durban Municipality to be part of the decoration of Moses Mabhida Stadium, part of the venues for the 2010 Soccer World Cup.

2009 - 2010: Keiskamma Altar piece in Make Art/Stop AIDS exhibition starting on the 25th of February in Durban, co-curated by David Gere and Carol Brown: Durban Art Gallery, Museum Africa (Johannesburg), Iziko Slave Lodge (Cape Town).

2010: Grahamstown National Arts Festival with the Keiskamma Guernica installation.

2010: Kirstenbosch Art Biennale with Botanical Artworks: Cycad, Aloes and Dune Walk.

2010: Keiskamma Guernica at Wits (Johannesburg) for the Drama for Life Festival
(21-28th August 2010).

2010: The Creation Altarpiece sold to UNISA Art Gallery (Pretoria).

2010: Keiskamma Guernica sold to Red Location Museum (Port Elizabeth).

Appendix 4

Permission to use the photos of the Keiskamma Altarpiece.

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The Keiskamma Trust is a community organisation centred in Hamburg (Eastern Cape) which works to foster hope and offer support for the most vulnerable. We strive to address the challenges of widespread poverty and disease through holistic and creative programmes and partnerships.



July 18, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

With this letter the Keiskamma Trust grants permission for S.A. Paton to publish photographs of works produced by the Keiskamma Art Project in South Africa.

Please cite the works as copyrighted by the Keiskamma Trust and when possible and appropriate, if you could list our website: www.keiskamma.org. we would be grateful.

With best wishes and thanks to Susan for her interest in the work of the Keiskamma Trust.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annette Woudstra", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Annette Woudstra

Keiskamma Trust General Manager

annette@keiskamma.org

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