

INDIGENOUS AESTHETICS AND NARRATIVES IN THE WORKS OF BLACK SOUTH  
AFRICAN ARTISTS IN LOCAL ART MUSEUMS

YVONNE WINTERS

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## **DECLARATION**

Except where acknowledged to the contrary, this dissertation is the original work of the candidate. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Art in History of Art, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Y. Winters.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Valerie Winters, née Gould and my ‘classificatory’ granny MaKhosana Vilakazi. It was the both of you who first taught me to value African art and culture.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an amalgam of reformulated essays on artists who had connections with 20-21<sup>st</sup> century KwaZulu-Natal: They appeared in exhibition catalogues that accompanied the exhibitions; *The Azaria Mbatha Retrospective*, 1998, *The Trevor Makhoba Memorial*, 2005 and *Cyprian Mpho Shilakoe Revisited*, 2006.

Chapter 1, the introduction; outlines the chapters, gives the theoretical and broader theoretical framework, history of the region and art therein, literature survey and methodology. Central to the theoretical framework is an attempt to meld the original essays into a coherent whole; by expanding the interpretation of indigenous cultural world-view to include the concept of orality versus literate cultures. Even in the transformation to literacy with westernization and Christianity the African oral mind-set is still operative; thus for instance the early Zulu writers like R.R.R. Dhlomo rendered the Zulu kings' oral praise-poems into written form and these became set-works for Zulu schools up until the 1994 new dispensation. Also dealt with are related issues of what therefore constitutes 'Africanness' and debates whether it is but the invention of the west in need of the 'Other' (something arguably pertinent to the art-collector's reasons for collecting), or if there is that own to the African style, like the oral style, which can be termed a 'legitimate Africanness' if one will. Further, how this style then exhibits itself in the visual arts as a 'preferred form' in terms of medium, colour, patterning and favored technique which best conspire to express these qualities. Chapter 2 (essay 1) and chapter 3 (essay 2), carry forward the assumptions made in the introduction. In modern times the oral genre has developed into an exciting style; namely the development of urban, often migrant musical forms, like *isicathimiya*, that challenge politics, social-wrongs, racism and taboos. It is argued that an artist like Trevor Makhoba can be considered a social commentator and 'master of the oral genre' in that he rendered this style into visual form. Certain of Makhoba's works depicting white females and black males are analyzed in this light and it is suggested that the oral genre also draws upon both stereotypical and universal archetypal imagery. Chapter 3 (essay 2) considers Azaria Mbatha's use of the older oral story-telling mode, rendered in linocut medium as an echo of earlier indigenous wooden 'pokerwork' panels, to transmit a political message in line with concepts of African Christianity, itself a syncretism of the Christian message with African world-view. This allegory was needed in a time where the Nationalist Government would have made open insurrection impossible. Chapter 4 (essay 3) concerns ex-Rorke's Drift art-student Cyprian

Shilakoe. I analyze his aquatints in the light of his own Sotho cultural ideas on contagion and the ancestors for deeper meaning. The fact of culture change is accepted and mention is made of the artist's friend and fellow student, Dan Rakgoathe's melding of western esoteric mysticism, like Rosicrucianism, into African thinking and how far this impacted on the more traditional Shilakoe's works. The essays are followed by Chapter 5, the conclusion, which serves to come to some resolution. This is then followed by the bibliography.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1. Overview of the thesis**

This dissertation's chapters are based upon previously published essays; all combine an indigenous aesthetic and a narrative post-modernist approach to the lives and works of Azaria Mbatha, Trevor Makhoba and Cyprian Shilakoe, each of whose work is represented in South African art museums/galleries. No sculptors or African traditional crafters are included as this would make the thesis too lengthy. Such an approach mediates a deeper interpretation of the works to an audience, many of whom come from non-African backgrounds. Each essay appeared as contextualizing texts, along with other essays in post 1994 catalogues which accompanied national travelling exhibitions of the particular artist's works. These essays were solicited submissions and my invitation stemmed from my position as curator of contemporary and traditionalist<sup>1</sup> African art at the Campbell Collections, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Each essay has been revisited and reformulated, incorporating previously unconsidered information and arguments to ensure unity of approach throughout the thesis. The selected artists have had some relationship with the province of KwaZulu-Natal; either having been born, or having studied, in the province. Hence each has referenced the African cultural world-view to a greater or lesser extent. All of course date from the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The fact of these artists having been included on exhibitions is an indication of their importance to art in the province, because such exhibitions take planning and funding, meaning that their staging indicates the seriousness of the post 1994 attempts to redress the inequalities of African art under the apartheid years. Central research questions would therefore be:

1. In artists' works that reflect traditional African world-view and western Christianity and/or mysticism (as in training at mission art schools), how far can one access these works via cultural aesthetics, world-view and historical life narrative? Is it indeed possible to enrich a viewer's experience of a work of art or sculpture by applying the anthropological concept of "thick description" (see Boarder theoretical framework) by using the post-modernist and narrative concept of 'Voice' and indeed 'multiple-voices', as well as the notion that pre-literate peoples use oral thinking which often differs in certain



2. significant respects from literate thinking? (see Considering cultural context to art of KZN) In other words can the using of cultural texts, oral ‘texts’ like poetry or music and interviews and understanding of indigenous artistic idiom enable a greater reading of a piece?
3. Further, how do these above mentioned issues, when accessed via mixed race co-authorship, wider consensus, debate and/or translation from an indigenous language and multi-cultural audience response, bring a consensually enriched interpretation of an artist and his/her work. Can one validate research via such means? And how can this help understanding an artist’s creative intentions?
4. Can one still rely on the resource of the original literature and interviews pre to the 1988 *Neglected tradition* exhibition (see Historical, political and ethnic background to art in KZN) and broaden them in the light of later post-modernist and narrative approaches (see Broader theoretical issues). How can this be applied to the works of a deceased artist?
5. Have western dominated views on African art and aesthetics actually worked counter to a deeper understanding of localized ethnic cultural context. How does this relate to Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and how do the realities of culture change, modernization and westernization affect any of these issues?

Each chapter addresses one or more of these key research questions where they are applicable to the understanding of the artist as person, his local ethnic milieu, his political and changing circumstances and his work methods and content. The lay-out of the thesis chapters are as follows:

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1. Overview of the thesis**

### **1.2. Considering cultural context and the implications of oral style on the interpretation and mediation of art in KwaZulu-Natal**

### **1.3. Pondering ‘Africanness’ and ‘preferred form’<sup>2</sup>**

#### **1.4. Historical, political and ethnic background to the art of KwaZulu-Natal**

#### **1.5. Broader theoretical issues**

#### **1.6. Methodology, matters of style, literature survey and motivation for approach adopted**

### **Chapter 2: Essay 1. Trevor Makhoba<sup>3</sup> and reflections on a distinctive African Genre.**

Chapter 2 is a revision and expansion of an essay for the *Trevor Makhoba Memorial Exhibition* catalogue (Durban Art Gallery, 2005). The original was written in co-authorship with Mxolisi Mchunu and titled “Great Temptation in the Garden: Trevor Makhoba as Taboo-Breaker.”

I was an exhibition committee member on the *Trevor Makhoba Memorial Exhibition* (2005) and essay contributor along with among others; Brendan Bell, Bruce Campbell-Smith, Khwezi Gule, Philippa Hobbs, Juliette Leeb-du Toit, Valerie Leigh, Paul Sibisi, Mduduzi Xakaza and Gerald West. My essay co-author is a Phd history candidate who had been a gardener (applicable because Makhoba’s painting depicts the master-servant interaction in apartheid South Africa), as had members of his family and he pursued the imagery of the ‘Kitchen-suit’ worn by servants in “A modern coming of age: Zulu manhood, domestic work and the ‘Kitchen suit’” in Carton, B; J. Laband, and Sithole, J. (Eds.) *Zulu Identities: being Zulu, past and present* (UKZN Press, 2008).

This chapter draws on black colleagues’ readings of the late Trevor Makhoba’s paintings, concentrating on the artist’s depictions of females, both black and white. Taking from Juliette Leeb-du Toit’s essay “Phila Trevor Makhoba’s Narratives and Mores: Dialectics of Artistic and Intellectual Leadership” in the same exhibition catalogue, it is argued that Makhoba could be considered the ‘Master’ of the visual hybrid, urban oral genre, also to be found in such music styles as *isicathimiya* and that his works require familiarity with the township life to fully grasp their import. Much of his work refers to topics that are socially taboo, as for instance the sexual encounters between master and servant across race in the old South Africa. Makhoba’s asides concerning South African race-relations are of particular interest

to the politics of the times. Politics, moralization and taboo are all dimensions that could be missed by those not party to this genre. I broach not only fellow-African responses but that of white South African audiences (including my own), to Makhoba's varied renditions of females, arguing that the artist as often communicates archetypal females (who can be figured as black as well as white) as he renders racial stereotypical ones. These are in part informed by the strong heroic-epic tradition in the writings of R.R.R. Dhlomo on the Zulu kings, which were set-works at pre 1994 African schools. As the artist is deceased and where there is a lack of recorded documentation some of my assumptions are perforce suppositions for which I do proffer reasons.

### **Chapter 3: Essay 2. Re-reading black South African history through the works of Azaria Mbatha. <sup>4</sup>**

Chapter 3 is a revision of the essay "African roots in the work of Azaria Mbatha" in *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition* catalogue (Durban Art Gallery, 1998).

I was an exhibition committee member on the *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective* (1998) and essay contributor along with Brenda Danilowitz, Philippa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin, Juliette Leeb-du Toit, Robert Loder, Azaria Mbatha, Dianne Stewart and Gerald West. I also conducted a walkabout at the Tatham Art Gallery exhibition-leg for their education program for KZN schools, which helped to formalize some of the ideas put forward in the original essay.

This chapter draws upon studies of African Christian Theology as it differs from European Christian Theology in its emphasis, and how this stems from African cultural world-views. Reference is to such theological debates in *Relevant Theology for Africa* Mapumulo Missiological Institute, 1972. Taking Azaria Mbatha's more recently published autobiography *Within Loving Memory of the Century* (UKZN Press, 2005) it is argued that Mbatha's religious works are not only referenced to this uniquely African stance on Christianity but they also contain an important political message. This message was deliberately masked by the artist's use of biblical narrative during the days of apartheid South

Africa's ban on insurgence by Africans. It is also argued that the artist's choice of sequential scenes in linocut contrasts of black and white, and, in such works as *The Story of Moses, 1963*, the inclusion of Zulu biblical written references, most likely derives from the artist's African roots rather than the influence of his Swedish teachers at Rorke's Drift. This argument means that I have, to a certain extent, countered Elizabeth Rankin and Philippa Hobbs's assertions in "The prints of Azaria Mbatha: Memory in process" in *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition* (Durban Art Gallery, 1998) that Mbatha was forced into presenting himself as the quintessential African artist by his European audiences' need for the mythically African.

#### **Chapter 4: Essay 3. The graphic works of Cyprian Shilakoe<sup>5</sup>: reflections on a cosmology informed by a unique combination of temperament and culture.**

Chapter 4 was originally written as an essay for the exhibition catalogue *Cyprian Mpho Shilakoe Revisited*, (Durban Art Gallery, 2006). This title has been retained in this chapter's rewrite.

The essay contribution to *Cyprian Shilakoe Revisited* (2006) was along with those by Jill Addleson, Linda Givon, Philippa Hobbs, Otto Lundböhm, Andries Oliphant and Elizabeth Rankin.

This chapter draws upon Phillipa Hobbs's essay "Prints, prophecy and the limits of popular testimony in Shilakoe's work" that appeared in the same catalogue, where she quotes interviews with the late artist's Swedish teachers at Rorke's Drift, KwaZulu-Natal in the late 1960s to early 1970s, regarding their attitudes to the unique development of Shilakoe's subject matter and use of aquatint etching. The artist's own BaKoni, North Sotho culture is especially referenced in the interpretation of his belief in the ancestors, contagion and life's meaning. Considerations are given to the influence of syncretism of African thinking with both Christianity and western mysticism; the latter introduced by the artist's friend Dan Rakgoathe. In these developments of a unique expression, parallels are suggested with the "New African" writers of the 1930-50s like the Dhlomo brothers. This is done retrospectively as the artist died in 1972. Thus, as in the case of Makhoba's work, I can be accused of supposition to build up my arguments, but throughout I have presented relevant documentation plus understandings from his surviving sister, the Swedish teachers at Rorke's

Drift and that of Rakgoathe. It is concluded that a lack of especially cultural knowledge could result in a misreading of some of this artist's deeper messages. As in Mbatha's case, there is a political subversion present in the works that can only be appreciated in the light of post-modernism, the subtlety of which was missed in the more militant stance of the anti-apartheid struggle politics of the times.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **Endnotes**

### **Bibliography**

#### **1.2. Considering cultural context and the implications of oral style on the interpretation and mediation of art in KwaZulu-Natal**

In the process of re-writing the essays into chapters for this Masters thesis, I had been looking again at the works of the late Trevor Makhoba in the catalogue *Trevor Makhoba Retrospective Exhibition* (Durban Art Gallery, 2005).<sup>6</sup> Once more I am amazed, aghast and amused by the works, how any one individual could have had such a range of commentary and visual imagery never fails to astound me. However, I am very circumspect in sharing the images, confirming in this reticence the existence of a controversy in regard to the hanging of the artist's works in the possession of my museum, the Campbell Collections, UKZN. Makhoba knew of this controversy, he had been informed by black research assistants from the institution that the content of his paintings outraged many, particularly white South African visitors. Nevertheless the artist persisted in a certain disingenuous innocence in his explanations to his friend and patron, Bruce Campbell-Smith, (Campbell-Smith 1005:23) of which I discuss in detail later. Why did Makhoba's works create such a controversy one may ask; because the works are often socially taboo for various reasons that range from ritual 'muthi' murder, death and sexuality, to the bizarre in South Africa's race relations. One white fundamentalist Christian viewer declared that God would damn myself, along with the entire selection committee to an eternity in hell, for including the work *Abelumbi of the Millennium, 2001*, now in Campbell-Smith's collection, on the exhibition *Untold tales of Magic:*

*Abelumbi*. That which most offended this viewer was the labeling in the work of “human parts on special!!” in the *muthi*-shop, which has trays of genitalia on open display, a large African gentleman wearing tribal ear-studs and cheap synthetic green suit, surveying a newborn baby that the burley white butcher-like assistant holds up for inspection. Only seeing the work or reading such a description as this, will alert to the reality of Makhoba’s abilities to outrage. However, and this is the disquieting irony of Makhoba’s depictions; it is not a complete fantasy *muthi*-shop that he creates, rather he points to his morally reprehensible fellows’ greed for power that such body-parts are thought to give the user, itself an age-old African belief. There is no political-correctness, no pretend that all is well, or indeed any assumption that European middle-class morality is the norm in this ‘New Millennium South Africa’ for Makhoba. What nevertheless is to be seen is an astute understanding of the psychological stress of urbanization upon the psyche of any African who ascribes to neither traditional nor Christian values. Absalom Vilakazi in *Zulu transformations: a study of the dynamics of social change* (University of Natal Press, 1965) says of this class:

They are a floating element of misfits who are called *amagxagxa* in the Reserve (Nyuswa circa 1957). These people are, of course, closer to the traditionalists than to the Christians and, in fact, their world view is totally traditionalist. They differ from the traditionalist group in their unashamed opportunism. There is no particular code of behavior by which they can be judged for their standards and actions are determined by expediency.” (Vilakazi 1965:142)

Makhoba’s African audience’s reactions are markedly different to those of the aforementioned white viewer who was so distressed by his rendition of a *muthi*-shop, most sigh at the frailties of those in need of power, for they understand the reality of such an expediency that gives credence to the practice of witchcraft. This that I shall call “the tolerance of the awful” is characteristic of many South Africans, not only those who are black, but also such whites as Campbell-Smith, and it is a relief to read his “*Hamba Kahle Umfowethu*, memories, insights and anecdotes: a tribute to Phila Trevor Makhoba” in *Trevor Makhoba Memorial Exhibition* catalogue (Durban Art Gallery, 2005). The assault on one’s senses that is presented by Makhoba in certain of his works like the one under discussion, can only be alleviated by explanations or interpretation of not only cultural world-view and the existence of pressures of social change, but in the case of Makhoba; the insight into his

complex nature, with a personal narrative for which he would be justified in claiming, “There but for the grace of God go I.” It is as if such grace comes in the form of the artist’s humour and irony as he reflects on his own African urban circumstance and its aberrations. It was worth it to be reminded of the man himself; the impoverished man with a drinking problem, one whom Campbell-Smith thought an undiagnosed epileptic, one who would accept well below the value for a painting, so as to have money in hand before returning home to an irate wife, the humourous and witty man who liked to party with his friends and students. Even the man one watched warily, wondering if some awkwardness or quirkiness on one’s part would become a part of a future painting, for we live uncomfortably with such a genius amongst our more urbane and conventional selves. As Juliette Leeb-du Toit says of Makhoba in her essay “Phila Trevor Makhoba’s Narratives and Mores: a Dialectics of Artistic and Intellectual Leadership” in the same exhibition catalogue:

While many contributors to this catalogue may wish to present Makhoba selectively, as a religious and moral man, which in many ways he was, those who knew him well will recall a man with a tremendous lust for life in all its facets, both good and bad....Makhoba was both volatile and placid, exuberant and introspective, well aware of his inspirational intent, and therefore it may seem contradictory to encounter Makhoba the moralist, as the counterpoise to Makhoba the hedonist. (Leeb-du Toit 2005:53):

If I had not known Makhoba myself and I had viewed his works, my only access to the complexity of the man and his cultural world-view, would surely have been this same catalogue with its contextual essays: This then is my argument for additional explanations/interpretation, for clearly one cannot expect to find such insight in an artwork alone. Thus for example in my re-write of my essay for this thesis, I contemplated Makhoba’s *The Garden of History, 2002* (No 93 in the catalogue), and realized the necessity of a reassessment of my original essay written with Mchunu “Great Temptation in the Garden: Trevor Makhoba as taboo-breaker’.” This was needed not only because the original was co-authored with my colleague Mxolisi Mchunu, making this thesis rewrite not fully my own, but because I now see that the artist dealt with the same theme in other works, and moreover his approach has not been a repetition or regurgitation. Here is Makhoba the social

commentator, the mirror to ourselves and not necessarily someone with a need to perpetuate a personal grudge; for in catalogue No 93 there is again a white female and black male depicted in a garden, but in this instance there is an entirely different dimension to the relationship. For it is a far more subtle rendition of white womanhood, while vulnerable she is an archetypal Athena, good daughter to her father Zeus (or Clio, Muse of History), or if one sought a comparative Zulu archetype, a *Nonkhubulwana*, beloved daughter of the High God *Umvelingqangi*. As such Makhoba seems to touch a universal trait of womanhood.

Makhoba's classical allusions in his painting, *Garden of History*, 2002 introduce another dimension to the discussion of the oral style; namely its relation, as an indigenous African style to that of the earlier generation of writers, stemming from the mission schools, most notably Adams College, Amamzintoti and Mariannhill at Pinetown, Natal. In many ways the indigenous idiom was combined with the heroic and Romantic style taught in these elite black colleges; expressing themselves firstly in music and then literature by such men as the Dhlomo brothers, R.R.R. and H.I.E., B.W. Vilakazi, J. Ngubane, P. Lamula and R. Caluza. These men came to be termed "The New Africans – who valued their rural roots but at the same time embraced modernity. This era of the 1930s-50s is known as 'the period of the Zulu cultural renaissance'." (personal communication, Mwelela Cele, Durban, 2009) Tim Couzens writing in *The New African: A study of the life and work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* (Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1985), discussing the era's contribution to the arts by Mark Radebe who he describes as "the chief ideologist in music for the educated elite (African)" notes further that:

Radebe rejected much of 'Negro' music (imported from the United States) as being an embodiment of 'only the lighter and more superficial elements of Negro idiom'...and as being based on compositions which were not folk songs at all but those of white men, such as the Stephen Foster songs. If 'a distinctive Bantu music' was wanted it had to be based on 'the only real Bantu music, namely, its folk music'. This conception was founded on a fairly precise view of history and the refinements of language. (Couzens 1985: 69-70)

Couzens continues to quote Radebe:



‘By proper development Bantu music could be freed from its manifest limitations and made the vehicle for the expression of a truly national music. Traditional songs are intimately associated with Bantu history and lie very near the heart of the people. In this music there is a mass of characteristic material. We know that the innate value of speech lies in traditional associations and connotations; and this is equally true of music which is as much a language as speech itself.’ (Couzens 1985:70)

Couzens indicates the extent to which the African writers and musicians of the 1930s-1950s referenced the western classics and Romantics for inspiration in their effort to solve the political and economic problems facing the urban African. I quote the florid language with classical references in a letter from H.M.J. Masiza, M.S. Radebe and B.J.P. Tyamzashe, of 27 March 1929, in the Skota papers (African Studies Institute, University of Witwatersrand) inserted in Couzens’s publication:

“..... Governments may legislate, political and industrial leaders eclipse *Mark Anthony’s rhetorical feats*, and religious institutions plead and intervene, but in the last analysis the solution of this economic (and political) problem will be found to rest with the Native himself. With a view to discussing ways and means whereby we may *through Art* contribute our share to this solution, *we, the undersigned invite a Conference of Musicians and all devotees to the Muses*, to meet at Kimberley on Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1929.”[Italics mine] (Couzens 1985: 81 endnote 159)

Couzens mentions some interesting formulaic aspects of the written style in use by this early generation of writers, who were the product of the elite mission schools, and says of Adams College:

“(A)ll the students were brought up on the ‘Royal Readers’ in English, and Francis Bacon’s essays may have been one of the set-works (Coral Island was one of the books taught at Edendale). In history or Zulu Mr Kuluse thinks that J.Y. Gibson’s *The Story of the Zulus* may have been read. Zulu was taught by Albert Luthuli.” (Couzens 1985:49)

S.V.H. Mdhuli wrote *The development of the African* (Mariannhill Mission Press, 1933). Of his writing style Couzens notes:

His whole book is full of ...phrases and epithets...(a) clichéd style. ... (But) His style is clearly that of the mission schools of the time...many of these formulaic phrases form a pattern – they are aphoristic messages such as ... ‘Let us strike the iron while it is still hot’...The important point to note here is that Mdhuli (and others) were not just using the phraseology, the vocabulary of the education system but *that phraseology was collocated with a particular message, the vocabulary contained an ideology....It is thus not sufficient to point out that style in the literature of the thirties was frequently imitative of European models; one must go further and say that style brought with it, inextricably, an ideological pattern.* [Italics mine] (Couzens 1985:30-31)

Couzens argues this conflation of style and rhetoric as one in which white liberals and missionaries colluded with the black elite toward ‘the development (modernization) of the African’. One must remark that this style is still found in the post 1994 political speeches of such men as the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki (like his “I am an African” speech at the adoption of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill, 1996) and one wonders in how far this extravagant style borrows as much from indigenous praise-poetry as the great authors of English literature. And it is also true that when these early Zulu authors came to write in earnest, their works described heroic epics rendered into written form of the traditional oral praises of the Zulu kings, Shaka, Dingaan and Dinizulu especially, and moreover, they wrote in Zulu rather than English. One could ask if this was not because this language is more expressive of the oral genre? I go into more detail concerning this history in the chapter on Makhoba, in relation to the painting that evoked the discussion. Also significant in the literature on the “New Africans” is the acknowledgement of the African penchant for debate, itself a characteristic of oral societies: Mdhuli comments concerning literary-debating societies:

(These) have been running for a long time in some of the towns (among the Africans)...One of the resolutions passed by the American Board Mission Conference in Durban, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1931 was to the effect that debating societies should be

formed in native reserves....In these debating clubs people could meet and deliberate on topics pertaining to their social, religious, moral and educational progress, nay, to discuss questions of moment like depression, unemployment, etc. (Mdhuli 1933:43)

Further and perhaps more importantly, concerning the re-write of my essays, from Leeb-du Toit, Nyoni and others' catalogue essays in the *Trevor Makhoba Memorial Exhibition* publication, I now know why my Zulu colleagues have such an assured reading of Makhoba's works; because he is expressing himself, especially concerning masculinity issues, through known Zulu oral idioms, albeit visually: If the early black elite musicians and writers partook in literary-debating societies, used formulaic phraseology and combined the heroic-epic with the royal oral praises of old, then so to did the later generations of urban and migrant Zulu readily draw upon both sources, for most school-going African's of the 1970-90s had the works of R.R.R. Dhlomo and S. Nyembesi concerning the lives of the Zulu kings as part of their curricula. And these African schools also emphasized debate, while further; many Zulu homes had the images of the Zulu kings on trays and calendars. (personal communication Mwelela Cele and Mthunzi Zungu, Durban, 2009) Certainly the image of Shaka printed on these items was taken from the drawing by the ship's Captain Saunders King, who visited the famous monarch in the early 1800s, a sketch later published by his friend Nathaniel Isaacs in *Travels and adventures in Eastern Africa* (London, Edward Churton, 1836). More significantly, this was the period of the neo-classical in art, and King depicts Shaka as likened to a classical Greek God. I discuss these matters in more detail in the chapter on Makhoba but here one needs to give ear to Leeb-du-Toit's commentary concerning the development of an urban hybrid oral genre, more readily expressed in such musical forms as *maskanda*, *isicathimiya* and *mbaqanga*, whose artists were "Notorious for their directness in their attempts to chide and rebuke, they have become almost untouchable (despite frequent censorship) under the guise of entertainment and music, yet pursue their notorious irreverence and social criticism unremittingly." (Leeb-du-Toit 2005:39) The visual proponent of this hybrid urban oral form is Trevor Makhoba and his kind, all mostly self-taught artists of the 1980s-90s. These masters of the genre, like the literary greats of the 1930s-50s had their roots in early Zulu praise-poetry and the idiom draws upon not only western elements of the heroic epic but more especially the early Zulu oral style with its cultural call to debate, and in the urban environment this centers on the challenges of "current

affairs, identity and contemporary histories, personal and collective, trivial and profound.”(Leeb-du Toit 2005:37)

As Leeb-du Toit significantly points out:

Makhoba is clearly reclaiming art within an African context of relevance and, at the same time, implicitly challenging an erstwhile predominant reception in an exclusively white audience. It is not merely art for visual pleasure or vicarious empathy, but art which serves a social purpose. (Leeb-du Toit 2005: 37)

I also quote Leeb-du Toit’s commentary on Makhoba’s struggle with black masculinity in her aforementioned essay:

Central to many of Makhoba’s images is a focus on male identity and the precariousness of the black male in an urban, partially disintegrating patriarchy -an issue of fundamental importance in many of the migrant worker themes in the *maskanda* and *isicathimiya* tradition. (Erlmann 1996:306). (Leeb-du Toit 2005 :40)

She continues:

The strong sense of a loss of male pride, authority and dignity pervades Makhoba’s work, who appears to suggest that as a result of both the lack of male authority and, on the other hand, an excess thereof - males may have become more authoritarian, corrupt and ineffectual, inferred by themes of rape, incest, wife-beating, ineffectualness and ultimately rejection by the *amadlozi*. (Leeb-du Toit 2005: 40)

The understanding of what constitutes the oral genre, which pervades the art expression of KwaZulu-Natal in particular, needs yet deeper discussion: I first came across “Orality versus Literacy” in 1993 when doing a module with Professor Edgard Sienaert who founded the Orality Studies Course at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Orality as a study is based upon the philosophy of two Jesuit priests, Father Walter Ong<sup>7</sup> whose best known work is *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (2nd ed. New York, Routledge, 2002) and Marcel Jousse who Edgard Sienaert has translated from French, as in “Marcel Jousse: The

Oral Style and the Anthropology of Gesture.” in *Oral Tradition* 1990, 5/1: 91-106.<sup>8</sup> These philosophers considered that thought and expression was organized differently between oral and literate societies or peoples. Oral poets do not remember verbatim, their poems are never repeated exactly the same way at each performance and audience participation influences their rendition. The idea is that older societies, like those of Africa as well as the peasantry of Europe, which did not have a written language, remember via certain mnemonic modes that characterize their style of thinking; hence oral thinking is formulaic and centers on certain standard themes. As such it is very patterned and dependent on the human physiology with words/phrases/images/gestures that are rhythmic, repetitious, alliterative, idiomatic and proverbial, much of which literate people regard as clichéd. Persons who think in this way are additive rather than subordinative, in other words using “and” to join sentences and aggregative rather than analytic, thus giving more typical examples rather than analyzing one incident for its exceptions. Oral speech also tends to be unnecessarily copious which enables the hearer to keep up with the story-line and the speaker to stay close to the subject, organize his/her thought and modulate the approach to the audience. Orality depends on traditional ritualized modes of doing things which ensures that such societies remain homeostatic and most innovation is discouraged as requiring integration and recall that will upset the smooth-flow of this equilibrium. Understandably, it is close to life as lived by a community and thus experiential and situational, for everything an oral person knows is related to his/her reality. It is also agonistically or effectively toned, having an immediacy that is lost in abstraction by literate peoples who depend upon the recorded word to give themselves the space to appear ‘collected’. Oral people are empathetic rather than objectively distanced and all extraneous detail is forfeited in remembering so that much of their history takes on a mythic dimension. It is the style of thinking that readily constellates into myth, folklore and poetry. Neither literacy nor orality is a neutral term; to literate people oral thinking appears illogical, unreliable and aggressive with ‘naming and blaming’. However, this last is a part of debate and rhetoric and the ‘how of speaking well’ becomes the basis of oral cultures’ power dynamics. The authors argue that oral thinking has its own non-linear logic unlike that of the literate world, where linear logic developed from and is dependent upon written text. When oral cultures become literate, as has happened with most African peoples, the culture still retains some aspects of orality and there are nowadays, in terms of this perceptual orientation, very few Africans who are either primary oral or fully literate for most are on a continuum

between the two extremes. This also applies to Europeans who can, like Marcel Jousse himself, have come from an illiterate peasantry. Sienaert says of this champion of orality:

Jousse offers a theoretical perspective of the thinking and perceptions of an 'insider', simultaneously recording the retention of his Oral-style consciousness and his quantum leap from an oral milieu to advanced academic literacy in one gifted lifetime. In so doing, he demonstrates the fallacy of the dichotomy between the 'oral' and 'literate' mind, with the associated connotations of 'oral = primitive' and 'literate = complex'. (<http://www.esienaert.co./jousse>)

Bogumil Jewsiewicki gives some interesting parallels between Zairian urban art and the black South African oral style in "Painting in Zaire: From the Invention of the west to the representation of social self" in Vogel, S., (Ed.) *Africa Explores: 20<sup>th</sup> century African art* (Centre for African Art, New York and Prestel, Munich, 1991). He says:

A Zairian painting refers to a story and emits a narrative, even when the story is not explicitly represented in the picture space. A number of paintings adopt a comic strip style...each image constituting a chapter in the tale. An even greater number of works contain numerous episodes of a story...to produce the effect of a simultaneous narrative, as no sequence is imposed among the images, the viewer must create one, adjusting it to suit the meaning they give to each element. (Jewsiewicki 1991:145)

He notes that the themes vary from one region to another; hence the comic-strip painting is characteristic of Kinshasa while historical paintings are found in Kisangani. Some painters have developed a personal discourse "in response to their perception of their social role and to the conditions of the market" (Jewsiewicki 1991:149). He further comments:

The urban painter, like the rural sculptor, resembles the jazz musician: he develops a theme without pretending to exhaust it. Neither the painting nor the performance is an attempt to surprise the public; instead, it re-creates what everyone already knows, and invites the participation of all present. The artist's imagination is limited to improvisation on well-understood themes...these artists usually make numerous versions of the themes that sell well. Such works are not copies...a sale generally

leads to a new version of the theme by the same or another painter. (Jewsiewicki 1991:131)

There is an element of the oral genre that it is hard to articulate from abstract theorizing and it is important because it is that which so often gets uproarious laughter from black South Africans and outrage from their white lay-fellow citizens and puts Indigenous Knowledge Systems<sup>9</sup> in serious doubt by western academia. Through a sequence of synchronicities, I am somewhat closer to what constitutes this element; it seems to me that it derives from the aforementioned aspect of oral societies; that of immediate response to experiential circumstances. To explain I give some of the incidents that exhibited this very visceral dimension of oral persons' responses as well as their often blatant disregard for 'truth' as it is perceived in western thought: My black colleague Mxolisi Mchunu sent me a SMS message that he was so angry he "spat in the eye and mouth of a 'pale face' (white)" board-member who held forth on the excessive salaries commanded by the new black elite. Concern and offers of anger management courses from his more sophisticated friends were wasted because he then laughed raucously and owned that it had only been, albeit it a very real, dream! This brought to mind a Majubadlukhethe Mazibuko's reasons for joining Bhambatha Zondi's rebels against the colonial government of Natal, in their imposition of poll-tax in 1906. In an oral interview that appears in the *Oral Interview project of Killie Campbell Africana Library, 1978* an elderly Mr Mazibuko gives an extraordinary graphic image of defiance that has stayed with me since I read it in 2004:

...the Govt. had decided the Black people should pay tax for their heads...this is how the trouble started, after the chiefs had time to reply Bambada<sup>10</sup> stood up and asked what the head had done...of what use is this head that I should pay for it. I carry it, how does this affect the Govt; a heated argument started and Bambada spat on the Commissioner, spat on his head in an attempt to spit on his face, the saliva landed on his hat, this was the signal of hostilities. (Mazibuko 1978: 2)

No amount of reading Paul Thompson's detailed study *Bambatha at Mpanza: the making of a rebel* (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2004) based upon court-cases and court-marshals (which one would expect to have noted such contempt of persons) confirmed this incident. Mchunu is a historian and I commented that neither he nor his fellow African intellectuals

seemed distressed by this inexactness. Moreover, Bhambatha Zondi's hero status is confirmed in his praises, which are taken as reflecting a valid indigenous history in Mxolisi Mchunu, Mthunzi Zungu and Ngced'omhlophe Ndlovu's "The verbal art of keeping the memories of Bhambada alive" in Magwaza, T; Y. Seleti, and Sithole, M.P.(Eds.) *Freedom sown in blood: memories of the Impi Yamakhanda an indigenous knowledge system perspective* (Ditlou Publ., 2006). I quote among other metaphorical likenesses, concerning the character of Bhambatha as shown in his praise-poems:

Bhambada is described as hitting men with *iqhabanga* (a type of knobkerrie), where ordinary men would use a stick; implying that he was excessive, powerful and vicious in his actions....He is likened to a thunderstorm that took place under the mountain of 'Hlenyane' at Ngome (which is above the site of the ambush at Mpanza in 1906), but the bullet (of the white colonial forces) missed him but hit the rock, breaking the rock but not the man. (Mchunu, Zungu and Ndlovu 2006: 46)

The authors continue:

The praises go on to say that no one could explain Bhambada's ever-changing character. He was obstinate like a frog that is chased from the house, only to return. He was a trespasser, going where 'lesser men' would not go (for instance he appropriated a white farmer's cattle with such daring as to shock them into inactivity)....Bhambada asks his warriors to return home to Ngome, but they refuse, saying, "We will die where you die!" (Mchunu, Zungu and Ndlovu 2006: 46)

It seems that this dimension of the oral genre, which is often expressed in praise-poetry is that of which Noeleen Turner in "Contemporary Zulu *izihasho*: a satirical attempt at social control" in Sienaert, E; N. Bell, and Lewis, M. (Eds.) *Oral Tradition and innovation: new wine in old bottles?* (University of Natal Oral Documentation and Research Centre, Durban, 1991) discusses:

If one looks at the Zulu equivalent of the term 'satire', it is the word *umbhinqo*. The same term is given as an alternative to *umbhuqo* as the Zulu equivalent for the English word 'sarcasm', or a 'sarcastic phrase'. 'Irony' has a slight variation on this form, and



the Zulu equivalent is *isibhinqo*. The term 'lampoon' is translated into Zulu as *umbhalo obhinqayo*. 'Wit' is translated into Zulu as *uteku*, and 'raillery' has the equivalent translation of 'wit.' (Turner 1991:203-204)

Turner explains of praise-poetry:

A person's 'praises' may be called out by a number of different voices from the surrounding group, but it will normally be by a person or persons who are very familiar with the person in question. The content of the oral poem may be lines accumulated in many ways – a person may achieve something noteworthy, or even do something that people get to hear about, and this may give birth to a line. When one of his family or compatriots meet him after this occasion, he might greet him with a line capturing the feat or event. A person may also compose a few 'suitable' lines for his own poem, but this rarely occurs when the praises are satirical. Often one or more lines reflect a certain behavior trait for which that person is well known or notorious. (Turner 1991:204)

The author then gives an example of a satirical praise-poem and her conclusions:

"Gina is a Christian, what's more, he is OK...However, he is not ever passed by a skirt...Also he doesn't just drink, he is a drunkard." ... Here Gina is exposed as being a womanizer and a drinker, not in a particularly nasty way, but rather in a teasing tone. Furthermore, Gina, the father of a past student of mine, is not at all ashamed of these lines, which are not infrequently used when referring to him. (Turner 1991:204)

Thompson in "Bhambatha's Family Tree: Oral evidence, new and old: the importance of Bhambatha kaMancinza" in *Natalia* 38(2008) pp.49-68 gives a rejoinder to M. P. Sithole and Nelson Zondi's alternative genealogy of Bhambatha in the same book that Mchunu and others wrote for:

Oral historians are familiar with the phenomenon of factual error being psychological truth for their informants, and in the Ngome time of troubles there would seem to be ample scope for the repression of memory and the development of false memory....It

is (nevertheless) incumbent on oral historians, as it is on all professional historians, to analyze the evidence, to weigh the probabilities of truth, and to appraise their readers of their judgment. They cannot treat oral sources in isolation. This means consulting written sources, i.e. pertinent publications and, if possible, documents. (Thompson 2008: 58-59)

He continues in regard to Indigenous Knowledge Systems, “IKS places high value on oral evidence for its instrumentality in the decolonization of the indigenous mind. It is therefore part of a political agenda” and concludes regarding the accuracy of the alternative oral history, “Thus the alternative history is a function of identity and resistance. But is the alternative history accurate?” (Thompson 2008:59)

I include these debates concerning IKS because I think that Thompson is correct in not outrightly rejecting the new oral histories, but rather that they should be examined against existing records and the disparities be interrogated. What do these new histories say of the persons keeping them? While to Thompson his interest is in that they indicate a politically biased new history which therefore speaks to shifts in power dynamics, to the topic of interpretation of oral style that is the concern of this thesis, oral data gives an insight into world-view and values of a culture that those older written records of historians, magistrates and the like may not. Having recently given testimony at an arbitration court hearing and experienced first-hand the harsh manipulations that defense lawyers can use to exclude qualifying information, I no longer agree with Thompson’s conviction that these persons had no reason to perpetrate lies. Maybe not lies *per se* but the Roman-Dutch law that derives from the western literate mind-set, is hardly sympathetic to oral persons needs to be additive, aggregative or metaphorical in expression. This remains mythic thinking and unreliable reference and such an attitude on the part of the European recorders of African testimonies, does affect that which is thought worth noting down versus that which may be rejected as just ‘so much fancy’ or worse ‘superstition’. So yes, the historical disparities ought to be analyzed for what they reveal, but the claims of both oral and literate persons ought to be equally subjected to interrogation for the data to be truly informative.

Thus Bhambatha’s contradictory praises stand as a record of Zulu perception for a hero figure. And one must surely be taken aback at how they echo Leeb-du Toit’s description of

Makhoba's character. Here there is no 'clean,' if often hypocritical, image required of leaders in the west; rather there is a pragmatism and acceptance of the complexity of life, as reflected in man(kind), (him)itself. The praises also show the aggressiveness, rhetoric and agonistic expression claimed by Ong (2002 ed.) and Jousse (Sienaert 1990: 91-106) to characterize oral cultures. Mchunu confirmed that such an image as spitting on one's enemy is sufficiently potent a metaphor for insult, as to eclipse the need for literate veracity. All this conforms to the oral genre and gives some insight into how Makhoba's works go unchallenged by fellow Africans while causing extreme agitation in whites. As regards veracity, it is noteworthy that Mchunu did not say, "You are right, there is no record of Bhambatha spitting on the head of any white colonial commissioner" instead he blithely declared that he had heard it in the field at Ngome and clarified it with a truly 'additive/aggregative' oral tale which confirmed spitting to be integral to Zulu defiance; during the violence of his home area of KwaShange, greater Pietermaritzburg in 1990, two women with TB (tuberculosis) resolved to spit on the South African Police, who sided with the IFP against the ANC supporting community. To my question "Did they do so?" the answer was "Yes, of course! - in war you use any mode of attack - I wonder if those policemen caught the disease? - I must ask around!" A western historian would be loath to be so readily assured as regards even this incident happening let alone ponder who would know of the policemen's fate, but local oral tradition believes it implicitly, because it fully articulates the anger and fury of war. As with myth, there is an alternative truth at play, one that does not shrink from the more grim realities of life-as-lived, and yet again there is no western 'middle-class' refinements as indeed there is no academic exactitude to be found in this story. This last recalls Jewsiewicki's description of a Zaire artist's image of children playing with used condoms, accompanying a newspaper letter:

Only the evil-minded can be scandalized by my repeated attacks against the administration of city hygiene....Around certain hotels in the capital, you can find kilos of used condoms. Children pick them up and try to blow them up like inflatable balloons. *Salongo* 29 March-9 April 1990, p.2. (Jewsiewicki 1991:142-3)

My non-African mind questions the exaggerations of these Zaire artists and writer, getting stuck on the word "kilos"; "Surely not!... and the local children in the painting catching the condoms as they are being thrown from the windows of hostels, no, really!" is what a

westerner thinks. Am I being too literate in my thoughts? Very likely, for it is a social comment that is being made and not a historical fact being stated under oath.

In regard to these observations I particularly consider Mchunu's readily granting me permission to use this incident, despite being a Phd history candidate in a formerly western university, which he considers "should transform to a more African ethos anyway," as telling. When I suggest to Mchunu that he is himself something of a "Master of the oral genre" he merely laughs and gives no apology for his less than refined responses, some of which I would think twice at sharing despite permission given to do so. Of the number of black colleagues I have worked with it is Mchunu who most reminds me of both Trevor Makhoba and Bhambatha Zondi, the former of whom I met and interviewed and the latter I 'know' from his praises and oral history.<sup>11</sup> Reading Couzen's (1985) work on the life of H.I.E. Dhlomo I came across a interesting cameo regarding his father Ezra, who it was said by his sister Florence Belina Kambule, to have been "born at Bhambatha's house (doubtful) and (to have) herd(ed) cattle with Bhambatha (likely) and that he and Bhambatha were 'just like twins'." (Couzens 1985: 42) More fascinating is this description of Ezra Dhlomo, one quite pertinent when one thinks his elder son R.R.R. wrote on the Zulu king Dinizulu, who was implicated in the 1906 Rebellion:

Ezra Dhlomo was not a very well-educated man...Both his daughter and his daughter-in-law testify to the fact that he was a quite and nice man, 'just a good Christian' (converted late in life upon moving to Edendale). The most passionate subject on which he ever spoke was Bhambatha, with whom, he used to say, he would have died had he been there 'He had a heart for warfare' said his daughter. 'When they spoke about it (Bhambatha uprising), Oh he used to get wild and tell us about all those things (that happened in the war).' (Couzens 1985:43)

My reasons for inserting this aside are to show how even the African Christian male can remain a Zulu patriot at heart and perhaps the fighting image of the Zulu is one other expression of this essentially oral mind-set? Certainly one needs to honour much of the African rhetoric around Bhambatha Zondi (and Mchunu, Zungu and Nyoni (2006) give extracts of the speeches of the former State President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki referring to the 'heroism' of Bhambatha Zondi, in their aforementioned article) as more than merely

political opportunism. The Zondi clan character seems to show much of the intractable nature of their most famed (or infamous?) son; Mchunu's grandmother was a Zondi and he would often warn white visitors to his home at KwaShange (under a Zondi chief from Bhambatha's family) to tolerate his grandmother's possible berating them for no apparent reason, as she "hated white people with a passion!" Hatred honed while working for a white farmer in New Hanover district, before moving to KwaShange. (personal communication Mchunu, Durban, 2006)

However, not every Zulu is a "Master of the oral genre", most would shy away from being so risqué in their self-expression but it does seem that some characters are particularly inclined to be so and this is usually acknowledged by those who know them. For instance I shared with my black colleagues Mchunu's SMS to do with the spitting, all just shock their heads saying "that is typical of Mchunu!" a comment I often heard in regard to Makhoba's paintings. This gets me back to my comment about Makhoba being disingenuous when playing innocent with Bruce Campbell-Smith when told his artworks outraged many viewers: Makhoba was a highly intelligent man and he knew of the controversy, again I think of Mchunu in this trait of being provocative and conclude that it seems integral to the character of a "Master of the oral genre" to be so. Of course the whole matter must be seen in the light of right to freedom of expression and technically Campbell Collections is a public gallery/museum so should display Makhoba's works. However it was originally a private house, and still has much of the ambiance of such, meaning that we are obliged to take the feelings of visitors and staff into account. And on the staff are for instance, elderly black men who either wore 'kitchen-suits' themselves or whose fathers did so, in the employ of the founder Dr Killie Campbell; so that Makhoba's *Great Temptation in the Garden, 1995* showing a madam seducing a gardener in such a uniform is discomforting as much to black staff as to white staff and visitors and arguably disrespectful of the memory of our founder.

### **1.3. Pondering 'Africanness' and 'preferred form'**

In this section I consider notable art historians' debates around the viewpoint prevalent in the 1980-90s that the typical 'African style' is no more than compliance with the European art-audiences' need for a 'mythic Africanness' or 'primitiveness'. This idea was put forward in an essay by Elizabeth Rankin and Philippa Hobbs "The Prints of Azaria Mbatha: Memory in

Process” in *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition* (Durban Art Gallery, 1998) in which they rely on Rhoda Rosen’s (1992) contention that Mbatha had manipulated ‘mythic Africanness’ as required by his Swedish art teachers and the art-market. Rankin and Hobbs agree with Rosen in saying that writers, like Johan van Rooyen in the *Cape Times* of 25 June 1968, have repeated claims of Mbatha being the quintessential African artist by overstating his studies at Rorke’s Drift, and minimizing his years training at Ceza, Mapumulo and in Sweden. Rosen concludes with the following assertion:

Nor (in the studies of Mbatha’s life and works) is there any considered attempt to analyse what exactly is meant by ‘African’, or what part of himself might play such a characterization of his work. (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:65-66)

The second essay is Anitra Nettleton’s “Myth of the transitional: black art and white markets in South Africa” in *South African Journal of Cultural and Art History* (Vol. 2, No 4 October 1988). She argues that art schools, including Rorke’s Drift and Fort Hare which taught art to black students, promoted stereotypical images/themes in the works of students so as to collude with the European desire for the ‘primitive’(which could also be termed the African ‘Other’) and this ‘primitiveness’ she equates to the ‘mythical’. She also regards these art schools as thus supporting the then apartheid regime’s ‘divide and rule’ policy along ethnic lines. Nettleton makes the following comment:

... in all these programmes participants were encouraged to schematize or stylize their forms, or to use mythical (‘Primitive’) subject matter which denied that their art might be a response to particular social conditions. (Nettleton: 1988, 2 (4):307)

And she makes an appeal for:

...the affirmation of non-western art as a historical phenomenon. (Nettleton 1988: 301)

Judging from the nature of their writings on African art one appreciates that Rankin, Hobbs and Nettleton are committed art historians, whose claims are well articulated and certainly in context of their writings, so countering them requires informed argument. I will try to answer

Rosen's challenge (1992) as to what is meant by 'African' and what actual part of any one artist's work characterises it and why that should be. In addition, I will indicate that African art, including school-art, even if depicting the mythical (itself a word that is debatable), in stylised/stereotypical form, does invariably respond to "particular social conditions" and moreover this is indeed "a historical phenomenon."

While I do not dispute the existence of a 'mythic Africanness' and even a 'mythic Primitiveness' I feel that what they imply has never been fully explored in the literature on African art as such, and for this study the words ought to be kept separated. The word 'mythic' linked to 'Africanness' or worse 'primitiveness' has become a dangerous hold-all for everything that is unanalysed pertinent to the African experience. In this format, the thinking is European evolutionist colonialism, best reflected in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* of 1902 and deserving of the African author Chinua Achebe's anger, as a "...novel which celebrates...dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race." ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_Conrad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Conrad)) The question is therefore; in whose experience is African art necessarily a depiction of either 'mythic Africanness' or 'primitiveness'? The fact is that Africans have their own mythologies, some perhaps little known to their European audience and this can lead to a clash of interpretation, should the latter assume that depictions in an African artist's chosen iconography has been executed for the foreigner's benefit, rather than for his own. Post-modernism has surely indicated that such concepts as reflected in Conrad's book stem from the western world's need to project onto a 'dark African Other', be it the continent and/or its peoples.<sup>12</sup> Clearly it is unfair to judge the African artist and use a measure clouded by European needs and perceptions couched in the English language and moreover use such a word as 'mythic' that invites an archaic, ambiguous interpretation, meaning both folklore and a fabrication. Certainly any black South African artist can manipulate this 'mythic Africanness', be it his/her own myth or a projected European notion of it and he/she may not even be aware of doing so, particularly as his/her buying public are invariably Europeans. The artist would then get trapped by this as Rankin and Hobbs (1998) feel happened to Mbatha, especially in terms of his later works done in Sweden and thus the artist's 'mythic Africanness' could well be no-more than "a construct of distance and memory." (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:70) While this is entirely permissible, the authors' imply that Mbatha is either unaware of, or worse, devious, when he claims to be recapitulating his own African past and he fails to admit how far European audience expectation is influencing

this process. Having noted this, none of my argument takes away from the fact that Mbatha's response to his audience was not an 'either/or' one but an 'and/or' one (a characteristic of the Oral style as pointed out in the previous section), in which he consciously chose to both recapitulated his African past, using its traditional aesthetic idiom as well as manipulate his European audience's need for either the African 'Other' or to sate their liberal conscience. It is also feasible that the strong expressionistic element found in the black and white linocuts had echoes of the German expressionists like Edvard Munch and this added to the appeal of Mbatha's style to Europeans. The artist sold through the African Art Centre, Durban which grew out of the liberalist *South African Institute of Race Relations*. Hence many of their patrons were both national and international persons supporting the anti-apartheid cause of the times. I realise that the word 'Africanness' is fraught with the same quandaries as is 'mythic' and 'primitiveness', for they are often thought synonymous, particularly as they possess a certain emotive charge to them,<sup>13</sup> nevertheless it is only so if one believes that the Africanness and preferred style is *per se* a mythic construct and more especially if one still holds to evolutionist views regarding the nations of mankind.<sup>14</sup> I do not contend this and trust that if one meets Rosen's challenge (1992) and unpacks the nature of 'Africanness' then it is possible to use the word both in addition to as well as an alternative for African idiom.

Thus in this thesis 'Africanness' is the idiom that is inherent to and derives from the cognitive thinking of generations of persons from an artist's own local African culture (Zulu and in the case of Shilakoe, Sotho, in terms of the essays compiled in this thesis), one that colours the social, political and economic life of the group. Obviously the word 'African' in itself is very wide in connotation, and if one wished to be pedantic then it is a 'misnomer' as the continent is massive with numerous cultures and peoples; nevertheless the word contains its own mythic<sup>15</sup> connotations and has been used in eminent art historians' writings, so I will retain it. Usually if faced by foreign ideas any culture will seek to reinterpret these new concepts according to its own norms. This then places the primary context of an African artist's life and works within his/her indigenous African world-view or value-system.<sup>16</sup> The anthropologist Darryl Forde, one of the leading structural-functionalists in the British social anthropology tradition that defined cultural world-view, ([www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/theory\\_pages/Turner.htm](http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/theory_pages/Turner.htm)) gives a good description of its meaning when declaring his intention for the compilation of essays for *African Worlds*:



*studies in the cosmological ideas and social values of African peoples* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1970 ed.):

In this book an attempt is made to present in brief compass the world-outlook of a number of African peoples. Each study seeks to portray and interpret the dominant beliefs and attitudes of one people concerning the place of Man in Nature and in Society, not only as revealed in formal and informal expressions of belief but also as implicit in customs and ethical prescriptions in both ritual and secular contexts.(Forde 1970: Introduction)

Aesthetics or ‘preferred form’ on the other hand refers to the composition of formal elements within an art piece that constitute a culturally favoured style, one that most effectively expresses aspects of African idiom, world-view or ‘Africanness’. To quote from the ArtLex dictionary at <http://www.aesthetics-online.org/>:

Formal elements are primary features which are not a matter of semantic significance — including color, line, mass, dimensions, scale, shape, space, texture, value; and the principles of design under which they are placed — including balance, contrast, dominance, harmony, movement, proportion, proximity, rhythm, similarity, unity, and dimensions. (<http://www.artlex.com/>)

Placed together according to the principles of design, these formal elements constitute a *gestalt*<sup>17</sup> or whole, allowing for a fuller aesthetic perception of an art work. Obviously neither ‘Africanness’ nor ‘preferred form’ induce a neutral response in the viewer; for persons reared in cultures privileging African world-view articulated in a certain style, will respond differently to any representative art piece, to someone of a different cultural background. The latter may of course have acquired a taste for the said piece through familiarity, understanding or fascination with the ‘Other’. Alternately they may find the work repels them for reasons not easily articulated yet ones that probably derive from their own inherited European value-system should this be in conflict to that of the African indigenous one.<sup>18</sup>

Of course not all artists who happen to be black South Africans reference an African traditional world-view/aesthetics and neither is it a foregone conclusion that artists who do so

are ethno-centric or regressively refusing modernization in thinking. While this statement sounds simplistic, to some unsophisticated persons, such prejudices can inform their views on African artists and their works.<sup>19</sup> This latter, must be seen as a value-judgement, yet one quite commonly found as a reaction to the South African apartheid era's illegitimate subversion of 'traditionalism' to its own ends. This is an issue that debatably has had a serious impact on the discipline of art history itself. Further, those artists who do express themselves by using 'Africanness' and preferred style can do so in varying degrees and be more or less conscious of doing so, and create any hybrid rendition they will. Taking the commentary on Mbatha's conscious use of both African idiom and his play to his European audience mentioned above, it is also conceivable that for many an artist; whether he/she is conscious of his/her intent in this regard often indicates if he/she is born into this world-view or if he/she is now deliberately deploying it as his/her favoured style. In the latter case such an artist, especially if working post 1994 may well be complying with the call of the 'African Renaissance' to return to African roots. One obvious characteristic of the African idiom/aesthetics is that usually for most artists, this idiom/aesthetics is applied subliminally by artists born to a culture holding the particular world-view, in other words such an artist does so 'intuitively' or 'instinctively', making it hard for an outsider to this milieu to fully grasp where he/she is 'coming from' (as the popular saying goes) by mere observation.<sup>20</sup> This is particularly so because traditional African artists, like their art-school trained counterparts, are often developing or 'polishing' their talent, something that can be interpreted as a western introduction when it is not necessarily so. This statement will be clarified later in the text when reviewing the African concept of artistic talent. I believe however that Mbatha is a case of someone who works subliminally or intuitively when using indigenous idiom, having grown up in the culture but also one who is highly conscious of his process and choices, so that he can as equally cater to his European audiences' expectations for a 'quintessential Africanness.'

The idea of the existence, both presently and even in the recent past, of an unsullied indigenous purely African culture is clearly untrue. This elucidates Nettleton's commentary concerning an artist's response to social conditions as a historical process of change. Certainly, even hybridity can be subliminal for it is a process in itself, where western and urban elements are synthesised within the African world-view and the preferred aesthetics are

duly altered and honed to best express this new permutation. As Mxolisi Mchunu comments in “Are Rural communities open sources of knowledge” in Denis, P. and Ntsimane, R. (Eds.) *Oral history in a wounded country: interactive interviewing in South Africa* (UKZN Press, 2008):

Yet today, indigenous culture is not something that is unwrapped from a package, having been sealed from colonial influence. What we are tempted to label ‘indigenous culture’ is a living hybrid, described in isiZulu words such as *isibhamu* and *imoto* (‘gun’ and ‘motor’) and metaphors that show how colonial culture was absorbed and made African or Zulu. (Mchunu 2008:141)

Aesthetics is not however the full story of African contemporary art, there is that arguably equally important one of content and how to interpret this so as to assess the artist’s relating of form to context and intent, for surely the relative success of the work as ‘art’ is dependent thereon. When speaking of the emphasis upon the aesthetic dimension dominating western art appreciation of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, Clifford Geertz says in “Art as a Cultural System” in *Local Knowledge: further essays in interpretive anthropology* (Perseus Books, 1983):

... (I)t is perhaps only in the modern age and in the West that some people...have managed to convince themselves that technical talk about art (and he is speaking of all the arts)...is sufficient to a complete understanding of it; that the whole secret of aesthetic power is located in the formal relations among sounds, images, volumes, themes or gestures. (Geertz 1983:96)

Geertz continues:

For everywhere else (predominantly in the non-western world)...other sorts of talk, whose terms and conceptions derive from cultural concerns art may serve, or reflect, or challenge, or describe, but does not in itself create, collects about it to connect its energies to the dynamic of human experience. (Geertz 1983:96)

I rely on Geertz in arguing for a greater historical and cultural context in the interpretation of works by 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century African artists. Geertz could be said to presage the post-modernist era of an alternative narrative, an experiential one deriving from the artist and his/her audiences' participation in a complex socio-cultural milieu. Within this I would include the 'Oral genre' as it is integral to pre-literate African societies' expression (as argued above in Section 1.2). Much of this interpretation needs to be mediated to the viewers, for invariably the African artist plays to a 'foreign' audience, one with its own aesthetics and values. Indeed the exhibition resource catalogue with its compilation of biography, informed essays and list of works on display is the art galleries/museums' attempt to address the aforementioned perceived vacuum, an admission that 'something more' is needed for the audience to fully appreciate viewing of any work. Whether this is the best way to go about the task of art exhibitions is open to debate but does not fall into the parameters of this study.

No doubt the first and obvious question is if any evidence of a traditional African artistic idiom, 'Africanness' or world-view is detectable in the work of black South African artists exhibited on any of the exhibitions referenced in this thesis. Clearly the fact of exhibitions being exclusively tendered for African artists' work, even if meant to redress the apartheid bias of public galleries pre to the watershed exhibition *The Neglected Tradition, 1988*, must of itself indicate a presence of something that is characteristically African, be it in aesthetics/formal elements favoured, or be it in content and interpretation thereof. Why for instance, should it be that artists like Joseph Manana who trained at the Durban University of Technology, still see fit to exhibit at the African Art Centre, Durban in 2007? Certainly an unschooled and illiterate Zulu artist like the late Tito Zungu trusted this outlet and its founding Director Jo Thorpe, to act the protective go-between with the wider art collecting world.<sup>21</sup> Is this merely a legacy of the apartheid era and earlier colonial preclusion of black South African artists or does it indicate that the artists themselves, even when working in contemporary mediums and art-school trained, identify themselves as black artists firstly and as South Africans only secondly? <sup>22</sup>

Perhaps this is the correct place to describe African understanding of artistic talent: Although I have heard the following from a number of African people including artists, most notably the carver Henry Mshololo, the rendition here is from my colleague Siyabonga Mkhize, a man who eminent historian Jeff Guy termed an indigenous historian,<sup>23</sup> one who is

acknowledged as having a talent for history, an *ingqaphelti*, within his own Embo-Mkhize clan.<sup>24</sup> Such a person has a gift or talent and does not need a certificate in order to practice it although he/she may study oral history for instance in order to develop this talent. The greatest gift in Zulu cultural thinking is that of the *imbongi* or praise poet. The artist is someone who equally has a gift as an *ingcweti*, one with a talent for working with a certain medium, like a carver in wood or engraver on stone. The word derives from “*ngcweti*-expertness, experience, faculty” hence “*ingcweti* –an expert, one gifted and experienced in something.” (Doke and Vilakazi 1948:553) An artist is more correctly an “*ingceti yemifanekiso*” –an artist or an expert at making likenesses or images. (Dent and Nyembezi 1984:13) Mkhize explained further that there is no school that can teach one to be an artist or poet but certainly one can and should develop such a talent, and here the biblical parable of the talents has conflated with traditional ideas and it is thought that the refusal to accept a talent will result in its loss. All gifts or talents are given by the ancestors and ultimately God, as are all good things like prosperity, children and the like. That a talent may be passed from parent to child has more to do with the ancestors so decreeing or gifting another in their genetic line than simply ‘learning the trade’ as it were. Mkhize further explained that there are many talents but that for art, like that for poetry, dancing and music are essentially the gift of creativity itself. There are certain Zulu persons who are acknowledged to be hugely so gifted, ones who required no academic titles to command respect, men like the radio historian Reggie Khumalo, language expert Thokozane Nene and the poet Mzizi Kunene.<sup>25</sup> Mkhize’s commentary is confirmed by certain characteristic responses of African artists who can be indignant if said to have copied some innovative essential of their expression from another, but not so in regard to how best to use a tool or work in a medium.<sup>26</sup>

One informative aside can be proffered concerning ‘Africanness’: I had asked my colleague Muzi Hadebe, if he as an African, recognised any of what I had hypothesised concerning ‘Africanness’ and ‘preferred form’ and he answered that the best validation he could give were the words of Africa’s poet laureate, the late Mazizi Kunene in an interview he had with him. Kunene said of Africa and the African psyche:

Africans are like their round houses and cattle-enclosures.... (They are) like nature itself...there is no beginning and no end... no inside and outside...African people are nature’s people...in nature everything is related...there is everything (in nature)

...(and) all belongs together...Africa and Africa's people are like that (too)." (Hadebe interview: 2001) <sup>27</sup>

In the light of the above, how does one take such commentary as that of authors Rankin and Hobbs (1998) in regard to Mbatha's mythic proportions? I quote regarding this:

Mbatha has been perceived as the quintessential black artist: born in KwaZulu-Natal; a 'natural talent' discovered and liberated by white patrons; a student of the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre of Rorke's Drift (itself a school that has acquired legendary dimensions); a printmaker who employs the simple gouged images of linocut; an artist who has produced a seemingly consistent, homogeneous body of works, a teller of tales in visual form. (Rankin and Hobbs 1998: 65)

The authors add that even Mbatha's self-imposed exile in Sweden in the 1960s until the present could be categorised as typical of the "South African artist under apartheid, forced to find asylum to find freedom of expression." (Rankin and Hobbs 1998: 65)

The authors continue in reference to Rosen's (1992) argument in which he concludes that Mbatha's biography is disingenuous in that it is slanted to his studies at Rorke's Drift and downplays his time (and the influence of) especially his studies in Sweden, thereby underplaying the extent of his western borrowings (in both medium and content, one assumes). The authors quote Rosen's conclusion:

'(I)t seems little questioned that a man who has spent nearly thirty years of his life in Sweden could still be fundamentally 'African' in his art.' (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:65-66)

Seeking the rejoinder could well mitigate the accusation of Mbatha's 'blanket' manipulation of a 'mythical Africanness.' One rebuttal is that the concept of the artist and creativity within African thinking is more likely the reason Mbatha was so consistent in his insistence that his 'Africanness' is of his own making and no teacher must be credited with its full genesis. He says of this wrestle with honing his artistic theme and style:

When I started using biblical motives I had aimed to Africanise the whole bible, but this theory did not work all the time...These theories were not discussed with anybody. No one was interested in biblical things in my surroundings-not even a single teacher ever told me or discussed anything. (Martin 1996:26)

This expression of 'Africanness' which could be said to be the answering of a call of vocation to express one's gift of creativity, is no mean accomplishment for those artists who attended training institutions in the former KwaZulu-Natal, like Rorke's Drift, Ndeleni and Mariannhill. It is particularly so because these schools were mostly adjuncts to Christian missions and therefore institutions founded to 'detribalise' and convert the African mind-set to a colonising European one, this before Mapumulo Mission Institute spearheaded African Christianity.<sup>28</sup> Further, despite Nettleton's comment concerning these institutions attempts to keep the artists' expressions 'Primitive', the students nevertheless did also absorb and reinterpret western influences in their works. Yet this is not saying that their 'Africanness' is then but playing to western notions of what African art 'should be', for the students not only called upon their ethnic roots intuitively by dint of being Africans reared in such milieu, they equally returned to them when faced by crises in their lives. Both Mbatha and Shilakoe underwent this process, making their art a fluctuating syncretism to a greater or lesser degree of African, Christian and western. In addition, students had to battle against a prevailing negative attitude toward anything traditional, especially among fellow black Christians who colluded with western notions that Africans lacked a 'high art'. *The Zulu Society*, a branch of the Bantu Teachers Union established in 1936, which ostensibly wished to record and promote Zulu tradition still placed a proviso that such tradition "accord with the teachings of Jesus Christ..." (Klopper 1992:190) Further, the Society's reference to art is patronising as it verbalises its uncertainty concerning the merits of anything 'African' and encourages those black South Africans with talent to imitate the European, thus "there are gifted *Abantu* with attractive talents...who can...copy objects of foreign designs, or make drawings, pictures, carvings and so on..."(Klopper 1992:190-191) And certainly, even the "quintessential black artist" (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:65) Azaria Mbatha's first works done at Ceza and Mapumulo, despite being linocuts, echo European pictures in their single scene depictions, although showing more patterning than is characteristic of such art unless it be the influence of western 'folk art'.<sup>29</sup> However, this marrying of content to medium surely remains an artistic feat for Mbatha and his fellow art-students; as they borrowed from the narrative style

of traditional Zulu story-telling, reflected in burnt relief carved mat-racks (*ixbhaxa*) with their successive ‘story-book’ scenes.

As against the schooled-artist those self-taught traditionalist artist/specialist artisans could be said to be in a stronger position as they did not have these same conflicts and therefore they retained much of their own indigenous self-referencing in the development of their talents. Perhaps a comparative look at these two renditions of an oral genre, namely the traditional burnt-relief panels and the art-school derived linocuts, needs to be made to seek validation for an African origin to the latter style.<sup>30</sup> Even Rankin and Hobbs who have serious reservations regarding Mbatha’s linocuts being a perpetuation of an earlier African idiom, nevertheless concede:

His choice of linocut (even in Sweden) seems rather to have related to its aesthetic properties, and his enjoyment of the strong black and white forms it affords, and perhaps to the memories of Africa it held for him. (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:70)

More significantly they quote Mbatha in an interview:

In our interview with Mbatha in 1996, he spoke of his Swedish teachers being anxious not to spoil his talent by encouraging him to follow conceptual approaches. For the artist himself, ‘Africanness’ is a state of mind. Thus, ‘African’ art is not dependent on time or place, he claimed, but can be created retrospectively. (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:69)

Mbatha himself never claimed to have copied mat-racks, however he conceded that he was so surrounded by Zulu art as a youth that it could well have been he saw them and absorbed some of their idiom, even if only subliminally. (personal communication Mbatha, 1998) It was Rankin and Hobbs’s reservations that lead to my actually asking Mbatha about this influence as up until then I had thought Esmé Berman’s such assumption to be correct. (Berman 1983: 291) A comparison between Mbatha’s earlier work and Ntizenyanga Qwabe’s burnt relief carved panels held in the Campbell Collections, UKZN <sup>31</sup> is then particularly revealing, as the similarities and differences can be more accurately ascribed. One can look at two panels (Campbell Collections: MM 329 and MM 322) by Qwabe which are obviously



works of some deliberation and not his more repetitive scenes exhibited on yearly agricultural-shows; these depict historical scenes which are somewhat hard to read. It should be noted that this figurative depiction is possibly one introduced from western art during colonial times. Nevertheless my argument remains the content and the technique used being African; the depiction invariably depicts African concerns (and in the example given below on Zulu royal praise-poetry), while the technique of burnt-wood relief carving equally derives from traditional idiom.



**Figure 1: N. Qwabe, *Depiction of King Dinuzulu* c1930s Burnt relief carved panel, 24x16cm. Campbell Collections, UKZN [MM 322]**

I will attempt to deconstruct only one scene on the bottom of the second panel; it depicts the Zulu king (then paramount chief) Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo. He is depicted seated on a chair, with his 'stick of office' in hand and is dressed in the matching jacket and knickerbockers, tartan socks and ankle-boots he wears in a postcard of 1908.<sup>32</sup> Qwabe has reworked this photograph, taking the table out of the picture and dressing the king in a more military jacket with added bandoleer (alternatively as there are a number of extant photographs of the king in varying poses and dress, Qwabe perhaps accessed another such postcard) and placing the whole in an ornate frame, atop which is perched a Royal Air Force aviation patch surrounded by Zulu warriors. Above this are placed two elephants flanking a kneeling figure apparently grinding corn. One can well query the details of such imagery, for example the aviation patch's source and suggest cigarette cards of the 1930s.<sup>33</sup> The entire scene is given a border reminiscent of the hinges on old family photograph albums.

In regard to the above description of Qwabe's panel one would indisputably first seek an interpretation from the perspective of the culture to which the artist belongs. It is very possible that the elephants emanate from one of Dinuzulu's praises:

*“Uphondo ewendlovu olunqaba ukungene emzimi wamankengane.*

*INgqungqulu egoqe amaphiko emva komuzi Ekuvukeni.*

*Ukhozi lukaNdaba olweqe luphindela kwaMandlakazi.”* (Dhlomo 1968:12)

This quote is very hard to translate into English and I am indebted to my colleagues Mthunzi Zungu and Siyabonga Mkhize for an interpretation of this section of the praises: Couched in ancient Zulu, the language is metaphorical and refers to Dinuzulu being the horns of an elephant refusing to enter the homestead of the conquered/vanquished Mandlakazi, the descendent of Dinuzulu's father Cetshwayo ka Mpande's enemy Zibebhu. Thus the enemy of the monarch's father became his own, and as victor he rather crosses borders like an eagle, using the top (skyward?) entrance of the homestead. The poetically worded praises are obviously important as they reappear in yet another royal portrait at the top of the same panel (no shown in figure 1), possibly Cetshwayo this time, with a head-ring (*isicoco*), a mark of high status that fell into disuse in the son's time. Clearly, because it is hard to read these panels, does not indicate that Qwabe does not wish to tell a story of historical importance and his borrowed re-interpreted western imagery, like photographs, frames of pictures and a Royal Air-force insignia, are the most convincing evidence that he conforms to the metaphorical language of traditional oral *izibongo* or praises. Here Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo is likened to an elephant and an eagle, accolades granted him in the course of his ancestral royal line's history. In addition the framing of a portrait has the same connotations that are found in the west; essentially it is a mark of respect that places the image in an honoured place usually within the house, serving the same purpose then as do oral praises.<sup>34</sup> My colleague Siyabonga Mkhize confirms my argument, saying that I am justified in likening Qwabe and Mbatha as artists working in an oral narrative tradition, "Yes Qwabe is telling a story and Mbatha is also thinking like a Zulu - like an African (and is telling a story). Yes, you could say this is 'Africanness' if you want to show what it would look like (visually)." (personal communication Mkhize, 2008) Mkhize's words echo those of Mbatha when he is reported by Rankin and Hobbs to have explained "For the artist himself, 'Africanness' is a state of mind. Thus, 'African' art is not dependent on time or place, he claimed, but can be created retrospectively." (Rankin and Hobbs 1998: 69)

That Mbatha did not actually copy any of Qwabe's panels then means little especially if it is recalled that Qwabe was working in a long established Zulu carving idiom, that of burnt relief carving. Arguably this is even more so because Mbatha, like Qwabe, came from the Ceza/Nongoma areas of Zululand, where the Zulu oral genre of royal *izibongo* or praises flourished.<sup>35</sup> Rankin and Hobbs wished to show Mbatha as a man who was exposed to world influences yet perhaps through no fault of his own, was trapped in the 'African myth' that the

world required. To build their argument they point to his early ready borrowings of western imagery, saying that this suggests “that ‘Africanness’ in Mbatha’s work was “a construct of distance and memory.” (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:70) As hopefully it has been argued here, an alternative view is to concur with art historian Anitra Nettleton in her fight against the liberal use of such words as ‘transitional’ or ‘primitive’ and indeed ‘craft’ that were the terms in use in the 1980s and plead “... the affirmation of non-western art as a historical phenomenon.” (Nettleton 1988:301). For these terminologies are equally those used to categorize forms of black South African art seen to ‘lift’ elements of especially western imagery, an accusation that implies that acculturation is the same as the ‘colonizing’ of the African mind, when anthropology shows it to be rather a dynamic of re-interpreting the foreign to conform to pre-existing African world-views. A good example of this is Qwabe’s use of western imagery prescribing to the needs of the oral genre, one still dominant in Africa.

To further the analogies between Mbatha and Qwabe and his ilk in regard to the oral narrative genre, is the obvious distinctive and related feature exhibited by African artists, like Mbatha and Muafangejo, of their extraordinary artistic facility in manipulating the linocut medium. One could question why it is that this medium came so ‘easily’ to them and look deeper than the obvious introduction of an inexpensive medium by the early European art teachers at Rorke’s Drift art school.

This expression of ‘preferred form’ can be said to be constituted of certain typical features of the visual oral style; the play on dark and light, the patterned background, the inclusion in many instances of writing as pattern, the division of the pictorial plane into sequential images which repeat the main characters or the labelling. In regard to these it is enlightening to review some of the narrative techniques or ‘preferred forms’ used in the Zulu language. Noverino Canonici in *The Zulu Folktale Tradition* (Zulu language and Literature University of Natal, Durban, 1993) mentions stylistic features used in oral tales: The main character’s praise names/*izibongo* are repeatedly called. There are “more or less ‘fixed’ refrains that are used as formulaic language which help in the development of the tale.” There are descriptive refrains which “encapsulate a narrative event and help its recall.” Also boasting formulae, which Canonici terms “core...folktale images.” And “a number of stories have a proverb as their core-cliché...they are built around a proverb, which may, however, not appear in the actual folktale text, but be used in the contextual situation.” (Canonici 1993:125-128)

Indeed, French philosopher of orality versus literacy, Marcel Jousse believed that oral cultures used the inherent gesture and rhythm of the human voice and body (with its repetitions and bilateral balancing) to record in memory, and this also applied to texts like writing, painting and sculpting, except that these are circumscribed by their medium, thus, “Message, text and medium are indivisible.”<sup>36</sup>

All these complexities make particularly rewarding studies of the work of such artists as Azaria Mbatha, Trevor Makhoba, and Cyprian Shilakoe that comprise accompanying chapters in this compilation.

#### **1.4. Historical, political and ethnic background of art in KwaZulu-Natal**

The background to the topic concerns the changed position of African contemporary 20<sup>th</sup> century art consequent upon the watershed exhibition *The Neglected Tradition* curated by art historian Stephen Sack at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 1988. Elizabeth Rankin and Carolyn Hamilton of the University of Witwatersrand’s Fine Arts Department delivered a paper “Revisions; reaction; re-vision : approaches to curating for a new South Africa “ at the 1996 South African Art Historians Association Conference, in which they discussed the need for a revision of art histories within galleries. It appears that pre to the 1988 exhibition, mainline South African art gallery/museum collections were restricted to works by artists representing styles punted at art schools. That these artists’ were invariably white indicated these institutions tacit support (for whatever reason) of the political agenda of the then Nationalist Government. Apart from the exceptions of the University of Witwatersrand’s Standard Bank Galleries, which viewed former university ethnographic holdings as art rather than as craft, and the Durban Art Gallery’s holdings of African art collected under the advisement of artist/critic Andrew Verster, the collecting of work by then contemporary African artists was left to such institutions as the Campbell Collections of UKZN, Museum Africa (formerly the Johannesburg Africana Library) and the then all African Universities, like Zululand and Fort Hare.

Campbell Collections of UKZN is known for the eclectic collecting policy of its founder, Dr Killie Campbell, who collected ‘Africana’ without prejudice to race or ethnic grouping.

Phillip Denis of the *Simolando Project* (School of Theology, UKZN) has noted that Campbell Collections was the first in South Africa to have an Oral History Project (the *Killie Campbell Oral History Project, 1978*) based upon Zulu essay competitions, the first dating from 1913. (Denis and Ntsimane 2008: Introduction) While artists were not the target of these particular projects, it is nevertheless true that Dr Killie Campbell was a patron to early African artists like Gerard Bhengu, Simon Mnguni and Jabulani Ntuli. In 1978 an *Artists' Index* was established along the lines of the *Killie Campbell Oral History Project, 1978* at Campbell Collections. Between 1988 and the 1<sup>st</sup> democratic elections of 1994 and continuing into the new millennium, the eclectic holdings (comprising historical and cultural records and photographs, art and ethnographic material) became the resource for exhibition loans of African art while public galleries/museums sought to correct the imbalance of their formerly racially biased holdings. The other happening was a greater emphasis upon documentation, and in particular the Centre for Visual Art, UKZN (then Department of Fine Art, UN) and the galleries; Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg, Durban Art Gallery, Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Wits University Galleries, all embarked upon research validation to produce catalogues of sufficient merit to warrant the latter's status as reference sources. These historic multi-disciplinary moves, which were also happening within other museum fields apart from the arts, were to be codified into *The National Heritage Resources Act of South Africa, No II of 1999* wherein "living heritage" is included, being described as "intangible aspects of inherited culture, and may include a) cultural tradition b) oral history c) performance d) ritual e) popular memory f) skills and techniques g) indigenous knowledge systems and h) the holistic approach to nature, society and social relationships." This act is reflected in the SAMA (South African Museums Association) *Professional Standards and Transformation Indicators* edited by Henrietta Ridley in 2006, wherein museums/galleries are encouraged to research and establish education programs that will enable interpretation and ownership of indigenous communities and artists. It is with a certain irony that the Campbell Collections was by default amongst the first to have access to the post-modernist 'Voice' and act as the reference resource of a fair part of this research as it pertained to African art at the time. In my position as curator of contemporary and traditionalist art I was often involved with loans, research enquiries, exhibition committees and invited to write for catalogues for which I drew upon this 'Voice' as recorded in my institution's holdings to produce the essays compiled into this thesis's chapters.

KwaZulu-Natal is commonly considered the home country of the Zulu people. It is pertinent to know something of the historical and cultural realities of these people and their neighbours as impacting their respective artistic expression because this provides the context for viewing these artworks from an interpretative vantage. This group is by no means culturally or historically homogenous and under the inclusive appellation of 'Zulu' fall a great number of tribes, clans and families, some of which are not north Nguni as are those of the Zulu royal house. The Hlubi, Ngwane and Nhangwini are related to the Swazi, while the Embo-Mkhize or AbaMbo can claim, along with their Mpondo relatives, to be *ukuthefula*<sup>37</sup> speaking like the now seldom mentioned amaLala.<sup>38</sup> All these peoples have family surnames associated with them, for instance Hadebe and Mazibuko are Hlubi while the name Dlamini so characteristic of the Swazi royal house is equally characteristic of the Nhangwini.<sup>39</sup> Each people have their clan or home lands, the tenure of which is vested with the *Inkosi* or Chief. These lands are to be found in the borders of the old Natal south of the Tugela River, while the Zulu proper are to be found in the former Zululand across this river. To compound the scenario are enclaves of Sotho and Swazi related peoples particularly along the Drakensberg and Lobombo Mountain ranges and in Nqutu district in northern KwaZulu-Natal. There certainly are both language and cultural similarities to be found across all of these groupings but there remains certain specifics that are own to the different groups, as are their unique histories, and more significantly, their indigenous aesthetic expressions in terms of artifacts and dress/ornament which are varied enough as to become clan/family identifiers (and are often described as regional differences). The fundamentals of the traditional culture as practiced in these homelands are a patrilineal, mainly pastoral people believing in the ancestral-spirits affect on their living decedents lives. Cattle and polygamy are important to the economic system and social structure and marriages are contracted between families via labola or bride-price of groom to bride's father. Children are legitimized by this payment as falling under the father's ancestral lineage. Traditionalists come under African customary law which is administrated by magistrates and chiefs and the father is the homestead head and ward of both women and children resident in the individual homesteads.

Also found across the landscape of KwaZulu-Natal are mission stations, founded by a number of Christian churches, both protestant and Roman Catholic. Thus for instance, most black South Africans from southern Natal are Catholic, if not still traditionalist deferring to their ancestral-beliefs, because of the many outstations of the Catholic Mariannhill mission at

Pinetown. *Kholwa* or Christian converts on these stations have often taken on a western life-style and value system that can be in conflict to that of their neighbours who may either follow traditional customary life-style and/or have joined independent churches or Zionist sects sympathetic to tradition. The missions were not only the start of education in the province, the United Christian church of the American Board being 'home' to many of the 'New Africans' discussed under cultural context, but the different Christian sects introduced western art-school training, as in the Catholic Mariannhill, Methodist based Ndaleni and Lutheran Rorke's Drift. To make the Province's historical scenario yet more complex, is the presence of white settlers and Indian immigrants on farms and in towns. In KwaZulu-Natal most of these white settlers' forefathers came from the British Isles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century while those in northern areas stem from Voortrekkers (forefathers to those known as Afrikaners mainly of Dutch and French decent and settlers dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) who obtained ground from the Zulu king Mpande in exchange for military services. The Indian Tamil, Telegu and Gudjerati Hindu immigrants came to work on sugar-plantations or as artisans of one trade or another, while Muslim traders from Pakistan and Gujarat, are invariably later period settlers who are the owners of trading-stores that sell mainly to the indigenous black population. Needless to say all these foreign groups have affected indigenous artistic expression, and this historical contact must be considered in any culture change shown by African artists and crafters.

The two big cities of the province are Pietermaritzburg and Durban and these are the main metropolises to which black South Africans moved to obtain work. Pre to 1994's first democratic elections the Nationalist Party Government applied its infamous apartheid policies which meant that black people lived in townships, usually on the outskirts of the towns, those of Durban being Umlazi, Chesterville, Lamontville and KwaMashu, the latter taking displaced peoples from forced removals from the squatter camp of Cato Manor in the early 1960s. In the apartheid system, said to have been based upon the colonial location policies of Sir Theopolis Shepstone, Native Commissioner of the Colony of Natal, black men became migrant workers who moved between their families in their homeland areas to work on contracts of certain lengths of time, like six months to a year, in the big cities. Often these men were traditionalist and they formed a complex class of their own, one of particular importance to African art, as they brought their traditional homeland art to town where it was subject to hybrid influences. On the Reef and Kimberley they worked primarily in the gold

and diamond Mines but in Durban and Pietermaritzburg they worked in factories, on the docks and as domestics in white homes. Fiona Rankin Smith in “Beauty is a hard journey” in Carton, B; J. Laband, and Sithole J. (Eds.) *Zulu Identities: being Zulu, past and present* (UKZN Press, 2008) says of this category’s “multiple identities”:

With the easing of influx control in the mid-1980s, unprecedented numbers of rural amaZulu flooded into informal settlements on the outskirts of cities in the Witwatersrand region. They swelled the century-old movement of Zulu migrants, who experienced life as a struggle to sustain both an urban existence and a rural abode, where the prospect of one day retiring to their ancestors held a powerful allure. In post-apartheid South Africa, isiZulu speaking rural Africans still view urban centers as paradoxical destinations, holding possibilities, as well as hardships. (Rankin-Smith 2008:410)

She continues to give a description of that unique big city phenomenon of the migrant-workers hostel market “Established in the 1940s by the Johannesburg city council, the Mai Mai hostel ”(Rankin-Smith 2008: 411) and continues concerning the hybrid art forms that developed there:

(Such markets)...became flourishing bazaars for traditional Zulu consumers seeking meat plates (*ugqoko*), headrests (*izigiki*) and beadwork, many of which were obtained from rural artisans in Natal and Zululand....In recent years Mai Mai has spawned a wider popular interest in the creative objects of Zulu migrants....(Thus for instance) Night watchmen ...construct telephone wire lids (*izimbenge*) for beer pots, establishing a lucrative style of art that to this day satisfies the tastes of local and international tourists.(Rankin-Smith 2008:411-412)

Durban has its own Dalton Road hostel markets and the Durban beachfront tourist trade, where traditional women, often from surrounding rural homelands, like Inanda or Ndwedwe would come to sell beadwork and other crafts to tourists. Durban also has its many informal settlements or shack-lands, like that which mushroomed at Cato Manor once more after the earlier clearance of the 1960s. Shack-lands are equally to be found, along with the ANC Governments ‘RDP’ (Redistribution and Development Program) houses, in smaller towns in



the province, where the new ‘back-to-back’ municipalities are dominated by councilors and mayors from out of the former townships.

The earlier generations of Christian blacks were educated and fell into yet another class of blue and white collar workers like pastors, teachers, nurses, clerks, delivery men while some of the women went into teaching or domestic work for white settler families. Christians tended to live in the black townships. As mentioned above, pertinent to Christians is that most of the early schools as well as the art-schools were attached to missions and naturally those who attended them were *Kholwa* or Christians. This meant that the content of artistic works emanating from these schools was often biblical in theme and representational in expression, even although this is invariably, certainly in the more imaginative artwork, Africanized in idiom. Christian institutions were however also the ‘home’ of the generation of “New African” writers and musicians of the 1930-50s as they were of the beginnings of the political powers of the ANC. The IFP, then the Inkatha Movement, also started as the local body of the ANC in exile before the relationship was severed by the Nationalist Government’s hegemonies and then the UDF became the ANC local front in 1983. This was the period of the armed struggle and clashes between ANC/UDF and IFP mark the era of the 1980-90s as one of civil wars in KwaZulu-Natal especially.

The build up to the 1994 elections and an ANC Government resulted in the former group area laws, prescribing black South Africans live in the townships, to be rescinded and parts of the inner city became what were termed ‘grey areas’, like Albert Park in Durban where black people rented flats in former all white areas. Here too reside foreign blacks, many of whom are refugees from the DRC, Rwanda and Zimbabwe who tended to move into these areas, bringing with them a cosmopolitan pan-African aspect to the city where most ply street trading, including that of curios from the rest of the continent. Otherwise there remains certain continuity to the Province’s dynamics despite political change, as many blacks stayed living in townships and/or rural men still migrate to work and continue to live in hostels in these townships. So saying, there are those often more elite blacks who have moved into former ‘white’ areas; introducing a new dynamic that is yet to fully bloom as regards artistic expression, but it is invariably marked by lavish neo-Rococo furnishings, status cars and finishes.

This overview is a simplified rendition of the dynamics of the province but it does show some of the historical complexities as well as the constant change and adaptation that form the matrix in which black South African artists, especially those in KwaZulu-Natal, find themselves. A matrix comprised of a variety of influences and conflicts, all impacting on identities, such as: Rural migrant versus urban township dweller. Traditional life-style and religion of the ancestors versus missionary introduced orthodox Christianity or Zionist African Christian synchronism. To this must be added pressures of modernization and adaptation to the metropolis which includes those realities of economic lack and struggle and the devastation of the AIDS pandemic. There is also the presence of subtle clan and homeland dynamics and politics, some of which developed into faction fighting and later into party partisanship of either ANC (UDF pre to unbanning of the ANC) versus IFP (formerly the Inkatha Movement) of the noted civil wars of the 1980s-1990s.

Finally, an undertow running through all these complexities that ought to be specifically mentioned is that there is no full knowing the exact impact that the long period of political anti-apartheid struggle, followed by the euphoria and change after the first democratic elections of 1994, has had on black South Africans, and indeed on all South Africans. Even in regard to the former, not only was there the obvious changes of a promise of better employment, education and freedom but the psychological or spiritual effects are immeasurable: That a part of colonized Africa was ‘renowned’ as African is of no small account to those living in it and how exactly this ‘African Renaissance’ will fully impact on African artistic expression is yet to be fully seen.

### **1.5. Broader theoretical framework**

Clifford Geertz’s (1973 and 1983) proposition mentioned above, derives from anthropology and is a form of hermeneutics or “the enterprise” of “the understanding of understanding” or “the theory and methodology of interpretation.”(Geertz 1983:5) Geertz in *Local Knowledge: Further essays in interpretative anthropology* (Perseus Books, 1983) regards it as an “experience-near” versus “experience-distant” concept and he describes it as follows:

(The concept of the) hermeneutic circle.... is ... central to ethnographic interpretation, and thus to the penetration of other people’s modes of thought, as it is

to literary, historical, philosophical, psychoanalytic, or biblical interpretation, or for that matter to the informal annotation of everyday experience we call common sense. (Geertz 1983:69)

Geertz's speaks of the concept of ethnography being "thick description." in "Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture" in *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays by Clifford Geertz*. (New York, Basic Books Publ., 1973). He says:

Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript - foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs or sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior.....Analysis then is sorting out the structures of signification - what Ryle called established codes, a somewhat misleading expression, for it makes the enterprise sound too much like that of the cipher clerk when it is much more like that of a literary critic -and determining their social ground and import.(Geertz 1973:9-10)

Two of Geertz's more brilliant contributions to the literature on interpretation are "Common Sense as a Cultural System" and "Art as a Cultural System" in *Local Knowledge: Further essays in interpretative anthropology* (Perseus Books,1983), titles which speak for themselves, or as the author says:

(T)his catching of "their" (other cultures') views in "our" (western academia's) vocabularies, (is) one of those things like riding a bicycle that is easier done than said. And in the following two essays I attempt to do a bit of it, in a rather more organized way, for what under some descriptions, though not under mine, would be the antipodal extremes of culture: common sense and art. (Geertz 1983: 9-10)

I take Geertz's essays as sounding a word of warning against too convoluted theorizing. When it comes to interpreting the cultural contexts of artists lives and its reflection/impact on their artwork themes and idiom there is no doubt that such structural anthropologists as Geertz, are helpful, not least because they speak or rather write, with eloquence and sagacity.

Mary Eaton in *Basic Issues in Aesthetics* (Belmont, Wadsworth, 1988) gives details of 'Marxist aesthetic sociology' which parallels Geertz's work, only it takes a historical and sociological line rather than anthropological one, as it centers on the way art functions socially, politically, economically and historically. According to such theories art is produced by historical conditions and so needs to be explained in terms of those conditions, particularly in regard to the ideologies that are reflected in and are perpetuated by them. Eaton says that Marxist views, in calling for holism, result in losing sight of what it is that makes art special or even why one should concentrate on art in particular. Both Geertz's understandings and those of Marxist theory, are countered by 'Deconstructionist' theory which holds that one can never fully know or reconstruct an artist's meaning, or equate a work with symbols operating at a particular time or place, or understand what a work would mean to every person in a given audience. (Eaton 1988:97-9)

While taking note of these counter-views, "naming, classifying and displaying" are according to Eilean Hooper-Greenhill in *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (Routledge, 2006) the basis on which museums operate. These, she says have 'looping effects' of "tacit or explicit choices made by people to adapt or resist cultural classifications that affect their lives and identities." (Hooper-Greenhill 2006:139) The author, Professor in Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, discusses the shift from modernism to post-modernism in museum/gallery approaches. Modernism she contends has to do with the imperialist museums of the conquering nations, the appropriation of artifacts from far-flung cultures within the, in this case, British Empire. Such artifacts were then displayed as the product of 'alien' and more sadly, 'primitive' cultures, this then being true 'othering' of the 'Other'. Modernism had much to do with colonialism and power-politics. Quite clearly such thought was adopted by the Nationalist Regime of pre 1994 South Africa, which could arguably be seen as a reactionary white minority control of an African majority, needing to use all forms of suppression in its 'arsenal' of policies, including the silencing and/or marginalizing of any indigenous African 'Voice'.

A recent application of some of these ideas to a South African context can be found in the work of Annie Coombes in *History after apartheid: visual culture and public memory in a democratic South Africa* (Witwatersrand University Press, 2004). She explains the displaying of art works in South African museums and how these allow alternate readings/narratives of

history. Post-modernism in museums has to do with repatriation of sacred artifacts, community involvement, the 'Voice' or narrative of the individual artist and the re-owning of cultures. It is many-voiced, multi-disciplined and respectful of alternative views. These two juxtaposing views, namely of modernism and post-modernism as regards knowledge/understanding, I draw on to help in interpreting the artists and art-works in this thesis.

A sub-theme of post-modernism is narrative. Oral history is essentially the giving ear to the narrative of more ordinary folk. In the case of this thesis there is the cultural narrative, local knowledge and IKS as well as the life-history and 'Voice' of the artists' own narratives. Contemporary art therapy allows yet another narrative, Shaun McNiff in *Art as medicine: creating a therapy of the imagination* (Shambala, 1992) speaks of dialogue with the art-work itself. Narrative therapy, generally described as the most humane of psychotherapies, which uses art-therapy to access the deeper emotions and subliminal intentions of a person, speaks of the validation and healing offered by the narrative approach, especially in cases of identity crises or individuation.

It is hugely debatable that artists, particularly those self-taught ones outside of mainline art-schools/styles are amongst the surest of those healing themselves through art. Narrative therapy itself is based upon the work of Australian family councilor Michael White and New Zealand anthropologist David Epston. One reference is *Experience, contradiction, narrative and imagination: selected papers of David Epston and Michael White, 1989-1991* (Dulwich Centre Publications, 1992). They developed a post-modern epistemology that is anchored in the respect for the individual, no longer does a healing-professional impose interpretations, but people are asked how things work for them, what is of value to them and acknowledge local content. Narrative therapy is not just telling stories; rather it is based upon the assumption that people organize meaning in their lives by telling their stories. Language used is never neutral and it constitutes people's realities. Narrative therapy owes a lot to post-modernism and 'Foucaultian' thinking as in Michael Foucault, *The hermeneutics of the subject: lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-82* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005). In mainline art any such psychological insight fell into the domain of the "outsider artists" and John Maizel Raw *Creation: Outsider art and beyond* (Phaidon, 1996) compares the art of those thought to be "mad" with those who are clearly Shamans in their own cultural traditions. He

thus sheds a new light onto creativity and art in the post-modernist era. Mark Freeman in *Rewriting the self: history, memory and narrative* (Routledge, 1993) gives some deeper insights into hermeneutics or “the theory of interpretation.” He discusses autobiographical writings, “false memories” and the need for the “Radiant obscurity of narratives” in which persons are allowed to retain some of their secrecy within their deeper selves and thus he says “(W)e must be bold enough and humble enough to remain in the surplus of meaning that exists (over and above that which is given by the author/artist)” (Freeman 1993: 149). This last is countered by Narrative Therapy’s claims, as discussed in Carey, M., and S., Russell, “Outsider-witness practices: Some answers to commonly asked questions “ In *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* (2003, No.1). that:

Narrative practice is founded on the idea that the stories that we tell about ourselves are not private and individual but are a social achievement. We probably all know that it is difficult to maintain an identity claim in isolation - we look for someone who will reflect back to us what it is we wish to claim for ourselves. An important part of our identity claims will be the values that we wish to live our lives by. (Carey and Russell 2003:3).

The effect of autobiographical narration is spoken of by Sarah Nuttal in her book edited with Carli Coetzee *Negotiating the Past: The making of memory in South Africa* (C.T.: Oxford Univ. Press 1996). While Minkley and Rassool in *Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa* discuss the nature of oral history and the danger of oral historians constructing a “master narrative of resistance” from interviews around the apartheid era struggle.

The compilation of essays draws upon these concepts from post-modernism, narrative therapy, oral history and memory in order to enable a theoretical framework to deeper viewing of the artworks and lives of the selected artists. Museum interpretation accordingly affected by this movement is also extremely pertinent.

The boarder issues also concern the power plays applicable to earlier modernist/colonial thinking: It was considered that Africans could not produce graphic art and the early school system insisted black students were restricted to traditional crafts. In 1948 Jack Grossert, Inspector for Art in the Bantu Education Department visited Father Patterson at the Cyrene

Mission in the then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) along with British art teacher Ann Robinson, to review the mission's disabled students' watercolours. Robinson records these experiences in *What is this thing called art?* Unpublished reminiscence (n.d. Campbell Collections). It was this experience that made Grossert go against accepted notions of 'High Art' at the time and include graphic art and painting into the syllabus of the Ndalen Art School in KwaZulu-Natal. In retrospect, one shudders at such rigid concepts of art and 'what art is' or 'should be'. In the early 1990s there was much debate on whether craft could be considered to be art. It was debated so much that mere mention of the debate in art circles leads to comments like "Oh no here we go again!" (personal communication J. van Heerden, Durban, 1994). Rightfully the debate belongs in the arena of modernism versus post-modernism. It also brings on-board the politics of empowerment, of community participation in galleries/museums and queries who exactly the audience is/was. It could also lead to such questions as the 'Insider-Outsider' debate, should I as a non-African assume the right to 'speak' on any of the works done by Africans? This latter argument then beggars the question of how pertinent is/are the realities of who are/were the artists' patrons and issues of 'Naive' and 'Primitive Art' for the 'Other.' All these issues are well debated in such books as Eileen Hooper-Greenhill *Museums and the Interpretation of visual culture* (Routledge, 2006) and Clifford Geertz's essays on interpretation. In his essay "Native's Point of View: Anthropological Understanding" in *Local Knowledge: further essays in interpretive anthropology* (Perseus Books, 1983) Geertz explodes the myth of anthropologists' methodologies:

Bronislaw Malinowski's *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* rendered established accounts of how anthropologists work fairly well implausible. The myth of the chameleon fieldworker, perfectly self-tuned to his exotic surroundings, a walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience and cosmopolitanism, was demolished by the man who had perhaps done the most to create it. (Geertz 1983:56)

Concerning the "Insider-Outsider" debate Geertz goes along with psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut in calling this paradigm the "experience-near" and "experience-distant" concepts. The former is what a patient or informant might naturally define as what he sees and thinks and what he would apply similarly to others, while the latter is one that specialists, like analysts or ethnographers, "employ to forward their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims." (Geertz

1983:57) In Narrative Therapy this same concept is encapsulated in “Structured” versus “Non-Structured” meaning-making, thus ‘Structured’ speaks of those practices/words that dominate western scientific practices like psychology; needs, drives, defenses, to give but a few, versus ‘Non-Structuralists’ words; beliefs, hopes, dreams, values. The latter taken ironically from anthropologists’ experience in the field. (Morkel 2007: 2-3)

### **1.6. Methodology, matters of style, literature survey and motivation for approach adopted**

I have firstly used pre-existing literature research from arts and anthropological fields as in the resources mentioned. My primary research tools are the analysis of individual artworks on exhibitions using both these as text and reference. Original art works in various contexts, such as public and private collections, ethnographic and art museums form my primary sources.

The main methodology comprises a measure of what Geertz called “common sense”, although I am aware of the debates around “Insider-Outsider” and the ethics of privacy/confidentiality and respect. A recent publication that is pragmatic and sensitive to local oral interviewing is that edited by Phillipe Denis and Radikobo Ntsimane titled, *Oral History in a wounded country: interactive interviewing in South Africa* (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008). My interactions have been mainly informal, deriving from a long-standing familiarity with acquiring, cataloguing, displaying, lecturing and publishing on ethnographic and art works. This is supplemented by being on ‘Selection Committees’ of major exhibitions of African art and being a part of outreach, such as the Gerard Bhengu Gallery at Centocow Mission, KwaZulu-Natal. Central to this methodology are informal communication with artists, dealers and others in the art world, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, often while buying works from artists. The African Art Centre, Durban’s Terry-Ann Stevenson and the late Director and founder Jo Thorpe, were invaluable contacts in this endeavor. Thus, I recall conversations with Gerard Bhengu, Paul Sibisi, Tony Nkosi, Trevor Makhoba, Raphael Magwaza, Willis Nxumalo, Musa Ngcobo and S’tokoza Cele to name but a few. Some artists I consider my friends over and above knowing them as artists or sculptors, persons like Henry Mshololo, John Sithole, Khehla Ngobese and Welcome Danca.



There are also more formal oral interviews forming part of the *Artists Index* at Campbell Collections, UKZN. All these interviews were done with the artists' permissions but any follow-up oral interviews would have an Informed Consent Form as is required by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Ethical Clearance Committee. This was done in the case of traditionalist carvers and dress-wearers and the sculptor Henry Mshololo, however the material was excluded from the final thesis, as it would make it too lengthy. As the main ethos in art is for artists to be known it would be unusual in the art field to grant anonymity as a form of confidentiality. I don't consider that any of the data given breaches confidentiality. The other methodological challenge in the arts field concerns copyright of published images of art-works; this must be in compliance with the Copyright Act of No 98 of 1987 as Amended 2001 and presently under revision. However for use in thesis and for research-papers there is a clause in this Act for "Fair usage" intended for educational purposes.

Exhibitions are the major resource of my primary material as is a net-work of galleries/museums and university departments that concentrate upon African contemporary and traditional art of KwaZulu-Natal. In particular, the staff of the Centre of Visual Arts, UKZN, Pietermaritzburg, with lecturers Juliette Leeb-du Toit, Juliet Armstrong and Ian Calder and the Witwatersrand University Galleries, Johannesburg's present and past staff, Karel Nel, Fiona Rankin-Smith, Elizabeth Rankin, Philippa Hobbs and Rayda Becker. The Durban Art Gallery's staff, especially the now retired Jill Addleson and Pat Khoza, have been singularly helpful. Friendships with art teachers at Rorke's Drift and Ndoleni Art School, Lorna Pearson, Craig Lancaster and Wendy Peterson during the 1980s are also included. Contacts with collectors in these fields like Bruce-Campbell Smith and Nick Maritz over an extensive period are also referenced, as is volunteer work at the Roman Catholic Mission of Mariannhill.

I do not undervalue the contribution made in my compilation of essays/chapters by Zulu persons; colleagues who were research-assistants and translators/interpreters, and interviewees (artists, traditional crafters and field-collectors) in the field. I made it a point as an "Outsider" or non-African to collaborate and draw upon African colleagues' interpretation, translation and local knowledge, always with their informed consent. Most often my cue for interpreting works in the way I do derives from the spontaneous response of

African visitors, colleagues and friends to art pieces on display, especially at Campbell Collections, UKZN. In 2004, I had come to acknowledge this debt, requesting such persons be my co-author. I include a re-write of one such essay on the late Trevor Makhoba, which was co-authored with colleague Mxolisi Mchunu. In the re-writing of my essays into chapters I have referred, with permission, to colleagues, Dingani Mthethwa, Ndaba Dube, Mxolisi Mchunu, Siyabonga Mkhize, Mthunzi Zungu, Mwelela Cele and Muzi Hadebe. All had been at one time or other library/museum interns under the Andrew Mellon Foundation Funding at my institution and some remained as permanent personnel and helped with research, interviews, collecting and translation in the course of their work, the most notable exhibitions being *Expression and the ancestors: diviners and artist* held at Campbell Collections in 2000 and *Untold tales of magic; Abelumbi* held at the Durban Art Gallery in 2001 and later on the NRF funded *Bhambatha or Impi Yamakhanda Project* of 2004-6. These projects all came under the directorship of Professor Yonah Seleti who subsequently moved to the Indigenous Knowledge Section of the Department of Science and Technology, stationed in Pretoria/Tshwane. I owe these African men a huge debt in understanding the topic of which I write and I am careful to grant them recognition for their input where I reference it. It is for the same reasons that my original essays are heavily footnoted, acknowledged and annotated, as I considered it a matter of personal ethics as urgent as that of showing respect for cultural values and the personhood of the artists.

In regard to matters of style employed in this thesis, I follow the Centre for Visual Arts (CVA), UKZN, Pietermaritzburg *Style-guide for Research Documents*, compiled by Professor Ian Calder in 2004. This style-guide uses the Harvard system for referencing citations. I nevertheless have with consideration, deviated from the Harvard convention of not using footnotes or endnotes, after debate as to including concepts under a sub-heading of Terminology. I found that my use of endnotes is not merely to clarify such concepts borrowed from other disciplines (like psychology and anthropology) as ‘World-view’, ‘Traditionalist’ or ‘*Gestalt*’ and moreover these endnotes’ integration into the text would make reading cumbersome and disrupt the flow of any argument. Further, it is more than terminology that needs elucidation, as there is a continuous requirement for elaboration of context and supplementary information as to source of ideas, pertinent history, cultural anecdote and their validation, which are best served by endnotes. It must be remembered that this thesis, while discussing African art, nevertheless draws from other disciplines, most

notably history, anthropology and psychology; disciplines in which footnotes or endnotes are still favoured, as indicated in *The Webster's Guide* (2004) "For writers in some disciplines, however – most notably in some of the humanities disciplines such as music, art, religion, theology, and even (sometimes) history - footnotes (or endnotes) are still widely in use."([www.webster.commnet.edu/mla](http://www.webster.commnet.edu/mla) )

The standard texts on African and more especially Zulu art before the watershed 1988 *Neglected Tradition Exhibition* were the following:

- Schlosser, K. 1975. Bantukunstler in Sudafrica Braunschweig: Offprint from: *Zeitschrift fur Ethnologie*.
- De Jager, E. J. 1973. *Contemporary African art in South Africa* Cape Town, Struik.
- Battiss, W; G.H. Franz; J.W. Grossert and Junod, H.P. 1958. *The Art of Africa* Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter.
- Grossert, J. W. 1967. *Art & craft in education: a critical review of the development of art and craft's education in Bantu schools in Natal, with particular reference to the period 1948-1962* Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter.
- Levinsohn, R. 1984. *Art and craft in South Africa: treasures in transition* Delta Books.

One of the earliest works that dealt equally with African graphic art and traditional craft was Anita Nettleton and David Hammond-Tooke *African art in southern Africa: from tradition to township* (A. D. Donker, 1989). African art as expressive of individual cultures was to be found in works like *Art and Ambiguity: Perspectives on the Brenthurst Collection of Southern African Art* (Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1991). This work had bench-mark essays on the nature of ethnography as art and reference to African indigenous or traditional aesthetics. The subject was expanded upon, with added historical perspective in *Zulu Treasures: of Kings and Commoners* (Local History Museums Durban and KwaZulu Cultural Museum, 1996).

Apart from exhibition catalogues, few articles dealt with the specific topic of African graphic and sculptural art. When they did, these formed mostly newspaper reports on exhibitions specific to mission schools like Rorke's Drift, Mariannhill and Ndalen. As such, the subject of art was seen as an essentially Mission School introduced adjunct to traditional functional

crafts. As stated before, it was only in later years and specifically in the 1990s, that the history of art was redressed, with individual artists of African decent having entire retrospective exhibitions dedicated to them. Such exhibitions were accompanied by catalogues which very often reflected new research into the artist's biography, themes and styles. Examples are: Juliette Leeb-du Toit *Spiritual art of Natal* (Tatham Art Gallery, 1993), *The Gerard Bhengu Retrospective* (Tatham Art Gallery, 1995), *The Azaria Mbatha Retrospective* (Durban Art Gallery 1998), Elizabeth Rankin *Images of wood: aspects of the history of sculpture in 20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa* (Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1989), Juliette Leeb-du Toit *Ndalení art school: a Retrospective* (Tatham Art Gallery, Pmb., 1999) and *Veterans of KZN: KwaZulu-Natal artists from the 1970s and 1980s* (Durban Art Gallery, 2004). This movement was spearheaded by the galleries which often invited known art historians like Juliette Leeb-du Toit, Sandra Kloppe, Liz Rankin, Philippa Hobbs and Karel Nel to guest-curate or contribute contextual essays for exhibitions that specifically dealt with art that had been formerly marginalized.

In more recent years books came to be published on the topics, such as E. J. de Jager *Images of man: contemporary South African black art and artists* (Fort Hare University Press, 1992). Elsa Miles, *Land and lives: a story of early Black artists* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1997) which deals with what the author termed "the pioneer black artists." A well-researched recent publication is that by Elizabeth Rankin and Philippa Hobbs *Rorke's Drift: empowering prints: twenty years of printmaking in South Africa* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2003). It was accompanied by an exhibition opened by Dr Yonah Seleti, then Director of Campbell Collections, UKZN. The most recent work of reference value is Ben Carton, John Laband, and Jabulani Sithole (Eds.) *Zulu Identities: being Zulu, past and present* (UKZN Press, 2008). The editors sought out fifty-two contributors who had taken a less than seasoned stance to the nature of being Zulu, including artistic expression and the oral genre and thus the publication indicates future trends in research.

As stated, Campbell Collections, UKZN were one source called upon to loan actual works for the earlier exhibitions. In more recent years there have been an increase in the number of committed art-collectors who specialize in African art, and galleries will include works on loan from their private collections in exhibitions aimed at redressing their own acknowledged early skewed holdings. These collectors have also ensured that the art-dealerships like

Sotheby's, Johans Borman and Kim Siebert's (all in Johannesburg), now handle African Art sales and museums/galleries acquire from these sources. One such collector, Bruce Campbell-Smith's collection is published in Hyden Proud, (Ed.) *Revisions: expanding the narrative of South African art: the Campbell Smith Collection* (Pretoria: SA History on Line and UNISA Press, 2006). An accompanying exhibition was curated by Hayden Proud at the Iziko SA National Gallery, Cape Town, from 1 October 2005 to 19 March 2006.

Prices paid for such works sold through the dealerships already mentioned as well as Stephen Weltz (in association with Sotheby's), Michael Stephenson of Cape Town and Canon and Canon of Hilton, ensured a market interest in these formerly neglected artists. Pre to this upsurge, the most reputable dealers were the African Art Centers in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. These Centers were founded as part of the early *South African Institute of Race Relations* and went independent around 1990 as non-profit organizations which aimed to help the impoverished African artists and crafters not only find a market but offered art and sale techniques.

My own contribution to the literature on African contemporary art started with a modest "Contemporary black art, with emphasis on Natal as represented in the Campbell Collections" in *Killie Campbell, 1881-1965* (Durban: University of Natal, 1981). It formed part of my work as curator of both the traditional ethnographic and art holdings at the Collections. In terms of my work I made available what information there was in the Artist Index, the documentation of the African Art Centre, Durban and the Ndoleni Art School student files, all housed in the Africana library. I also administered loans for the increase in exhibitions mentioned. It was especially former Durban Art Gallery Director/Collections Manager, Jill Addleson, known for her professional curation of many traveling retrospective exhibitions, who invited me onto the Committees and for whom I wrote contextualizing essays for the accompanying published catalogues.

What I have contributed to the area of such writings is a certain experiential dimension to the understanding of graphic and sculptural works. As stated, all of this writing derived specifically from my work as curator (more correctly Senior Museologist) at the Campbell Collections of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. My training had been in history and anthropology, I then specialized in Museum Science which had components centered upon

both art and ethnographic collections. I also up-graded my museum training in 2000 by attending a course “South African National Cultural Heritage Program” a corroboration of University of Witwatersrand and University of KZN with American partners; Michigan State University, Chicago Historical Society and the Smithsonian Folklife Centre, Washington, DC. USA. The main contemporary emphasis in the museums of the USA is on community outreach and ‘Voice’, itself a change from the elitist curator/academia of the galleries/museums of former times.

My training and experience made me well aware of the cultural roots of much of the sculptural and the graphic artworks of African artists. Therefore my essay contributions center on the disciplinary cross-over between art and ethnography; mediating indigenous cultural cosmology/world-view, aesthetics, craft techniques, culture change and considerations of the artist’s own temperament/individuality. In terms of anthropology I found I referenced the works of the 1970s structuralists like Ivar-Axel Berglund *Zulu thought patterns and symbolism* (London: C. Hurst, 1976) and Harriett Ngubane *Body and mind in Zulu medicine* (London: Academia, 1977). That which remained valuable in these authors’ works was their use of intensive field-work; Berglund sought to ask himself:

How do Zulu themselves understand their particular expression? How do *they* themselves explain it?...This study shows that much of traditional thinking is not only still found in Zulu society, but, in fact, is receiving increasing attention, especially among people who live in rural areas. This is particularly true in times of crises in the lives of men and women....I have attempted to describe Zulu as they are today...It would be unrealistic to assume that any single person is versed in all knowledge pertaining to rituals, concepts and symbols. Zulu themselves admit this from time to time, saying they do not know. (Berglund 1976: Introduction)

Referencing these authors, plus the advantage of actually interacting with many African artists and craftsmen, acquiring their works and interviewing them for the *Artist Index* (Campbell Collections, UKZN) made me aware of cultural world-views influencing how these people worked and choose to approach their themes in the way they do. Through this I came to particularly appreciate the ‘exceptions’ to the older anthropological literature’s preconceived interpretations of a ‘Zulu way’ of doing whatever. This, a post-modernist

giving the artist his/her 'Voice', one that acknowledges and more importantly allows for the complexities of varied cultural, historical and individual influences, is what I consider to be my contribution to the topic/study of this thesis. To this can be added the querying of the oral genre in its various aspects undertaken in the reformulation of the essays into chapters as well as the attempt to see how this effects the choice of preferred aesthetical form. Artists are like their fellow-men, subject to the vagaries of westernization and social change but usually this change conforms to that which is compatible with earlier social and cultural values. To emphasize, while there is a degree of truth in the old anthropological assumption that African persons are subsumed within their community rather than prompted by the strong individualism of the western world, it is nevertheless a fact that for African artists especially, many do seek to express their unique personhood, and while readily accessing traditional cultural idiom and thinking, they also often grapple with issues of destiny, calling and much like diviners/Shaman, tend to occupy the periphery of their societies. Lastly, the African cultural world-view does have its own sense of what constitutes art, often it is that which enhances a piece's ritual purpose and this means that the creators, as specialists no-doubt partake of the ethos of this domain. I would caution however, that those Africans producing for the tourist trade no doubt have other motivating criteria and it is also so that any artist can be motivated from both standpoints.

## Chapter 2: Essay 1.

### Trevor Makhoba and reflections on a distinctive African Genre

This chapter draws on black colleagues' readings of the late Trevor Makhoba's paintings, concentrating on the artist's depictions of females, both black and white. I also discuss my own and fellow European South African's responses both to the artist's depictions and to my black colleagues' readings thereof. Taking from Juliette Leeb-du Toit's essay "Phila Trevor Makhoba's Narratives and Mores: Dialectics of Artistic and Intellectual Leadership" in the *Trevor Makhoba Memorial Exhibition* catalogue (Durban Art Gallery, 2005), it is argued that Makhoba could be considered the 'Master' of the visual hybrid, urban oral genre, also to be found in such music styles as *isicathimiya* and thus his works require familiarity with the township life to fully grasp their import. This process takes from earlier generations of Zulu oral narrative reflected in such traditions as praise-poetry and story-telling; only here it is transformed by the influences of modernity commensurate with the ever increasing urban diaspora, presenting the town-dweller with oftentimes distressing changes from older rural and cultural life-styles and mores. Much of Makhoba's work moreover refers to topics that are socially taboo, as for instance the sexual encounters between master and servant across race in the old South Africa. Makhoba's asides concerning South African race-relations are of particular interest to the politics of the times. Politics, moralization and taboo are all dimensions that could be missed by those not party to this genre. I broach not only fellow-African responses but that of white South African audiences (including my own), to Makhoba's varied renditions of females, arguing that the artist as often communicates archetypal females (who can be figured as black as well as white) as he renders racial stereotypical ones. These it seems show the influence of such early Zulu writers of the heroic epic as R.R.R. Dhlomo whose works on the Zulu kings were standard set-works in the African schools of the 1970s-1990s. As the artist is deceased and where there is a lack of recorded documentation some of my assumptions are perforce suppositions for which I do proffer reasons.

### Rethinking *Great Temptation in the Garden*, 1995



My original essay for the *Trevor Makhoba Memorial Exhibition* (Durban Art Gallery, 2005) was written in co-authorship with Mxolisi Mchunu and titled “Great Temptation in the Garden: Trevor Makhoba as Taboo-Breaker.” The essay centered on the interpretation of Makhoba’s painting *Great Temptation in the Garden*, 1995 which depicts a lascivious white madam, nearly naked, she has been drinking and offers wine in a tin-mug to a young black gardener dressed in an old Natal phenomenon termed a ‘kitchen-suit’; essentially a Victorian boy child’s tunic and knickerbockers transformed by a colonial white madam as attire for her 12 year old Zulu ‘kitchen-boy’, as he had come to work in his traditional *umutsha* or loin-covering. The Durban wholesale and retail store owner Benjamin Greenacre, had the outfit copied as a domestic worker’s uniform, and so was born this curious worker’s outfit. (Verbeek 1982: 92)



**Figure 1: T. Makhoba, *Great Temptation in the Garden*, 1995. Oil on canvas, 42x59cm. Campbell Collections, UKZN (WCP3002).**

The “Trevor Makhoba as taboo-breaker” part of the essay’s title derived from the challenge to viewers that this painted scene evoked: This centers on the obvious seduction by the madam or employer of the servant in a suburban garden. Mchunu had himself been a gardener and Makhoba’s claim “Out there these things do happen!” sounded true to him. (Winters and Mchunu 2005: 79) So started some intense debate between myself and Mchunu; concluded only once I conceded the emotional truth of gardeners’ ‘master-servant mythology’. I quote a lengthy endnote:

We as the authors...have come to our understanding after a singular interaction between us. When Winters was questioning Mchunu in regard to the veracity of Makhoba's painted scene, Mchunu told her a belief held by gardeners that madams feed them on their own expressed breast milk. So bizarre was the tale that the initial response of Winters was, "I don't believe it!" to which Mchunu exclaimed, "Believe it. It happens, yes it happens!" When Winters argued the absence of any western cultural precedent for such behavior, Mchunu became so stressed he started laughing to the point of crying, and then said, "I lied, I lied...but it is still true, it is still true!" (Winters and Mchunu 2005: Endnote 11)

This lead to the following understanding of the fact that myth often holds within it a paradox and too ready dismissal of it as mere fabrication could mean closing all further enquiry:

There is perhaps no better way to express the nature of myth than Mchunu's rather extraordinary response, for it is essential to believe in the emotional veracity of such a tale, for it does not reflect factual happenings so much as encapsulates the very 'real' pain and humiliation felt by gardeners in their encounters with their dominant madams (who in this tale maybe treated their servants as perpetual children). For Winters to persist in dismissing such tales (no matter if she perceived them as distressing or preposterous) as 'pure fiction' would be to risk alienation from the topic under discussion and possibly indicate her as one of the very 'madams' depicted. (Winters and Mchunu 2005: Endnote 11)

To realize our deeper conclusions around the depicted madam's seduction, I quote the pertinent section from the text:

The first point in regard to this particular scene (of the seducing madam) is the difficulty of assessing if indeed it was a true experience, either for Makhoba himself or for any one of his fellow one-time gardeners (Makhoba had done gardening among his many jobs). The artist had different versions to tell according to who interrogated him, and in the end one can only know that he as an artist truly believed that, "Out there these things do happen!" Certainly the wealth of detail could indicate that there is some factual reality to the painting, but it is equally possible that it shares with the

viewer a myth that encapsulates how gardeners perceive the ‘dangers’ inherent within the servant-mistress/madam relationship. (Winters and Mchunu 2005: 74)

Once again we as authors comment on the difficulties of collaborating in interpretation of the mythic dimension of Makhoba’s work:

As the authors of this essay we, ourselves, came from the divergent worlds depicted by Makhoba, Winters being white and female and like most South Africans having been ‘madam’ by default, and Mchunu being black and male and a one-time gardener or ‘garden-boy’. Because our understanding is based upon experience and often ‘heated’ debate, and whilst striving for objectivity we nevertheless hold that any minimizing of such an emotionally charged tabooed topic (by, for instance declaring it mere ‘fiction’), is guilty of perpetuating the iniquitous system upon which it was based. Thus while agreeing that the veracity of Makhoba’s work is of central concern we contend that this has nothing to do with having to prove a ‘time, date or incident’, as it is another category of ‘truth’ at play here, one that holds a deeper significance. (Winters and Mchunu 2005: 74)

We further give our conclusions as to how and why we interpret the work as we have and suggest a way forward in dealing with myth:

What is important is to grant the participants of such experiences (the gardeners in this case, as Makhoba clearly intended to show their situation), the right to claim and even exaggerate their own ‘mythic-tale’ (of their interactions with their madams/mistresses), for the telling of and believing in such stories (and here one gets back to issues of ‘truth’ and why it is so important for participants to claim these tales as ‘fact’) allows the gardeners a chance of healing from their feelings of humiliation as men; subjugated not only by the nature of servant-hood but also more probably because of their race, indicated by their often being called, ‘Garden-boys’, ‘Jonge’ or worse, ‘Piccanins’. Such tales are spread when gardeners get together to talk (usually on street-corners) and these tales help their tellers cope with the feelings evoked by their difficult circumstances, and as individuals they can take courage that their own

situation may not be as bad as that of a fellow gardener. (Winters and Mchunu 2005: 74)

In retrospect I can clearly see the symbolism involved in the myth that so flabbergasted me, that of madams feeding their ‘garden-boys’ expressed breast-milk so as to ensure bonding with the servants so they would not leave service. This has been dealt with in Mchunu’s chapter “A Modern coming of Age: Zulu manhood, domestic work and the ‘kitchen-suit’” in Carton, B; J. Laband, and Sithole, J. (Eds.) *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* (UKZN Press, 2008) which developed from our essay for the Makhoba exhibition. Yet initially these connections were not there, the first tentative glimmer being the remark in the quoted endnote as to “perpetual children” and it is only discussion that brought to light Mchunu’s realization that indeed he never thought his madam guilty of such a thing, as he decanted the store bought milk from carry-bags, yet still he would never accept milk at work. (Mchunu 2008: 579) I now know what my Zulu male colleagues are implying when a white female on the staff brings a ‘melktert’<sup>40</sup> for tea and if any of these males do eat it, there is much underhand teasing and badgering of such a foolhardy fellow. Normally, in polite society it is not proper, even in this chapter, to actually mention or explain these matters: For these matters are taboo because they refer to topics that are socially taboo; sexuality, racial dominance and the greatest of taboos in old South African society, miscegenation and the racial divide. From my discussions with Mchunu I became convinced of the link between taboo and the need for myth as a way to handle or contain the emotion laden experience of South African servant-hood.

One example of a master-servant taboo concerns the ‘kitchen-suit’ itself: Professor Iain Edwards director of Campbell Collections, UKZN in the late 90s, one day come into my office and deposited a un-used such uniform in its characteristic stiff white cotton duct material with it’s red binding. He had found it in a clear-out sale of one or other elite ‘ONF’ (Old Natal Family)<sup>41</sup> home. Being a fellow white South African, my boss and I merely thought the uniform a neo-colonial oddity, one which Edwards had himself worn as a student to signal his political sympathies with the under-class of black workers. (personal communication Edwards, Durban, 1997) I thought to involve a black cleaner in the enthusiasm over this acquisition, a man I still regard as a friend and one with whom I had had many conversations and with whom I had collected traditional Inanda area courting regalia.

His reaction stunned me; with evident pain at the humiliation of once wearing the suit, he told that cleaners declared the red binding stood as a warning to the young domestic servant or ‘house-boy’ of where his arms would be cut off should he pursue any amorous intentions toward the daughters of the house. This warning came from older relatives who had gone into service. I had never heard such a myth before and yet my own family had been in the KwaZulu-Natal hotel trade and I recalled the uniforms from childhood. The fact that this man had never told the story before, in spite of Makhoba’s *Great Temptation in the Garden, 1995* on prominent display in Edwards’s office, clearly signaled a ‘sub-culture’ of taboo around any sexual relations between employer and domestic. Mchunu’s essay confirms these assumptions and historian Benedict Carton, editor of the publication in which Mchunu’s article appears, commented that Mchunu’s writings as reflections on his own experience of domestic service were “an exposé of master-servant relations in pre 1994 KwaZulu-Natal.”(personal communication Carton, Durban, 2007)

When Carton required details of the ‘kitchen-suit’ for Mchunu’s essay endnotes, it recalled a somewhat traumatic incident for me. This incident gives insight into the taboo on racial fraternization that was codified in the old South African Immorality Act. For my first job in my late teens/early twenties, I lived in yet another KwaZulu-Natal neo-colonial oddity, a residential hotel, where the vast number of Zulu workers wore ‘kitchen-suits’, waiters wore the white rendition, gardeners the khaki and kitchen-hands the denim. In the morning the waiters would bring tea into the residents’ rooms. This one morning a new waiter, a handsome youth of about my own age named Mishack, dallied to ask me to be his girlfriend, or his “sweet (heart)” as he put it. I declined, making up a lie of a boyfriend in a neighbouring town and so I thought ended this quite normal little interaction, given the South African apartheid scenario of the time. Only when trying to recall what Mishack wore for Mchunu’s essay did I realize I was struggling to remember his white ‘kitchen-suit’ with its red binding,<sup>42</sup> a cue that when combined with the information shared by my cleaner friend aforementioned, suddenly brought to mind a severe disciplining of the youth by the hotel owner in the communal walkway of this Anglo-Indian style building. I said to Mchunu that I could not fathom if this was the so-called ‘false memory syndrome’ or a genuine incident of suppressed memory caused by the anger I had nurtured for the hotel proprietor at the shame he made myself and the young man feel. The Rottweiler or Doberman dog in Makhoba’s picture takes on a whole other meaning in the light of this experience; the dog is most

certainly a stand-in for the white male in his role of social disciplinarian, a ‘watch-dog’ ensuring compliance with the Immorality Laws of the time. One can also understand better the nature of repressed memory and its link to taboo and accept that this may well be the reason for the discomfort evoked by Makhoba’s paintings and the reason they are so often ignored by white South Africans.

### **The socio-cultural explanation of taboo and its permitted breach in the oral genre**

Zulu tradition has a strong play on taboo and the requisite respect and avoidance (*ukuhlonipha* and *ukuzila*) that must accompany any dealings with taboo areas. These areas of behavior concern sacred liminal space between the world of the ancestors and the living. Usually one thinks of birth and death as falling within these domains but sexuality does too, as it expresses the creative powers of the sacred domain.<sup>43</sup> It is this latter area of taboo that Trevor Makhoba so often challenges. One then questions what forms of taboo-breaking mechanisms are available within Zulu society, do these apply only to the actual tabooed behavior, here an inter-race sexual liaison between madam and gardener, or do they also apply to the telling of the myths ‘out of the family’ as it were, as Mchunu and my cleaner friend had done. It seems that it could be a breach of faith to report on the myths but not as serious a violation as to engage in the actual taboo behavior. In fact it seems that the oral genre of Zulu tradition in its modernized migrant-labourer and urbanized forms of music and poetry allow for this.

Art historian Juliette Leeb-du Toit draws attention to this in her essay “Phila Trevor Makhoba’s Narratives and Mores: Dialectics of Artistic and Intellectual Leadership” in the *Trevor Makhoba Memorial Exhibition* catalogue:

This narrative genre painting is rooted, among others, in contemporary oral discourse which functions as a vital vocabulary that relates cultural, political and personal experience. Centered in praise poetry (*izibongo*) and various musical traditions (*maskanda*, *isicathimiya* and *mbaqanga*), these have often functioned as the only terrain for uncensored discourse on current affairs, identity and contemporary histories, both personal and collective, trivial and profound. These musicians and

poets see their task to de-construct, debate and challenge current events, taboos or other realities. (Leeb-du Toit 2005:37)

She continues:

Largely unhindered by ostensible appropriateness and obedience patterns of tradition, they engage in debates on authenticity and hybridity with regard to culture, and the increasing sensitivity to criticism by the state....Like his musician counterparts, Makhoba is clearly reclaiming art within an African context of relevance and, at the same time, implicitly challenging an erstwhile predominant reception in an exclusively white audience. It is not merely art for visual pleasure or vicarious empathy, but art which serves a social purpose. (Leeb- du Toit 2005:37)

In my own experience, where I almost invariably had Makhoba's artworks mediated to me by black male colleagues working either as research assistants, translators or in museum education, I have long known that they interpret the gist of Makhoba's paintings quickly and accurately, even if sometimes it takes some articulation to explain their understandings or intuitions to an outsider. These readings are by no means superficial renditions of what is perceived as going on in a painting, in fact the interpretations have a lot in common with the divining of dream imagery and there is an acceptance of the fact that anyone's slant will be coloured by their own experiences. I used to think this facility related to the familiarity of socio-cultural context, but now realize the 'reading' takes place on a far more complex level; it combines familiarity of context, very possibly the facility that black culture has in regard to interpreting dream symbolism,<sup>44</sup> which can appear very akin to the 'reading' of the cues in the oral tradition of which Leeb-du Toit speaks.

In this essay I wish to consider primarily this latter 'reading' of cues in more detail and take up the other two observations in a more generalized way via the actual analysis of some of the imagery. Examples of traditional taboo breaking within the oral tradition are: Some clan praises possess 'insults' that can only be used by someone who knows the person well, for instance the *isithakazelo* or praise "*Msunu ka nyoko* (Your mother's vagina) as a praise for the family of Sishi. (personal communication Mchunu, Durban, 2008) For an outsider to use such a praise would be an insult and yet it is an honour within the correct context. Normally

girls may not utter certain sexually charged words before elders but for a week before a coming-of-age *umemulo* they go about the village singing rude songs and are given money as a token fine for breach of taboo. (personal communication, Mchunu, Durban, 2008) Clearly these are instances of traditional Zulu sanctioned taboo breaking and no doubt indicate the deep complexities of Zulu culture. In order to truly come to terms with the nature of Trevor Makhoba's art of social commentary it is necessary to at least know of the existence of such profundities within tradition. A Zulu person will sometimes say something which is taboo or which they want to remain obtuse, in the Zulu tongue. When challenged as to what they are intending, the rejoinder will be "*Isizulu asitolkwa*" the approximate translation being "I said it in Zulu and Zulu is not to be translated" in other words "This thing (or the Zulu (language) speaks for itself." (personal communication Mchunu, Durban, 2008)

### **Intuitive interpretation, socio-cultural aspects of taboo and stereotyping**

This phrase ("*Isizulu asitolkwa*" [I said it in Zulu and Zulu is not to be translated]) is particularly applicable to Trevor Makhoba's paintings as it was told to me by Mchunu as his answer to anyone deliberately misreading<sup>45</sup> the artist's work *The valley of Love, 1993* which hangs in his former office at Campbell Collections, UKZN. (personal communication Mchunu, Durban, 2008) What Mchunu is speaking of and what is contained within the oral genre, is "experiential knowledge" and psychologist Eric Fromm in "Psychoanalysis and the Art of knowing" in Palmer, H. (Ed.) *Inner Knowing: Consciousness, Creativity, Insight, Intuition* (Tarcher/Putman, 1998) confirms this type of knowing:

As long as a patient (or any person) remains in the attitude of the detached scientific observer, taking himself as the object of investigation, he is not in touch with his unconscious, except by thinking about it; he does not experience the wider, deeper reality of himself. Discovering one's unconscious is, precisely not an intellectual act, but an affective experience, which can hardly be put in words at all. (Fromm 1998: 100)

He continues:



This does not mean that thinking and speculation may not precede the act of discovery; but the act of discovery itself is always a total experience. (One) characterized by its spontaneity and suddenness. ...oneself and the world appear in a different light, are seen from a different viewpoint. There is usually a good deal of anxiety aroused before the experience takes place, while afterwards a new feeling of certainty is present.(Fromm 1998: 100)

The phrase “*Isizulu asitolkwa*” then encompasses “experiential knowledge” and links the various threads of; taboo subject matter, the cultural modes of breaking taboo and the genre of praise poetry and musical tradition in their use of ‘challenge to debate’ mentioned by Leeb-du Toit. To break a taboo is often described by means of an idiom “*ukuzwa amanzi ngobhoko*” (Put your walking-stick in to test the water’s depth), (personal communication Mchunu, Durban. 2008) or *umhola* a word that describes the actions of someone who tests the invisible boundaries of social taboo (personal communication Dingani Mthethwa, Durban, 1999), hereby breaking the ‘conspiracy of silence’ that pertains to normal tabooed social interactions. This is what men do when using the oral genre and what Makhoba does in his painting subject-matter. The rejoinder in polite society to Makhoba’s taboo-breaking paintings is then “*Isizulu asitolkwa*”, meaning that if you do not quite ‘get it’ when viewing the artist’s work, as when you do not quite ‘get it’ in listening to a taboo breaking *isibongo* or praise poem, then accept that you are not party to the message, indeed you very possibly fall into the category of person to be respected or avoided in regard to the area of taboo touched upon.

Being white does not necessarily preclude one from understanding the implications of the taboo-breaking: I have often intuitively ‘read’ Makhoba’s work correctly, but I have learnt to defer to my Zulu companions in regard to whether my interpretation, particularly in regard to African thinking, is correct. I have had fellow white colleagues who have chronically and perhaps deliberately ‘misread’ Makhoba’s work, only to witness inscrutable expressions and silence on the side of the very same men who would normally engage in debate as to subtle nuances of interpretation. For example, in the interpretation of *Great temptation in the Garden, 1995* one white colleague said the work was pornography, as what happened between a man and a woman was private and Makhoba was guilty of placing it in the public domain. My black colleagues said nothing regarding this remark, choosing in fact to ignore it,

only my querying their view resulted in consensus; that the viewer was either attempting to keep the taboo in place or had not looked at the painting's content. It was generally agreed among ourselves that the topic depicts too much human emotion on the part of both gardener and madam, to classify as pornography. However it is possible that someone who has not studied anthropology, which is the field that deals with the social function of taboos, may be misusing the term pornography to express a forbidden or tabooed topic.

Although I debate with my black male colleagues over Makhoba's painting's interpretation I still differ in my interpretation concerning the content: The males all felt the madam in Makhoba's painting was abusive and using her position of power over the gardener who in true compliance with *ukuhlonipha* or respect, lowers his eyes trying to avoid the 'red' signal of danger invoked by the woman's panties.<sup>46</sup> Thus to these men the madam remains a witch (*Umthakathi*), even more so it seems, as witches who seduce men and make them their slaves, are conceptualized as light skinned. (Winters and Mchunu 2005:75-76) Also the presence of the dog on the madam's part is interpreted as deliberate power abuse by my black male colleagues.<sup>47</sup> I on the other hand, while certainly agreeing that the woman is misusing her position as employer by seducing the young gardener, do not accord the woman the status of witch *per se*. To me, a witch manipulates power and I do not see the woman in the picture as empowered in any way, rather, she appears as a neurotic and neglected wife seeking validation of her self-esteem in her ill-advised drunken flirting with the gardener. The Rottweiler or Doberman dog is indicative of her being only outwardly in control of the situation, for as mentioned before, the animal is a token obedience to her husband who no doubt bought the dog to protect her. Hence the power remains in the court of a white male once again. Two fellow white women have independently assessed the woman in the way I have, denying that the woman has any power at all and reiterating the loosening of inhibitions that takes place upon drinking. The one woman, a very respected person actually saying she cringed when she saw the painting thinking it was herself as she once worked with Makhoba on an art project and I assume her fear relates to her acting without due decorum as art students are wont to do. The other woman added an interesting aside in regard to white female power, that it can be 'empty' and it is the women who are the victims of their husbands, hence they so often took their frustrations out on servants. This scenario is well attested to in the findings of Jacklyn Cock in *Maids and Madams: a study in the politics of exploitation* (Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1980). Why then is the woman's neurotic acting

out receiving no sympathy from black males, themselves victims of the same white male patriarchy. And why is it that women ‘take the fall’ and are accused of being witches? This doubtless speaks to the universal theme across cultures of male dominance which projects all evil onto women who are cast as irredeemable, lascivious temptresses of innocent men folk. As I will later show, Makhoba acknowledged the role of feminism in *Hard Blow in Beijing, 1996* in defeating male dominance, placing all women, black and white in the fight for equality, but significantly only showing black males taking the fall.

### **Trevor Makhoba’s manipulation of the oral genre and his attitude to his viewer-ship**

To get back to *Great Temptation in the Garden, 1995*; what all viewers, including black males and white females, do agree on is the brilliance of Trevor Makhoba in regard to his manipulation of his oral genre, not least because he manages to communicate such nuances that engender conflicting responses, ones themselves often socially tabooed, like identification, anger, shame or recall of similar such traumatized circumstances on both sides. Mchunu however reported many local white South African visitors would deny the scenario depicted in the painting could or would ever have happened in South African society; a response that may derive from a blinkered view, like the colleague who dismissed it as pornography, that wishes to hide all of the pain and the humiliation of a tabooed behavior, be it of gardener or fellow white female from view.

Makhoba’s statement to Bruce Campbell-Smith that he was disappointed in Campbell Collections, UKZN not exhibiting all of his works (Campbell-Smith 2005:18) is distressing but understandable in light of the explanation he must have received from the museum’s research-assistants. I never interacted with the artist other than in company of one of the black male researchers. Over time there were four of these men and I was singularly struck how all, whether Zulu, Matabele, Sotho or Hlubi, were excessively protective of Makhoba in regard to his personal problems,<sup>48</sup> whether this was brotherly feeling or because they regarded him as a genius and therefore allowed to make blunders, I could not fully fathom;<sup>49</sup> but this fact signals to me that Leeb-du Toit’s commentary on the oral style is valid, for these men instantaneously recognized in Makhoba a master of his genre. These men would have explained to Makhoba the offence taken by some of the white staff to his taboo-breaking artworks and thus I suspect that Makhoba’s statement to Campbell-Smith was in itself a

challenge by the artist to debate around his works. Makhoba was too intelligent a man to be fully innocent of all knowledge of the controversial nature of his depictions. Liz and Imogen Gunner in “Where’s it Gone, Freedom?”: Composing *Isicathimiya* in Post-apartheid South Africa in the age of 9/11” in Carton, B; J. Laband, and Sithole J. (Eds.) *Zulu identities: being Zulu, past and present* (Pietermaritzburg, UKZN Press, 2008) mention:

The songs of *isicathimiya*...have the choice to engage with difficult and controversial topics... Some singers and composers see it as their duty to engage with controversy, rather than work with the well-worn themes of loneliness, love and courtship and the pain of the city that have marked the genre. The freedom of voice of the new era has propelled some groups into making the deliberate choice to become ‘messengers’ for their community and thus heightened the didactic emphasis within the genre.(Gunner and Gunner 2008:426-7)

I would like to draw a parallel between Makhoba and Alexander Solzhenitsyn the Russian writer of ‘Gulag’ fame.<sup>50</sup> Solzhenitsyn had the capacity to make a Communist boss with minimal education into both the ‘barbarian’ as well as the contradictory humane person he likely was. The writer does the same for the prisoner survivors as his stories very fallible ‘heroes’. To my mind Trevor Makhoba has attained the same, he manages for instance to communicate the African stereotype of certain whites, females in this chapter, as well as touch on the archetypal in both white and black (of which I go into detail later). The white stereotype as it appears in early black culture is depicted in Makhoba’s works too; as a race of beings, *Izilwane* or sea monsters, not ‘human’ in the way of a black person but rather a law unto themselves in which their behaviors make little sense to common (African) logic. And yet simultaneously, in the eyes of a white viewer, party to these strange behaviors, Makhoba’s whites are more like archetypes, albeit sometimes that of the ‘Shadow’, than simply crass and insensitive stereotypes.<sup>51</sup> For myself as white South African, every reading of a Makhoba painting contains this contradiction, I may well be shamed by the depiction but I know where the depicted female ‘is coming from’ to use popular parlance. Thus for instance I cannot help but feel a sad anguish for both parties depicted in *Great Temptation in the Garden, 1995* and suspect the madam’s foolish seduction has little hope of success even sans Rottweiler/Doberman dog as bodyguard. The confused discomfort of the gardener at the madam’s shameful display is visible. What I cannot quite decide is how much of this

Makhoba himself empathizes with as a fellow human-being, rather than intuitively as white idiosyncrasy. In other words, is it his mastery of the oral genre that affords him so excellent a characterization or some deeper cogitation on his part? To explain my deliberations another way; I do know from discussion with my black male colleagues why African thinking is so harsh on the madam for her indiscretions, and no doubt if they read this chapter they will point out once again “A woman may not approach a man, this is wrong, such a woman is playing with him and therefore a witch!” This is the socially sanctioned line taken by males in male company, but what I doubt is that all males inclusive of Makhoba, on the level of “experiential knowledge” do not know that most humans, be they male or female, black or white, are not necessarily deemed irredeemably evil for trespasses that derive from mere stupidity, poor up-bringing, insensitivity, despair or foolishness.

Perhaps the biggest indicator that Makhoba is social commentator and observer rather than simply someone obsessed with his topic, in this case black perceptions of white people, or indeed merely spiteful or given to race hatred; is that his idiom is the oral genre which can range across many topics of concern, even including those of food, if we are to go by such works as *Greens are essential, 2001* and *The Pumpkin Patch, 1992*. Of the latter, the artist described the inspiration as a “pumpkin party” (Halloween?) held by a white art patron in the city of Durban. (personal communication Makhoba, Durban, 2003) Even in this, one can see the genesis of future black querying as regards the strange ways of whites. Hence it can safely be said that the theme of white female and black male interaction was one of many themes falling into the genre that the artist dealt with. This assumption accords with an observation made by the Gunners’ in regard to the multiple themes dealt with by the Try Singers of the Valley of 1000 Hills. It is worth hearing their conclusion as it is so typical of Makhoba’s mode of working:

Thus their song...’*Sasesashaya lengoma ukuze sikhumbuz’ ekaya*’ (We remember home), scripts a complex bundle of what home stands for in their new passage of global awareness. The home (imagery) is further complicated by their ‘Where’s it gone, freedom?’ which gestures to an imagined past secure world now forever gone. But nostalgia is not their trademark, simply one among many tropes of their artistic message. For the genre as a whole, the post-1994 era has produced a new edge of

confidence and certainty, both in lyrics and general style.(Gunner and Gunner 2008: 428)

One could be reading a commentary on one of Makhoba's paintings rather than one on the *isicathimiya* renditions of migrant workers back home for the weekend. The Gunners' final comment concerning the new confidence of post-1994 is also applicable to Makhoba, it articulates better than I could my own understanding of Makhoba's challenge via Campbell-Smith as to why an institution such as the Campbell Collections, UKZN would be reticent in regard to displaying his controversial tabooed works. Possibly, to Makhoba their being couched in an acceptable taboo-breaking idiom is to be taken into account as well as issues of post-1994 'African Renaissance expression' if one may put it so blithely. This also speaks to Makhoba's audience base; the artist knew he was a true master of his genre as he said to his wife words to the effect of, "one day my works will bring you a fortune." (personal communication Paul Sibisi, Durban, 2001) <sup>52</sup> Fortunately for the Try Singers, they have a local African audience honed in the genre. But Makhoba had to face an art-buying public that is mostly conservative white, be they South African or international. Brendan Bell, Director of the Tatham Art Gallery is quite caustic in his comment on the response of the Natal Witness art critic Derek Leigh's retort to the granting of an award to Makhoba for his "*Azibuye Emasisweni, 1991*" on the 1991 Biennale 4. I quote:

One can only imagine the consternation and confusion this award caused in certain circles, a supposedly right-wing organization lauding the work of a black artist and one with no formal training to boot!....What he (Leigh) struggled with was how the submissions had been selected and judged for awards. From his academic perspective in a tertiary education institution and his own training and production based squarely in a western fine art tradition this is hardly surprising. (Bell 2005: 14)

Bell continues:

...Makhoba's work was dismissed as 'a charming painting, deserving of a merit award, but certainly not the first prize.' The dismissal was compounded by remarks about 'magic' cows 'magically' kicking up "a great cloud of dust on a tarred road." (Bell 2005: 14)

Indeed it would seem that Makhoba was aware of this problem and it perplexed him greatly, hence his attempt to open the debate with Campbell Collections staff, but sadly the old school white female ‘Voice’ was too strong to be countered by that of the black male contingent of the time.<sup>53</sup> Very possibly, if Makhoba’s buyers were mainly black he would then have been the success he promised his wife. This gives rise to another question; if Makhoba is representative of a visual rendition of the oral genre then has there been a rise in other black artists working in his style? There are Makhoba’s two artist apprentices, Welcome Danca and Sisbusiso Duma, who continue the idiom and Themba Siwela who confesses to Makhoba’s influence and inspiration on his style and theme. (Winters and Mchunu 2005:75) It is also possible to see Joseph Manana’s work as within the style. It is telling that, apart from the stalwart collectors/patrons like Bruce Campbell-Smith and Paul Mikula and the galleries, artists of this style have a great difficulty finding a market. Manana made a point of thanking Mikula for his support at his exhibition opening at the African Art Centre, Durban in 2007 and Welcome Danca, Bheki Khambule and Sibusiso Duma complained that they had not sold a single work on a 2008 exhibition at the Centre. (personal communication Khambule, Durban, 2008) At a later date these artists mentioned that they were encouraged by a fellow black artist to “remove all ethnic references” from their works, and paint only “memories and scenery” as this would sell to white clients in Cape Town and Johannesburg. (Interview with Muzi Hadebe, Durban, 2009) It seems then that not only are white South Africans not supporting this oral genre but that the black post-1994 elite have other tastes than former township/urban reminders.<sup>54</sup>



**Figure 2: T. Makhoba, *Hard Blow in Beijing, 1996*. Oil on board, 60x 90cm Bruce-Campbell Smith Collection.**

Broadening the basis of Makhoba's reference to the relationship between males and females, both black and white and his mastery of the archetypal I wish to consider two other of Makhoba's paintings that depict white women and black males, so as to indicate some of the complexity of the artist's attitude to females as opposed to males, both black and white and draw on the analogy made with Solzhenitsyn's characterizations. The first gives a base line insight into Makhoba's own pronouncements concerning women as a gender. It is *Hard blow in Beijing, 1996* in the Bruce-Campbell Smith Collection, of which Vulindlela Nyoni in "Uneasy discourses of Power: Crises of Black masculinity in the Work of Trevor Makhoba" in the *Trevor Makhoba Memorial Exhibition* catalogue, 2005 says:

A Hard Blow in Beijing 1996, is perhaps Makhoba's most blatant assertion of a crisis in Masculinity. The image, set in a boxing ring, displays the displacement of masculinity in favour of a radical perspective of feminism. A black male figure sits defeated on the floor of a boxing ring unable to recover from the blow dealt him by his opponent, a black woman clad in a bodice similar to those associated with bondage. Kneeling next to the defeated fighter and in the act of counting out the fallen man is the referee, a white woman clad in similar bondage outfit. (Nyoni 2005:57)

He continues in his understanding of the piece:

Despite the implications of servitude and sexual objectification the women in the boxing ring appear strong, assertive and very much aware of their gender specificity displacing any (if not all) notions of essential patriarchy...Of course, this is a metaphor for Makhoba's comment on the International Conference on Gender and Women in Beijing, 1995. Makhoba presents the strength of a united front of womanhood or feminism in dialogue as a feat greater than the physical prowess of masculinity ideology. (Nyoni 2005:57)

Nyoni hits on a truth in regard to an alliance between repressed blacks in the old South Africa and the experience of women before the feminist movement had taken up women's issues, which did much to conscienceize all inequalities, including significantly the race issue: When I first wrote this I had been chatting with my colleague Mxolisi Mchunu and the conversation



turned to my mother's disappointments in life; she had her hopes for an art education "back home" in the United Kingdom defeated by the advent of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War in which she, along with other women did their 'bit' for maintaining the war time economy working in a bank, only to lose her job upon the return of men from the war in 1946. Mchunu was distressed to hear this story, saying that it recalled the similarities between the position of women before the feminist movement's fight and the position of blacks during the apartheid years. In the same way as Mchunu voiced concern for the plight of this earlier generation of white women, so I think that Makhoba's renditions of white women in his paintings, are complex but not perforce all negative, something that his depictions of black women also indicate. In regard to *Of the Ancestors/Tiger Woman, 1990* Valerie Leigh in "Select Themes in the work of Trevor Makhoba" in *Trevor Makhoba Memorial Exhibition* catalogue, gives Makhoba's own words concerning his attitude to all women no matter their colour, as a gender:

'...here in this picture I was very much concerned about the creatures the women are; but God made them very, very interesting people in life. He also made them to be very, very brave in all aspects of life.' (Leigh 2005: 44)



**Figure 3: T. Makhoba, "AAC" Portrait of Jo Thorpe in Crown of AAC (African Art Centre), 1993. Acrylic on board, 30,5x25cm. Jo Thorpe Collection (JT222)**

Leigh recalls the fact that Makhoba had a great admiration for his mother. Makhoba also did a celebratory portrait of Jo Thorpe, founder of the African Art Centre, Durban, now in the Jo Thorpe Collections housed at Campbell Collections, UKZN. In this work the artist has

attempted to render the face of Thorpe in a gold cup, a crown of the Centre upon her head, a rolled degree/award and black hands upon her shoulders with angelic wings spread protectively over her. Like many others, Makhoba appreciated what Thorpe had done for the black artists of the province and it is worth noting that his attempt at Thorpe's portrait signals that he saw her as an individual rather than as one subsumed by her gender or her colour/race. It seems then that these women, including the ladies in bondage attire, have none of them violated the mores the madam in *Great Temptation in the Garden, 1995* had done. Why are they to be admired and she banished as a witch? Very possibly, African society does not tolerate the vagaries of private neurosis the way European society does. One must not forget that Sigmund Freud with his accusations that all of mankind's problems are sexual was not an African. To Makhoba the admired women are strong and fighting for their rights as if they were men themselves, they do not use feminine 'wiles' and 'ways' to gain their ends, plus they fight in a public arena, not 'fester' in a secret enclosed garden.

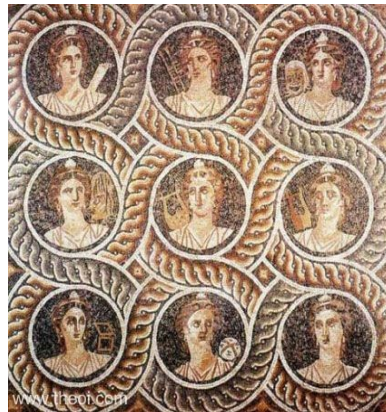


**Figure 4: T. Makhoba, *Garden of History*, 2002. Oil on paper, 50x75cm. Bruce-Campbell Smith Collection**

One other of Makhoba's images of white womanhood that I wish to discuss is *Garden of History, 2002*. Before continuing any further, the white girl in the picture must be the Muse of History, Clio (or Kleio), the first amongst the nine Muses after whom Herodotus named his book on history. (Cassell's Encyclopedia n.d. Vol3: 155). It is said of her:

Clio, the Muse of History, recorded all great deeds and heroic actions, with the names of their authors, and was therefore generally represented with a laurel wreath and a

book and stylus, to indicate her readiness to note all that happened to mortal men and the immortal gods. (Graves 1960:56)



**Figure 5: Mosaic portraits of Muses in Archaeological Museum of Cos, Greece. Portraits of the nine Muses with identifying attributes: Kalliope with scroll, Euterpe with flute, Thaleia with comic mask, Melpomene tragic mask, Terpsikhore lyre, Erato lyre, Kleio writing block, Ourania globe, and Polymnia without attributes. (<http://www.theoi.com>. Accessed 20 October 2009)**

The Muses were daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory), with their chief seat of worship on Mount Olympus in Thessaly, while the term Museum was originally applied to a part of the ancient palace of Alexandria, set aside as a shrine to the Muses and the study of the sciences. (Cassell's Encyclopedia n.d. Vol. 7:41). The Muses were "originally goddesses of memory only, but later identified with the individual arts and sciences. The paintings of Heraculaneum show all nine in their respective attributes." (The Wordsworth Dictionary, 2001:764) My only reference to these murals are in the writing of Helen Gardener in *Art through the Ages* (London.G Bell and Son. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. n.d.) and one can only pause at the following echo of Makhoba's work:

The colours were bright – red and black to throw the panels and figures into relief, with rich creamy white in the borders....Sometimes the wall space assumed an architectural appearance. Columns and windows are painted on the surface in perspective...This framework often enclosed a large painting in the center. On the sides the architectural details were so portrayed that they produced an illusion of depth and distant landscape. (Gardener n. d.:188)

Where would a man like Makhoba have come by such classical allusions? I am indebted once again to colleagues, this time to Mwelela Cele and Mthunzi Zungu, for giving me a lecture on the writers of the 1930-50s, known as "the period of the Zulu cultural Renaissance" with such

men as Revd. P. Lumula, B.W. Vilakazi (who studied at Mariannhill), the Dhlomo brothers R.R.R. and H.I.E. (who hailed from Adams College), J. Ngubane (from Adams) and the musician R. Caluza (of Adams/Ohlange). These writers wrote heroic epic praise-poetry of the Zulu kings, like R.R.R. Dhlomo's, *Ushaka* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1937), *uDingane Kasenzangakhona* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1936) *uCetshwayo* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1952) and *uDinizulu KaCetshwayo* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1968). Cele and Zungu say that up to around 1980-90s when the Zulu royal history was 'hi-jacked' by the Inkatha Freedom Party, even ANC supporters enjoyed these publications and nearly every standard in African schools had one or other of these works as set-work books, as well as later writers in their ilk, like S. Nyembezi's *Izibongo Zamakhosi* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1978). Interestingly, this latter work is illustrated by the artist Barbara Tyrrell (Dr Killie Campbell's protégé and artist-recorder of tribal costume) with heroic Zulu warriors and the like, reminiscent of Makhoba's Zulu warrior in the painting under question. Jill Addleson details Makhoba's education as "Educated Nyanisweni School, then Amanzowlandle H.P. and Menzi High, both in Umlazi (greater Durban) but left before matric in 1974." (Addleson 2005:9) It seems very likely then that Makhoba, like Cele and Zungu and many others growing up before the IFP association with the Zulu royal house, was also party to this combination of the traditional Zulu praise-poem and the heroic-epic genre of these early Zulu writers. At least some of their words were more than just praises of old, but borrowings from the romantic style taught at the mission schools. Thus R.R.R. Dhlomo in *uDingane KaSenzangakhona* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1936) claims:

*Lencwadi ngiyilobe ukuze sisibone kahle kalula isimilo sikaDingane, ngiyilobe njengenganekwana kodwa yona iyiqiniso lonke. Noma amaswi engiwafake emilonyeni yabo ingekho ezincwadini zezindaba zezwe, ngifanekisile ukuthi kwakufanele abe 'njalo.* (Dhlomo 1936: Preface iii)

I am indebted to Cele for the following translation:

I wrote it as if it was a tale, but it is based upon evidence, where there were no words (of Dingane and others) I put certain words in their mouths. (personal communication, Mwelela Cele, Durban, 2009)

I also quote a piece from out of S.V.H. Mdhuli *The Development of the African* (Mariannhill Mission Press, 1933):

Before we deal with recreation with reference to natives we should make a brief survey of its history. Among the ancients the Greeks and Romans were foremost in keeping fit their members physically, morally and mentally by means of games....The Romans also took sport as a part of their military life... The Greeks transferred their culture to the Romans who in turn gave it as a gift to the western nations. (Mdhuli 1933:40)

Mdhuli continues his comparison between the classical nations and that of the African:

The question is often asked - Are the natives naturally sportive? In answer to this question let us look back to the time before the arrival of the whites to our shores. At the very outset we find that the Zulus, Xosas and Basutos were always in constant warfare with their neighbouring tribes. Boys before reaching the adolescent stage, were taught directly or indirectly how to handle spears and other weapons. That was their sport. (Mdhuli 1933:40)

Even despite these likely sources for Makhoba's classical and heroic imagery, I am not aware of any exact depiction that he could have copied, and it remains true that Makhoba, by introducing a Zulu traditionalist male receiving this 'history book' or 'memory aid (literacy received by one of an oral culture?)' is still producing his own unique rendition of the later 'hybrid oral genre' for Clio handing over these 'histories'. Certainly the specific identity of the female as Clio strikes one as strange for a man of Makhoba's educational level (subject to Cele and Zungu's observations stated above, and also their comment that many Zulu scholars of the older generation would have had the privilege of teachers coming from out of the black elite mission institutions) and very likely he saw her in this guise, as Clio the Muse of History, at a European patron's home or a gallery. However the choice of actual female imagery itself is relatively idiosyncratic, making one wonder further if the artist had a particular white woman he knew as reference? Moreover, far more interesting is that this woman is an echo of a particular 'type', an archetype one may say, of European female-hood,

one that many of us who are white would also have rendered as Clio, and if not Clio then certainly Athena, the virginal goddess; one has to ask the question how Makhoba came by such a seemingly European archetype or does this rather indicate a universality to all archetypal images? I intend to go into this issue in some depth later. Of more interest to me at this point, is that initially I could find no source information on this painting, and it was only long afterwards that I read Ruth Rendall's "The Dreadful Day of Judgment" in her *Collected Short Stories* (Arrow Books, 1987, pp. 282-291) and I realized the woman as Clio; in Rendall's story a sex-obsessed gravedigger upsets his mates by fondling a nearly nude, partly veiled statue that had fallen from one of the tombstones, when his fellow digger says, " 'He (the grave's incumbent) was a historian, the plaque says'... 'She's (the statue) supposed to be Clio, the Muse of History. That's why she has got a scroll in her hand.'"(Rendall 1987:2888) The story's conclusion is the 'randy' gravedigger returns to retrieve the statue as a keep-sake before leaving for other itinerant work, to be found later by his mate, smashed dead, one is lead to assume by the very statue as if in revenge (for violation?). One realizes that Rendall's popularity as a crime-writer is her command of the typical or the archetypal idiom, much like Makhoba's popularity as 'Master' of the visual oral genre, making the similarities between short-story and the painting "*Garden of History, 2002*" more interesting. It is for these reasons that I have left my following original debates around the work fairly intact, only coming back to Clio in conclusion.

To support my contention that Makhoba is equal to Rendell in his manipulations of the archetypal and mythic processes (and one can certainly note the link to the oral genre), I will give some context of my deliberations with African colleagues as well as my own suppositions regarding the female *vis-à-vis* her interaction with the Zulu traditionalist male in the painting. As with *Great temptation in the Garden, 1995* the scene takes place against the background of a garden, an image that could well conjure any of these scenarios; The Herculaneum murals mentioned before, paradise as a garden or the garden of Eden with the subsequent 'Fall of mankind' where the wicked conduct their wrong-doings in secret, an unnaturally tended and essentially European taming of nature and of a space where Africans once courted and grazed their herds, the last in other words the European appropriation of Africa as territory. It is of course also where madams/masters interact with servants. Although one can assume, by dint of the title, that this is Clio, there is no clearer identification proffered in the accompanying *Trevor Memorial Exhibition* catalogue; hence to

all intents and purposes to an audience whom one must assume are largely non-Classicists, this haunting and perplexing female image merely depicts a young white girl dressed in transparent mini dress, kneeling on a stack of books, stiff backed and appearing to be frowningly serious as she hands a book to a traditionally dressed Zulu warrior, standing atop a shield. The warrior receives the book with disturbed deference. A garden with a bridge at centre is to be seen through a window in the background and many skulls hang on the side walls. To my own eye the girl looks more like an Athena archetype, and if she be Clio then this is a case in point of what Robert Graves in *The Greek Myths: I* (Penguin Books, 1960) terms ‘iconotropy’ a process where earlier gods and goddesses eclipse other later ones to become more differentiated; for Athena is made up of three earlier goddesses “Athene the maiden, Aphrodite the nymph and Hera the crone.” (Graves 1960:21) Athena in one rendition of myth has her antecedent in the Virgin-priestesses of Neith engaged annually in armed combat and should be clothed in leather girdle of the Libyan women (Graves 1960:44), while more importantly she presided over all wisdom and knowledge (more correctly Clio’s domain or area of action). (Graves 1960:46) In the more formed myths Athena is the virgin daughter of her father Zeus who claims of herself in the Greek play by Aeschylus “There is no mother anywhere who gave me birth, and but for marriage, I am always for the male with all my heart, and strongly on my father’s side.” (Ward 2006: 127) Whether Makhoba’s rendered white girl is Clio or Athena or merely an archetype of a virginal white female, one must concede that the artist has rendered her perfectly. No man would try to assail this girl’s purity, and yet she is dressed in this transparent dress ‘as if’ she is being seductive. In some ways she could even be a fairer version of the Zulu virgin goddess *Nomkhubulwana*, again very much her father, the Lord-of-the-Sky *uMvelingqangi*’s daughter, envisioned as bare breasted and dressed in a girdle of beads, a beautiful girl who men must never see or “become blind because they have looked where they ought not to see.” (Berglund 1976:65) In regard to this latter comment, it can be matched by this statement by Graves:

Athene, though as modest as Artemis, is far more generous. When Teiresias, one day, accidentally surprises her in a bath, she laid her hands over his eyes and blinded him, but gave him inward sight by way of compensation. (Graves 1960:98)

This sympathetic archetypal account of Clio/Athena is however not necessarily that of African viewers and yet this commentary is by no means invalidated for their interpretations

do in fact speak of both archetypes and stereotypes and how it is these intersect. Mxolisi Mchunu gave the first of more subtle readings of the painting; that the warrior's disturbed deference, showed he was supposed to be grateful for the gift of literacy the girl is so intent upon giving but he has no idea what he was to do with this strange gift that means little to him in his old traditional life-style.<sup>55</sup> This raises questions as regards western influences upon the lives of Africans, where even good intentions when misguided actually miss the mark. What will happen to that book one wonders, perhaps it will be wrapped in cloth and placed reverently in the 'kist (chest)' of the main house in a traditional homestead.<sup>56</sup> I had an uneasy feeling about the girl's transparent dress and all I got from Mchunu was "I can't think why, but maybe it is a play on the fact that black men are supposed to be oversexed - looking through a girl's dress..." To the question if he thought the girl was then 'leading the man on' Mchunu answered tentatively "Well not exactly, maybe she doesn't realize what she is doing."

The next Zulu male colleague would not engage with the picture other than to defer to my question by saying that maybe it was 'talking' of the introduction of "literacy" or "even the bible." I sensed a racial taboo but Mchunu's reaction to my thought was that I was foolish to ask when the man had other concerns on his mind than trying to figure out an interaction between the woman and the warrior. A valid enough rejoinder and a reminder that there is a time and a place and a context to being an audience to this genre, and not every theme is equally of concern to all. It was only when I asked yet another colleague, Siyabonga Mkhize, did I get an extraordinary response, one that 'floored' me as regards my own afore mentioned remunerations: The scene was clearly speaking of the two races, black and white, the sexes spoke of that known as typical of each, the black is seen as strong and hardy hence the choice of a traditional male warrior while whites are seen as female because it is known that they are a 'soft', even a physically weak race, hence the choice of a girl. The girl's long hair places her as an *Isilwane* or Sea-monster, as the early Zulu perceived the whites.<sup>57</sup> The matter was clearly the introduction of the bible which are always seen as red as that was the colour of those introduced by missionaries. The warrior is being handed a bible, told to lay down his shield, not use his weapons and humble himself according to 'The Book'. Blacks are depicted as easily misled and to fool, a 'race of innocents', by the more cunning white race. The girl's transparent dress speaks of the deceptiveness and deceit of the white race. In exchange for the 'Holy Book' comes all forms of evil introduced to the black population by



the European. The girl is dressed as a prostitute, a profession unknown until the white man came. Mkhize in trying to explain these perceptions, mentioned the fact that the missionaries of KwaSizaBantu at Kranzkop, where he had worked for a number of years, could not come to traditional Zulus and ask of them to repent of their “sins.” The rejoinder would be “only Christians know of ‘Sins’” hence the missionaries had to translate “Sin” as “*Ihlazo*” or “Disgrace” or “Shame” for the traditionalists to understand their own wrong-doings. I asked Mkhize if he could think of any *isicathimiya* song that he immediately associated with the particular painting’s content. He suggested, “*Is there Albertina in the house*” a song in which a black man who took on “white ways” would come to ask for a “shameless girl, Albertina” to come out to him, her lover, in public. This disrespectful behavior was something introduced by the taking on of “white ways” and only an *isicathimiya* song can broach these western introduced behaviors, as the musical style itself was a western one deriving from African-American music, combined with former African styles, hence it can “talk of the taboos.”

Just as I had thought the interpretation of *Garden of History, 2002* resolved and I could finally wrap up this chapter I confounded the issue by telling Mchunu what Mkhize had said. Mchunu was angry at the interpretation, to him the “girl is excited to give this book of history to the man” and the Zulu man is “no easily deceived fool.” Rather he is playing with the girl by pretending to take this foreign book as if it mattered to him. It seems that Mchunu’s understanding is that the girl is not so much a prostitute but coming from a position of enthusiastic faith that her actions are good and noble, that she is depicted in a transparent dress can as equally indicate the fact of her sexuality being hidden by her prudishness. Mchunu finished by saying he wished Makhoba were still alive as we could put the matter to rest by asking him, to which I answered that Makhoba’s explanations were notoriously cryptic and helped little and he, Mchunu was forgetting his own rejoinder to those challenging Makhoba’s painting *The valley of Love, 1993* by claiming, “*Isizulu asitolkwa*” [The Zulu speaks for itself]. We could only but laugh and I did manage to get Mchunu to explain that such debate was within the nature of the oral genre. One interesting observation which I do not wish to belabour out of respect for both colleagues, is that they are men with very different characters and experience of Europeans: Mchunu has had to contend with a far more conflicted an experience in that he has been a gardener to white madams who yet helped his family by supplying refuge during the greater Pietermaritzburg civil war, known as

the ‘7 Day’s War’ of 25<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> March, 1990, while Mkhize’s experiences of Europeans are consistent with foreign missionaries input at KwaSizaBantu, otherwise he has never actually been subject to any European ‘master/madam’. Mchunu could also not see Mkhize’s meanings in the *isicathimiya* song “*Is there Albertina in the house*” which he duly sang softly as a one time *isicathimiya* singer, to the quizzical looks of the waitrons of the Coffee-house we entered. With a certain irony I wondered if I did not myself fit the profile of the “shameless (old)girl, Albertina.” At the time Mchunu shared an interesting aside on the musical *isicathimiya* style, he said that he can never think of these songs without tears, when recalling his fathers (classificatory) and their mates, men of the older age-group, as they belonged to such a group and would sing sentimental songs of life as once lived in the rural areas. This because it was a life-style shattered by the ‘7 Day’s War’ and the period of violence between the IFP/Inkatha and ANC/UDF in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands. Nevertheless both Mchunu and Mkhize’s responses to the painting beggar the question as regards the arguably deeper and more conflicted artist, Trevor Makhoba himself. Perhaps pertinent here is to mention that Makhoba was a keen African jazz musician and he and his students often painted to music, and since his death these artists, particularly Welcome Danca, still refer to him as “The Master” and feel as if “taken over by Makhoba’s Spirit” while painting. (personal communication Welcome Danca, Durban,2009)

How do I explain my own assessment of the girl in Makhoba’s picture as an Athena archetype and match this to both Mchunu and Mkhize’s understandings: Yes I can now refer to the fact that somewhere Makhoba did come across Clio, the Muse of History, but that he imaged her in such an archetypal fashion as for her to reverberate as an image in my own mind, especially as a white female. And it is this fact that astounds me regarding the artist’s capacities to manipulate the archetypal. I refer to Tim Ward *Savage Breast: One man’s search for the Goddess* (Winchester, UK, 2006) who sees Athena as the face of many modern western women, he says of the negative side of this archetypal female embodied in one of his former mistresses:

During my divorce she pushed me to wage a fierce custody battle for my son...At home she wanted me to raise my son according to her principals, and I began to feel that every word I said to my child feel under her scrutiny and judgment. I resented her

even while I tried to win her approval...Our relationship ended with her crying in the shower so her sobs could not be overheard.(Ward 2006: 123)

Indeed Athena is the patron goddess of many western cultures:

...British classicist Jane Harrison argues that classical Athenian poets and politicians deliberately took the ancient city goddess and remade her as a tool for their own political propaganda....Athena originated as a prehistoric maiden goddess, or *kore* of her patron city. ....in the case of France, a very kore-like, beautiful young woman known as *Marianne*, who is represented by a real woman chosen by the French government. ...(And in ancient city states).. the real object of worship of the citizens was not the goddess but the city herself. (Ward 2006:127-8)

Here one can only conclude that Athena perplexes males whatever culture she appears in, she remains her father's daughter, a front to whatever dominant group he, as father, represents. Hence there are echo's to Mkhize's 'reading' of the depicted girl indeed standing for western, white society, the patron goddess of many Europeans. Ward says "Athena...is the only deity Zeus trusted enough to allow her to hurl his thunderbolt. Why? Because she is strong, wise. But most of all obedient to her father's will." (Ward 2006:137) The girl's "excitement" in Mchunu's interpretation does have overtones of sexuality, for as classicists know, "In early Rome, the famous Vestal Virgins were, most probably, sacred prostitutes..."(Willis, 2008: [www.getethical.com](http://www.getethical.com)). Maybe it would be kind to point out that which makes Europeans particularly hard to understand is that they are an array of 'tribes' that never lost their pagan gods and goddesses despite Christianization by a Judaic patriarchy and few Africans realize these conflicting histories impact upon what to them appear peculiar, wayward and immoral behaviors and motives. The question however remains as to why exactly they should as Africans have sought to make allowances for such a people when they abused their former pre 1994, dominant positions anyway?

## Conclusions

In summary one can say the late Phila Trevor Makhoba's art depictions remain a social commentary, one that often touches upon the taboos of not only African traditional society but those of other communities as well. The oral genres, like *isicathimiya* and *maskanda*,

which are a modern rendition of early *izibongo*, allow for culturally approved taboo-breaking that challenge one as viewer/listener to enter the debate. This is a debate that often exposes South Africans of all races and both sexes' 'under bellies' or sensitive spots. It takes a strong constitution to engage with that which Makhoba and his ilk of 'oral 'Masters' presents us, but the rewards are in self-scrutiny and reconciliation of classes, races and cultures. This remains an unpredictable process in which the archetypes and stereotypes presented of us are often our 'Shadows' or denied worst faces. Nevertheless, as psychology tells us, the integration of these can lead to healing, the re-owning of our energies and the breaking of our neuroses. I duly concede that my assessments of Makhoba's paintings, particularly those with obvious classical allusions, have an excess of speculation on both my and my black colleagues' parts, however I retain this in the text as indicative of the level of disturbance of the viewers' psychic equilibrium so characteristic of the artist's works. I can think of few other artists who so disturb one; a disquiet that truly challenges the viewer. And it is questionable that this is indeed the artist's intent, or surely he would have supplied his audience with more in the way of interpretation. That he did not do so leaves one to ponder his works and gives one license to debate them how one will. Finally, all of this processing and integration can only take place in an atmosphere of humorous, compassionate and fellowship-filled debate that are native to African societies. Makhoba is most certainly the master of his field, one perhaps pertinent only to South African, and KwaZulu-Natal society. And moreover one largely misread by outsiders to, or deliberately underplayed in, this complex multi-cultured milieu.

## Chapter 3: Essay 2.

### Re-reading black South African history through the works of Azaria Mbatha

Allan Botha says in his introduction to Azaria Mbatha's autobiography *Within Loving Memory of the Century* (UKZN Press, 2005: xiv) that "We must confront our past and the regime that persecuted our (black South African) fellow-travellers... They were trampled and demeaned...yet their memories and dreams produced social reform and incredible political change." He goes on to quote Mbatha on his sense of history, a uniquely African one which combines cultural symbolism, modernisation and political aspiration:

After reviewing what our grandparents told us as children, all of it is based on memory, I am convinced today that African history demands as serious an approach as does the history of any other continent. There is a broad and vivid process of human development to be discovered in its evolution. (Mbatha 2005:230)

The body of work by Azaria Mbatha dating from the early 1960s until the 1990s, exhibited on the *Azaria Mbatha-Retrospective Exhibition* at the Durban Art Gallery in 1998, reflects a deeply considered symbol structure: A vision which draws upon personal experience of both modernization and Zulu cultural values and thinking that was impacted by the prevailing political oppression of black South Africans during the apartheid era. A vision, often articulated in a form of pan-Africanist Christian liberation theology, using allegory and metaphor to hide the artist's aspirations to freedom. One he only partly obtained in voluntary exile in Sweden, for he sorely felt his alienation from his African roots. Mbatha's art and life thus expresses a distinctively black South African history. Mbatha himself places his Zulu cultural origins at the centre of his rich symbolism.<sup>58</sup>

No person stands still in the course of time and changes can be discerned in the positions taken by myself in my work. But all the time, an adherence to a fundamental cultural

identity serves as a sounding-board.....My subjects touch aspects of all human experience, but the idiom, the graphic form, is rooted in my childhood and upbringing in Zulu society and in South Africa..... During my childhood, we learned about the ancient Zulu heroes through the stories told to us by the adults and we were encouraged to ask questions about these stories and find out more about our past. It was during these sessions that we learned to identify ourselves as Zulus. (Martin 1996: Interview)

Against this claim of the artist's referencing an essentially African symbolism must be juxtaposed the serious questioning of art historians Elizabeth Rankin and Philippa Hobbs in "The prints of Azaria Mbatha: Memory in Process" In *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition* (Durban Art Gallery, 1998) the authors question "these ideas of an essential 'Africanness' (which) have continuously characterised writing about Mbatha until the entrenched stereotype of his art would seem to block any fresh reading." (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:65) The authors continue:

One may speculate whether Mbatha, and perhaps his mentors in Sweden, felt such subject matter appropriate to an artist whose African identity continued to be perceived as related to his art production...(thus not) encouraging him to follow other conceptual approaches." (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:69)

Rankin and Hobbs make some powerful arguments for considering Mbatha's work as "a construct of distance and memory." (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:70) They consider stylistic exposure of Mbatha in his earlier career, like his experimentation in colour and being taught other print-making techniques and conclude that "It is implicit in this choice (to emphasise the lino-cut medium), as in the subject matter of the 1970s and 1980s (neo-African themes), that Mbatha was developing (a) consciously 'African' agenda at that time, even though he had permanently left the continent." (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:75) More important is their commentary on the imagery Mbatha uses in the earlier works dating from Ceza, Mapumulo and Rorke's Drift, supposedly of his own reference and uninfluenced by his Swedish teachers:

Moreover, the dress Mbatha's figures wear is customarily a relatively neutral long robe, reminiscent of ecclesiastical vestments, or occasionally a shorter tunic-like garment that suggests historical dress but European rather than African. Nor is the foliage that fills the background in some of the early prints, like *greetings – Nativity* recognisably African. Only the occasional inclusion, as in this print and a few others, of African animals unexpected in Biblical scenes may seem to locate the prints definitively on the continent. (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:68)

The answer to some of these contentions of Rankin and Hobbs, can yet support Mbatha's own assertions and it is certainly a complex situation: For it is true what Rankin and Hobbs claim, that Mbatha has been written about as the quintessentially African artist, but what one has to assess is if this is a deliberate disinformation campaign on the part of the artist and his Swedish teachers, or if it relates rather to Mbatha's natural proclivities, mode of thinking and preferred style and if these in turn derive from his African background. (Some of the arguments have been dealt with in Chapter 1: Introduction, 1.3. Pondering 'Africanness' and 'preferred form') Further one can suggest that his teachers perceived the relative uniqueness of this complex process and therefore largely left him to pursue it accordingly. My own supposition is that this latter view is perhaps more accurate, for it is supported by Mbatha's complicated processes of memory, dreaming and reflection on his African past as seen in his recent autobiography. Mbatha's return to his African roots then, while yet manipulating the European audience's need of the 'African Other' (as mentioned in Chapter 1: Introduction, 1.3.) was sharpened by his sense of alienation in self-imposed exile in Sweden and thus not merely a play to the said European audience. Rankin and Hobbs contend:

Mbatha's self-imposed exile in Sweden from the end of the 1960s might seem to distance him from this categorization (as quintessential African artist), but even this event matches some concepts of the South African artist under *apartheid*, forced to find asylum to find freedom of expression. (Rankin and Hobbs 2005:65)

I prefer to see this exile and the processes the artist underwent abroad as a part of Mbatha's

personal odyssey and indeed a necessary (to himself at least) response to the historical realities of South African political oppression of blacks at the time. In addition Mbatha projects himself as a man who is a well-educated, deep thinker who despite his access to various art techniques and schools of thought, chooses to return to the one he found most expressive of his need to contemplate his African past, one that aided in this process while in exile. Moreover, if analysing his earlier works done while still in South Africa; it is possible to see that even seemingly Judeo-Christian biblical imagery was yet couched in African, and African-Christian terms, inclusive of their cultural, perceptual and political dimensions. These counter assertions can best be supported by an intense analysis of some of his works as well as reliance upon his own statements, gleaned from interviews and autobiography and I will do so later in this chapter.

Mbatha readily acknowledges the psychological development that took place within himself during the years he has been in self imposed exile in Sweden and thus largely out of contact with daily Zulu experience and thus reliant upon memory:

How much the exile reinforced this identity is of greatest importance to understand, when the revitalisation of old truths is a parallel theme in society....(This) cultural shift has given my art a special perspective - distance, both in time and space. The privilege for me as an artist in exile is to have the time to formulate earlier experiences. Collecting, arranging and revising thoughts and memories is a process going on at the same time as new impulses are felt. (Martin 1996: Biography)

Understanding of the profundity and subtlety of this process as essentially Mbatha's integration of self, isolated in exile but still seeking to be one with his source in Africa, and the continent's place in the world is better articulated in Mbatha's poignant reflections in his autobiography:

Though the two are not fused, I saw another lake from my seat among the rocks today – a lake of a softer blue, a lake on the Mfolozi in Zululand...As I peered more intently I saw...my own reflection peering back at me in an image much bigger than reality. It frightened me to recognise myself as second person for the first time. By now,



however, I am used to that experience, especially when alone. Then again, is one ever alone? (Mbatha 2005:222)

He continues:

I place South Africa at the centre of the lake in my dream –my small home is part of Africa; Africa is part of the world – I and many others are part of the land that I study across an entire century. So I represent my work, both my writing and my art, as separated from but embodied in a larger totality. (Mbatha 2005:222)

Mbatha's process of reformulation and re-scripting of his own African narrative started in 1980. In November of that year the African Art Centre, Durban, hosted an exhibition of fourteen of his then newer works. Werner Eichel's book, *Azaria Mbatha: In the heart of the Tiger*, (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1986), shows the subsequent fuller development of these themes and symbols. Of the works on exhibition, art critic Andrew Verster, referring to both the content of the works and the artist's return to his favoured linocut medium after studying art at University College, Stockholm, Sweden,<sup>59</sup> wrote in his newspaper column:

Now that (Mbatha)... has his Fine Arts degree behind him and has had time to reassess his direction, it is significant that he has returned to his roots and is working with the same vigour and conviction as before. He has purged his vision of the foreign elements which were in danger of obscuring his message, and has rediscovered the expressive potentialities of simple black and white. (Verster: 13 November 1980)

While Mbatha's later works offer a contemplative and sophisticated political statement via his return to African themes, there is no doubt that his earlier works done while in South Africa express subtleties of an alternative African history couched in seemingly innocuous biblical narrative. The linocut *The Story of Moses, 1963* depicting Moses as God's elected leader for 'His Peoples', leading his fellow Israelites out of Egypt from subjugation to Pharaoh, is of main concern as it echoes the black South African experience of disenfranchisement and 'enslavement' under the Nationalist regime. These earlier works that commonly deal with biblical narrative, date from the period 1960-1967, when he was at the Lutheran Evangelical Church Missions of Ceza, Mapumulo and Rorke's Drift and Mbatha says of this theme:

When I started using biblical motives I had aimed to Africanise the whole Bible, but this theory did not work all the time....These theories were not discussed with anybody. No one was interested in biblical things in my surroundings - not even a single teacher ever told me or discussed anything. (Martin 1996:26).

One must suspect a deeper humanistic and political consciousness behind all of Mbatha's thinking and works, one constantly reflective of the black man's then struggles and one confirmed when reading such a passages as follows in the artist's autobiography:

I have written that South Africa is black man's land. This is borne out by the faces one meets in any big city here. The same holds true when we walk in the countryside. Let me impress on the majority, however, that there is no such thing as freedom. No one in any society can do as he pleases. Let our blacks ensure that each human being respects the rights of all others, and conversely, let all others honour the rights of our blacks. There

must be a mutual sharing of benefits, rights and duties. Welcome the minority therefore, let them join in all our activities. (Mbatha 2005:69)

He continues:

Of the many who crowd my memory – the dreamers and prophets, the workers and students, the members of my own family – all confirm that land was the substance of our crises. Let both sides in the current South Africa consolidate their reserves and launch their initiatives. Let them strive for social and economic reform, and above all for land reform, or my small home will soon be ablaze. I implore you, I, Azaria, the instigator of earthquakes in the land of the wolves. (Mbatha 2005:69)

However, there appears to be a contradiction in regard to how isolated Mbatha was in terms of discussing his biblical themes in his South African art-school days. As Leeb-du Toit mentions:

(While Mbatha's)... frequent use of biblical themes arose from his own experience and convictions, ...(he was) also inspired by his debates with black theological students at the Mapumulo Lutheran Theological College (L.T.C.). (Leeb du Toit 1993:15)

She quotes Mbatha as saying “Their arguments on theological questions deepened my artistic vision by giving me new ideas and a deeper insight.”(Leeb du Toit 1993: 15) It seems then that Mbatha himself neither regarded his art teachers as instrumental in influencing his choice of biblical narrative theme, nor in how he chose to interpret this theme. Rankin and Hobbs quote Johan van Rooyen in the Cape Times of 25 June 1968 saying “Mbatha's art is essentially a hybrid of biblical narrative and Zulu lore” (Rankin and Hobbs 1998: 65) and one these authors further accuse the artist of claiming as largely of his own making. As mentioned these authors argue against stereotyping the artist as wholly ‘Africanised’, saying this will:

“block any fresh reading (of his work)... While it is true that (there is indications of) ... “so-called ‘Africanness’” of his subject matter... (this) is not as straightforward as many

writers suggest, and in any event undergoes a pertinent shift in direction.” (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:66)

Nevertheless, the authors concede that the artist’s use of biblical allegory as political statement still stands and they note that his works before emigrating are largely biblical while those in exile are more obviously African in idiom. (Rankin and Hobbs 1998:69) This statement makes one appreciate the relatively greater subtlety of Mbatha’s use of biblical allegory to hide his political agenda as against his perhaps more nostalgic reflections exhibited in his works post leaving South Africa.

As noted, Mbatha was in touch with current trends in African Christian theology. Leeb-du Toit points out that aspects of African Christian theology were a regular topic of conference papers presented at the Lutheran Theological College at Mapumulo. (Leeb du Toit 1993:14-17) African Christian theology debates the pertinence of orthodox Christianity to essentially African concerns and the contribution that African culture and indigenous cosmology can make to such Christian debate. James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore in their edited work, *Black Theology: A Documentary History 1966-1979* (Orbis Books, 1979), compare American Black Christian theology (which they term Black theology) and African Christian theology specific to the continent of Africa. The authors point out; the American black experience is a minority one, separated from land ownership, tribal language, culture and living historical memory, while that in Africa is a majority experience never wholly separated from the land, tribe and ancestors. Even under the political oppressions of the former South African government, the European in Africa was faced by the pervasive reality of a vast and alien land and an indigenous people who could resist foreign acculturation.(Cone and Wilmore 1979: 63) The latter claim is a moot point, for example, Choan-Seng Song claims a uniquely American black identification with the story of Exodus (Cone and Wilmore 1979:568), while Mbatha makes a similar, albeit largely tacit claim for the Zulu experience under the then apartheid regime in the imagery he used in *The story of Moses*, 1963. Central concerns of African theology are; the African image of man, concepts of God and the spiritual world, priesthood, sacrifice and concepts of morality. African culture has contributed a depth of rich insight to Christian debate. The messianic movement represented in the break-away independent African church movement or Zionism, as it is

commonly termed, is considered to be most in touch with this African Christian theology. (Spruger 1972:164-5) Also applicable to African Christian theology is the liberation theology movement. I quote from Wikipedia:

The Theology of Liberation is a school of Christian theology in which the salvation or liberation wrought by Christ is ... also in terms of liberation in other spheres: the aspirations of oppressed peoples & social classes; an understanding of history in which the human being is seen as assuming conscious responsibility for human destiny...It emphasizes the Christian mission to bring justice to the poor and oppressed, particularly through political activism. .... Liberation theologians use political theory, primarily Marxism, to help understand how to combat poverty. (<http://en.wikipedia.org –liberation theology>)

Further:

At its inception, liberation theology was predominantly found in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council. It is sometimes regarded as a form of Christian socialism, and it has enjoyed widespread influence in Latin America and among the Jesuits, although its influence diminished within Catholicism after liberation theologians using Marxist concepts were harshly admonished by Pope John Paul II (leading to the curtailing of its growth).(<http://en.wikipedia.org –liberation theology>)

While the Mbatha family were protestant, this ‘liberation-theological’ thinking emphasising a social conscience and concern for poverty, permeated the inter-denominational Diakonia Council of Churches which established Koinonia Retreat Centre at Botha’s Hill, KwaZulu-Natal in the late 1960s -early 1970s in order to conduct social and healing courses, across race-lines. Mbatha, certainly as a young man, was the product of a devout Lutheran Christian home but this changed to that of the Zionist Independent Church Movement because this was more supportive both politically and experientially, toward traditional African Christianity. (Mbatha, A. 2005: 23)

Fortunately we now know from Azaria Mbatha's autobiography to what extent he did come from a politically aware Zulu home that was yet strongly Christian: His parents gave the artist an identification with the Old Testament in the choice of the Hebrew name 'Azaria' which means "helped by God" (in the male rendition) and "blessed by God" (in the female version). (Mbatha, 2005:1) <sup>60</sup> One very telling childhood account is of Mbatha's mother saying "Starvation only began when the Government introduced people (other blacks during the forced removals) from other areas. There was no room for our cattle and goats." When the child Azaria asked "Why?" he was told "So the Government could get land for the ruling classes" and when the distressed boy exclaimed "What about us?" he received the ambiguous message common to many an oppressed black South African parent of the time, "Sit down and have your dinner quickly." (Mbatha, A. 2005:23) <sup>61</sup>

Mbatha tells of a definitive experience of his father attending the Lutheran church with his family and being thrown out as it was an all white congregation, an incident that resulted in him becoming mistrustful of white and missionary expressions of Christianity. The elder Mbatha eventually left the orthodox Christian church for Zionism, as this allowed for experiential questioning, like for instance if an angel was black or white, and gave him a platform to tell and have interpreted his dreams and visions. Mbatha in his autobiography places dreaming as central to African orientation in living meaningful lives and concludes "the best approach to tribal tension, let me say lay at the level of dreams." (Mbatha, A. 2004:33) Dreaming is further placed within the context of Christianity and he comments:

It (Christianity) did not establish itself because it came with the conquering whites, or because it produced a good man, or because its evaluation of human personality accorded largely with *ubuntu* as a way of life. Rather it found acceptance because it imparted valid meaning to blacks in the fabric of white society. In short it enabled them to be better people in the complexities of life under white oppression. (Mbatha 2005: 34-36)

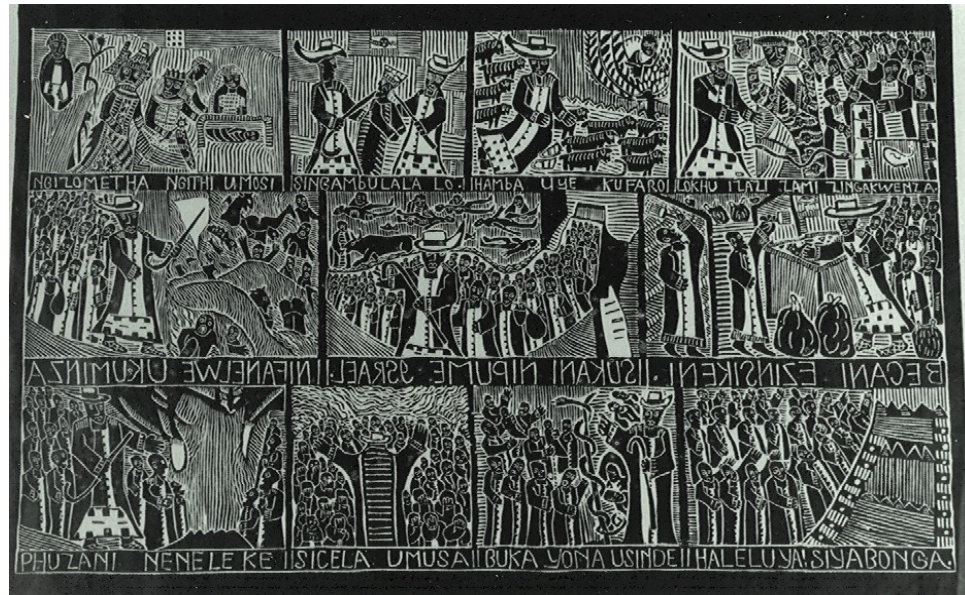


Figure 1: A. Mbatha *The Story of Moses*, 1963 Linocut on paper, 72x46,5cm. Campbell Collections, UKZN (WCP3009)

In this statement Mbatha shares the precepts of African Christian theology and one can discern in the statement that his deep contemplation in exile has concurred with issues debated in Zulu homes. One cannot underestimate the contribution of education and native intellect in Mbatha as a person. His work done in Sweden indicates elements of pan-Africanism, for example, the mask symbols used in *Muter und Kind* (Eichel 1986:64 No.9) are not Zulu but Dogon masks from Mali (Vogel 1991:92). The former never had masks as such, the nearest being a face veil worn by a bride or newly married woman to respect (*ukuhlonipha*) the in-law family and their ancestral-spirits.(Doke and Vilakazi 1964:334) Considering these varied influences on the artist it can be appreciated that Mbatha's 'return to roots' is not indicative of undiluted Zulu traditionalist thought-patterns. Nevertheless such considerations and queries as those of Rankin and Hobbs mentioned, combined with that which is yet specifically Zulu in thought and cosmology informing Mbatha's artistic iconography, only grant his works' a noteworthy alternative African historical narrative.

One must view each scene of the linocut print *The Story of Moses*, 1963 separately, so as to seek corroboration to not only an African political parallel to Exodus but also to find elements of a truly indigenous and African Christian interpretation of this biblical story. This particular work

is titled scene by scene in Zulu: although the inclusion of written texts as labelling and patterning, is not as characteristic of the artist's work as it is of fellow Rorke's Drift student John Muafangejo. This captioning (some in mirror-writing and some normal script) arguably allows for a deeper viewing of the imagery, than can be found in his other works that rely only on visual formal elements for interpretation. The narrative sequence of images used by Mbatha is a mode of story telling inherited from Zulu oral tradition. Four scenes in the life of Moses, follow each other and are to be read from right to left in the first row, then left to right (with mirror-writing) depicting three central occasions from Exodus in the second row, and finally four final scenes pertinent to the 'Chosen People' are to be read from right to left in the final row.<sup>62</sup>



Scene 1 - "*Ngizometha ngithi uMosi*" [Moses is named by Pharaoh's daughter, "I name him Moses!"] Exodus 2:10 "When the child grew older she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying "I drew him out of the water." (NIV:1981)



Scene 2 - "*Singambulala Lo*" [Moses kills the Egyptian overseer of slaves, God commands, "Kill this one!"] Exodus 2:11-12 "One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." (NIV:1981)

Scene 3 - "*Hamba uye Kufaro*" [God commands Moses, "Go to Pharaoh!" (and ask to bring the Israelites out of Egypt)] Exodus 3:10 "God says "So now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." (NIV:1981)





Scene 4 – “*Lokhu izazi zami zingakwenza*” [Pharaoh’s sorcerers claim, “We can make our own magic!” (and they turn their staffs into snakes which Aaron’s staff swallows )] Exodus 7:11 “Pharaoh summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same...each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs.” (NIV:1981)



Scene 5 – “*Becani Ezinsikeni*” [God commands the Israelites to mark their doorposts for the Passover, “Paint the posts!”] Exodus 12:7 “Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.” (NIV:1981)



Scene 6 - “*Sukani nipume Israel*” [Pharaoh orders Moses to take his people and leave Egypt, “Go to Israel!”] Exodus 12:31-32 “During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go worship the lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said and go. And

also bless me.” (NIV:1981)

Scene 7 - “*Nifanelwe ukuminza*” [God instructs Moses to command the sea to flow back over the Egyptians, “You are to drown!”] Exodus 14:26 “Then the Lord said to Moses “stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over



the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.” (NIV:1981)



Scene 8 - “*Phuzani neneleke*” [Moses obeys God by striking the rock and water appears, he tells the quarrelling Israelites, “Drink enough!”] Exodus 17:5-6. The Lord answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go, I will stand there before Hareb. Strike the

rock and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” (NIV:1981)



Scene 9 - “*Sicela umusa*” [The people hear the thunder and lightening on Mount Sinai, they are afraid and cry for Moses to stand between them and God, “We ask for mercy!”]. Numbers 14:17:12 ? “When the people saw the thunder and lightening and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or

we will die.” (NIV:1981) Alternatively the unrepentant and rebellious Israelites faced with God’s signs exclaim; Exodus 20:18-21 “We will die.” (NIV:1981)



Scene 10 – “*Buka yona usinde*” [God instructs Moses to make a serpent, place it on a pole and stand it up for the rebellious Israelites to ‘look, be bitten and live’ translated here as “Look and be healed!”] Numbers 21:1-8 “The people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to

die in the dessert?... The Lord said to Moses .. “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look upon it and live.” (NIV:1981)



Scene 11- “*Haleluja! Siyabonga*” [The people believe God’s promises to Moses and bow down to God, “Praise! we thank You”]Exodus 4:31? “He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped.” (NIV:1981)



Alternatively, nearing his death, Moses offers his people God’s blessings and the choice of life if they follow God’s commandments. Deuteronomy 30:15-20? (NIV:1981)

**Figures 2-5; From *Izindaba Zas’ebaibeleni Eliyingcwele* (Stories of the Bible) (Mariannhill Press, 1933). Moses and the Red Sea Crossing, Moses and the Caduceus, Moses striking the rock and Dress of a Levite Priest.<sup>63</sup>**

It is possible to see some resemblance to the illustrations in Langa, T. Rev., and Sauter, J. Rev., (Eds.), *Izindaba Zas’ebaibeleni Eliyingcwele* [Stories of the Bible](Mariannhill Press, 1933 (with later reprints). This work, produced by a Roman Catholic institution, appears to have been the only translation into Zulu which was illustrated at



the time. (personal communication Rev. B. Zulu,1998)<sup>64</sup>

Scenes 9-11 appear to follow this illustrated Bible history closely. The original Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy (all credited to Moses) have been similarly contracted by Mbatha in his artwork. In the book, selected sections were illustrated in order to emphasise the Christian doctrine that Moses was a precursor to Jesus Christ and that



Moses foretold the latter's coming in order to proclaim the new more perfect law. (Langa and Sauter 1933, 86) As a Christian, Mbatha was party to this tradition of transmutation and it could be argued that it was a natural progression for the artist to depict either Moses as Zulu prophet or Jesus as an African saviour, as in *Leben Jesu*, 1965. (Eichel 1986: 70)

It is worth taking a look at some of these early engravings as they serve to explain some of Mbatha's imagery and selection of scene. Yet at the same time these engravings ensure one's appreciation of Mbatha's originality and independence as an artist for he certainly has not copied them, rather creating his own unique iconography. Very likely the combination of being an more enquiring Protestant (versus a Catholic) and having had Swedish teachers concerned with not duly influencing students at Rorke's Drift, have had a hand in encouraging this unique voice of a black artist and one cannot help but compare the biblical illustrations of Duke Ketye in the updated 1979 Catholic Bible, *Bible. Zulu. Selections: Indaba enhle kaNkulunkulu uMarko, imiSebenzi, Elase-Efesu, amaHubo* (INhlangano yeBhayibheli yase South Africa). Ketye was one of Sister Pientia Selhorst's artist apprentices and clearly he is heavily influenced by his teacher and mentor's German expressionistic style.

Mbatha claims that the vividness of his father's narrative skills are the primary source of his biblical images, and only later did he go back on the text for reference. (Leeb-du Toit Interview: 1995)<sup>65</sup> It is important to hear what Mbatha has to say of the work:

This was the period when I proved new ways of mastering my tools without knowing what would be the result. The story of Moses was chosen because I imagined then, a South African Moses who shouted, "Let my people go!" In the society where I grew up, the feeling of the community was put first - in my pictures I like to have many people – we - instead of I, but I believe in a strong selfhood... (within) each individual in order to have the groups' confidence. We as a group need self discipline. As far as I see myself, the artist is a dictator in the way he works - he doesn't receive information as to how he should form his line, but he goes alone. (Martin 1996: 47)

Mbatha has evoked an African Moses as divinely ordained leader to rule an African people.

There was a common Zulu saying when Nelson Mandela was in office that he was the ‘African Moses’ appointed by God to deliver black South Africans from the ‘slavery’ under apartheid. (personal communication Siyabonga Mkhize, Durban, 2008) Ntombela, Mthenjwa and Donda’s book *Umkhusha wezizukulwane* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter. 1999) give the words of a political song of both the ANC and IFP; the former calling on Oliver Tambo and the latter the “*Mholiwenkatha*” or leader of the IFP, namely Mangosutho Buthelezi, to go and talk to Botha to release Mandela “so that Mandela can rule.” (Ntombela, Mthenjwa and Donda 1999:77) In Zulu culture, strong leadership is always present (in the form of a traditional chief), and this person’s authority is acknowledged as a legitimate use of power, his anger being righteous because it derives from the ancestral-spirits (*Amadlozi*). (Berglund 1976:255, 263) Diviners (*izangoma*) help to balance this legitimate use of power and counter that which is evil or illegitimate (*ukuthakatha*). (Berglund 1976:308) A Zulu Moses would have the right to anger as depicted in scene 8 - where the suffix *ke* attached to the command, “*Phuzani neneleke* (Drink enough!)” shows an aggrieved Moses, vexed by his people doubting God’s promise. (personal communication Dingani Mthethwa, Durban, 1998)

Mbatha’s image of many people echo’s what Archbishop Tutu says of African culture, that the sense of community is stronger than individualism. He says when an African is asked, “How are you?” the answer is in the plural, “We are well, we are here” for the health of relatives has an effect on one’s own vitality. (Tutu 1972: 44) Central to most indigenous African thought is the concern with sickness and health, sickness being due either to an imbalance in relationship between the living and their ancestral-spirits or some illegitimate use of power through evil, requiring various techniques for re-establishing harmony, such as confession, sacrifice or medicines. (Berglund 1976: 122-3,266-7,314-5, 256-7) Scene 10 - “*Buka yona usinde* (Look and be healed!)” is a rendition of Aaron’s staff (Nu.17:8-10) and the serpent on a pole (Nu. 21:8) which God instructed Moses to place as a sign which would promise life to the repentant. In the Christian teaching this sign is said to prefigure the cross of Jesus Christ. Within Zulu tradition this image has its echo in the Zulu symbolism of snakes, ancestral-spirits and their role in renewal and/or healing. (Berglund 1976:184, 145)

There are numerous parallels between this seeming biblical account of Moses and Zulu traditional symbolism. No doubt this needs to be seen against the realities of Mbatha's family history as outlined by Brenda Danilowitz in "Azaria Mbatha's narrative strategy: resolving the dilemma of a Kholwa son" in the *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition* catalogue (Durban Art Gallery, 1998) when she mentions that Mbatha's grandfather was a veteran of Cetshwayo's army who fought in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, yet his father converted to the Lutheran church, where she records Mbatha saying of his father "To be a good Christian for him was through work, work and work hard." (Danilowitz 1998: 26). She also quotes Mbatha on the Zulu royalty of the past, on the subject of Christianity:

They (The Zulu monarchy) didn't want to be converted....Cetshwayo didn't want Christianity. The Christian Zulu was a spoilt Zulu. And most of the conflict was through this Christianity. That the Zulu shouldn't be Christianized. And so my grandfather was part of the organization of Cetshwayo who fought the Zulu War and my father was born just after that war. (Danilowitz 1998:26)

The artist and more especially his forefathers were suspicious of the imported missionary orthodox Christianity of the west. It is only with the development of an African Christianity at the Lutheran Mapumulo Theological College in the 1970s, which coincided with various liberation theologies resulting from the Catholic 'Vatican II', that any syncretism could take place between Christianity and traditional Zulu world-view.

It is not necessary to belabour the similarities between Mbatha's biblical references and his rendition of *The Story of Moses*, 1963; however, one additional likeness ought to be mentioned, that of the high-god of Zulu indigenous religion and the Judaeo-Christian God. In indigenous African religions there is an acknowledged high-god, *Uzivelele* (the uncaused self existing one) whose holy transcendence is stressed. Man does not approach him other than in dire straits (such as drought), normally placing trust in the ancestral-spirits. (Tutu 1972:47) This high-god manifests through lightening and thunder and when approached, he is approached on certain mountains via the intercession of a chief (or person of authority), after ritual purification through

abstinence from food and sexual activity. A spot upon the mountain is considered holy ground and the participants kneel and creep to the place of worship on hands and knees. The prayer to Him is couched in eloquence of language and dignified behaviour:

*Nkosi, siphambi kwobuso bakho! Nkosi, silethwe isihlalo sethu esikhulu! Wena wezulu, wena okona njalo-njalo, sibuke usilekelele! Wasibulala, wena wezulu, singazi ukuthi senzeni! Sizilahla phansi kwobuso bakho, wena Nkosi! Sithi, mawusihawukele usilethele amantombazana akho! Sithi, Nkosi yamazulu, ungasibulali!* (Lord, we are in your presence! Lord, we have been brought here by our great cry (ie. our great need)! You of the heaven, you who are everlasting, look upon us and assist us! Why do you destroy us, you of the sky, we being unconscious of what wrong we have done. We cast ourselves down before your countenance, you Lord! We say, have mercy on us and give us your daughters (i.e. drops of rain)! We say, Lord of the heavens, do not destroy us!). (Berglund 1976:45)<sup>66</sup>

It is hard to find the exact biblical reference for scene 9 - “*Sicela umusa* (We ask for mercy!)” but Exodus 20:18-21, which is repeated in Numbers 14-17, appears to be closest. In Exodus, God’s speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai is perceived as thunder and lightening by the awed people, who beg Moses to stand between them and God for they will die in his presence. The people could be said to have been ritually impure from the contagion of their sin of doubt and wrong-doing and it is this state which makes them vulnerable. The request for mercy is in the form of an apology to God, as such it is characteristic of Zulu prayer. The final scene 11- “*Halehuya ! Siyabonga* [Praise ! We thank you]” is yet another essentially Zulu version of praise and thanks on the part of the people. (Personal communication Dingani Mthethwa, Durban, 1998) Mbatha has placed more emphasis upon the reconciliation between God and the community than that found in the original biblical text, as he indicates in his afore quoted interview with Anthea Martin (1996) of the African Art Centre, Durban.

Mbatha’s final comment concerning *The Story of Moses, 1963* in which he talks of a strong individuality demanded of the artist is preceded in Zulu culture by the role of diviners (*izangoma*), persons who act as mediums between the world of the living and the ancestral-

spirits. Perhaps a more appropriate contemporary role is that of prophet in the messianic independent sects or Zionist groups of African Christians. And as one learns from Mbatha's autobiography, his father left the Lutheran church for Zionism. The Zionists have:

Built up a syncretistic system of purification rites, taboos, faith-healing and witch-finding. Groups of this type ask for a leader who is a healer and who is in intimate contact with the religious heritage of the African past. (Sundkler 1961:109)

While the biblical dress depicted by Mbatha in *The story of Moses, 1963*, has its biblical precedent in Aaron's holy garments (Exodus 28:4) it is equivalent to that worn by members of independent church sects or Zionists. The prophet may dream the correct colour and style of church robes, to be worn by himself and congregants as a part of healing and spiritual strengthening. The staff of Aaron depicted by Mbatha mirrors both the traditional diviners' paraphernalia and the Zionist use of sticks as 'weapons'. Usually three sticks are received by a member as part of initiation, which are used variously to ward off lightning, drive out demons from the sick and to embody the spiritual power of the Zionist Christian sect member. (Sundkler 1961: 213,214-15) Furthermore, knowledge of the life-stories of many Zulu artists attests to a link between the role of the artist and the diviner and/or prophet. Thus Mbatha in addition claims for himself in the role of artist, the authority of a moralist and diviner/prophet. This link between artist and diviner/prophet is invariably assumed by persons of Zulu descent, as it synchs with their indigenous world-view.<sup>67</sup>

Mbatha's series of work produced in the 1980's in Sweden reflects a conscious decision to use Zulu traditional symbolism. Leeb-du Toit considers that the search for Zulu roots took place in Mbatha mind because of feelings of loneliness during his years of exile in Sweden. (personal communication, Leeb-du Toit, Durban, 1998) It seems likely that this is what gave rise to the reformulation of the 'African' within the artist's later works. Mbatha had come to assume a unity of experience for all humanity and all societies and this overshadows his artworks executed in later years, leading Rankin and Hobbs to query how far his later works were a "construct of distance and memory." (Rankin and Hobbs 1998: 70) Mbatha however says of this body of artwork:



In my pictures I use symbols and ideas that come from the Zulu tradition and culture. I am convinced that some of the insights of this culture are common to everybody who tries to live a humane and social life. I have chosen the symbols that I have in order to send a message to those who, like me, suffer in this modern world from isolation, alienation and anxiety. (Eichel 1986:6)

During this period one of Mbatha's central concerns is that of alienation from roots. He attributes this to a deliberate act of turning ones back upon ones culture or past. He declares:

They (the young who have turned their back on their origins) must change their ways and learn to tame their own hearts. Otherwise they will be like untamed animals, like tigers. (Eichel 1986:9)

Berglund's study of traditional Zulu thought points to the source of Mbatha's perplexing symbol of the 'heart of an untamed tiger': Witchcraft (*ukuthakatha*) derives from suspicion, envy, jealousy and results in anger which needs to be 'cooled' in the heart so that it does not become evil action. In all situations in which people come together and associate in a manner that allows for possible discord, jealousy or argument, there is room for suspicion of witchcraft. (Berglund 1976:271-2,305) That this symbol pre-dated Mbatha's stay in Sweden is born out in Leeb du Toit's publications on the links between Zulu traditional colours of healing, namely red, black and white and images found in cloths originally imported from India, including ones with the tiger motif. I quote:

....(Certain) distinctive cloths become intrinsically association with divination ....(One the *ibhaye* ) consists of a patterned bright red, or maroon cloth (less frequently a royal blue) with black and white motifs, characterized by a decorative border surrounding a central motif consisting of African fauna or symbols, such as lions, leopards, crocodiles, ostriches, and shields, amongst others, or more exotic ones, such as the tiger, peacock.(Leeb du Toit , 2000: 1)

She continues:

(T) he *ibhaye* animal image has acquired significance in that it alludes to two aspects central to sangoma practice. Firstly it is intrinsic to the rites of passage of the sangoma, as the cloth is usually selected only when an image appears constantly in a dream to the neophyte or *uthwasa*. (Zwane pers. comm. 1988). In this the image conveys a personal experiential dimension besides its collective one (as a cloth for diviners). Krige notes that one of the symptoms of a calling by the shades (ancestral-spirits) is to become ill and dream constantly, often of 'wild beasts and serpents; he hears voices calling him and telling him to go to a certain spot and find roots or catch some animal there' (Krige 1965: 302-303). (Leeb-du Toit, 2000:1)

Concerning *The story of Moses, 1963*, Mbatha inserts a small tiger-head above Pharaoh in reference to the latter's hardness of heart despite Aaron's signs from God. (Exodus 7:13) This indicates that Mbatha started using this symbol very early in his work to refer to the untamed heart that continues to do evil, countering yet one more image that Rankin and Hobbs suggest derived from European rather than obvious African symbolism. While the tiger is a creature of another continent which the artist must have borrowed from somewhere (very possibly the cloths of which Leeb du Toit speaks), the concept of what the tiger stands for is arguably Zulu, and if not indigenous Zulu (predisposed to a more positive view of the big-cats) then at least from African Christianity (with its more negative connotations of Satan, introduced into Africa from western Christian thought). More importantly, one has to concede it is a reinterpretation that took place among Zulu on African soil and not one that took place in Mbatha's own psyche while alone in exile in Europe. Thus the actual source for the artist's iconography is his and his Zulu community's own unconscious processing of life's paradoxes as lived. And certainly life for many African people in the pre-1994 South Africa with its political and social inequalities is acknowledged to have given rise to feelings that lead to hatred and envy. Mbatha's linocut, *Rich and poor, 1981*, (Eichel 1986:35) depicts such inequality. Of the contents he says:

Social injustice brings death to the oppressed. The ladder, symbolizing both advancement and a lack of solidarity, illustrated the tensions between rich and poor. The successful

career man in this picture is black; those at the bottom of the ladder would just as soon kill him if they could. (Eichel 1986: 33)

Mbatha's depiction of the hated rich man as black cannot pass without some comment: I personally think the figure is meant to be black and that Mbatha is speaking of the same black opportunistic African stereotype of which Trevor Makhoba speaks in his painting *Abelumbi of the Millennium, 2001* depicting a *muthi* or herbal shop's singular black customer (discussed in Chapter 1:Introduction, 1.2.). Be this as it may, certainly Mbatha is not pandering to a European audience by this statement, rather he reflects a sentiment characteristic of Zulu culture: The man who enriches himself at the expense of others awakens envy which may lead to witchcraft (*ukuthakatha*) and if not that then he is held in suspicion of using such means to gain his ends. (Berglund 1976: 272) Having said this, one must assume that the man in the linocut could as easily have been European and that it is the selfishness and greed exhibited which could lead the poor to "just as soon kill him if they could." (Eichel 1986: 33)

The work, *Visit in the village, 1981*, (Eichel 1986: 27) shows Mbatha using almost pure Zulu traditional concepts as regards reconciliation or social healing: He explains this work:

The entire village kneels and prays. Will help come? The ancestors, invisible to the villagers, have gathered at the huts of their decedents. They forge the bond between the generations, and the future becomes less threatening. (Eichel 1986:25)

In Zulu thinking, it is the diviners (*izangoma*), elders, chiefs and above all, the ancestral-spirits, who act to address the disharmony or evil which threatens men:

They (the ancestral-spirits) are working their work, helping people so that everything goes well....They fight the bad ones who trouble their children. (Berglund 1976:307)

In summary it is possible to view the works of Azaria Mbatha as a complex combination of considered thinking with his development of his intuitional faculties: A process native to the artist as person and arguably present before he emigrated. Furthermore it is this that allowed

Mbatha to develop his chosen medium of lino-cut, to expand on the Zulu oral genre and afforded him the opportunity to make political statements hidden behind biblical allegory in the pre 1994 South Africa. This process is also singularly dependent upon an African orientation to life, an African world-view obtained through acculturation and rearing as a Zulu, and while the messages are certainly universal ones, which reaffirm the applicability of the Judeo-Christian message, this process remains couched in an essentially African format, that of African Christianity. It is also true that there is in the artist's work a development of selfhood; one in which the artist has returned to his own cultural roots and expresses a confidence in being African and more particularly in being Zulu, an owning of his forefathers' cultural and national identity. In this regard one must assume that the artist knows himself exceedingly well and he has owned his iconography and preferred form and this is indeed an African one. Moreover, in true African fashion Mbatha accesses some of his symbols from dreams, which stem from his unconscious as an African, making his iconography and style truly his own and not that of his European audience or his Swedish art-teachers. This is not a man who is simply playing to a European audiences' longing for the dark African 'Other'; one must assume that Mbatha is astute enough to be aware of the potential power this gives him in the art-world and (while taking into account the point made in Chapter 1: Introduction, 1.3 regarding his manipulation of his European audience) one must concede that Mbatha's own integrity would guard against his becoming a pawn as African artist. Rather he is indeed the 'quintessential African artist' but this is of his own making, development and choice in regard to oral or narrative style, medium, and an iconography deriving from his African past and his deliberate return to these roots. Thus his later process of 'neo-Africanization' that took place in voluntary exile in Sweden is also a choice on his part and indeed it is questionable if the artist would have developed in the same confident way if he found himself still resident in South Africa during the apartheid period. It is heartening that Mbatha is himself aware of these paradoxes of his being and art, ones that often surprised him, for in conversation with Leeb-du Toit he recalled his shock at the changes within his culture that had taken place during his absence, and he wondered if he himself, isolated from the pressures causing such change, was not more 'Zulu' than his family who had remained in KwaZulu-Natal. (Leeb du-Toit Interview: 1995)

#### Chapter 4: Essay 3.

### **The graphic works of Cyprian Shilakoe: reflections on a cosmology informed by a unique combination of temperament and culture**

When I initially came into contact with the artist Cyprian Shilakoe's life and work, I was left with three distinct impressions: Firstly, the inordinate sensitivity with which he depicts in aquatint etchings his ever present existential distress or '*angst*'. Secondly, the comradeship of fellow artist Dan Rakgoathe, which allowed the two men to seek answers to life's quandaries within both worldwide (especially western mysticism) and more significantly, indigenous Sotho<sup>6869</sup> cultural cosmology, including the position of the ancestors and their approach via dreams. Thirdly, the artist's disturbing premonition of his own death at the age of twenty-six, in a car accident on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1972. There is no doubt that these factors are interrelated, the one leading to the other, with the last giving a *coup de theatre* to the artist's life and sense of destiny, that could have given rise to his enigmatic statement "*I've come to say good-bye. I'm going to die, but do not mourn because I will come back.*" (Addleson 2005: 2)

These impressions need to be placed within the context of Nationalist South Africa for the period paralleling the artist's life, 1946 to 1972: Shilakoe's experiences in fact counteract the then apartheid propaganda that assumed such profundity of thought beyond the average African, who was supposed to be rather content with his portion, never troubling himself with any search for meaning to assuage an existential crises.<sup>70</sup> However there is evidence to contradict this simplistic and politically expedient assumption: If one views the lives of the writers of the 1930-50s like the Dhlomo brothers, R.R.R. and H.I.E., there is testimony to such self questing; the thinking of these men is termed "The New African philosophy" by Mwelela Cele in "The New African: H.I.E Dhlomo's brilliance as a writer, dramatist, poet and politician knew no bounds" in *Wordsetc, South African Literary Journal* (First quarter 2009, pp.53-56). I quote:

(The New Africans) embraced modernity. They believed that the contract between Africa and other parts of the world was not going to end but would rather advance....For

instance, while Dhlomo was proud of his Zulu culture and heritage, he was not a Zulu nationalist. Instead, he regarded himself as a “New African.” (Cele 2009:55)

There were no doubt similarities between the world of H.I.E. Dhlomo and that of Shilakoe and Rakgoathe; Cele mentions how Dhlomo became the librarian to the Bantu Social Centre, Durban in the 1940s, his estranged wife describing him as “a quite man, very much reserved...He continued to be a bookworm.” (Cele 2009:55) Cele’s observations of the Bantu Social Centre raise possible parallel happenings to students at art schools, like Rorke’s Drift:

On the surface these centres were benign creations with noble goals, but a closer look reveals that they were a means of social control in a society that limited black freedom. But the plan of using these centres for social control backfired as leading intellectuals of the era turned them into incubators of political thought that sought to challenge the system. (Cele 2009:55)

Similarly, for Shilakoe to find answers in traditional African cultural cosmology with momentum and validation from imported religion/philosophy, while admittedly somewhat inevitable considering his circumstances, remains audacious for such a young man from the (then) rural Transvaal, who by all accounts lead a marginalized life on outlying missions, except for his brief periods in Soweto and his visits to his Johannesburg art-agent Linda Givon Goodman. This seeming overconfidence echoes his enigmatic statement of his return after death; obviously Shilakoe had a ‘sense of self’, nourished by his knowledge of the uniqueness of what he attempted in his artwork. That he hid this aspect of himself from others, in particular his Rorke’s Drift Art Centre teachers, Peter Gowenius and the more sensitive Ola Granath, who nevertheless intuited it, is very telling.<sup>71</sup> I shall consider more of this dynamic later.

Because the Nationalist ‘divide and rule’ policy subverted the concepts of ‘race’ and ‘culture’ to its own ends, it is necessary to point out that the ‘African culture’ referred to in this chapter is that into which Shilakoe was born: This could be described as his inherited mode of ordering his universe and society, that which gave him a sense of identity as an African and moreover that which was engendered in him through the nurture of his grandmother Emily Dibakoane, as

primary care-giver. One should not forget that in all likelihood, Dibakoane was born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, into a north Sotho community preexistent to the Afrikaner Nationalism that was to blight the life of her grandson's generation, making claims of Shilakoe's ethnocentrism being regressive, particularly unjust.<sup>72</sup> These factors are important in the light of concepts of what African art 'should-be'; Bogumil Jewsiewicki "Urban art: art of the here and now" in Vogel, S., (ed.) *Africa Explores: 20<sup>th</sup> century African art* (Center for African Art, New York and Prestel, Munich, 1991) mentions the Zaire Second Republic (1965-1990) of President Mobutu Sese Seko as implementing an African renaissance or "authenticity policy":

(This policy was) ...built around an idealized anthropological conception of African culture and a simplistic redefinition of ethnicity, (which) was intertwined with the international trade in African art....Art experts agreed that truly African art stood apart from time and real contemporary life. (Jewsiewicki 1991:137)

The author counters with an observation impinging on the realities faced by African artists across the continent:

An important prejudice lies in the denial that Africa's creativity could absorb and digest the colonial shock. The division of culture into two poles - modernity and tradition, separated by the colonial conquest - sidesteps the problems of appropriation - of Africa's cultural and intellectual cannibalization of the West. Today, in fact, the only modern art considered legitimate in Zaire operates within the framework of Western culture. (Jewsiewicki 1991:139)

One may assume that the then South African Government policy's emphasis on ethnicity equated to Jewsiewicki's first point, "(that) postcolonial ethnography reproduced a tale of continuity of tradition, treating the colonial period as a parenthesis."(1991:137) This would be deceptive however, as it is arguable that Nationalism itself was a perpetuation of colonialism that lasted longer than elsewhere in Africa. The present African Renaissance of the post 1994 democratic South Africa certainly has elements of the Zaire policy, including its Pan Africanism, and most mainline historians are suspicious of it, no doubt because they are aware of the many exceptions

to be found in the field.<sup>73</sup> Even Jewsiewicki's second comment, that Africa's creativity can and does absorb westernization, is helpful only in regard to its truth, but his insistence on Africa's "cannibalization" of the west is overstated, certainly for southern Africa, particularly for the Rorke's Drift students of the late 1960s and early 1970s. To refer once more to the writings of Cele and Couzens on the black writers and musicians of the 1930-1950s (dealt with in more detail in Chapters 1 and 3), an era termed "The Period of the Zulu Cultural Renaissance" (personal communication Cele, Durban, 2009) and one extending into the 1960-1970s through the reading/listening to their creations, can be considered the truer renaissance for the South African black in regard to finding his/her unique place in the world. These considerations do speak to the complexity and paradox of Shilakoe and Rakgoathe as artists: Their mediums were the very best that the west could offer, as Philippa Hobbs in her insightful and authoritative essay "Prints, prophecy and the limits of popular testimony in Shilakoe's work" in *Cyprian Mpho Shilakoe revisited* (Durban Art Gallery, 2006) says of Rorke's Drift teacher, Ola Granath's intentions:

Although the curriculum was informal, the materials the printmakers worked with were often sophisticated, at least during Granath's ambitious tenure at Rorke's Drift. Far from perceiving the studio as an environment offering alternatives to disadvantaged artists, he sought to maintain the western norms of fine print practice. (Hobbs 2006:34)

And yet, the contradictions remain that Shilakoe and Rakgoathe, like their fellow students, Vuminkosi Zulu especially, while yet working in the best of western fine print-making practices, and while contending with all that was presented by living in times of increasing modernization, nevertheless consistently referred back to their own indigenous African world-view. Unfortunately, the subtleties of the consequent synthesizing process of these elements, was largely missed by those not versed in religious anthropology. As Hobbs mentions, even the founding teacher of Rorke's Drift, Peder Gowenius assumed that these artists, led by Shilakoe, were guilty in their etchings done in the early 1970s, of "producing piteous 'yes-boss' art." (Hobbs 2006:37) Hobbs continues:



He (Gowenius) still holds today that the ‘problem’ in Shilakoe’s work is an emasculating stylization accompanying the portrayal – even the valorizing – of deprivation.....Nuances of tone and rich blacks did not redeem these images. Nor, evidently, did expressions of supernatural experiences, though Gowenius may have been unaware of this dimension of Shilakoe’s creative life. (Hobbs 2006:37)

Ola Granath however, was, while disturbed by the direction Shilakoe took in his work, still aware of something significant happening to the artist. Hobbs gives Granath’s words regarding his decision to let Shilakoe explore this new-found expression:

For Cyprian with etching and aquatint came an atmospheric approach. I felt this was his thing. It felt genuine and I was reluctant to intervene, even though I felt a little shocked about the sentimentality. It was quite different compared with the other students. I’d never seen things like this made by an African artist before. Yet it was all his own idea. (Hobbs 2006:37)

Gowenius’s argument was that African art should be used as a tool to rebel against the oppressors, however, the actual subversion found in Shilakoe’s works comprising the questioning of man, and particularly African man’s, existential meaning and place in the cosmos, was evidently lost to the politically conscienceised Swede, who lived in an era that pre-dated post-modernist non-judgmental acceptance of indigenous ‘Voice’. If there was a political element to Shilakoe’s work, and perforce there surely was, its sympathies would have been more likely those of the Black Consciousness Movement of Steve Biko than the militant confrontational line taken by the then ANC in exile.<sup>74</sup> These issues of the black South African struggle of the times displaying more than socio-economic and political dimensions to include psycho-spiritual ones, can now be seen in a different light: One could argue that such artists as Cyprian Shilakoe and his fellow Rorke’s Drift students, in grappling in their art with finding their own place within a greater scheme articulated in the African context, were caught unbeknown to themselves in the flow of postmodernist thinking,<sup>75</sup> which supplanted earlier colonial modernism. In so doing they contributed simultaneously to invalidating the latter’s rigidity and prejudices while strengthening the relativism of postmodern respect for both

individual and diverse cultural worldviews. Further, their exploitation of the dominant western world, in any of, medium, influence, concept or argument, is to be acknowledged for the value and depth that it did bring to their lives and work.

When Jill Addleson invited me to write something concerning the African belief in the ancestors reflected in Shilakoe's work, I did wonder if this would be possible, as I knew he had come under the influence of his devout Christian grandmother (and it is generally assumed that Christianity<sup>76</sup> is perforce unsympathetic to the indigenous religion of the ancestors) and he had died some thirty years ago. Also I knew of no resource giving definite statements concerning his beliefs. And although the artist was Sotho, I could not necessarily assume he retained traditional concepts intact, especially if subject to modernization and western influences. However, Addleson's excellent detective work in tracing family members, in particular his sister Emily Mahlangu was a huge help to this end. Cobus van Bosch in *The South African Art Times* (May 2006, Issue 5) interviewed Addleson. I quote:

“By sheer coincidence, through an article published in the Daily Sun, we discovered that Cyprian Shilakoe has been survived by one brother and four sisters. One of his sisters, Mrs Emily Mahlangu, of Mathibestad, happened to read the article which Mr S. Dladla, editor of the *Daily Sun*, had published in his newspaper dated 3 March 2005.”(Van Bosch 2006:9)

On 3 August 2005, Jill Addleson, Curator of the *Cyprian Shilakoe Revisited* exhibition and Philippa Hobbs, Curator of the MTN Art Collection, traveled to Dennilton, about 50 kilometers from Bronkhorstspuit, to meet Emily Mhlangu and to see the early Shilakoe works owned by the family. Van Bosch takes up the interview with Addleson:

“We made the most amazing find: there, shut up in the family home which hasn't been used by family members since the death of both Cyprian's parents on 19th June 1983, we found a total of eight early Shilakoe works of art, never before shown on public exhibition: there are two clay sculptures –the rarest find amongst this collection, two acrylic on masonite paintings, done when he was training in art at Rorke's Drift, and

three wood sculptures. We also discovered the certificate he received on completion of his fine art course at Rorke's Drift. It is signed by his teacher, Otto Lundböhlm and Bishop Dlamini who was the presiding head, in charge of the Rorke's Drift Mission. What we found to be even more amazing is that since Cyprian's parents' death no one has ever tried to break into the house and nothing at all has been disturbed in it. For years, this great national treasure was safe, waiting to be rediscovered. " (Van Bosch 2006: 9)

Addleson freely shared her and Hobbs's interview with Mahlangu and I was invited to pose questions through them. The other great resource was the work of Donvé Langhan *The unfolding man: the life and art of Dan Rakgoathe* (Cape Town, David Phillips, 2000). These sources have helped in large part toward giving answers to my original lack of knowledge concerning Shilakoe. Of the philosophically inclined Dan Rakgoathe, Leeb-du Toit says in *Spiritual Art in Natal* (Tatham Art Gallery, 1993):

Rakgoathe indicated that although he was brought up as a Christian, he was impressed by the 'local people' at Rorke's Drift, by their spontaneity and 'natural thought' and also by his art history studies of African art where he learnt about 'African mysticism.' (Leeb-du Toit 1993:23)

Supporting this statement are Elizabeth Rankin and Philippa Hobbs in *Rorke's Drift, Empowering prints* (Cape Town, Double Story Books, 2003); they mention Muzi Tabete's (a trainee diviner under the well-known Luduma Madela) influence on Rakgoathe, who produced a very similar rendition of the *Spirit of Creation*, 1975 to Tabete's early 1962 linocut of a similar scene. (Rankin and Hobbs 2003:71) The authors give Rakgoathe's words:

I could recognize that Tabete's piece has something to do with the Spirit of Creation,,, it comes in my poetry as Clear Audience. This is a mystical experience where people actually hear voices. I dreamt about Clear Audience – just a voice talking very beautifully: 'Listen Beloved.' 'Who speaks?' 'Ask not who speaks for I am what I am, the Spirit of Creation.' (Rankin and Hobbs 2003:71)

Where one speaks of Rakgoathe as philosopher one needs to broach his constant “search for intellectual affirmation of his intuitive understanding of human nature” (Langhan 2000:33) and Langhan says the artist would read Magazines such as *Psychology Today* which “introduced him to the thinking of philosophers such as Carl Gustav Jung and Rudolf Steiner.”(Langhan 2000:33) Leeb-du Toit says that Rakgoathe mentioned he was a Rosicrucian <sup>77</sup> and would share his philosophizing with his friend Shilakoe (personal e-mail communication Leeb-du Toit, 2009) and she feels that this argues to the two men’s source inspiration being the product of syncretism of esoteric western mysticism and African thought, rather than being either purely African or the influence of only Christianity on African indigenous thought. I will discuss this in more depth in works I think are particularly influenced by such foreign elements.

African indigenous religion itself is more than the belief in the ancestors and ramifies to a wider cosmology or explanation for the order of the universe. While it is debatably easy to find parallels between this African world view and western mysticism, it remains possible to discern the thread as originating in either the one or the other: An example would be in Rakgoathe’s use of the word “Clear Audience” as suggestive of a borrowing of ‘Clairaudience’ a much used term in para-psychology. So too is the claim that the African believes in reincarnation because he speaks of being “reborn through his descendents”, anthropology would interpret this as “a man seeks immortality through his son(s), who will remember him as an ancestor.” (personal communication Dingani Mthethwa, Durban 2000) Support for Leeb-du Toit’s supposition is indicated by a linocut on the *Cyprian Mpho Shilakoe revisited* Exhibition, titled *Reincarnation, 1970* (Catalogue No 42). Both Shilakoe and Rakgoathe would have been party to the uninfluenced African world-view by dint of their being born into a society that ordered its world in a certain way. But in addition, as Leeb-du Toit pointed out, they would have been subject to the syncretism of this African world-view with western mysticism.

It is through Shilakoe and Rakgoathe’s friendship that one can perhaps best understand the place of the ancestors and the pervasiveness of the original Sotho worldview. Both Shilakoe and Rakgoathe were BaKoni, a sub-group of the BaPedi or north Sotho from Mapumalanga,<sup>78</sup> and initially I had surmised that their rapport stemmed from their initiation into manhood, as is the norm with the north Sotho,<sup>79</sup> however, it appears that Shilakoe, although circumcised had not

actually gone through initiation school.<sup>80</sup> The singular affinity between the two men can be seen in the following incident reported by Langan:

To their mutual delight, they (Shilakoe and Rakgoathe) discovered that they were united by a mystical bond which allowed them to communicate with each other through thoughts and dreams. Dan remembers waking up one day to see Cyprian peering down at him from the upper bunk bed on which he slept, with an intent, questioning look on his face, saying, “Makoni<sup>81</sup> were you sleeping?” Dan replied that he had just woken up from a dream in which he was a small boy smearing the floor of his hut with cow dung. Cyprian immediately jumped down from his bed in excitement. He had apparently been thinking of a young boy whom they had both known, whom they used to laugh at because he had this rather ridiculous habit of smearing the floor with cow dung. (The joke being that domestic chores such as these were never done by boys.) (Langan 2000:77-78)

Possibly this rapport as easily indicates that both men were then uninitiated cultural ‘outsiders’, especially as the dream seems to suggest their being in some way ‘feminine’.<sup>82</sup> Whichever way one wishes to understand this close bond, there is no doubting that such synchronicity would have given credence to their belief that they were essentially correct in their supposition that despite the apparent indifference of life, it nevertheless possessed meaning and thus a destiny.<sup>83</sup> Langan suggests some important differences between these two men’s temperaments which expressed itself in their artwork subject matter and style:

Both artists explored the spiritual side of human nature, but Cyprian was a more depressed personality. His poignant images of social deprivation were rooted in a darkness from which he could not escape. By contrast, Dan’s work, while also dealing with the shadow side of life, was often celebratory: while acknowledging the darkness, he also embraced the light.(Langan 2000:78)

I think that this difference also speaks to the emphasis employed by each in their works, which arguably indicates their relative degrees of accessing either western mysticism or African cosmology, or in how closely these were integrated. Western mysticism is romantic but not

performer pessimistic and Rakgoathe's work reflects this hope and trust in a greater unity in the universe, confirmed by his constant seeking of "visionary images throughout his career" (Rankin and Hobbs 2003:71) and in his works this is reflected by his swirling patterns and his preference for the linocut medium that more readily allows for this. Shilakoe on the other hand produced relatively fewer works that embraced his friend's synergetic mysticism and where he did these are invariably linocuts very reminiscent of the work of Rakgoathe; the main body of his work remains brooding and filled with an existential angst more in keeping with African concepts of contagion with resultant isolation and anxiety, and these works are invariably rendered in the more evocative medium of etchings and aquatints, as noted by Hobbs (2006) and discussed later in this chapter.

It is from Dan Rakgoathe's biography however that one sees the ancestors as more than mere 'lip-service' to a sentimental African philosophy; instead they have a tangible effect upon human behavior. This despite Rakgoathe being reared a Christian in the African Methodist Episcopal church. (Langhan 2000:78) I quote Langhan:

Dan's obsessive drinking had saddened his father...However, immediately after his father's death Dan's relationship with alcohol began to change...Whenever he imbibed liquor he found himself the victim of violence of some sort...When he reflected on why these incidents were happening, Dan concluded that in accordance with his tribal custom, his ancestors were dissatisfied with him and were making their dissatisfaction known. (Langhan 2000:101)

This experience of Rakgoathe, has such an air of authenticity, that one cannot continue to doubt that his ancestors affected his conscience in much the same way that, Christians for instance, would say that God or the Holy Spirit was 'speaking' to them resulting in a religious epiphany of some import to them personally.

Even if one excludes Rakgoathe's testimony, there is still the access to the mind of Cyprian Shilakoe supplied by his artworks. In searching for evidence of his belief in the existence of the ancestors, these beings are most noticeable in the work, *Inspiration from Koko*, - 1971, which

appears to have been a posthumous memorial to his beloved grandmother Emily Dibakoane. Nel describes the surrounding figures as, "... fetus-like heads of ancestral beings in the realm close to non-form..." (Nel and Givon 1990:23) Dibakoane is probably drawn from a photograph, as Shilakoe seldom depicts such specific facial features in his works, more typically relying on suggestive archetypal forms. Here his grandmother wears the Mothers union or *Manyano* uniform of the 1950s, that which she would have worn to Thursday meetings as well as Sunday sermons at St Peter's Anglican church at Mathibestad.<sup>84</sup>



**Figure 1: C. Shilakoe, *Inspiration from Koko*, - 1971 Etching and aquatint on paper, 30,5x21,2cm. University of Zululand Collection.**

Of course Dibakoane's being a devout Christian makes one question her influence upon her grandson's actual belief in the efficacy of the ancestors. However, two bits of information concerning Emily Dibakoane lead to the suspicion that she was born a traditionalist, only converting later in life, lending to the supposition that she possibly continued to believe in the efficacy of the ancestors.<sup>85</sup> Firstly, the fact of her being illiterate, for at the time she was a child, Christian converts' children usually had an education as they attended mission schools. Secondly, the other fact of her having been a third wife, for generally only traditionalists are polygamist. Shilakoe could then justifiably draw Dibakoane in the surrounding protective light of her Christian faith and contain this image within a network of generations of ancestors, back

to the beginning of time. It may not be readily known, but the Sotho name for God, *Modimo*, is a synonym for the first ancestor, as is the Zulu name used for Him, *Unkulunkulu*. (Hardie 1994: 38 and Callaway 1869: 130) Rakgoathe in his work, *Domain of the Badimo -1978* has the following to say, “This work is my interpretation of where we go when we die. The word ‘Badimo’ means ancestors in Sotho, or people who are with God.” (Langhan 2000:136) The influence of traditional belief on African Christianity suggests it is likely that this link between creator and creation predates missionary conversion.<sup>86</sup>

There is however, a deeper process at work in Cyprian Shilakoe than is shown in his rendition of the ancestors in, *Inspiration from Koko,- 1971*. Looking at his entire body of work one suspects that he was perhaps closer to traditional thinking than Dan Rakgoathe appears to have been. It seems possible that Shilakoe was not always consciously aware of these pervasive influences, something which gives his work a deeper immediacy and integrity than Rakgoathe’s, whose work is altogether more considered as he attempts to integrate universal symbolism with his African world-view. This despite the aforementioned fact of Shilakoe’s knowing that he was contributing something unique in his art, which could be termed a ‘sense of self’, it is quite feasible that what he sought to articulate was hidden in the unconscious of both his own and the communal Sotho mind. Shilakoe’s works indicate the place of the ancestors as integral to the processes of life and death, a truly African notion as regards their authority as actual spiritual principals. When Shilakoe celebrates life he does so controversially, as in, *I don’t want birth control -1971*.



Figure 2: C. Shilakoe, *I don’t want birth control -1971* Etching and aquatint on paper, 30,5x21,2cm . University of Zululand Collection.



This extraordinary work shows the agonies of the ‘mothers of the nation’ giving birth in a cattle-byre, while a stream of recently born children move toward the gate as symbolic of life. The ancestors form a dark conglomerate of brooding figures at the upper right of the picture. Seeing this aquatint’s subject matter against the political scenario of the 1970s, one immediately realizes that the work was Shilakoe’s challenge to the call of M. C. Botha, the then Nationalist Government minister of Bantu Administration and Development, to white South African’s to have more babies, so as to increase the dwindling numbers of this affluent section of South Africa.<sup>87</sup> These were termed the “Botha babies” and the reaction of black South Africans was to resist Botha’s Departmental campaigns to encourage birth-control for themselves, a profound irony once majority rule of “One man, One vote” became a reality in 1994 and Nationalist minority rule was toppled. This South African apartheid era tragi-comedy must surely be seen as prompting Shilakoe’s work, yet one wonders if the intense young artist’s identifying with his people’s needs, fully grasped the irony of his work for it is so intimate and heart-felt that, while it is social commentary, it yet contains no overt satire usual to this genre. In fact, Shilakoe’s reaction was in accord with indigenous beliefs that children are a gift from God and the ancestors, and it is wrong to prevent their being brought to life.<sup>88</sup> All of this expresses north Sotho cultural concepts on the nature of time and creation itself:

Creation continues throughout cosmologic time. Hence one’s origins are always present...world time is finite but cosmologic time, or ancestral time is continuous – life in the world of the living is an aspect of life as a whole...The social order includes essentially the existence of the not living who by virtue of being ancestors are closest to the origins of society and the people.(Hardie 1994:35)

One cannot but be struck by Shilakoe’s depiction of almost palpable pain at the allotment of women and the existential loneliness of life as lived by humans, comparative to his longing for the all encompassing spiritual dimension of the ancestors and God in their continuous time. There is an African way of ‘reading’ these themes in the works of Shilakoe that is underutilized because the Sotho worldview is not known to a predominantly white audience: For instance African belief holds that females in giving birth and being mourners at death, act as the mediums

between the world of ancestors and the living, thus enabling this ‘continuum of cosmologic time.’

It is perhaps that such layers of meaning as found in *I don't want birth control -1971*, are best articulated in the aquatint etching medium offered by Ola Granath during Shilakoe's training at Rorke's Drift. Hobbs says of the medium:

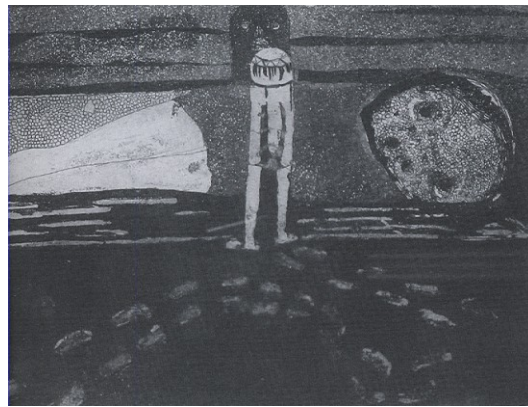
The etching medium itself was also an important discovery for Shilakoe. Its distinct peculiarities and opportunities –especially the lachrymose quality of acid painting - might also have advanced his expressive, sometimes maudlin, subject matter. (Hobbs 2006:34)

In addition, African females, in acting the mediums between the realm of the living and the dead, pay a high price for this role, as it places them in a state of ‘heat producing darkness’ known as *thefifi* or *sefifi* (‘heat’)<sup>89</sup> and *senyama* (‘darkness’). The Sotho cultures,<sup>90</sup> which comprise those of the western Tswana, the southern Basuto or BaSotho and Shilakoe's northern BaPedi, have an extremely well developed concept of contagion or pollution that can derive from states of *thefifi*. It is said that there should be order in the “*lolwapa* (yard)” of a Sotho home, as this reflects the order of the cosmos (as well as the ancestors and God), which is ensured by the ‘cooling down’ of any ‘heat’ producing pollution or disorder. (Hardie 1994:37) Certain ‘heat’ producing states place associated persons in an ambiguous position because they threaten the boundaries of this ordered world. Such persons are isolated from social contact so that the individual “...becomes very lonely, people scorn him and do not want his company.” (Hammond-Tooke 1981:119) To explain further:

It seems analytically useful to distinguish between two types of ambiguous (MoSotho<sup>91</sup>) person. Firstly, there are those who exhibit ambiguity in their very existence and being, or in the status they occupy: I shall refer to this as paradoxical ambiguity. Examples of this are aborted fetuses, still-births, twins, chiefs, witches and those afflicted with sickness. (Hammond-Tooke 1981:119)

Hammond-Tooke continues:

The other type derives from marginality, which is usually associated with change of status as the individual progresses through life, e.g. Birth, initiation, death, widowhood and (unexpectedly) traveling. This I term liminal ambiguity. Paradoxical ambiguity is static, in the Hegelian sense, and involves the permanent union of opposites in a “synchronic” moment: liminal ambiguity is diachronic and is expressed over time. It is associated with a temporary state that eventually finds resolution when the status-change is completed. (Hammond-Tooke 1981:119)



Figures 3-4: C. Shilakoe, *Follow the footsteps...you will find her sleeping* -1970. Etching on paper, 25,5x37,5cm., University of Zululand Collections and *Where are we from?*-1970 Linocut, Size (not given) on Standard Bank National Arts Festival Exhibition,1990.

It seems that Shilakoe was to experience this ‘liminal ambiguity’ often, where he embodied a state of ‘heat producing darkness’. There were the times his parents left home because of migrant-work, those when he himself attended Rorke’s Drift Art School and the occasions like his grandmother’s funeral. Emily Mahlangu says her brother drifted away from the Christian lifestyle once their grandmother died, “escaping into the bush” rather than attending church, ...(for) after church on Sunday (without his grandmother) he was very lonely.” (Addleson 2005:9) Her description echoes the state of isolation caused by *thefifi senyama* and one can see in the ever-present loneliness permeating Shilakoe’s artworks a truly Sotho response to the contagion of travel and death. One needs only look at works like, *Loneliness-1971* and the poignant, *Follow the footsteps...you will find her sleeping -1970* to realize that the references are not just to the very real ache of separation from a loved one. In regard to the last work, with its depiction of a footstep pathway to ‘Koko’s’ body lying in state, (euphemistically described by the artist as “sleeping”) one recalls that to the Sotho, travel induces an equal state of liminal ambiguity.<sup>92</sup> One then wonders if to a MoSotho, both death and travel are a journey, invariably leading to separation anxiety, yet one ‘rite-of-passage’ that at least his culture does prepare him for.

The best insight into these dynamics is to be found in Shilakoe’s most profoundly existentialist work, the woodcut, *Where are we from?-1970*. This work haunts the mind with lonely figures, some with bundles of earthly possessions, passing along paths of light within an endless cosmos of stars, moon and galaxies. Unfortunately this last work appears to be rare and the only copy I have seen appears in Karel Nel and Linda Givon *Cyprian Shilakoe (1946-1972) Third Guest Artist Award 1990* (Standard Bank National Arts Festival, 1990). This is a woodcut and the sharper lines and greater contrasts of black and white afford the theme a more severe and alienating aspect than that given by the softer tones of the artist’s aquatint works. It is also possible to see the influence of Rakgoathe’s preferred medium and mysticism as subject matter in this work. However, as Langhan indicated, Shilakoe is the more depressed and pessimistic of the two men and it is hard to think of one of his friend’s works that is quite as sobering.



**Figure 5: C. Shilakoe, *The Widow*-1969. Aquatint on paper, 31x30,2cm University of Zululand Collection.**

One work by Shilakoe that is particularly concerned with the issues of contagion and loneliness is, *The Widow* -1969. Widowhood is a severe state of isolation and this can be clearly seen in the work, where even the couple's child is separated from the privileges of social communion. One could conclude that the picture's black patches, including the isolated child's little shadow, are indicative of the contagion or *makgoma*, of death. (Hammond-Tooke 1981:118)

A Sotho widow or widower is described as, "(Someone) whose blood has been excited by losing part of it to the departed." (Hardie 1994:34) To have contact with a widow who has not yet gone through the purification ceremony to remove her 'heat' is deemed to be fatal, "This is the real 'poison'. It cannot be cured." (Hammond-Tooke 1981:119) After a funeral, family will wash down the whole house, its windows and the clothes of the deceased, so as to 'cool down' the home, a ritual that is maintained, "regardless of religious denomination" and which, "graphically recalls and re-establishes for all the order of the cosmos which has been disturbed in the *"lolwapa"* (yard)." (Hardie 1994:38) It is not hard to extrapolate this cultural provision to the fact of Addleson and Hobbs's discovery of the family home at Dennilton left untouched from the date of the parents' deaths in the 1980s.<sup>93</sup> It should be noted that all southern African cultures, not only the Sotho, but the Nguni (the Zulu for instance) retain versions of these very contagion beliefs in regard to death and mourning, but because these are essentially family or private matters, the rest of South Africa's multi-cultural society may be quite unaware of the fact.<sup>94</sup>

Nel says of the work, *The Widow*-1969:

One sees the tragedy of the migrant labour system in the **Widow**. This symbolic image embodies the woman who has lost her man to the city, or through death in a mining or industrial accident, or even to another woman, an urban woman.(Nel and Givon 1990:8)

To my own mind these words re-iterate the interpretations of Gowenius that dismisses Shilakoe's art as being the sentimentalizing of the African as victim in his association with the white 'master-race'. One can see in such an interpretation the frustration of Gowenius that the African is failing to take more action. Anthropology does not indicate that African religion tends to fatalism as do the Eastern ones, so there is something of 'white guilt'<sup>95</sup> in these interpretations. Rather, this artwork's depiction is the cultural understanding of the nature of contagion, it's the way that *Seriti* (Power) or Spirit is and needs to be approached. It would be interesting to know if these are Nel's own words or if he quotes Shilakoe's dealer Linda Givon Goodman, reporting those of the artist himself. Nel's comments nevertheless are important because of the artistic prerequisite of keeping an open and intuitive mind when viewing any artwork, something especially applicable to that of Cyprian Shilakoe. It must be recalled that an artist by the very act of creating, invites his viewers to draw their own conclusions and that Shilakoe's public were mainly whites who did not share a Sotho worldview. Does the artist's audience then read his works as he himself intended? One must not forget that Shilakoe is quoted as saying that the Europeans have the recorded Bible but Africans still needed to have their legends written down, something he intended to document via his art. This touches upon the nature of any individual's cultural experience, and the question if Shilakoe was consciously manipulating his indigenous cosmology or if it remained subliminal to his works. Either way, one wonders if he caused alienation in his more Eurocentric audience; on the one hand not being politically radical enough for those of Gowenius's persuasion, while on the other hand, being so filled with obtuse cultural reference and '*angst*' as to cause discomfort to the less politicized. All said, one needs the balance offered by a commentary such as Nel's, for as a respected art historian he is in the best position to universalize Shilakoe's more ethnically specific message; as it could be argued that the converse of the Sotho notions of contagion is but the outrage at the abuse of white capitalism

of black migrant labour. In this form the message is more a moral one that can conscienceise the ‘white-guilt’ in the artist’s buying and gallery attending audience.

The above commentary brings one to another fact regarding Cyprian Shilakoe, and this is the recognition of his unique personhood or ‘sense of self’; a compound of temperament, cultural origins, sensitivities, interests and talents. The interpreting of any one of his pictures using cultural references should not rob the viewer from appreciating the fact that the artist remained an individual who could never be eclipsed by his culture’s world-view. Rather, culture is something that Shilakoe used to reflect upon life and express his and life’s essential being through his evocative and poignant artworks. It seems that Shilakoe certainly saw this expression as his destiny, one that included his death at a young age and the fact that his artwork would continue to find value and meaning once he had passed-on. If this is not so, then it is particularly hard to accept Shilakoe’s obscure statement concerning his return. To most Christians these words echo those of Jesus when promising the Holy Spirit to his disciples: “You heard me say, “I am going away and I am coming back to you.” (John 14:28) A suggestion of the true context of Shilakoe’s statement appears from the answer his sister Emily supplied to Addleson’s question concerning her brother’s belief’s in the ancestors:

I’m not sure (what his belief in the ancestors was exactly) but what makes me wonder is that he use(d) to say ... (these) words: “I’m going to leave this world, but I will be back, and you people you are going to remember me, and I will be back in a way you don’t understand,” –he use(d) to sing two songs of Jim Reeves, namely, “ This world is not my home”. I’ve forgotten the other one but they were sung by Jim Reeves. When he finished to sing he was crying very loud(ly). (Addleson 2005: 2)

This statement can have any number of interpretations: That Shilakoe was referencing the concept of the ancestors as part of ‘continuous cosmologic time’ and it does seem that this is the content of his sister’s deliberations. That traditional African concepts of the position of the ancestors has had an admixture of the foreign concept of reincarnation added, as happened to Dan Rakgoathe when working on his, *Domain of the Badimo -1978* where he says, “What you see now, child of humankind, is the domain of the Badimo, your ancestral home, whence you

come and hence shall return, in order to come back again, many times.” (Langhan 2000:136) <sup>96</sup> One other interpretation of Shilakoe’s enigmatic claim is that he was experiencing some of the passion of Christ before His equally untimely death, if so, one can certainly allow him a touch of the ‘Redeemer complex’. Or finally, that the artist is in fact alluding to his conviction that he, Cyprian Shilakoe, would one day be recognized as one of South Africa’s great artists, itself no delusion, for he was given the *Standard Bank Guest artist award* posthumously in 1990 and the very exhibition essay (along with the other essays and the exhibition catalogue) that this chapter is based upon, stand as another such validation. Whichever interpretation, central was Shilakoe’s knowing that he was indeed somehow extraordinary in his self expression. As indicated, the exact ‘somehow’ need not have been fully conscious to the artist or to his audience and for evidence of this one can recall his teacher Granath’s feelings, already quoted from Hobbs, to reiterate:

“... It (his artistic experimentation) felt genuine and I was reluctant to intervene...It was quite different compared with the other students. I’d never seen things like this made by an African artist before. Yet it was all his own idea.” (Hobbs 2006:37)

It may also have been that many of these possibilities were working together on a particularly vulnerable Shilakoe at the time, giving rise to his thought-provoking statement. Talking of her brother’s state of mind after he had completed his Rorke’s Drift training and he was staying in Roodepoort, Emily Mahlangu gives an insight into what may have been a presentiment of his death later that year:

At first I saw him bringing his luggage at home he was from Soweto, because after finishing his studies he did not come [come] straight home, secondly he came home to show us a woman he was going to marry; third time he came to show us a car(,) a new one “The car of the year.”(Th)is was early 1972, but he was no more staying at Aunt’s place. And he was not quite happy, he looked sad there was no more happiness in his face, and my parents noticed that. (Addleson 2005: 2)



Of the prediction of Shilakoe's forthcoming death, I quote some recollections of friends and family:

He (Shilakoe) had a close working relationship with Dan Rakgoathe, who was also involved in that accident. Dan Rakgoathe recalled that on the day of Cyprian Shilakoe's death, they had both been discussing the mystery of death.

The artist, Louis Maqhubela, told Linda Givon that:

Cyprian came to me before he died, in spirit, to say good-bye. He must be dead by now. (Addleson 2005:2)

And in regard to her own knowing of her brother Cyprian's death, Emily says:

On the fourth of September I had a dream, I saw him in a glass coffin near the road it was 2 o'clock in the morning, and I told my parents same time. I knocked at their bedroom, they cried and myself. It was on Monday. On Thursday my aunt came and told us about his death. I did not believe inst(ead) of crying I was angry. I thought I will awake him, we were all sad, we were left empty, only tears, empty. (Addleson 2005:2)

It seems that even before predicting his own death, Shilakoe had this family capacity to foretell death via dreams. Nel comments:

Shilakoe had spent his early childhood and youth in the northern Transvaal under the nurturing care of his grandmother. He was obviously very close to her and often spoke of her and her strong mystical powers. She had an uncanny ability to predict the future events in dreams, an ability which Cyprian Shilakoe by all accounts seems to have inherited. (Nel and Givon 1990:15)

Nel tells of Linda Givon Goodman's recall of this ability:

Linda Goodman, who became Shilakoe's dealer early on in his short career, recalls one such incident. She recounts how he told her of a disturbing dream he had had of finding a dead donkey right outside his grandmother's house, and that on entering he found that she too was dead. Shilakoe's dream turned into a prophecy, for three years later, on finding the dead donkey outside his grandmother's home, he knew what he would find within.(Nel and Givon 1990:15)

While it may seem odd to some that the Shilakoe family had such premonitions and dreams, it would probably not be seen as out of the ordinary to an African person, in particular a BaPedi or north Sotho, as dreams are the regular mode for the living and the dead to interact. One's ancestors appear in dreams to complain if one is forgetful of them and they would also send premonitions of danger or death. Being Christian would not necessarily mean the total forfeiting of this original mode of making sense of the world.<sup>97</sup> If one takes into account the impressions of Shilakoe's life mentioned in the introductory paragraph and explain them in context of indigenous African thinking, then there is in fact nothing strange about Shilakoe foreknowing his own death.

In summary, it is possible to re-look at the art of Cyprian Shilakoe and assert that his works can now more easily be accessed via the 'language' of his indigenous cultural cosmology: Not only this African world-view but the extent it was influenced by his deliberations with his friend Dan Rakgoathe, to create a synthesis with esoteric western mysticism. Throughout, one must not forget the sympathy for Christianity that must have been engendered in the young Shilakoe by his love for his grandmother, so that he only drifted from the church upon her death, to search for his own explanations, ones that in large part comprised an intuitive return to his Sotho roots. In doing this Shilakoe used the best of the dominant west, its fine-art mediums, schooling and questioning of experiences exacerbated by that very west (as for example the one alluded to by Nel, of widowhood through migrant-work) and he created evocative works. Perhaps in doing this, Shilakoe and his friend Dan Rakgoathe could be described as Sotho "New Africans" to take

from the description of the Dhlomo brothers mentioned, as they certainly contributed to a Sotho “Cultural Renaissance.”

One can better appreciate the richness of this essential African heritage informed by western mysticism and Christianity: A cosmology that can so movingly express the artist’s pervasive existential awareness of the complexities and ‘*angst*’ of human existence, one that articulates another political view, instead of overt rebellion, there is that of the survivor who found strength and meaning in the realm of Spirit and created a truly ‘African mysticism’. Against this one can still wonder at Shilakoe’s degree of conscious manipulation of his own culture, as it appeared so inherent as to come naturally to him. His works possess not mere sentimentality but a deep and profound ‘at-onement’ with his fellow beings and life itself. This is what he sought to express in his art and he knew he had succeeded, giving him a ‘sense of self’ and destiny that was so strong as to compel him to speak of his return in the words of Christ Himself.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation as stated in the abstract and chapter 1, the introduction, is an amalgam of reformulated essays; all of which appeared in exhibition catalogues that accompanied major traveling exhibitions: *The Azaria Mbatha Retrospective*, 1998, *The Trevor Makhoba Memorial*, 2005 and *Cyprian Mpho Shilakoe Revisited*, 2006. All were curated by Jill Addleson of the Durban Art Gallery, who invited me to contribute in my capacity as curator of traditional and contemporary African art at the Campbell Collections, UKZN. All the artists have links with KwaZulu-Natal, either by being born here or by dint of studying in the province and all are 20<sup>th</sup> century if not 21<sup>st</sup> century artists; both Trevor Makhoba and Cyprian Shilakoe are deceased.

It is possible to say that the fact of there having been exhibitions centered on these artist and issues, means that the attempts to redress the apartheid era's bias toward art collecting policies emphasizing white art genre, meant that few black artists were to be found represented in the mainline galleries. Stephen Sacks curated exhibition for Johannesburg Art Gallery, *The Neglected Tradition* in 1988 sought to point out this injustice. It was only then that mainline galleries and art schools started to take black South African art seriously, and there was a pressure on the former private collections, like that of the late Dr Killie Campbell, namely The Campbell Collections, UKZN, to lend works for these major exhibitions. The subsequent decade concentrated on this redress and an era of art historians of the ilk of Sandra Klopper, Anitra Nettleton, Liz Rankin, Philippa Hobbs, Karel Nel from the Witwatersrand University, and Juliet Armstrong, Juliette Leeb-du Toit and Ian Calder of the University of KwaZulu-Natal came into their own. The galleries like Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg, Durban Art Gallery, Johannesburg Art Gallery and Witwatersrand and Standard Bank Galleries, MTN Collections and others were as involved. Nettleton, Nel, Klopper, Johnny van Skalkwyk, and David Hammond-Took at Witwatersrand and Standard Bank Galleries and NASKAU, Pretoria, spearheaded the acceptance of traditional ethnographic crafts as art and this laid the foundation for my such orientation in the essay contributions to exhibition catalogues.

I consider my place as on the periphery of these galleries but by default having an institutional collection that had holdings of the very ethnographic and artworks required for the redressing

exhibitions. Thus my original essays took an interpretive approach to black South African art; referencing the cultural and ethnic background as well as the life-histories of the artists and crafters to give context to their works and at core all my chapters retain this as my central orientation. However, I have introduced concepts from the writings of art-historians Rankin and Hobbs (1998 and 2006), Nettleton (1988 and 1991) and Leeb-du Toit (2005) in particular, many being first articulated in their essays for the same exhibition catalogues. Thus Chapter I, the introduction and again Chapter 3 (essay 2) on Azaria Mbatha takes from Rankin and Hobbs's conferring with Rosen's (1992) arguments that the artist was acting to his buying public in presenting himself as the quintessential African artist; I debate what constitutes 'Africanness' and if it is valid that it is merely an invention of the west in need of projecting onto a 'dark African Other'. I conclude that there is that own and pertinent to the African idiom that is an indigenous cultural 'Africanness' and that this moreover exhibits as 'preferred form' in terms of medium, colour, patterning and favored technique, all of which conspire to better express this quality. I also query whether this is another perspective on the early oral style.

Chapter 2 (essay 1), Chapter 3 (essay 2) and Chapter 4 (essay 3) carry forward the assumptions made in the introduction. To meld these essays into a coherent whole I have expanded on the concept of indigenous creativity where this is in agreement with the oral genre as it is exhibited in Zulu tradition: This style is that which derives from the pre-literate mind-set or world-view of the African cultures and is particularly expressed in the praise-poet or *imbongi* as he is termed in Zulu. In modern times it has developed into an exciting style, arguably first in evidence in the great Zulu writers of the 1930-50s, like the Dhlomo brothers, R.R.R. and H.I.E., known as "The New Africans" who embraced the traditional (R.R.R. Dhlomo wrote down the past Zulu kings praises and his books remained set-works in the era of "Bantu Education" thus arguably influencing black artists) yet did not discard the best of the west, regarding themselves as modern and progressive. More important to the visual arts is the development of urban, often migrant musical forms, like *isicathimiya* and others, an oral style that challenges politics, social-wrongs, racism and taboos. I rely on art-historians like Leeb-du Toit (2005) who perhaps first mooted the idea of a visual such rendition and I discuss these concepts in their wider context in Chapter 1, the introduction, even giving examples from working with African colleagues on the *Impi Yamakhanda –Bhambatha* (Uprising of 1906) Project, 2004-6 which had as its brief to look at

history and IKS (Indigenous Knowledge Systems). I pursue these ideas particularly in the chapters on Trevor Makhoba and Azaria Mbatha. In Chapter 2, (essay 1) I argue that an artist like Trevor Makhoba can be considered the ‘Master of the oral genre’ when rendering this style into visual form, in this he often reflects both the stereotyping as well as the archetypal in his renditions of particularly whites, (and in the essay, white females), making him debatably one of the great South African social commentators. In this chapter I rely on my African colleagues to give their reading and response to Makhoba’s art as a surer way of assessing the accuracy of claims of an extant oral genre. First introduced in Chapter 1, the introduction, I consider Mbatha along with his fellow Rorke’s Drift students and how they probably referenced the indigenous oral style, translating it into linocut in especially their thematic biblical story-telling mode, using the traditional techniques of burnt relief-carved wood carving (with its contrasts of burnt wood decoration against light natural wood) found in such a rural carvers’ work as that of Qwabe. In Chapter 3, (essay2) on Azaria Mbatha, I pursue the scrutiny of biblical themes as impacted by Christianity and change, and argued that this is an African Christianity which incorporates the best of the western introduced religion, and this is couched in language and concepts sympathetic to black cultural world-view and values. I also claim that many of the works with a biblical theme are disguised political commentary on the nature of Man (kinds’) existence, in the apartheid decades. It is argued then that this ‘Africanness’ was not in order to sell to white buyers desirous of a ‘mythic African Other’ but rather a development from out of the cultures of Africa themselves and a development that the Swedish art teachers, who had introduced the new print-making mediums at Mapumulo and Rorke’s Drift Art Schools, had recognized and encouraged. In Chapter 4 (essay 3) on the ex-Rorke’s Drift art-student Cyprian Shilakoe, I analyze his aquatints in the light of his own Sotho cultural ideas on the contagion state of ‘heat producing darkness’ known as *thefifi* or *sefifi* (‘heat’) and *senyama* (‘darkness’) and continuous cosmologic, or ancestral time. However in terms of this chapter I took up Leeb-du Toit’s suggestion, as my academic supervisor, to take a closer look at the thinking of Shilakoe’s friend and fellow art-student Dan Rakgoathe, as he had claimed in interviews with her to have been a Rosicrucian. All I could find as conclusive reference were quotes to the effect that Rakgoathe considered himself to be an ‘African mystic’, that he often used words clearly from this school of thought (like “re-incarnation”) and that he read very widely into Jungian psychology; proof that he did reflect a syncretism of traditional African thought, western mysticism (and archetypal

psychology, which also draws upon esoteric doctrine) in his works. However, except for some early linocuts much like those of Rakgoathe, Shilakoe remained closer to African thought, even possibly moving from his grandmother's Christianity after her death, back to the existential dimensions of Sotho thinking.

To conclude then, all my chapters retain the interpretation or mediation of an African 'Voice', cultural world-view, and acknowledge the realities of culture change and the influence of westernization and urbanization. In their reformulated aspect the chapters concede to an 'Africanness' that is not merely playing to a western audience, but rather derives from the oral versus literate mind-set of the original cultures. The process of written-recording of this same early praise-poetry and its synthesis with the heroic-epic of classicism and Romantic literature taught at the elite missions schools; firstly gave rise to the 'New African' mentioned above and secondly, the political beginnings of the ANC (as well as the IFP and including this party's 'hi-jacking' of the Zulu royal praises). The unique development of this genre into the urban hybrid form that breaks taboo and challenges racism, inequalities and politics is also pursued and some works that exhibit this as well as the introduction of Christianity and its synthesis into African Christianity, and indeed African mysticism's borrowings from western esoteric Christianity are all considered and examples given.

In this undertaking I have been singularly fortunate in my associates; not only in regard to my academic supervisor, Professor Juliette Leeb-du Toit, and the many art-historians who equally contributed to the original exhibition catalogues and expanded their writings to other publications, but to African colleagues who translated, researched and debated and even co-authored some original essays with me. I could not have accomplished any of what I had undertaken in this Masters dissertation without the good fortune of these many contacts. This includes the nature of my work as curator of ethnographic and art collections at the Campbell Collections, UKZN, as it arguably attempts to carry out its founder, the late Dr Killie Campbell's mandate of knowledge preservation and generation on history, culture and arts of the peoples of south east Africa without prejudice to race, creed or colour.

Lastly, I feel I need to comment on my writing style; I found that I needed to deviate from the strict Harvard style adopted by the Centre for Visual Arts, UKZN (Calder:2004) and included endnotes to validate, contextualize and elucidate the claims made in my arguments in my chapters. I found this necessary because much of the contextual material I drew upon to make my suppositions is not noted in any publications but derives from many years of dealing with museum collections of both artworks and ethnographic materials. During this time information derived from contact with artists and crafters, field-collectors, research-assistants and translators. My writing-style in the text body is often somewhat 'stream of consciousness' for the same reason. This is also because of the nature of the topics dealt with, both multi-disciplinary (art, history, anthropology and even psychology are combined) as well as the fact that if one deals with the oral style, one tends to exhibit many of the traits characteristic of this style which has characteristically stood in opposition to the more concise literary style. However, I neither apologize for this nor for the fact that my thesis is unresolved to a certain extent; for not only was it not easy to amalgamate and reformulate former essays meant for more popular reading (namely exhibition catalogues), but this writing-style is native to the post-modernist 'Voice' which I adopt in my methodology. I repeat the quote on this orientation from my endnotes (Chapter 4: Essay 3:endnote7):

In anthropology interpretation gravitates toward narrative and centers on listening to and talking with the other...“There is no final meaning for any particular sign, no notion of unitary sense of text, no interpretation can be regarded as superior to any other.” Further, “Postmodernity concentrates on the tensions of difference and similarity erupting from processes of globalization: the accelerating circulation of people, the increasingly dense and frequent cross-cultural interactions, and the unavoidable intersections of local and global knowledge.” (Weiss, S. and Wesley, K. 2005. *Postmodernism and its critics* at <http://www.as.va.edu>)



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## Endnotes

### Chapter 1: Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Traditional is taken to mean any person or custom that follows early African cultural conventions. When I speak of traditional, it is not that I am unaware of the international academia frowning on such words as, “traditional” ‘indigenous’ and ‘first peoples’ in response to especially the First Nations submissions to Parliaments in New Zealand, Australia and perhaps North America and Canada. However the situation is different in the post 1994 South Africa, where the *National Heritage Resources Act of 1999* encourages museums/galleries to adopt such terminology.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Preferred Form’ describes the formal elements favoured by any culture that becomes an identifiable style. See later in text for a more detailed definition.

<sup>3</sup> A brief biography of Makhoba: Trevor Phila Makhoba was born 8<sup>th</sup> January 1956 in Durban. He died 24 February 2003. He was a self-taught artist who had held a number of solo exhibitions and had participated in group shows, especially with his two students, Welcome Danca and Sibusiso Duma. He received a number of awards including the 1996 Standard Bank Young Artist award. His work is represented in private and public collections, most notably in that of Bruce Campbell-Smith to be seen in Hayden Proud (Ed.) *Revisions: expanding the narrative of South African Art*. (SAHO:Unisa,2006)

<sup>4</sup> Bibliography of Mbatha: He was born in 1941 in the Mahlabathini district of KwaZulu-Natal. Trained first at Ceza Hospital, then Mapumulo and Rorke’s Drift, ECL (Lutheran) missions from 1961-1965. In 1965 he moved to Stockholm, Sweden, to pursue his studies and has since lived in self-imposed exile in Sweden. He has had numerous exhibitions and awards over his long career and is represented in foremost collections of African art around the world.

<sup>5</sup> Bibliography of artist: Cyprian Mpho Shilakoe; He was born in 1946 in Barberton, Mapumalanga. He studied art at the ELC Art and Craft Centre, Rorke’s Drift and graduated in 1969. He established a studio at St Ansgar’s Mission, Roodepoort in 1970 and in 1972 won first prize at a printmaking exhibition at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the United States. He died in a car accident in 1972. He was awarded the Standard bank National Arts Festival’s guest artist accolade retrospectively in 1990.

<sup>6</sup> This catalogue was published but the exhibition did not happen because of the legal ramifications of the artist’s widow having an issue with copyright on her husband’s works. A tremendous amount of work went into the exhibition and it is a huge loss to the art world that it could not take place.

<sup>7</sup> “Father **Walter Jackson Ong**, Ph.D. (November 30, 1912 – August 12, 2003), was an American Jesuit priest, professor of English literature, cultural and religious historian and philosopher. Publications to consult; *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2002) and *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*. Ed. Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup. (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton P, 2002).” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/walter.J.Ong>)

<sup>8</sup> There is an informative biography on Marcel Jousse by Edgard Sienaert at <http://www.esienaert.co./jousse>. I quote: “Born in 1886 in rural France to poor, illiterate parents, Marcel Jousse would proudly lay claim to his paysan – peasant – status. He remembers coming to consciousness to the rocking of his cradle and the rhythmic melodising of lullabies and recitations of sacred texts by his mother and the village women. These early childhood memories formed the beginning of his life-long fascination with recitation, rhythm, memory and memorisation - and with oral society and education in general. He studied ethnology, anthropology, psychology and religion ...” Jousse wrote the classic *The Oral Style*, 1924.

<sup>9</sup> Indigenous Knowledge Systems or IKS is essentially an “African Renaissance” redress of the global dominance of western causative thinking. It is a form of post-modernism where early African cultural ‘Voice’ is given a platform. It is encoded into the post 1994 South African Governmental system, with offices in both the Arts and Culture and Science and Technology Departments.

<sup>10</sup> This is the early Zulu spelling retained but for the insertion of an h in the Oral Interview Project of the famous rebel’s descendents in 2004. The earlier Anglicized version however is variously written Bambata, Bambatha and Bhambhatha. (See the same work cited in the text for details).

<sup>11</sup> I was asked to serve on the *Impi Yamkhanda* -Bhambatha Project Committee in 2004-6. This was an NRF funded project in the centennial year to the Uprising of 1906, aimed at finding evidence of an African perspective on history which falls under IKS. The Committee was chaired by Professor Yonah Seleti, and Mxolisi Mchunu was a field-researcher on the Project.

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<sup>12</sup> The concept of a 'dark mythic Other' that has become synonymous with Africa owes its existence to such works as mentioned in the text, like Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, 1902 of which the Achebe wrote a criticism *The image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"*, 1975. Nevertheless Conrad's work earns the following commentary from his fellow Europeans "The themes of *Heart of Darkness*, and the depiction of a journey into the darkness of the human psyche, still resonate with modern readers." ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_Conrad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Conrad)) This essentially European perception of the African is most developed in the work of the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung. His concept was that western man had become so sophisticated that he/she lost the link to archetypal energies which remain encapsulated in the unconscious, dreams and in universal mythology. To western man Africa as continent, with her peoples, flora and fauna is most representative of what he/she feels to be lost though civilization. See Jung, C.G. *Man and his symbols* (Dell and Co (15<sup>th</sup> edition ,1976). This search for 'soul' as Africa is found in others like Joy Adamson, known for her experiments to reintroduce lion into the wilds, but also painter of ethnological and botanical pictures. She emigrated from Austria to Kenya just before World-War 2, to escape not just the Nazi regime but to find a less jaded world to that of pre-war Europe. For her this search encompassed all of Africa "...through animals, man will discover his soul." ([www.amazon.ca/Joy-Adamson-Behind-Caroline-Cass-biography](http://www.amazon.ca/Joy-Adamson-Behind-Caroline-Cass-biography)) Of interest in Jungian dream-analysis is the consistent image of what Clarissa Pinkola Estés terms "The dark man" as he appears in women's dreams, "There is a strong physical aspect to dark man dream -sweating, heart pounding...The dream-maker has dispensed with subtle messages to dreamer and now sends images which shake neurological and autonomic nervous systems of dreamers, thereby communicating the urgency of the matter..." and as such he is the "harbinger...(of what the dreamer is) about to discover and begin liberating; a forgotten and captive function of her psyche." (Estés 1992:66-68)

<sup>13</sup> The explanation for this emotive charge is once more dependent on the work of Jung who, when talking of myths and dreams and the western mind, says, "They are not in any sense lifeless or meaningless "remnants"... they still function ...(to) form a bridge between the ways in which we consciously express our thoughts and a more...colourful and pictorial form of expression. It is this form, as well, that appeals directly to feeling and emotion."(Jung 1976: 29-33)

<sup>14</sup> Evolutionism is attributable to Charles Darwin's concept of 'natural selection.' It became a strong contender theory in early anthropology. Formulated by Victorians, it was worked into a hierarchy with the European at the pinnacle of 'civilization' and 'evolution'. The Nazi regime put paid to any such notions with the perpetration of the holocaust.

<sup>15</sup> This is a 'mythic' edge native to the cultures of Africa themselves, for every society has its myths and folklore. There is an emotive charge to mythology as it invariably encapsulates the unconscious archetypes that motivate people or alternatively articulate some essential that cannot be expressed without forfeiting their constellating energy in more prosaic language. The oral genre that is central to 'Africanness' and 'preferred form' is dependent upon this energy or emotive charge. I am of course using the language of Jungian analysis but a reading of the essay on Makhoba will verify the power of myth in local black South African experiences.

<sup>16</sup> "A world view (or worldview) is a term calqued from the German word *Weltanschauung* ... *Welt* is the German word for "world", and *Anschauung* is the German word for "view" or "outlook." It is a concept fundamental to German philosophy and epistemology and refers to a *wide world perception*. Additionally, it refers to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts with it. The German word is also in wide use in English, as well as the translated form *world outlook*." (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worldview>) As a concept world-view was taken up by anthropology.

<sup>17</sup> *Gestalt* is of course a German word for the sum of anything forming a whole, I use it because it is a mode of cognitive perception especially pertinent to the visual. I quote from the web wikipedia: "Gestalt psychology ... is a theory of mind and brain that proposes that the operational principle of the brain is holistic, parallel, and analog, with self-organizing tendencies; or, that the whole is different than the sum of its parts....The Gestalt effect refers to the form-forming capability of our senses, particularly with respect to the visual recognition of figures and whole forms instead of just a collection of simple lines and curves." ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gestalt\\_psychology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gestalt_psychology))

<sup>18</sup> The essay on Trevor Makhoba's oral style within this compilation is an example of this in practice. I also think of the commentary of Francis Colenso, daughter of the famous Zulu supporting bishop of Pietermaritzburg in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, concerning San rock art being "hideous" where even this liberal Victorian European was repelled by the unfamiliar in African expression. (Origin Centre : 2008)

<sup>19</sup> Working in a public gallery/museum means one comes across many such notions concerning African art from the lay public. The most common such being that unschooled art is not worthy of collection.

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<sup>20</sup> I would regard ceramicists Clive Sithole and Nathi Khanyile as examples of artists who in their mainline institutional studies consciously returned to roots, while most self-taught ‘grassroots’ artist like Henry Mshololo and Trevor Makhoba exemplify the ‘instinctual’ use of indigenous idiom, be it in thought or in its application.

<sup>21</sup> Thorpe painted a work of the “Zungu Flight” [JT223] depicting Zungu and his wife seated with herself on the airplane. This was the Zungu couple’s first flight to attend an exhibition of his works at the Menengelli Gallery in Johannesburg in the 1970s. Thorpe would also front the work of traditionalist doll-makers from Ndwedwe, so much so that the anthropologist Eleanor Preston-Whyte coined the title of “culture-broker” for Thorpe when the women made JT 301, a figure of her decorated in beads, something not granted other depictions of white South Africans. (personal communication Preston-Whyte, Durban, 1998)

<sup>22</sup> See the essay on Trevor Makhoba’s oral style and commentary concerning Joseph Manana as a contemporary artist working in this African genre.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted from the opening address by Professor Jeff Guy at the launch of Mkhize’s book in Zulu on the Embo history, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2006 at Campbell Collections, UKZN.

<sup>24</sup> The Embo-Mkhize people hold that historically they are not of the same Nguni stock as the Zulu. They had however been subsumed within the former KwaZulu. Their royal house is to be found at Engolela, Umkomaas district. (personal communication Siyabonga Mkhize, Durban, 2007)

<sup>25</sup> Whenever Campbell Collections had functions in the time of Professors Edgar Sienaert and Yonah Seleti’s terms as Directors, these ‘indigenous intellectuals’ would be requested to speak. Most often they only spoke in Zulu and so the nuances would be lost in translation.

<sup>26</sup> Examples are the normally courteous Khehla Ngobese exploding at the *Abelumbi workshop* 2001, when it was implied he came by his favoured green, gold and black colours, not from his own observation of Africa as he himself claimed, but by copying the ruling ANC colours. This has nothing to do with the artist’s politics as he was pro ANC and anti the IFP from experiences perpetrated by the latter party’s supporters in the 1980s. (personal communication Ngobese, Durban, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Hadebe had visited the poet, who was then a very popular Professor at the University of Natal, Durban, to find Kunene busy writing a poem about nature. Kunene, as a true African, graciously shared his thoughts with Hadebe. (personal communication Hadebe, Durban, 2001)

<sup>28</sup> See the chapter on Azaria Mbatha for more context.

<sup>29</sup> Works like “*Jonah*, 1962”, “*At 11 o’clock, 1962*”, “*Jesus carrying the cross, 1962*” and “*Mapumulo College, 1962*”. Mbatha mentions the first of these as done at Ceza Mission hospital, he having been identified with Jonah by his father in his stubborn desire to leave home. (Mbatha 1998: 57) The Director of the BAT shop in Durban, Marissa Frick Jordan told me that Mbatha’s early work recalled “German cookie cutter designs.” (personal communication Jordan, 1989) I did not take her seriously, not knowing much about this genre until reading the Wikipedia entry on the web. I was quite surprised at their social purpose and quote: “Springerle (from Baden-Württemberg, Germany) cookies originally displayed biblical scenes and were used to teach the illiterate about the Bible. Eventually, the cookies were decorated with secular scenes depicting images of life events, such as marriages and births.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cookie\\_decorating](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cookie_decorating)) It must be recalled that Mbatha was a Lutheran and the missionary Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa combines German, Norwegian and Swedish branches of the church, hence Jordan’s observation could be well-founded, for mission stations were often ‘little parts of the mother/fatherlands.’

<sup>30</sup> Refer to the essay on Azaria Mbatha for a more detailed look at this style as used by him and his fellow early generation of art school students.

<sup>31</sup> The Collections hold a number of these works, the most valuable being the one deriving from H.C. Lugg’s collection as it is documented “*Ntizenyanga Qwabi Ka Qomintaba Eqongqo/Emgolozie Mnyama/Endaweni Ka Mgiya Ka Ziwe (/) U/ Nongoma*” On the occasion of the visit to Nongoma/the visit Duke(?) of Devonshire/June 14, 1939” [MM1949]. An exact duplicate to this one plus the two discussed in the text came from the collection of the photographer Lynn Acutt and the catalogue cards read “...made by Zulu 1937 at Nongoma.” [MM322-329] It would seem that Qwabe was producing the work long after the postcard he based it on was published. The anthropologist Katesa Schlosser has written on the artist in her publication “Bantukünstler in Südafrika” In *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Offprint. 1975.

<sup>32</sup> “Zulu Chief, Dinuzulu” in Killie Campbell Africana Library: Postcards - Zulu. Unfortunately the original has been defaced by the drawing on of glasses and other more rude scribbles. One cannot say if this was done by the irreverent white school-girls who sent and received the original with Christmas wishes for 1908, adding “isn’t he sweet?” in reference to the depicted monarch. What is certain is that one cannot now readily reproduce this particular print without causing offence.

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<sup>33</sup> See [www.planefacts.co.uk](http://www.planefacts.co.uk) on 1930's aviation cards. I owe the source to a visitor to the museum, whose name I have forgotten, but he said he recognized the tiger-moth plane in Qwabe's other panel as an image on a cigarette card. I looked it up and think he could be correct and it is a de Havilland D.H. 82A.

<sup>34</sup> This accords with anthropological concepts of acculturation. No trait or image is borrowed with the source culture's conceptual 'baggage' intact; instead it is reworked so as to be integrated into the world-view of the borrowing culture. The honouring by framing was told me by the Nazareth Baptist Church (Shembe Sect) artist Dominic Cele in connection with portraits of the church leaders/prophets. The Royal Air-force insignia is particularly interesting. In trying to find such an aviation patch I looked at WAC Campbell's brother-in-law, Urban Armstrong's such badges. In the 1914-1918 1<sup>st</sup> World War he was seconded by the SADF to the Royal Air Force, and the patch displays eagle's wings; a clear association between the mighty bird and mankind's earliest flight. Also the museum collections have numerous Zulu made models of airplanes and helicopters in wire, wood and beads. Of these some are simultaneously birds and airplanes. (JT295-296) This evidence shows that the symbolism of flight found in the west is equally that of Zulu thinking.

<sup>35</sup> A cross reference to the Trevor Makhoba essay in this compilation is especially instructive as this considers the influence of the more modern oral genre of *isicathimiya* and *maskanda*.

<sup>36</sup> Dr Joan Conolly of the Indigenous Knowledge Project at the Durban University of Technology did her dissertation on Marcel Jousse's theory. It gives an understanding of the link between Zulu oral narrative style and the characteristic artistic style under discussion. Certainly this explains the puzzling lack of 'life' and 'vibrancy' so often to be seen in artworks that 'lift' the African artistic idiom out of its original context, as for instance in tourist 'kitsch' or in some (only) new African Christian artworks. See Jousse, M. *The anthropology of geste and rhythm: studies in the anthropological laws of human expression and their application in the Galilean oral style tradition* Edited from the original French by Edgar Sienaert and translated collaboration with Joan Conolly. Durban: Univ. Natal Centre for Oral Studies 1997.

<sup>37</sup> *Thefula* (intr.) Speak in the Qwabe fashion, by using 'y' in place of 'l' in practically every instance except in concords of classes 3 and 6." (Doke and. Vilakazi, 1964:789).

<sup>38</sup> Described by these peoples as "talking like a child" and information that has come down through oral tradition. (personal communication Siyabonga Mkhize, Durban, 2008)

<sup>39</sup> In 2008 a number of these peoples filed with the Nhlapo Commission (tasked by Government to consider the position of traditional clan chiefdoms) to be recognized as independent of the Zulu with a status of 'kingship' comparable.

## Chapter 2: Essay 1.

<sup>40</sup> 'Melktert' translates to 'milk tart' and is a milk custard tart usually dusted with cinnamon, a delicacy the perfect making of which is kept a secret in Afrikaans and Cape Malay families. (Branford 1991:196) One very telling tale is that which Mchunu tells of his great desire to taste such a tart. The madam he termed Mrs. Cronjé in his essay (Mchunu 2008: 578) was in fact a very caring albeit strict Afrikaaner lady who considered Mchunu 'her child'. (personal communication Mchunu, Durban, 2007) One day she asked the teenage Mchunu what he would really like, he said he had never tasted a 'melktert' so she made him one. Whenever we were both dejected with personal difficulties, Mchunu would arrive with a store bought 'melktert' and the two of us would commiserate over this tasty treat. This seemingly inconsequential anecdote is given because these are the contradictions and complexities in the lives of South Africans that created the strange 'myths' that form the very basis of the genre of Trevor Makhoba's social commentary paintings. The emotions encapsulated in the complex and subtle messages of his work 'speak' on these levels, an interpretation that would be missed by outsiders to the South African experience.

<sup>41</sup> An 'ONF' is a member of the early colonial families that formed the elite of the former Natal Provincial social set. Usually of British extraction they form a 'class' that it is hard to penetrate. An American equivalent would be a 'WASP' (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant).

<sup>42</sup> And yet I know he wore it as I clearly remember another young waiter, Joseph who was murdered at Dassenhoek wearing one as he appeared in a 'snap-shot' which was taken by my white friend at this residential hotel's tropical gardens that ran down to Kloof George.

<sup>43</sup> See Ivar-Axel Berglund *Zulu Thought patterns and symbolism* (C. Hurst, 1976) for such concepts.

<sup>44</sup> I do not wish to be side-tracked by the complexities of dream interpretation in this chapter. My comment is made because I find that many Zulu have a facility with dream interpretation that is often couched in prophetic terms. It is

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pertinent to Makhoba's work in that Siyabonga Mkhize interpretation of *Garden of History*, 2002 was very similar to a series of prophetic dreams he kindly shared with me.

<sup>45</sup> Many South African whites do this because they seem to hate the challenge of Makhoba's works. By minimizing the artist himself, they perhaps hope to have the pictures removed from view. Some of the nature of this commentary/sarcasm/insult is well known to cartoonists, for instance the likening of abstract painters' techniques to the brush-work of a chimpanzee. To me these responses do not engage debate and can only be considered counter-productive.

<sup>46</sup> Such use of colours seems to be the visual cue for 'reading' this oral genre.

<sup>47</sup> Both breed of dog was popular among white South Africans at a certain period around the 1980s, coinciding with Makhoba's painting time reference. To whites the dogs were more 'fashion' breeds which coincidentally served to protect their suburban homes, while to blacks such dogs were seen as trained by their masters to attack them and their fellow blacks. The breeds are German in origin and therefore not popular with English South Africans, who like their British relatives 'back home', rejected such breeds in a wave of anti German sentiment during and subsequent to the World Wars. One then assumes the madam in the painting, along with her absent husband, are a stereotypical white South African 'class'; *Nouveau riche* with values neither specifically English nor Afrikaans, and unlikely to be well educated. All meaning that there was no 'background' to impart a more rigid moral tone. The real irony of this portrait is that this couple describes one that was the product of the apartheid era's privileging of urbanized whites.

<sup>48</sup> I do not wish to go into Makhoba's personal life, there is detail enough in the essays and reminiscence in the Memorial Exhibition catalogue of 2005. What I do feel is that these difficulties gave the artist's work a veracity of experience on his part as well as arguably a compassion for the foibles of his fellow men.

<sup>49</sup> Perhaps just one of these interactions can be given to indicate my meaning. In 2002 Makhoba came to the museum desperate to sell a work, if paid in cash he was prepared to take half of what he could get if paid by cheque. My Sotho colleague overrode my own negotiations by hauling a thick wad of bank notes from his back pocket, a quarter of his pay packet intended for payments. He explained his action afterwards; essentially that he saw Makhoba was afraid to return home without money and he understood totally. Ironically the topic of the painting "*Siyasha ixbhaxa*" (WCP3297) was of a man who has been drinking and has just beaten his wife, the children upset for their mother. Makhoba said that this was a common township happening and the drinking invariably started through the demoralization of not having any employment and the woman nagging and/or taunting the man as regards his being useless as a provider. The painting continues to draw sympathy from men and anger from women. It is very difficult to know where to hang such a work in a public collection, and it takes some courage to do so because of the ceaseless challenge of its controversial nature.

<sup>50</sup> Author of such works depicting prison life during the USSR's Joseph Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev repressive Regimes, like *The Gulag Archipelago*, *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle*.

<sup>51</sup> "Archetypes: Irreprehensible in themselves, but the effects appear in consciousness as archetypal images and ideas. These are universal patterns or motifs which come from the collective unconscious and are the basic content of religions, mythologies, legends and fairytales. They emerge in individuals through dreams and visions" From James A. Hall *The Jungian Experience: Analysis and Individuation* (Inner City Books 1986, Glossary). Archetypes were postulated by the psychologist Carl Jung and have become part of popular psychology.

<sup>52</sup> Sadly this led to the legal tangles over her charges for copyright to print her husband's works in the Memorial exhibition catalogue, resulting in the exhibition being cancelled, a huge disservice to the memory of Makhoba as artist. Gugu Makhobo died in August 2008. (personal communication Welcome Danca, Durban, 2009)

<sup>53</sup> It must be realized that the University of KwaZulu-Natal had only just started with its transformation policies around this time. Just pre to the Memorial exhibition of 2005 consequent upon the untimely death of Makhoba in 2003, the Director Professor Yonah Seleti, himself African, albeit Zambian had agreed to allow a staff debate concerning the hanging of Makhoba's works. This was instigated by Ndaba Dube, another foreign national from Zimbabwe, but most of the white staff murmured that they were not going to participate. The matter has never been resolved and Mxolisi Mchunu when educational officer still contended with accusations of 'disrespectfulness' if he dared hang the more controversial of Makhoba's paintings. One does need to be somewhat more circumspect in an anomalous place like the Campbell Collections, it was the home of a Old Natal colonial family and is synonymous with the daughter of the family, the founder Killie Campbell, the collector of Africana. Her own staff, some of who's descendents now work for the institution, wore 'kitchen-suits' in service to "Miss Killie." It is a difficult debate as the walls of a neo Cape Dutch one time home, now university research resource/museum/library are arguably unlike those of an 'neutral' exhibition hall of an art gallery.

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<sup>54</sup> These new tastes are to be found in Galleries in the big shopping malls, like Kizo Gallery at Gateway, Umhlanga. Although African themes are represented, they are often by white artists working in established and sophisticated styles on enormous canvasses that no struggling black could ever find a space in his shack or RDP house to even paint on. Obviously the works cater for a niche market and in any case Makhoba and other oral genre artists' works would be dwarfed on the walls of the opulent neo Tuscan, colonial and modernist 'mansions' that occupy the ridges of the KwaZulu-Natal north coast.

<sup>55</sup> Mchunu mentioned having been given a scale to weigh himself by one family as their teenage gardener. His interpretation came from this incident. "I did not even know that a scale was for." To the question if he accepted it he said "I had to and I had to make out as if I was grateful. I don't know what I did with it even-it was a nuisance to take home on the bus."

<sup>56</sup> This is what happened to my copy of E. Krige's *Social System of the Zulu*. I had leant it to a cleaner for his sister's school project. I gave up asking for its return when told that an uncle had decided it was so precious a book, being on the customs of his people, that it must stay with the family. "But don't worry Miss Winters, your book is kept in a special place, it is safe." I did not have the heart to ask if the old man was literate, thinking of the similar fate of many a bible among early Dutch, Boer families of the Cape.

<sup>57</sup> These characteristics of whites kept coming up in current black representations for whites as *Abelumbi* or wizards during the workshop for artists at the *Untold tales of magic: Abelumbi exhibition*. Durban Art Gallery 2001. There is no gainsaying that to a white person they are extremely distressing and I doubt I could have handled the implications had it not been for my knowledge of history and anthropology, helped along with humour on the part of both myself and my kindly black friends and colleagues.

### Chapter 3: Essay 2.

<sup>58</sup> When Mbatha came to South Africa in 1996 for his exhibition at the African Art Centre, I was designated to show him the Campbell Collections, UKZN. What struck me about Mbatha corroborates my assessment of the artist as being deeply considered in character: Firstly his statement concerning the burnt relief-carved panels by N. Qwabe that art critics like Esmé Berman (Berman 1983:281 & 291) suggest to have been his source for the stark contrast of light and dark in his linocuts: When I mentioned this he appeared surprised as if consciously seeing these panels for the first time, he then feel silent while looking at them intently, finally conceding that in his early years he was surrounded by Zulu artifacts and maybe he could have been influenced unbeknown to himself. The other was in looking at a photograph album of Zulu interest that belonged to Gerard Bhengu's patron, Dr Max Kholer when at Centocow Mission and Tabankhulu in the Transkei. Again Mbatha looked intently and queried if he could get copies especially of the Zulu monarchs? I record this aside because it confirms the artist's predilection to an uncommonly intense reflexive looking and in this case, looking at his own Zulu cultural heritage where familiarity could make anyone blasé.

<sup>59</sup> Although Mbatha did study art at University College Stockholm, Sweden, the artist's education was wider, he did a degree in Social Science at the University of Lund, Sweden and then a teaching course at Teachers College, Larhogskolan, Malmo, Sweden. His work was not confined to Fine Art, he worked as consultant in Aachen, Germany on matters of African development and education. (Martin 1996: Biography) This broad education and experience indicates to what extent the artist can draw on other than traditionalist Zulu thought in his imagery.

<sup>60</sup> The name a Zulu child is given is very meaningful to the adult Zulu as it is thought to affect his/her future destiny and character as well as reflect his/her family history or propensities of forefathers. Traditionally the name was given by the father who announced it publicly (Krige E. 1936:73-75 ), although there are certainly cases of a mother dreaming the name of her unborn child and it is also often that a child has an English name with the same meaning as his Zulu names (personal communication Mrs. Hadebe, Estcourt, 2003) as did Azaria Mbatha in his other names, "Celumusa Jabulisi." (Mbatha, A. 2004: 1)

<sup>61</sup> Black children often perceived parental advice that countered obvious political activity in favour of work to feed the family as a form of collusion by the older generations with the Nationalist Government's apartheid policies. (personal communication Dingani Mthethwa, Durban, 2000)

<sup>62</sup> The translations from Zulu and the biblical passage references are suggested ones. They were arrived at by means of discussion with Zulu speakers and biblical reading. (*The Holy Bible: New International Version* Bible Society of South Africa 1981, and personal communication Patrick Ngubane, Durban, 1997 and Dingani Mthethwa, Durban, 1998)

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<sup>63</sup> This image of a Levite Priest is one possible source of the horn-shape hat and the little squares on the gowns worn by Moses as depicted by Mbatha. The biblical text reads, "These are the garments they are to make; a breast-piece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so they may serve me as priests. Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen.... (The) Breast-piece... is to be square...folded double...then mount four rows precious stones on it....twelve stones for the tribes of Israel...(Further) Attach the sacred diadem to the turban." (Exodus 28:3-21, 29:6)

<sup>64</sup> This information came from a Lutheran pastor and it is therefore very applicable. Subsequently it was confirmed by a Catholic Zulu who used the same book, unaltered but a much later reprint, to read his illiterate mother her favorite bible stories during the 1980s. (personal communication Mthunzi Zungu, Durban, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> Listening to a Zulu translation of the scenes in *The story of Moses, 1963*, in which the immediacy of the commands lead to an enactment of the actual scenes is perhaps the most convincing proof of Mbatha's claim that it was his father's narrative skill which was the primary inspiration of his pictorial imagery. This translation also suggested a need to understand Zulu idiom and thinking to more fully understand the images. I thank my ex-colleague Dingani Mthethwa in particular for his knowledge of Zulu oral poetry and for his translations. Without his input I would have continued to see the work as essentially one of visual patterning.

<sup>66</sup> There are a number of reasons for the reliance upon the work of Ivar-Axel Berglund. His study is arguably the most complete one concerning itself with contemporary lay Zulu symbolism and thinking called upon in times of life-crises. It also relies upon Zulu persons own interpretation and understanding of their culture. (Berglund 1976: 19, 13) To the author a symbol is a vehicle whereby it is possible to voice thought, experience and concepts intelligibly. (Berglund 1976:18) Berglund is from Lutheran missionary stock, he is listed as a Reverend, lecturer and member of staff of the Mapumulo Theological College in 1967. (Mapumulo Theological College 1967:177) It is significant that he lectured on traditional Zulu thinking at Mapumulo and contributed to African Christian theology at a time when Mbatha was associated with the College. His book was first published in Swedish as Volume No. XX11 in *Studia Missionalia Upsaliensia* in 1975. Such sympathetic attempts at removing Euro-centric Christian bias, indicate that the Lutheran church were pro-active in their attempts to understand indigenous African culture and this fact may well have contributed to Mbatha's full development as an artist.

<sup>67</sup> The Campbell Collections, UKZN has acquired artwork over a period of time from artists in KwaZulu-Natal. Contact with the artists indicate the number who are both artist and practising diviner or who were at some time 'called' to become diviners or prophets by their ancestral-spirits. Lumuna Madela, Mziwhakhe Mbatha, Tito Zungu, Henry Mashololo, Kehla Ngobese, Asmon Mzila and Thembi Mchunu are some who come to mind.(Campbell Collections: Natal Artist Index) An artist may be called by the ancestral-spirits by becoming disorientated and sick as happens in the case of traditional diviners, claiming either that the instruction to create artworks comes from the ancestral-spirits as part of healing, or that they are creating art under the direct 'muse' of an ancestral-spirit. Artists are often very alone at this time and take their cue from the world of the ancestors, rather than from their fellow men. (personal communication Mshololo 1989 and Ngobese, Durban, 1988) Ordinary Zulu persons when confronted by artworks of evident originality invariably declare the artist must have been instructed by their ancestral-spirits. (personal communication Z. Phungula, Durban, 1988).

#### Chapter 4: Essay 3.

<sup>68</sup> Both men were from the BaKoni clan of the BaPedi or North Sotho from the Bushbuckridge area of Mapumalanga. (Addleson. 2006: 16) It is said that the name BaKoni is a 'Sotho-ised' form of Nguni (the Zulu and Swazi are North Nguni) and those identifying themselves as BaKoni indicated they came from the general area of Swaziland or northern Natal, sometime in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their culture became indistinguishable from that of other Sotho within their adopted homeland and they took the totem *Phuthi* (Duiker). One group of BaKoni assumed the name of *Kgaga*, meaning Pangolin. The BaKoni live with other BaPedi in a chain of chiefdoms that lie along the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountains around Bushbuckridge and Swaziland. During the 1970-80s, the Nationalist Government declared the area a 'Bantustan' of Lebowa, with the capital at Pietersburg, now renamed Polokwane within Mapumalanga (former eastern Transvaal). (Hammond-Tooke 1982: 1-3)

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<sup>70</sup> The following is an extract of the Nationalist Government's response to the Fagan Report of July 1948, which mooted African integration in towns was inevitable in terms of economy: "...the Fagan Commission report reads like a document from another world: ...so fantastic do its findings sound - "A settled, permanent native population..." How could such a thing be contemplated? The native is, and must always be in the town to serve his European master: that is his purpose and function, that is what God created him for. If he cannot accept this position, let him return to the Reserves where he truly belongs and where he can develop along his own lines." (Huddleston 1957:188)

<sup>71</sup> At initial writing of this I myself had only intuited this aspect of Shilakoe's character but can now argue from a more informed stand-point thanks to Philippa Hobbs's excellent research interviews with the artist's Rorke's Drift teachers, in "Prints, prophecy and the limits of popular testimony in Shilakoe's work" that appeared in the same catalogue as my own original essay, namely *Cyprian Mpho Shillakoe revisited* (Durban Art Gallery, 2006). I regard this as testimony to the value of such exhibition catalogues as they serve in the reviewing of art history.

<sup>72</sup> I refer in the text to Shilakoe's grandmother, so here I will insert a little concerning Dan Rakgoathe's paternal grandmother. Langhan mentions her as living to over 100, a woman who retold her own grandmother's creation tales, and one whose recollections "would begin with phrases such as, 'It happened when a swarm of locusts destroyed the crops, that was when I was a little girl..." (Langhan 200:9) My point being that this is the language/idiom of origins and security, and while certainly emotional it is neither sentimental, insignificant and nor can it be discounted as a reason for any artist to have strong cultural affinities. So saying, it could also be that which so annoyed Gowenius as sentimentalist in Shilakoe's expressions, mentioned by Hobbs (2006).

<sup>73</sup> For my knowledge of this I have sat in the audience among academics at lectures on Indigenous Knowledge Systems given by visiting lecturers of the relevant post 1994 Government Department. The commentary of these University based historians indicates their querying of aspects of this policy.

<sup>74</sup> I quote James Leatt, Theo Kneifel and Klaus Nürnberger, *Contending ideologies in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philips 1986):

"In black consciousness thinking, the history of South Africa can be interpreted as a dialectical process. From the thesis of white racism and the antithesis of black solidarity a synthesis will emerge: the true humanity without regard to race or colour. In the past, it was argued, the ANC and the PAC had chosen the strategy of confrontation, first through moral persuasion, then non-violent extra-parliamentary campaigns, including boycotts, strikes and stay-at-homes, and finally armed insurgency. The BCM believed these strategies were premature and thus doomed to fail. Instead, black consciousness held that in order to play a positive role in the liberation struggle, blacks had to develop a sense of solidarity through the concept of group power, and in this way build a broad base from which to counter the divide-and-rule strategies of whites." (Leatt, et al. 1986: 107-108)

<sup>75</sup> Postmodernism is a school of thinking applied through various disciplines, from arts to social sciences. It developed from modernism or modernity, during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is known for its approach to knowledge "rejecting boundaries between high and low forms of art, ...rigid genre distinctions... (and) ... grand narratives, (it) favors "mini-narratives," stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts..." (Klages 2005: <http://www.colorado.edu>) In its methodology, Postmodernism tends toward "... interpretation (that is)... introspective and anti-objectivist which is a form of individualized understanding. It is more a vision than data observation. In anthropology interpretation gravitates toward narrative and centers on listening to and talking with the other..." "There is no final meaning for any particular sign, no notion of unitary sense of text, no interpretation can be regarded as superior to any other." Further, "Postmodernity concentrates on the tensions of difference and similarity erupting from processes of globalization: the accelerating circulation of people, the increasingly dense and frequent cross-cultural interactions, and the unavoidable intersections of local and global knowledge." (Weiss and Wesley 2005: <http://www.as.va.edu>)

<sup>76</sup> I am speaking of the colonial era's missionary instituted Christianity. While certainly the Christian message is for all men, it nevertheless took decades before an African Christianity was formed. Meanwhile Christianity was confused with western civilization, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and all that was of traditional culture, in particular the ancestors and polygamy, were seen as pagan and was often declared a forbidden practice on orthodox Christian mission stations. (Winters 1998:90)

<sup>77</sup> "**Rosicrucianism** (symbol: the Rose Cross) is the theology of a secret society of mystics, allegedly formed in late medieval Germany, holding a doctrine "built on esoteric truths of the ancient past", which, "concealed from the average man, provide insight into nature, the physical universe and the spiritual realm."<sup>[1]</sup> Between 1607 and 1616, two anonymous manifestos were published, first in Germany and later throughout Europe.<sup>[2]</sup> These were *Fama Fraternitatis* RC (The Fame of the Brotherhood of RC) and *Confessio Fraternitatis* (The Confession of the Brotherhood of RC). The influence of these documents, presenting a "most laudable Order" of mystic-philosopher-



doctors and promoting a "Universal Reformation of Mankind", gave rise to an enthusiasm called by its historian Dame Frances Yates the "Rosicrucian Enlightenment".<sup>[3]</sup> In later centuries many esoteric societies have claimed to derive their doctrines, in whole or in part, from the original Rosicrucians. Several modern societies, which date the beginning of the Order to earlier centuries, have been formed for the study of Rosicrucianism and allied subjects. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosicrucianism>)

<sup>78</sup> See endnote 1.

<sup>79</sup> Here I am referencing texts such as A.M. Duggan-Cronin 1931 *The Bantu tribes of South Africa: Volume II: The Suto-Chuana tribes* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1931) and Peter Becker *Inland tribes of Southern Africa* (London: Granada, 1979). On the surface, it would appear that Rakgoathe came from too educated and Christian a home to be initiated, his father Ephraim Rakgoathe being a deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal church. (Langhan 2000:15) Nevertheless, Rakgoathe's initiatory status remains unknown, while Shilakoe was circumcised but did not go through initiation school (see endnote 7). Traditional initiation is not a subject that is readily discussed outside of the home and men never talk of the actual experience other than with their particular initiation-school members. Peter Magubane in *Vanishing cultures of South Africa* (Cape Town: Struik, 1998) mentions that for the BaSotho there was a decrease in initiations during the colonial years but, "In recent years it has seen a major resurgence, and most young people today are initiated." (Magubane 1998:109) Indeed it seems that most Christian and educated young men from any of the cultures that had traditional initiations are once again being initiated. In conversation it appears that this is mostly because they cannot go back to their rural communities, as the pressure to be initiated is so great that they are excluded from most activities and treated like children. There may have been a time in which Christian parents stopped initiation, but it does seem from Shilakoe's story (see endnote 7) that the pressure to be circumcised remained a reality. Very likely this was because of the threat of social ostracisation. (personal communication Paseka Nkhoesa, Zweli Nadayi, Mwelele Cele, ,Durban, 2004)

<sup>80</sup> Addleson did ask Shilakoe's sister Emily Mahlangu if Shilakoe had gone through initiation according to traditional rites, and was told: "She told me that because her mother was a nurse, he was circumcised in hospital, but that neither of his parents would discuss this with any of the children. He was circumcised during the Dennilton years and so was already an adult,- and before he went to study at RD (Rorke's Drift)." (personal communication Addleson, Durban, 2005)

<sup>81</sup> I also base my supposition as to the close tie upon the use of this praise-name, it could be a clan or tribal appellation or an initiatory school name. Even if the two men were not 'brothers' via initiation, or only Rakgoathe was initiated or alternatively, like Shilakoe uninitiated, it would remain true that Sotho cultures which do have imitations place a high premium on male bonding. It seems to me that the two men's age difference of nine years, is no deterrent to their being initiatory age-mates, as it is known that Sotho will initiate males across a generational span of youths. (Magubane 1998:109)

<sup>82</sup> When my colleague, Mxolisi Mchunu was researching Zulu masculinity he told me that Zulu men call a man who is 'weak' or 'harmless' in behavior, "a woman", it is possible that the BaKoni hold similar views and that this is the real cultural context of this dream. (personal communication Mchunu, Durban, 2004)

<sup>83</sup> Langhan tells of Rakgoathe's fascination with the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung's writings on synchronicity, a philosophy which in itself takes away the randomness of circumstances merely happening and grants life a deeper connectedness. (Langhan 2000:33)

<sup>84</sup> My reference is to my own circa 1950s family photographs of Ndebele farm working women in the Delmas area of Mapumalanga. These women are dressed in Mothers Union or *Manyano* uniforms in order to attend meetings known locally as "Black Thursday." The name is a reference to the colouring of the uniforms (black hat or 'doek' (head kerchief), white crocheted collar or tunic top, and black shirt and skirt). This dress is almost exactly that worn by Emily Dibakoane, probably at the same period, and has been fairly formalized as the contemporary dress of the Mothers Union of the Anglican church in South Africa. *Photographs of the Khosana and Vilakazi families in the Bertram-Winters albums* (author's collection) and painting by Julia Skeen, *The church goes, 1983* (Doris Sithole and Kathleen Mgozi of St Agnes Anglican church of the Holy Spirit, Mother's Union, Botha's Hill) (Campbell Collections,UKZN :WCP 2441).

<sup>85</sup> I also make this assumption based on the same Ndebele women depicted in their "Black Thursday" dress mentioned in endnote 11. Martha Vilakazi was the leader of the Mothers Union but she had been born a daughter of a traditionalist Khosana headman at Waaikraal, Mapumalanga, circa 1896. She retained her respect for her African culture and her grandsons and daughters were initiated in Ndebele initiatory schools. The Ndebele are a cultural mix of Sotho and Nguni, as is the BaKoni culture of Rakgoathe and Shilakoe (see endnote 1). Mrs. Vilakazi also believed that one should never leave the area one was born in because this was where God had given one's ancestors

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a sacred trust, if one had to leave then one ought to return as an elderly person so as to die and be buried there to join the ever-present world of the ancestors. (personal communication Janet Winters, Rosetta, 2005)

<sup>86</sup> I have dealt with issues of African Christianity and the orthodox Christian churches' responses to the issues involved in "African roots in the works of Azaria Mbatha" in *Azaria Mbatha: Retrospective Exhibition* (Durban Art Gallery, 1998).

<sup>87</sup> I insert a suitably sarcastic extract from John Scott's news-piece of the 14<sup>th</sup> Sept 2004, "Our Botha babies showed Australia the way with its Costello kids" in *The Cape Times*:

"Many years ago a man known best as M C Botha, who had the title Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, urged all married white South Africans to have a baby for the republic...."

This was in addition to any babies they might have had, anyway, for themselves.... The idea was that we had to start reproducing ourselves more quickly, otherwise the blacks would outnumber us by an even greater percentage than they already did. ...

In spite of the general mirth, some of the party faithful took his appeal to heart, and there was a spate of laatlammetjies within a year, to swell the volk's thinning ranks. This was before the advent of television in South Africa, so there wasn't much else to do in the evenings, anyway. ... They were known as "Botha babies."

<sup>88</sup> At the time of the "Botha babies" incident, there were many altercations between the races in regard to this matter. I can recall in the early 1980's an incident when a Zulu colleague's fertile wife had just born him child number eleven, and a white colleague tried to make this father agree to put an end to this burgeoning family for "reasons of financial costliness", only for the Zulu colleague to 'discipline' the disrespectful intruder with the curt rejoinder "If God gives me these children, who am I to turn them away!"

<sup>89</sup> *Thefifi* or *sefifi* ('heat'), the latter is the standard North Sotho version and the first is the BaKoni/Kgaga rendition of the word. (Hammond-Tooke 1981: 119)

<sup>90</sup> There are variations in spelling of the words for these Sotho groups, depending upon the date of the reference and the particular author's compliance with standard modern spelling. As far as can be deduced the correct spelling of North Sotho words is taken from the dominant BaPedi community's dialect. It is much like the word "Chuana" being the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century spelling of the now standardized "Tswana." (Duggan-Cronnin 1931: 33-44)

<sup>91</sup> When I use the word "MoSotho" I am referring to a single person who identifies themselves as from one of the Sotho cultures, the plural "BaSotho" would then refer to the entire group. This is akin to referring to an "Englishman", versus "Englishmen" or "The English."

<sup>92</sup> Of interest is the fact that because travelers are in a state of contagion they can bring ill-fortune, Sotho villages are known for their numerous footpaths which are thought to lessen some of the effects of passing on such contagion. (Hardie, 1994: 38)

<sup>93</sup> My Zulu colleague, Mxolisi Mchunu, who I mentioned this to, told me that in his research of the KwaShange violence of the 1980s-90s even burnt homes as well as those of owners who re-located have been left intact for 18 years or more. The reason is that invariably such homes contain the graves of the forefathers. I also recall my childhood fascination at Ndebele traditional homes abandoned and never taken on by any other family and being told by Ndebele servants that the homes are also the place of the ancestors. Subsequently I have known African friends whose entire family now live in town but who have 'empty' homes in rural areas to which they return for ceremonies. When I used the word "empty" I was corrected, "because the ancestors reside there." (personal communication Zondi family, Durban, 2009)

<sup>94</sup> I once lent a camera to a Zulu work-mate who had then recently lost a family member. I had heard a lot about his mother and really wished to see a picture of her, but although there were other images which he readily shared, there was none of his mother and my involuntary exclamation "Oh but where's your mom?" made him explain that she could not be photographed because she was still in mourning. Only my obvious ignorance of such African norms elicited an explanation regarding the customary understanding of the contagion of death and its being symbolized by mourning dress and the necessity of lifting it by means of ritual sacrifices. (personal communication Mthunzi Zungu, Durban, 2005)

<sup>95</sup> "White guilt refers to the concept of individual or collective guilt often said to be felt by some White people for the racist treatment of people of color by Whites both historically and presently.<sup>[1]</sup> The term is generally used in pejorative way (and in a partisan fashion within American political circles). White guilt has been described as one of several psychosocial costs of racism for White individuals along with the ability to have empathic reactions towards racism, and fear of non-Whites.<sup>[2]</sup>" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White\\_guilt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_guilt))

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<sup>96</sup> Of interest is that the words “whence you come and hence shall return” is from the African concept that the realm of the ancestors is whence the living emanate, while the last words of the sentence “in order to come back again, many times” conforms to the esoteric (when found in the west, as against the east, where it is a mainline Hindu belief) doctrine of reincarnation espoused by Rosicrucians, Theosophists and Anthroosophists like Rudolf Steiner; making this work an exceptional example of Rakgoathe’s syncretism as indicated by Leeb-du Toit.

<sup>97</sup> Donvé Langan *The unfolding man: the life and art of Dan Rakgoathe* (Cape Town: David Philips, 2000) gives many incidents of dreams taken seriously because they are thought to derive from the ancestors. In addition I mention a twenty-something MoSotho student studying in Durban and away from his home in Gaborone, Botswana. When he visited the museum our conversation turned to the change in weather, which he said he had predicted because he had dreamt of, “shimmering pythons” and this plus his goose-bumps meant it would rain! I found his prediction so fascinating that I asked if he still accessed his ancestors via dreams, and was told that his whole family still did so, even to the point that they were in cell-phone contact concerning their mutual dream contents. Such concerns as a car’s colour being seen as inauspicious in a dream along with ‘reality-checks’ such as minor accidents, will warrant a family consultation as to the sense of selling the car so as to forestall any further misfortune. Incidentally the young man’s family were orthodox Christian church members but this was not seen to alter their attachment to dreams or their ancestors. (personal communication Armond Mogatwe, 2005) This does not mean that every African person is given to leading an experiential life informed by his dreams, I have known African friends who have deliberately turned away from their family’s emphasis on dreams; one man told me that he had a very negative association with dreams because they were so readily referenced in his home in Mputuland. This was not because the dreams were considered misleading but rather that ‘big’ or significant dreams affected the atmosphere of the home to such an extent that even his uncle was recalled from the goldmines to deal with matters raised in them. (personal communication Dingani Mthethwa, Durban, 2000)

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