

Visual Trauma: Representations of African Bodies in the 1983 *Contre Apartheid* Exhibition

MA Thesis

Department of English

University of the Western Cape



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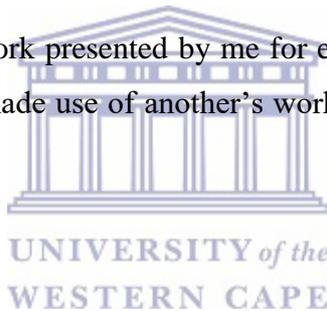
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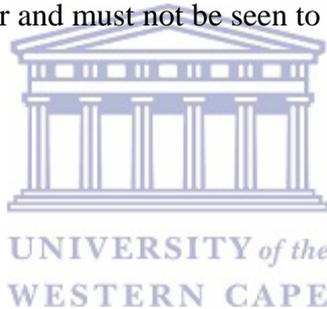
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Abstract

After the 1976 student uprising, South Africa entered a period of increased violent state repression. The struggle against apartheid also became increasingly globalised, as can be seen in the UN resolution and the rise of various international anti-apartheid organisations. My thesis looks at the various ways in which art was used as a response to the crisis of late apartheid in the 1980s, focusing on a landmark international exhibition, the Art Contre Apartheid exhibition which opened in Paris on 1983. It examines the context and history of the Art Contre Apartheid collection, and follows its path to its current location at the Mayibuye Archive at the University of the Western Cape, where it mostly languishes in packing crates. My research locates its analysis of the works in broader debates around art and politics during the struggle years in South Africa, but also to highlights the continuities and contrasts between international responses to apartheid, and local struggle art produced in the period surrounding the launch of the exhibition. Some of most compelling works of art in the collection depict the human form, and register acts of torture. The analysis focuses specifically on depictions of a fragmentation and dismemberment of the human body. Drawing on Elaine Scarry's argument about the limitations of language as an adequate response to trauma, my research develops an analysis of these works that demonstrates how the body becomes a privileged site in which violent political contestations are made visible. The thesis also deals extensively with the 'absence of form', which highlights the various instances in the ACA collection where abstract art was used as a signifier of pain, and thus the unspeakable effects of apartheid.

Keywords

The Art Contre Apartheid collection

Art

Apartheid

South African Resistance Art

Jacques Derrida

Albie Sachs

Sue Williamson

Trauma

Torture

Nelson Mandela



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Chapter 1: Introduction

The collection offered here will form the basis of a future museum against apartheid. But first, these works will be presented in a traveling exhibition to be received by museums and other cultural facilities throughout the world. The day will come – and our efforts are joined to those of the international community aiming to hasten that day's arrival – when the museum thus constituted will be presented as a gift to the first free and democratic government of South Africa to be elected by universal suffrage. Until then, the Association of Artists of the World against Apartheid will assume, through the appropriate legal, institutional and financial structures, the trusteeship of the works.

Antonio Saura and Ernest Pignon-Ernest

The 1980s saw an escalation of political tension in South Africa as rising popular resistance against apartheid was met by increased state repression and the imposition of draconian states of emergencies. During 1985, 'a state of emergency was declared in South Africa in response to renewed outbreaks of violent resistance...[and] the police were again given wide-ranging powers for the forceful suppression of popular protest, including the detention and interrogation of suspects without trial' (Peffer 63). More importantly, this period saw the globalization of the fight against racism in South Africa, with numerous anti-apartheid organizations being established world-wide. This thesis provides a detailed analysis of one such global initiative to protest against apartheid, namely the "Association of Artists of the World against

Apartheid" and one of its landmark events, namely the 'Art Contre Apartheid' (ACA) collection, which was organized in 1983, after its creation had been planned for 12 years. As reflected in their introductory comment cited above, the primary purpose of the collection was to form a stance of opposition against apartheid, which the organizers refer to as a museum against apartheid.

Of particular importance is the fact that the creators refer to ACA as a ‘traveling exhibition’, thus establishing its mobility and freedom. Here, the collection itself is portrayed as an instrument of change and democracy, as its message against apartheid was founded on precepts that directly contradicted the racist regime. The creators of ACA had a keen sense of futurity, and their work anticipated a democratic South Africa long before the country had reached such a point. Interestingly, the collection made use of rich images of the human form in order to express this anticipation and protest against apartheid. The following section will provide background to this collection, outlining the mission which the creators and the contributing artists alike sought to undertake. This paves the way for a discussion of the dominant narrative of human suffering that is evident in the collection, forming a visual language for traumatic experiences under apartheid.

1.1 Background to the Art Contre Apartheid Collection

As the title of the exhibition indicates, this collection was an intervention in the South African political and cultural sphere during the 1980s, bringing together a group of international artists dedicated to opposing a system premised on racism and injustice. This international collection, which was organised by Antonio Saura and Ernest Pignon-Ernest, boasts the works of leading artists hailing from 30 different countries globally, and consists of 150 paintings and sculptures, as well as literary and essayistic contributions. It comprises the work of 85 artists, a few of whom are amongst the world’s most well-known international artists of the twentieth century. The collection consists of various types of media, namely painting, literature, print, photography and photo montages.

This collection also includes Jacques Derrida’s well-known essay entitled ‘Racism’s Last Word’ (1983), which will be looked at more closely in chapter two.

Art Contre Apartheid features the work of celebrated international artists such as Ernest Pignon-Ernest, Christian Boltanski, Sol LeWitt, Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Donald Judd, Joe Tilson, Robert Motherwell, Claes Oldenberg, Tom Phillips, Lucebert, Larry Rivers, Pierre Soulages, and South African artist, Gavin Jantjes. Among these names are a few of the leading artists of our time, and their contributions to this collection are often the only examples of their art in South Africa. Works by artists such as Lichtenstein and Rauschenberg are moreover highly valuable on the international art market, easily fetching auction prices in the region of 5,000,000 – 7,000,000 USD. For this reason, amongst several others which the thesis will discuss, the collection is a highly valuable and significant South African art resource.

For the purpose of the thesis, it is important to note that the ACA collection came together on a voluntary basis, with artists donating their works, presumably out of an ethical commitment to stand against political injustices and demonstrate solidarity with South Africans that were suffering as a result of apartheid. As reflected in the ACA catalogue, the organizers of the collection, Antonio Saura, Spanish artist and writer, and Ernest Pignon-Ernest, a French artist who rose to prominence in the early 1960s, state that a

small group of artists joined the creators that have already committed themselves to our cause and with those that we thought were still to be convinced: we ourselves approached a number of American, European and African artists. Our objective was to bring together the largest possible range of sensibilities, cultures and artistic experiences thus confirming the universal character of condemnation. (Saura and Pignon-Ernest 13)

As the thesis will discuss, the ‘universal character of condemnation’ (13) which the creators refer to here suggests that the fight against apartheid had become a global effort. The creators emphasize that the ACA collection was intended to use artistry to create a visual language to

speak out against apartheid's injustices. The ACA collection is a document of the growing internationalization of anti-apartheid movements in the 1980s. According to Håkan Thörn,

Given the number of people that participated in the transnational anti-apartheid movement, as well as its geographical dispersion and its achievements, there is no doubt that it was one of the most influential social movements during the post-war era. In addition to the South African movement organizations, the transnational anti-apartheid network connected thousands of groups and organizations, including solidarity organizations, unions, churches, women's, youth and student organizations in more than 100 countries. For example, only in Britain more than 184 local groups were affiliated to the British AAM in 1990; and its list of international contacts included anti-apartheid solidarity organizations in 37 countries. (Thörn 5)

Thus, the highly organized system of apartheid was faced with an increasingly globalized resistance amongst millions of activists. The anti-apartheid movement spanned from the late 1950s to the 1990s, and organized cultural, consumer and sports boycotts, marches and political initiatives that worked together to protest against the apartheid government and its racist laws. The work of the ACA artists may therefore be seen in the context of the activism of millions of other activists that sought to see a political change in South Africa.

Several of the artists involved in the creation of this collection engaged in social and political struggles within their own personal contexts and physical spaces. Gavin Jantjes, for example, the only South African artist to contribute to the collection, is considered a prominent contributor to resistance movements within South Africa. For a large part of the 1970s, Gavin Jantjes was an active and militant critic of the apartheid regime. Jantjes' passion for political liberation and equality may also be aligned with the work of another ACA artist, namely Lucebertus Jacobus Swaanswijk (Lucebert). Lucebert is often referred to as the poet of the CoBra group, which was a highly influential group of artists. The CoBra group was formed in Paris and consisted of thirty members. The group was named after the founders' cities of

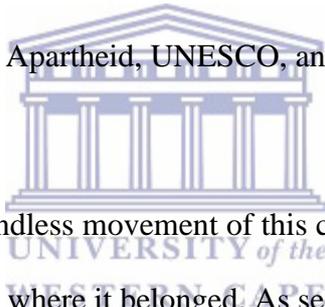
origin – Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. The artists and poets that contributed to this movement were known for their spontaneous and vigorously rebellious style, and were primarily inspired by the art of children, primitive art forms and the mentally ill. Using distinctly intuitive methods, Lucebert and his peers created art premised on the devastation which plagued Europeans following World War II. According to Fredika Van Elburg, ‘the one thing they were sure of was that poetry had to change in response to the drastically altered situation after World War II’ (94). The art created by the CoBra group was therefore highly politicized, emphasizing the devastating effects of war. It is therefore no surprise that Lucebert created works that challenged its viewers and engaged with political matters with vigour, passion and conviction.

Apart from the activism of artists such as Jantjies and Lucebert, all the contributing artists were in a sense engaging in a form of political activism; their contribution to ACA was a political intervention in the growing international campaign against apartheid in the 1980s. ACA must therefore be analysed as a response to the escalating tensions present within South Africa during the 1980s following the Soweto uprising in 1976, and increased state repression and brutality in its aftermath. Therefore, the visual representations of the struggle against apartheid will be examined as documents in which the political and the aesthetic became intertwined. The thesis will explore the tensions inherent in this body of overtly political art, and aims to consider the sometimes uneven ways in which explicit political purpose and aesthetic effect became ways of visual meaning making.

As will be expanded upon within the duration of the chapter, several of the works within the collection were considered to be propagandistic, while others were so void of any political commentary that they seemed to lack meaning or relevance concerning the South African political context into which the collection entered. The varying perspectives visualized within

ACA work together to create a body of works that are rich in commentary that complicated their cultural and political role within South Africa.

The collection was exhibited for the first time at the Fondation Nationale des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques, Paris in 1983, as the repressive political conditions in the country for which it was intended were not conducive. The collection includes two paintings of Nelson Mandela, who was imprisoned at the time, and whose image was strictly censored in South Africa. It also displays images of police brutality and torture under the apartheid government, and would therefore not have been allowed exhibition rights under National Party rule. After its Paris premiere, the collection travelled to forty different countries, including Spain, Finland, Denmark, Tunisia, Italy and West Germany. ACA had been supported by the United Nations and its Special Committee against Apartheid, UNESCO, and the governments of Finland, Sweden and Norway.



However, despite the seemingly endless movement of this collection, it was ultimately intended to travel to South Africa, where it belonged. As seen in the introductory excerpt by Antonio Saura and Ernest Pignon-Ernest, ACA was designed to serve as a gift to South Africa once it became a democratic country. This was the case because the content displayed throughout the collection opposed the actions and leadership of a government that made injustices lawful. Ernest and Saura also contend that the ACA collection served as a ‘traveling exhibition’ until 1996, informing the world about the injustices which were taking place within South Africa during the 1980s.

In an attempt to manage the travels of the art works and see to the exhibition’s eventual home-coming to South Africa, a ‘Cultural Foundation’ against apartheid was established as a trustee of the collection; Nelson Mandela was designated as an honorary trustee, even though he was still imprisoned at the time. With the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994,

the conditions for the exhibition's travel to its intended destination were finally in place. Nelson Mandela, who had been named President of South Africa during the period of the publication of the catalogue created for the opening of the ACA collection in South Africa in 1995, welcomed the collection upon its return. The following statement is worth citing in full, as it outlines the importance of the collection and its role as a visual commentary on a highly contested political period in South African history. Mandela acknowledged the importance of the collection, and its contribution to the fight against apartheid, stating the following in a foreword to the ACA catalogue:

The works of art contained in the 'Art against Apartheid' collection bear testimony to the concrete support that was given to the people of South Africa in a crucial stage of their struggle for freedom and democracy. Through the years the conscience of the world gave voice in many ways to its revulsion at the system of apartheid. Concerts were given on the stages of the world, demonstrations were held, leaders were honoured for their brave actions. But it was through the foresight and efforts of two artists, Ernest Pignon Ernest and Antonio Saura, who united artists from around the globe, that the visual arts, as a collective force, showed its unity with the people of South Africa. The collection reminds us of the solidarity of mankind and the contribution that the visual arts can make in fulfilling human ideals.

(Mandela 3)

Mandela acknowledged the international efforts of artists and activists, stating that the collection bears testimony to the power of the collective, and thus how art is able to articulate a common humanity. The arrival of the collection in South Africa was a watershed moment that did not only demonstrate the power of resistance but also proved that artists from all over the world had been capable of participating in a global movement that was ultimately able to triumph over apartheid. Perhaps more importantly, in light of the discussion which the thesis will engage in, the efforts employed by the ACA artists demonstrated the power of the

‘contribution that the visual arts can make in fulfilling human ideals’ (Mandela 3). It is upon this premise that the thesis aims to highlight the powerful ability of the visual arts to communicate social justice ideas, and its ability to do so in a distinctive visual language.

Barbara Masekela, ambassador of South Africa in France and contributor to the ACA catalogue, agreed with Madiba:

This collection is a forthright reaffirmation that, yes, among the manifold purposes of art is that it can contribute to the freedom of human beings. The multitude of voices that were raised against apartheid, raised for the freedom of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners were without equivocation those of painters, singers, sculptors, composers, actors and all other artists you can ever imagine. In Denmark, Sweden, Finland, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Senegal, Zimbabwe – all over – there were festivals of music, art exhibitions, organised to say NO! to apartheid. (Masekela 5)

The statements made by Madiba and Masekela acknowledge the artistic interventions made on their behalf. In addition to the symbolic value and power of the collection, ACA was brought to the country at a time where the costs of acquiring the work of artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Roberto Matta and Wilfredo Lam were far beyond the means of art galleries and museums in South Africa. The value of the efforts made by the ACA organizers and artists was especially seen upon the arrival of the collection in South Africa. An article entitled ‘Art in Parliament has “Power, Range”’, which was written by journalist Fiona Chisholm (*Argus*, 8th February 1996), outlines several responses to the ACA collection.

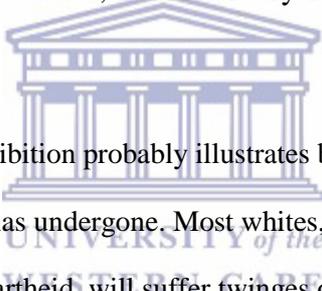
Chisholm writes as follows:

“Stunning”, “unexpectedly high standard” and “anti-imperialist rather than anti-apartheid art” – these were the reactions of three art personalities to the international art world’s collective response to “hideous apartheid”, which, in an exhibition entitled ‘Art Against Apartheid’, was yesterday handed over by French ambassador Mr Tristan D’Albis in Parliament to Ms Brigitte

Mabandla, Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. All three critics, Benita Munitz, Philip Todres and Lionel Davis, were unanimous that the decision to show the art in the corridors of the first democratically-elected Parliament was inspired. Nobody, they said, could walk down the passages without being stopped by the range and power of the 91 art works.

The choice to exhibit the collection in Parliament was supported by critics, and the collection was received with praise. Interestingly, the works were laid out on the benches in the former white House of Assembly. This was an ironic, as these anti-segregationist works were temporarily assuming the positions of former racist leaders in an act of defiance against acts of racism. However, not all political and art critics were positive. In an article entitled 'Past on Show in Parliament' (*Sunday Weekend*, 10th February 1996), political writer John

Maclennan wrote:



The Art Against Apartheid exhibition probably illustrates better than anything else what dramatic changes the country has undergone. Most whites, and especially white MPs who served in parties promoting apartheid, will suffer twinges of guilt or irritation as they view works which come from 91 artists around the world. White National Party members appear shocked by the works on display. They say some of the works are blasphemous and that others are pornographic. The Democratic Party's Douglas Gibson said he had no problem with the exhibition, but described many of the works as propaganda rather than art.

This review outlines a few of the reasons as to why the collection never fulfilled its complete purpose of forming a museum against apartheid, as envisaged by its creators. Rather than an effort to display progressive art designed to encourage South Africans to engage critically with their apartheid past, the works were quickly and simplistically branded as politically dated propaganda.

As will be dealt with more thoroughly in the thesis, the idea of politically engaged art is more complex than a reductive notion of propaganda. Furthermore, artists and theorists alike

challenged and even rejected the idea that political or ‘propagandistic’ art should be frowned upon. Artist Thamsanqa Mnyele, whose work was explored by critics such as Diana Wylie, is just one of many artists that promoted the idea that political art played a vital role in the South African art scene during the 1980s. In her paper titled “‘From the Bottom of our Hearts’: Making Art in the Time of Struggle’, Wylie suggests that many black and progressive artists such as Mnyele rejected the idea that political art is necessarily propagandistic. According to Mnyele, political art could ‘restore to us the respect we have lost’. (quoted in Wylie 60)

The ACA collection was meant to be shown in parliament for six months, and then constitute the museum which the creators intended. However, after the six-month period had ended, the collection was given to the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape. Instead of being exhibited in a museum, the collection now languishes in packing crates at the university. When recalling the journey of Art Contre Apartheid, Barbara Masekela said, ‘this collection, buried in crates in a warehouse in Canada, waited still to be viewed in the light of a free South Africa’ (Masekela 5). It is therefore ironic that the collection was transported from those crates in Canada to a free and democratic South Africa, and is still not freely exhibited.

Five years after the arrival of the collection in South Africa, the Krok brothers founded the Apartheid Museum, which is currently located in Johannesburg, in a sense replacing the original ACA idea of a museum with a more commercially driven version. In spite of its economic and political value, the Art Contre Apartheid collection has not been given space to act as museum. We may speculate that one of the reasons why the Art Contre Apartheid collection did not make a more permanent impact on the South African art and public culture, despite Mandela’s and Masakela’s initial praise and positive newspaper reviews, is that its aesthetics were perhaps not easily assimilable into the broader currents in local art in the post-

apartheid period. Several of the art works did not resonate easily with the art of the 1980s, and the genre of struggle art.

During the 1980s, art in South Africa became intensely politicised under the broader rubric “art is a weapon of the struggle”, and many of the abstract, postmodernist works of the ACA were not readily readable in local paradigms of politically engaged art. For instance, ACA works such as ‘Drunk with Turpentine’ (1979) by Robert Motherwell and ‘Physiochromie’ (1982) by Carlos Cruz-Diez are abstract works that are difficult to interpret within a political anti-apartheid framework. The collection was therefore regarded as a compilation of works that, in the case of certain contributions, had, on the face of it, little to say about apartheid.

It is with these points in mind that the thesis will pay specific attention to the fact that this prestigious collection is not exhibited, and does not speak to South Africans from the storage space in which it is now held at the University of the Western Cape. It will therefore suggest that the exhibition is not fulfilling the purpose for which it was intended. Apart from the catalogue of the collection that is available at the University of the Western Cape, Art Centre Apartheid is not exhibited openly. The collection therefore does not ‘say something’ to post-apartheid South Africa, as its curators intended.

1.2 Jacques Derrida and the Art Centre Apartheid collection

One of the most noteworthy elements of the Art Centre Apartheid collection is one of two essays contributed by Jacques Derrida, world-renowned French philosopher. In fact, it may be argued that the essay, titled ‘Le dernier mot du racism’ or ‘Racism’s Last Word’, has received substantially more attention than the art works of the ACA collection itself.

In his essay, Derrida writes not only critically about apartheid but also gestures towards a post-apartheid futurity. ‘Racism’s Last Word’ envisions the end of apartheid, marking it as a temporary aberration that can only be properly grasped from the imagined position of a

postapartheid future; a point of view that is concretised in the metaphor of the “rear-view mirror”.

Derrida writes,

Apartheid – may that remain the name from now on, the unique appellation for the ultimate racism in the world, the last of many. May it thus remain but may a day come when it will be only for the memory of man. A memory in advance; such, perhaps, is the time given for this Exhibition. At once both urgent and untimely, it exposes itself and takes a chance with time.... It gives only a foresight in painting, very close to silence, and the rear-view vision of a future for which apartheid will be the name of a thing abolished at last. Having then been confined, abandoned to the silence of memory, the name will resonate all by itself, reduced to the state of a term in disuse. The thing it names will be no longer.... The Exhibition therefore is not a presentation. Nothing is delivered here in the present, nothing that would be presentable – only in tomorrow’s rear-view mirror, the late, ultimate racism, the last of many. (Derrida 53)

Derrida aligns the idea of the rear-view mirror, the retrospective view of apartheid’s horrors, with the ACA art works; he suggests that looking at the ACA art works is akin to looking at a rear-view mirror in which the apartheid past is made visible. Derrida engages with apartheid and its ideology as something that had already ended, and that cannot be imagined to exist in the future. The visual metaphor of the mirror also suggests that the collection was designed to cause reflection and self-introspection on the part of the viewers. It is suggested that the art works reflect, symbolically, the ugly face of injustice and racism – realities that perhaps cannot be easily viewed and confronted directly. Derrida’s essay also suggests that South Africans need to move forward from apartheid to a world without racism. Here, he in turn aligns his ideas with those of ACA’s curators, Antonio Saura and Ernest Pignon-Ernest, who say, ‘the day will come...when the museum thus constituted will be presented as a gift to the first free and democratic government of South Africa’ (Quoted in Derrida 52 - 53) in the

foreword of the catalogue of ACA's debut exhibition . Derrida's essay is therefore a valuable complement to the collection, as it expresses in words the visual undertaking of the ACA collection. For this reason, the essay will be referenced throughout the duration of the thesis.

Apart from the provocative temporal and visual metaphor of the rear view mirror, 'Racism's Last Word' also uses the spatial image of the satellite as a symbol with which one may gain an understanding of the purpose of ACA. He contends that 'artists from all over the world are preparing to launch a new satellite, a vehicle whose dimensions can hardly be determined except as a satellite of humanity' (Derrida 55). Derrida used the idea of the freedom and mobility of a satellite circling the globe unimpeded by national boundaries or political constraints in order to illustrate the boundless trajectory of the ACA exhibition. He predicted that the collection of works would not be restrained by national laws, but would serve as a supra-national, global reminder to viewers not to perpetuate the evils enforced by a government such as the apartheid government. The uninhibited, travelling nature of this exhibition was indeed seen as the collection was exhibited across the world, and thus spread its influence globally, transcending geographical boundaries. He goes on to attest to the use of the term 'satellite' as follows: 'a satellite is a guard, it keeps watch and gives warning: Do not forget Apartheid, save humanity from this evil, an evil that cannot be summed up in principal and abstract iniquity of a system' (Derrida 56). The ACA exhibition was therefore intended to serve as a reminder to South Africans not to perpetuate the hatred and agony brought about during the apartheid era.

Derrida extends the metaphor of the travelling 'satellite', which crosses terrestrial national borders, by critiquing the idea of a bounded nation state. Thus, he presents the possibility of transnational unity and solidarity. Drawing attention to the fact that the collection was not allowed to enter the country for which it was intended, Derrida writes: 'born in exile, the exhibition already bears witness against the forced assignment to "natural" territory, the

geography of birth' (Derrida 55). Here, Derrida places emphasis on the boundaries which constrain the collection.

Using the term 'exile', Derrida also invokes the exile which political activists were forced to succumb to as a result of their opposition of the apartheid laws. Thus, the collection itself is depicted as a subject forced to yield to the beliefs of an unjust system, and so accepts its endless orbital flight around the world, as a satellite, forbidden from the country where it belonged.

Furthermore, within the same essay, Derrida refers to apartheid as 'the most racist of racisms,' (53) and condemns the many forms of violence which were performed by the apartheid government. Derrida highlights that 'no tongue has ever translated this name, as if all languages were defending themselves, closing their mouths against a sinister incorporation of the thing by means of a word' (54). Unlike the travelling satellite, apartheid is a disease or contagion that needs to be quarantined: it may not travel, and is shunned and isolated from the right to a space amongst languages worldwide.

In a further expansion of the satellite metaphor, Derrida suggests that art is a "language" with universal appeal and access. In contrast to the inability of the word "apartheid" to travel and be translated into other languages, Derrida acknowledges that ACA was designed not only to provide visual representations of apartheid's injustices, but also to speak a language that is universally accessible – a visual language. He says, 'in this collective and international exhibition... pictural idioms will be crossing but they will be attempting to speak the other's language without renouncing their own' (Derrida 56). This extract speaks not only of the power of the collection, but also the purpose for which the collection was created – ACA was not designed to speak on behalf of those who perhaps did not feel at liberty to express their political and social concerns about the country. Instead, according to Derrida, the collection

was designed to articulate a global discourse of critical engagement that would be available to all, including South Africans.

Furthermore, Derrida suggests that the collection was intended to continue to serve as a memorial or reminder to South Africans not to perpetuate the cruelty brought about during this period in history. This seems to have been particularly important to note, as it portrays the collection as a gift that would not only have an effect on the current generation, but would also inspire future generations not to perpetuate the cruelty brought about during the apartheid era. He expresses this desire as follows:

If it never reaches its destination, having been condemned to an endless flight or immobilized far from an unshakable South Africa, it will not only keep the archival record of a failure or despair but continue to say something, something that can be heard today, in the present.

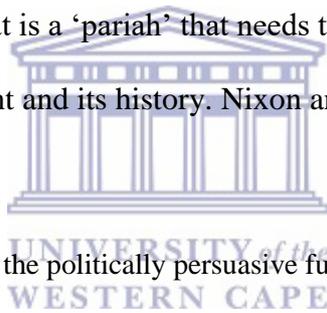
(Derrida 55-56)

Here, Derrida articulates the possibility that this exhibition may never reach its destination, and thus concedes the possibility of an unshakeable grip of the apartheid system. This is an important analysis of the state of the political situation at the time, as well as the purpose for which the collection was sent – to ‘continue to say something’. In an analysis of individual art works, the thesis seeks to interpret what the collection continues to say today, even after the end of apartheid, and the extent to which the messages portrayed through the works may be read as a reminder to South Africans not to perpetuate racism.

However, it is important to note that ‘Racism’s Last Word’ was met with considerable scholarly debate. In their response entitled ‘No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida’s “Le Dernier Mot du Racisme”’, Rob Nixon and Anne McClintock provide a critique of ‘Racism’s Last Word’, claiming that the essay fails to acknowledge the shifting discourses that were subject to a long history of political and institutional racism, and that shaped apartheid South Africa. They say,

As it stands, Derrida's protest is deficient in any sense of how the discourses of South African racism have been at once historically constituted and politically constitutive. For to begin to investigate how the representation of racial difference has functioned in South Africa's political and economic life, it is necessary to recognize and track the shifting character of these discourses. (Nixon and McClintock 140)

Here, Nixon and McClintock critique Derrida's essay based on its lack of a discussion of the important representation of racial difference that, in their opinion, cements the very character of South Africa's political and economic existence. As the title of their essay suggests, Nixon and McClintock disagree with the separation of the word 'apartheid' from the history within which it is embedded. They suggest that Derrida's essay deals with the word apartheid purely on a linguistic level, as a word that is a 'pariah' that needs to be in 'quarantine', and thereby as a term delinked from its referent and its history. Nixon and McClintock frame this argument as follows:



Derrida has little to say about the politically persuasive function that successive racist lexicons have served in South Africa. To face the challenge of investigating the strategic role of representation, one would have to part ways with him by releasing that pariah of a word apartheid, from its quarantine from historical process, examining it instead in the context of developing discourse of racial difference. (Nixon and McClintock 141)

However, in as much as these critical responses to Derrida's essay are noteworthy, this thesis will primarily focus on reading his text as a contextual accompaniment which offers ekphrastic commentary on specific art works within the ACA. David Carrier describes ekphrasis as 'verbal re-creations of the visual artwork' (Carrier 8). The term ekphrasis therefore refers to a vivid description of works of art, where language is used to engage with and visualize an art work.

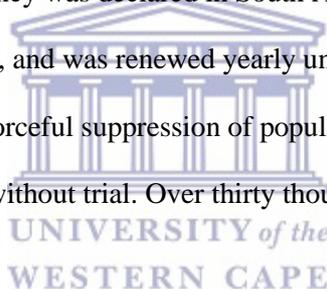
Ekphrasis is a point of intersection between the verbal and visual, and as Michael Ann Holly argues: ‘although interpreting visual art may be a minor process comparing to experiencing its aesthetic forms, the relationship between artwork and the language we use to explain it is essential for dynamic understanding’ (quoted in Alkholy 7). Taking a cue from the idea of ekphrasis, it is possible to re-read ‘Racism’s Last Word’ in its original context, namely as part of a catalogue of reproduced art works. The essay directly responds to some of the art works in an ekphrastic manner, and can therefore be used more broadly to frame the discussion and analysis of the art works. For example, in the catalogue of the ACA collection, Derrida’s use of the metaphor of a concentration camp appears to be directly referring to the work titled ‘Nelson Mandela’ (1978), a painting by Icelandic artist, Erro. This ACA work displays a saintly looking head of Nelson Mandela, who was at the time the imprisoned leader of the African National Congress (ANC), against a background that suggests Nazi and fascist iconography. This painting may be read as a visual correlative of Derrida’s metaphor of a concentration camp; a comparison of South Africa with Nazi Germany that imprisoned ‘dissidents’. Derrida’s text therefore functions as an intermedial engagement with the visual works. The thesis will suggest that Derrida’s essay is not simply a commentary on the art works, but also makes an aesthetic intervention itself. This will be expanded upon within the analysis section of the thesis.

1.3 The South African Art Scene during the 1980s

During the 1980s, South Africa experienced an increase of both political and civil unrest as a result of the intensified apartheid repression after the 1976 Soweto uprising. An important contributing factor that brought about a significant change to the direction of South African art during the 1980s was the State of Emergency (SOE). This was an instrument used by the apartheid government to control political dissent. When the state was faced with

unprecedented revolt against apartheid laws – demonstrated both in 1960 and 1985 – a State of Emergency was declared. For instance, the 21st March 1960 had seen the massacre of unarmed protestors in Sharpeville. As a response to the heightening of resistance on this occasion, the government declared a State of Emergency on 30th March 1960. Similarly, the 25th July 1985 declaration of a State of Emergency followed after the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement, led by activists such as Steve Biko. In contrast to the 1965 State of Emergency, the 1985 declaration brought about a higher level of state violence against protestors. In his book titled *Art against Apartheid*, John Peffer provides important commentary on the State of Emergency declared in 1985:

During 1985 a state of emergency was declared in South Africa in response to renewed outbreaks of violent resistance, and was renewed yearly until 1990. The police were again given wide-ranging powers for the forceful suppression of popular protest, including the detention and interrogation of suspects without trial. Over thirty thousand people were detained during 1986 and 1987. (Peffer 63)

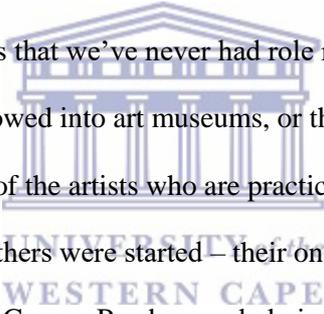


Thousands of political activists were placed in detention within a short space of time, and as a consequence, many were subjected to a life in exile. Mongane Wally Serote, a prominent artist, political activist and poet of the 1970s and 1980s, speaks of this period as follows:

Since 1960 we have gone through 16 June 1976, with Soweto, and September 1984, when Sebokeng, a township near Vereeniging, exploded, the people destroying the structures of apartheid and implementing the ANC's call to render the country ungovernable. Since then, the corridors of apartheid power haven been shaken by a permanent crisis. In an attempt to recreate normality, the regime has had to rely heavily on violence and increasing brutality, while we have lived through two states of emergency and are currently – since June 1988 – undergoing a third. Through this fierce passage other lessons must be learnt. (Serote 11)

The growing defiance of the apartheid government posed a threat to the consolidation of white minority rule, and there was an increase in political unrest, internal violence and attacks on the apartheid system. The tensions between the government and the people were therefore heightened during this time, while apartheid received increasing global exposure.

The history of oppression, restrictions and strict laws stunted freedom of various forms of expression, including artistic expression. In the context of apartheid repression, the term ‘township art’ gained prominence during the 1970s. This period gave rise to several art works that were regarded as so-called ‘typical’ illustrations of black life during apartheid. In an interview, renowned South African artist and curator David Koloane reflected on the condition of South African artists under apartheid and their work as follows:



One thing you have to realize is that we’ve never had role models in the visual arts in this country. We were not even allowed into art museums, or theatres or cinemas because of the Separate Amenities Act. Most of the artists who are practicing now, [and] when centres like Funda, Rorke’s Drift, and all others were started – their only role models were the Polly Street artists, the Gerard Sekotos, the George Pemas, and obviously their environment which was different from the white environment. You couldn’t imagine an artist moving out of Soweto to go and paint Sandton [then an exclusive white suburb] or Yeoville. [This art] was, in a sense, a way of emphasizing the difference that existed, that exists between blacks and whites. (Quoted in Peffer 29)

Despite these unfavourable conditions, the 1970s saw the creation of significant art works by black artists, even though laws curbed black South African artists from exhibiting works within particular galleries. In her book titled *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, Clementine Deliss quotes the following statement by David Koloane, which provides important insight into the limitations placed on black artists. Koloane details the strict rules stipulated by gallery owners under apartheid:

If you didn't do this kind of thing [township art] it was harder. In 1977 and 1987 I started experimenting with collage, and I took some of these pieces to Gallery 21. The first thing the owner said was that I didn't do the work ... because this is so 'un-African.' He said that for that reason he didn't feel comfortable buying it. (Deliss 263)

According to Peffer, "African" work for this gallerist meant township art: either cubistic distortions of the figure or naturalistic renditions of black life' (29). Artists who sought to express their creativity in ways that did not align with the gallerist's perceptions of African men and women were considered unsuitable for curation. Peffer expands on this subject, explaining the extent to which artists themselves were denied the artistic freedom:

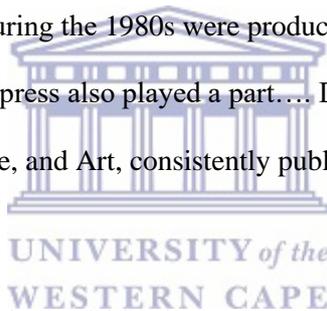
'African' meant a two-dimensional, self-referential, figurative art after the styles of the European realists, impressionists, or expressionists. Partly because of the demands of gallery owners, this limited set of iconographic genres and restricted range of stylistic modes continued to be reproduced by most black South African artists into the 1980s and beyond. Even Sekoto, who continued to exhibit back home by sending paintings from Paris, was unable to show his images of Paris in the South African galleries. (Peffer 29)

Therefore, black South African artists were not only restricted by the market to create art works acceptable to the established art scene, but were also politically constrained to address only themes that did not oppose the laws stipulated by the government. However, despite these limitations, the late 1970s and the early 1980s revolutionized South African art. The visual arts, literature and music became highly politicised during the late 1970s and the early 1980s. South African artists and writers of all races, forming part of a broader coalition of 'progressive' artists, began to use their access to artistic expression to form a stance of opposition against the unjust system of apartheid.

Peffer summarises this shift as follows: 'this was a period when the desires of marginalized social groups seemed particularly poised to acquire political expression through cultural

expression, and it was a time when the struggle for art was synonymous with the struggle for the end of apartheid' (xvii). The inclination to use art forms as a means to protest against injustices was a practice that was not only endorsed by those that stood as a united force alongside South Africans (the Art Contre Apartheid artists), but also by those within the country that longed for political liberation. Peffer provides useful insight into the transformation which occurred within the South African art scene during the 1980s:

During the 1970s and 1980s, overtly political protest art was also made in grey areas, for instance, under Steven Sack, who ran an underground poster workshop at Shaft 16 in the Crown Mines settlement. Sack also served as the first director of the African Institute of Art, a tertiary training program in Diepkloof, at the edge of Soweto. Most of the posters, T-shirts, and other types of 'people's art' made during the 1980s were produced under racially interactive social conditions. The alternative art press also played a part.... During the 1980s... alternative journals such as Speak, Sesame, and Art, consistently published art and debates across the colour line. (Peffer 36-37)



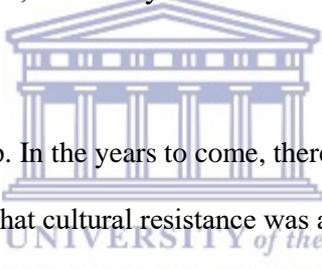
Artists therefore articulated their ideas within these 'grey areas'. For this reason, the creation of resistance art in South Africa flourished during this period, thus giving rise to the phrase "art as a weapon of struggle". According to Peffer,

By the early 1980s the art world had become thoroughly polemical in South Africa. This was especially the case following the call for "cultural workers" to use their art as a "weapon of struggle," a directive disseminated by activists aligned with the African National Congress, at the Culture and Resistance festival in Botswana in 1982. (Peffer xviii - xix)

Artists who contributed to this wave of artistic opposition included George Pemba, Gavin Jantjes, Dumile Feni, Willie Bester, Noria Mabasa and Manfred Zylla. Dumile Feni, for example, found his subject matter in everyday life, while describing the trials experienced during apartheid in his famous art works entitled 'Railway Accident' (1966) and 'The

Stricken Household' (1965). Dumile Feni, although his art was not typical of highly politicized struggle art, became a prominent activist who used his artistic skill to speak out against apartheid through abstract, ambiguous visual depictions of injustices. These South African artists, among others, will be referred to in more detail in the thesis.

As will be expanded upon in chapter three, the idea of 'resistance art' became increasingly important during the 1980s in South Africa. In her book titled *Resistance Art in South Africa* (1983), Sue Williamson provides an important account of the purpose of resistance art in South Africa during this tumultuous period. The notion of art as a form of protest and political engagement found strong expression in the 'Art Towards Social Development and Change in South Africa' conference, hosted by the University of Cape Town in 1979. She says:



The debate had been opened up. In the years to come, there would be a growing realisation amongst anti-apartheid forces that cultural resistance was a tool of immense power... In a sense, the new direction was but a development of the old principle governing traditional African art, which is that art must have a function in the community: a song is composed to be sung especially while walking; a sculpture serves as a chair; a house is decorated to enhance the village. The new twist was this: that the 'function' could be one of bringing about change.

(Williamson 9)

In the excerpt above, it is noted that prior to the influx of political tensions in South Africa, South African art was premised on functionality in a social and domestic context. This was partly due to the reasons Williamson mentions above, and partly due to strict laws placed upon marginalised South African artists.

In 1984, Thamsanqa Mnyele, a self-exiled artist living in Botswana, was one of the many South African artists who expressed their concerns concerning the lack of international

intervention during the apartheid era. In an interview quoted in Sue Williams' *Resistance Art in South Africa*, Mnyele expressed these concerns as follows:

I have often been asked why, in South Africa, when... whole communities suffer dismemberment through forced removals when the majority of the people are declared foreigners in the country of their birth, when people are crudely and ruthlessly suppressed through rushed pieces of legislation, detentions, the massacre of workers and students; when therefore whole communities resist this genocide through organising themselves into civic organisations, there has been disturbingly little visual arts output in the country or abroad which is organically related to these community efforts. Nor has there been a groundedly political voice from this quarter, let alone a broad art movement with an obvious national commitment.

Such is the extent of the concern. (Quoted in Williamson 8)

Mnyele's comments appear to neglect the Art Centre Apartheid collection, possibly suggesting that he might not have been aware of the creation of this collection, as he was in exile in Botswana at the time. However, his views are nevertheless insightful as they illustrate the major concerns of committed artists in South Africa at the time. Mnyele called for works of art that spoke directly to the oppression suffered by South Africans.

Mnyele also desired to see art in South Africa that connected itself "organically" to the struggle against oppression. Here, Mnyele was possibly directing his critique at mainstream white artists, as well as several black South African artists who created works that engaged with the apartheid system in ways that weren't as direct as Mnyele suggested. These South African artists continued to create works of art that may not have been centred on resistance, yet engaged more subtly with the politics of the country. Mnyele's call for engaged and committed resistance art illustrates the dominant discourse of struggle politics within South Africa at the time. All art was evaluated in terms of its relevance to the struggle against apartheid, and thus whether it was being used as a 'weapon of the struggle'.

However, the pervasiveness of the idea of struggle or protest art later became a contested and limiting notion. At the point when apartheid was starting to crumble, cultural commentators such as Albie Sachs voiced a critique of the notion that “art is a weapon of struggle”. Albie Sachs, who was an ANC representative at the time, wrote a paper entitled ‘Preparing Ourselves for Freedom’ which was presented at an African National Congress seminar on culture and resistance. It was written in 1989, and therefore was written as a response to the work of artists that used art as a weapon of struggle during this period in South African history. Sachs was not only a political figure and a future member of the Constitutional Court, but also a literary critic and intellectual. In a book titled *Spring is Rebellious: Arguments about Cultural Freedom by Albie Sachs and Respondents*, Sachs seems to appeal to a discussion of what Ingrid de Kok refers to as South Africa’s ‘cultural imperatives’ (9), arguing:



Allow me, as someone who has for many years been arguing that art should be seen as an instrument of struggle, to explain why suddenly this affirmation seems not only banal and devoid of real content, but actually wrong and potentially harmful... it results in an impoverishment of our art. Instead of getting real criticism, we get solidarity criticism. Our artists are not pushed to improve the quality of their work, it is enough that it be politically correct. The more fists and spears and guns, the better. The range of themes is narrowed down so much that all that is funny or curious or genuinely tragic in the world is extruded. (Sachs 20)

This opening statement bore within it the essence of the paper which Sachs presented. Here, Sachs displays a determination to challenge the dogma of art as a weapon of struggle; a principle which had been accepted by the ANC for years. Frank Meintjies provides a useful summary of Sachs’ argument, stating that Sachs’ paper, ‘debunks the idea that progressive culture is by definition direct, propagandistic and confined to reflex responses to oppression – but warns political organisations will be practicing regimentation, Stalinism and the

suppression of cultural democracy if they issue rigid instructions to artists' (Meintjies 30). Here, it must be noted that Sachs did not necessarily suggest that artists should neglect speaking about the struggle. Instead, Sachs suggested that artists should not be bound by unmediated political imperatives – he called for freedom in art. Sachs's intervention allows one to critically interrogate the distortive cultural politics of the 1980s, and so react against it.

1.4 Theoretical Frameworks

One of the challenges in interpreting, reading and evaluating the various works of art in the Art Contre Apartheid collection is that it is so varied in style and content. For this reason, the thesis will primarily focus on the way various artists have represented and depicted the human body. In total, out of all the paintings and sculptures in ACA, 33 works represent human figures. These representations range from abstract images to overt representations of human suffering under apartheid and the brutal effects of political violence. What is particularly significant are the aesthetics of distortion: in several instances, human bodies are fragmented, tortured, maimed and in pain, making them revealing sites of trauma. The thesis will attempt to explore the limitations of language communication for the expression of pain, and thus it will suggest that ACA makes an attempt to articulate visually the pain of others while steering away from the popular narrative of language communication of that pain.

A key point of departure in understanding the representations of bodily trauma is Elaine Scarry's classic study, titled *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985). This study analyses various representations of pain as expressed through the human form, while discussing the limits of language in expressing this pain. While Scarry's classic intervention has been supplemented by a considerable volume of more current work on pain, language and trauma, her study is foundational for this thesis since it dates from the same historical period of ACA, and is therefore a useful lens with which to interrogate its

representational practices. Several works in the Art Contre Apartheid collection make a connection between the human form and pain, and Scarry's framework will form a basis for the analysis, making the injustices of apartheid visible. According to Scarry,

Because the person in pain is ordinarily so bereft of the resources of speech, it is not surprising that the language for pain should sometimes be brought into being by those who are not themselves in pain but who speak on behalf of those who are. Though there are very great impediments to expressing another's sentient distress, so are there also very great reasons why one might want to do so, and thus there come to be avenues by which this most radically private of experiences begins to enter the realm of public discourse. (Scarry 6)

Here, Scarry suggests that pain strips victims of their ability to express themselves linguistically. This does not necessarily speak of the limitations of the victim, but rather the limitations of language. Furthermore, Scarry provides a useful analysis of the representation of pain and suffering in the human body. She says, 'whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language... physical pain does not resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language' (4). Here, Scarry points out that language often fails to express pain adequately. This thesis will develop this idea and suggest that ACA served as a form of visual expression of that which could not be expressed in words.

Scarry also mentions that although many may struggle with the communication of someone else's distress, there are avenues which they may use to usher the depths of these experiences into what she defines as 'the realm of public discourse' (Scarry 6). I will argue that ACA serves as such an avenue, displaying the trials of South Africans through visual communication. Derrida's essay, as referenced earlier on in this introduction, appears to draw on Scarry's ideas about the limits of language:

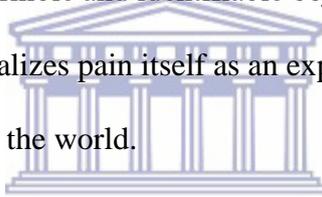
In this collective and international exhibition... pictorial, sculptural idioms will be crossing, but they will be attempting to speak the other's language without renouncing their own. And in order to effect this translation, their common reference henceforth makes an appeal to a language that cannot be found, a language at once very old, older than Europe, but for that very reason to be invented once more. (Derrida 56)

Here, Derrida implies that the visual representations used and referenced throughout the collection effect a type of pictorial language that is capable of communicating that which may otherwise have been difficult to express in language. French artist Mehdi Qotbi, contributor to the ACA collection, created an art work that makes such a connection in his work titled 'Chant d'espoir contre l'apartheid' (1983), which translates to 'Hope Song against Apartheid'. This art work displays a confusing range of patterns that take no specific shape. The term 'hope' in the title implies a sense of futurity and the potential of a South Africa beyond apartheid. However, it also alludes to an ominous sense of lack and loss, as the presence of hope is the absence of that which one most desires and needs. It is therefore interesting that the drawing itself does not refer to an overt sense of hope, the presence of lack, nor a struggle against apartheid. Through a depiction of an absence of a visual referent that is reflective of its title, the artist in turn draws the viewer's attention to the unspeakable acts that political artists and activists, both nationally and internationally, would have to undertake in order to transform South Africa into a democratic country.

Simultaneously, the lack of alignment between the visual and the titular 'hope song' also highlights an incongruence between violence as seen under apartheid and an artistic expression thereof. Scarry describes this misalignment as, 'the complete absence of referential content,' (162) and in turn says that it displays an inability 'from being rendered in language,' (102). Scarry expands below:

Though the capacity to experience physical pain is as primal a fact about the human being as is the capacity to hear, to touch, to desire, to fear, to hunger, it differs from these events, and from every other bodily and psychic event, by not having an object outside the boundaries of the body, as desire is desire of x, fear is fear of y, hunger is hunger for z; but pain is not ‘of’ or ‘for’ anything – it is itself alone. This objectlessness, the complete absence of referential content, almost prevents it from being rendered in language: objectless, it cannot easily be objectified in any form, material or verbal. (Scarry 161-162)

Here, Scarry suggests that because pain cannot be related to any object outside of the human body, pain cannot be expressed in words; pain is manifested as radical uncertainty. The presence or absence of pain fails to be objectively verified. In light of Scarry’s theory, it may be suggested that the lack of discernible and identifiable objects within Qotbi’s drawing portrays the ineffable, and so visualizes pain itself as an experience that refuses to be identified in any specific object in the world.



These suggestions introduce the idea that visual communication of pain does have limitations, as ACA artists chose to depict abstractions which alluded to pain, rather than using direct visual clues in order to communicate such a message. The thesis will engage in this discussion in chapter two.

Furthermore, in terms of the pain experienced within the physical body, in the introduction to her book, Scarry explains that bodies in ‘pain [are] ordinarily... bereft of the resources of speech’ (4). For this reason those that observe the pain of another are often in doubt of the extent of the pain being experienced within the linguistically silent body of another. The communication of pain is constrained by its resistance to language, limiting its ability to be understood by outsiders.

It may therefore be suggested that this was one of the reasons why the ACA artists opted for a visual expression of pain, as opposed to using language to convey the same message. In

making this suggestion, the thesis will argue that the artists used depictions that directly alluded to voicelessness in difficult and traumatic situations. Examples of ACA works that portrayed such a message included a painting of an imprisoned man with a distorted mouth in 'Le Reveil' (1982) by Franta, and a painting of a severely undernourished child in 'Apartheid' (1983) by Gontran Netto.

The thesis will suggest that the visual is able to convey that which may be difficult to express in words. In engaging in this discussion, the thesis will question the limitations of language in comparison to visual communication of pain and trauma as experienced under apartheid. This discussion will be supported by statements such as those made by a contributor to the ACA collection, Jacques Derrida, who, as we have seen, imagines the ACA collection as a 'satellite' (55) that is able to travel with unimpeded freedom, suggesting that art is able to communicate a globalized message without linguistic constraints.

However, it is worth noting that Scarry's ideas have been subject to considerable scholarly discussion. According to Tamás Bényei and Alexandra Stara, 'while in language, there are several non-literary registers and kinds of discourse, including confession and autobiography, that attempt to render a traumatic non-experience, such a distinction is much more difficult to make in the case of the visual arts: a drawing or a painting, no matter how crude, is immediately seen as "art"' (Bényei and Stara 8). They therefore posit the idea that visual representations of suffering are limited, as these representations are immediately regarded as works of art, as opposed to political documents illustrating very serious social injustices.

Furthermore, the choice to display the bodies of those that had undergone torture has also been subject to debate. Elizabeth Dauphinee refers to the public display of the images of tortured human beings as a form of 'fetishization'. She expands on this idea, saying that, 'the drive to repetitively circulate the icon of the tortured body for ethical academic and

praxis-oriented projects is to risk the circulation of the same logic of verifiability that animated the production of pain in the first place – that is, the appropriation of others' bodies through photography and their objectification toward the service of particular kinds of politics' (140). Dauphinee suggests that, in publicizing these images, those responsible for publicizing them inadvertently objectify the tortured bodies in an attempt to convey a political message.

Dauphinee also suggests that images of the body in pain may 'fetishize' an unimaginable type of pain, even though these representations may serve as tools with which to expose and combat political injustices. According to Dauphinee,

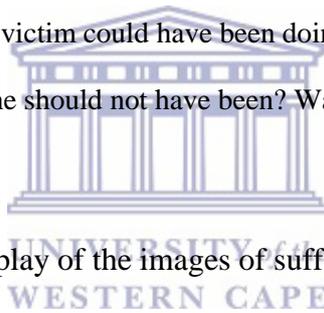
Beyond the obvious claim that an image can never unproblematically represent the complexity of a lived reality, the visceral experience of pain both animates and confounds attempts to 'make sense' of pain within the logic of a culture and a politics that rely for their ethical bearings on the verifiability associated with the visible.... The image of the body in pain... makes possible a whole host of political activities, from torture to military intervention to antiwar activities to critical social science scholarship.... Indeed, many of these practices... rely on the circulation of abject imagery to illustrate and support their political claims. In turn, these practices fetishize pain in their drive to make visible what is essentially unimaginable – that is, the spectrum of experience associated with the body in pain. The body in pain is thus produced as an aesthetic visual image, a symbolic icon that stands in for itself as the referent object of political violence. (139)

Here, the notion of the body in pain as a tool with which to make pain visible is being challenged. Dauphinee seems to suggest that the pain and trauma of victims may be inadvertently manipulated in order to deliver political messages and support political claims. She argues that these representations abstract the actual trauma experienced by real victims, and thus the human body in pain is reduced to a mere, 'symbolic icon' (139) or 'object' (139) to be used as a deliverer of a message.

Livia K. Stone shares the sentiments of Dauphinee, stating that ‘images of suffering bodies can be seen as the visual equivalent of the common journalistic headline, “She was raped,” a phrase that feminists have criticized for over 30 years’ (Stone 183). The passive voice in this particular phrase reduces the focus on the perpetrator (the rapist) from the story, thus transforming the survivor of the crime into both the subject and the object of the crime.

Transferring the argument to visual art, Stone critiques the art works’ focus on the maimed and violated victim:

When looking for an explanation of how this could have happened, the reader of such a headline has nowhere to look in the narrative other than to the victim herself. While there is a perpetrator implied in the sentence, the phrase, like the image, leaves an ambiguity that can raise questions about what the victim could have been doing that contributed to the assault: Was she out alone at night where she should not have been? Was he involved in drug trafficking and gangs? (Stone 183)



Stone proposes that the public display of the images of suffering bodies as a means with which to illustrate injustice locates the violence and the humiliation surrounding the violence in the image of the suffering body, rather than locating it in the assailant. She suggests that this is the case ‘for the simple reason that the assailant is nowhere to be seen,’ (183) within the image. Therefore, one of the critiques that the ACA collection may face is the absence of the perpetrator. According to Stone,

If the purpose of an image is to draw attention to the social, economic, and political structures that result in violence (assault, sickness, starvation, etc.) for some populations, then the image has failed to the degree that these structures are not represented visually in the frame. Images can quite easily miss the mark by implying the presence of an absent force such as sexism, racism, dispossession, or the unequal application of law. (Stone 183)

Therefore, in engaging in this discussion, the thesis will acknowledge the cases where the perpetrator is absent as well as works where he plays a role in the visual composition of the various art works, so as to acknowledge these debates and apply them to the visual works within the collection. Overall, the thesis hopes to investigate the power of visual communication in the representation of trauma, and will use the Art Contre Apartheid collection as a case-study for this investigation.

1.5 Thesis Overview

An opening chapter will discuss the representations of the human body in pain as depicted in specific works of the ACA collection. It will argue that the collection makes use of the dominant narrative of the body in a state of trauma in an attempt to make injustices experienced under apartheid visible. In doing so, the chapter will discuss the extent to which the ACA collection portrays pain as a tool with which to protest against apartheid.

Most trauma theory has focused on literary effects, making the argument that language itself is distorted, disrupted and insufficient to represent the trauma experienced under apartheid as an attempt with which to combat racism. This raises the question whether non-linguistic representations such as visual art are better suited to express traumatic content, and will therefore will be dealt with in this chapter.

While the ACA works will serve as the main focus of the thesis, works created by South African artists during the 1980s will be analysed for comparison as well. The second chapter will be designated for a discussion of both the condition of South Africa during the time in which the collection was created, and the South African art scene during this period. This is important because the foundation of both the visual and the literary messages within Art Contre Apartheid are in conversation with the history of the country for which they were formed. This discussion will therefore pave the way for a discussion of the functions of the

literary in *Art Contre Apartheid*, and the potential and limitations thereof in conveying messages of resistance through trauma.

A concluding chapter will engage in a discussion of both the power and the limitations of language in comparison to that of the dominant visual narrative portrayed within the ACA collection. Thus, it will question more extensively whether the visual, as expressed through art, is more suited to explore trauma than language. As the catalogue of the ACA collection is rich in poetry, I will focus primarily on a discussion of ACA poetry.



Chapter 2: Visual Art as a Language for Trauma in the Art Contre Apartheid Collection

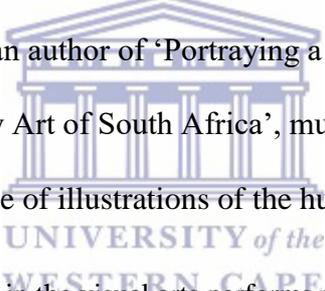
It is as though our rulers stalk every page and haunt every picture: everything is obsessed by the oppressors and the trauma they have imposed. – Albie Sachs

Art Contre Apartheid (ACA) is a collection rich with images that work together to communicate a meaningful message in opposition of apartheid. One of the most prominent depictions within the collection is that of the human figure and the trauma which South African bodies were subjected to under apartheid. This chapter will engage in a critical discussion of this prominent theme within the collection, suggesting that the ACA artists made repeated use of illustrations of the human body as a means with which to communicate trauma, specifically referencing the effects on human subjects suffering under apartheid. It will propose that the collection challenges its viewers to pay attention to the way pain is inscribed on human bodies, as well as shed light on the sources of this violence. This collection seems to answer the question: what are the implications of suggesting that physical pain is not an invisible, interior geography; that the viewer may know that other bodies are in pain and that those bodies are able to respond to that pain? In pursuing this discussion, the chapter will suggest that the ACA artists depicted bodily trauma in an attempt to express visually that which may have been difficult to communicate in words. It will therefore posit that the collection itself may be interpreted as a visual language for pain.

In an article titled ‘Why?’ (1983), published in the Art Contre Apartheid catalogue, Antonio Saura and Ernest Pignon-Ernest define the purpose of the collection as follows: ‘the objective the Association of artists of the World against Apartheid proposed to the artists standing for the humanistic legacy was to participate in the international campaign that denounced the crime against humanity and culture that was apartheid’ (Pignon-Ernest and Saura 13). The

collection was therefore framed in explicitly political terms, using art to denounce apartheid. In order to do this, the artists used depictions of the human form as the dominant element within the collection – 33 of the 77 art works of the collection display images of the human form, with several of these illustrations suggesting either trauma and anguish or discomfort and unhappiness. For instance, artists such as Wolf Vostel and Gavin Jantjies, both of whom were contributors to the collection, paid particular attention to illustrations of trauma inflicted on the human body. Other ACA art works that represent the human form include ‘Tribute to Steve Biko’ (1978) by Fluoman, ‘El Drapo’ (1982) by Josep Guinovart and ‘Sans titre’ (1982) by Wilfredo Lam.

To contextualise the dominant theme of suffering in the collection, the work of theorists such as Anneleen de Jong, South African author of ‘Portraying a Story: The Narrative Function of the Human Form in Contemporary Art of South Africa’, must be noted. De Jong provides an important outline of the importance of illustrations of the human form within the visual arts:



The image of the human figure in the visual arts performs a role similar to the character of a personage in literature. The material that is used for the representation, the form, and the context in which the human form is placed constitutes its identity, even if it is not of a specific individual. Furthermore, the use of a human figure facilitates the correspondence with the viewer, an interaction that is very important. (de Jong 129)

In many ways, the human form is used to highlight the extent of the pain and suffering experienced by a group of people, while employing what de Jong refers to as facilitating ‘the correspondence with the viewer’ (129): the depiction of the human form within art also functions as a means with which to create a connection between artist and viewer. Author and theorist Inas Alkholy seems to agree with de Jong, highlighting the use of the human body as a communicative tool: ‘artists through the ages have been expressing deep human sufferings in artworks,’ (Alkholy 4). De Jong also provides a noteworthy explanation of the functions of

the representation of the human form in select works by South African artists such as Willie Bester, Andries Botha, and Jackson Hlungwani. Her paper suggests that these artists worked towards illustrating the cultural construction of identity and its representation through the depiction of the human being in art. She introduces her paper as follows:

Of the many elements involved in the analysis of a painting, the representation of the human being is central. The image of the human being, although abstract or even visually absent in form, is generally a key element in the structure of an artwork. Both in literature and the visual arts, the human figure is an element with high narrative potential, and it plays a key role in creating a link between the art work and the viewer, and hence in the construction of meaning. (de Jong 125)

The ACA works acknowledge the ‘narrative potential’ (125) of the human form in art, making the depiction thereof a central communicative tool. Interestingly, several works within the ACA collection illustrate what de Jong refers to as being ‘visually absent of form’ (125). Examples of such works include ‘Nelson Mandela’ (1983) by Louis Le Brocqy, ‘Le Reveil’ (1982) by Franta, ‘Dream of a Dutch Merchant’ (1981) by Lucebert, ‘Untitled’ (1982) by Wifredo Lam and ‘Dos’ (1982) by Magdalena Abalanowicz. These works display distortions, fragmentation and dismemberment of the human form, yet they are portrayed as the ‘key elements,’ (125) within these art works. A few of these works will be analysed based on their portrayal of the human form and the extent to which these forms provide a critique of apartheid.

In addition, the collection comprises an extensive list of artists that chose to use abstract illustrations that seemed to have very little to say about apartheid, yet had been designed to express an opposition against apartheid. ACA works that make use of this function include ‘La vie en rose’ (1980), meaning ‘Life in Pink’ by Mark Brusse, ‘P 53-9’ (1979) by Rafael Canogar, ‘Sol Exent’

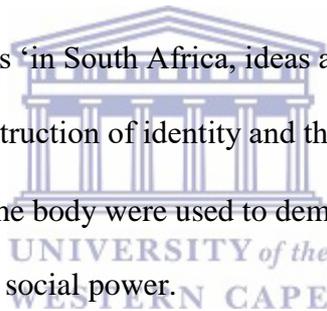
(1979) meaning 'Rising Sun' by Rafols Casamada and 'Untitled' (1983) by Roy Lichtenstein.

In light of this discussion, a few of the works referenced above will be analysed as visual communications that are able to convey powerful messages through the absence of unbroken, whole South African bodies. The thesis will also comprise of a detailed discussion of works within the collection that allude to distress under apartheid in their titles or certain visual signifiers, but do not display any identifiable form.

South African artists have been known to use the body in distress as a means to convey an outcry against injustices within society. As will be discussed more carefully in the following chapter, the reason for this artistic trend in the South African art scene may be traced back to the 1980s – a period which saw the entrenchment of violence in everyday life. According to

Janet Berry Hess, during the 1980s 'in South Africa, ideas and images related to the body have been central to both the construction of identity and the exercise of power' (Hess 61).

She suggests that illustrations of the body were used to demonstrate the right to express one's identity and cultural, political and social power.



Although Hess acknowledges that the idea of the individual body is in a sense a Western construct, 'attention to specific representations of the body and body practices can provide insight into the experience of individual South Africans' (Hess 61). Several theorists, such as Elizabeth Dauphinee, have argued that the human body is capable of displaying human emotions that might not ordinarily be understood when communicated in words. However, she also contends that this display may be considered controversial. In her paper titled 'The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery', Dauphinee outlines her argument:

The visual expression of pain and trauma translates into a politics of representation that flattens the experience of pain by being able to capture only the visible causes or expressions of pain.

One of the results of this is the development of an aesthetic imagery of pain-causing phenomena – an iconography of symbols that stand in for pain and thus become the representational alibis for actual pain: images of starvation, of emaciated concentration-camp victims, of hooded prisoners, of broken and bleeding skins, of blood-stained floors in prison cells, and so on. In the imaging of pain-causing phenomena and of bodies in pain... people become representations of their plights. (Dauphinee 142)

Here, Dauphinee seems to suggest that pain and its effect on those experiencing pain firsthand is limited and constrained by the exterior, surface-based display of that experience. Thus, although she acknowledges that the visual may represent the plights of those suffering, the full extent of their experiences is not easily represented through images. It may therefore be suggested that the very representation of pain through depictions thereof has the potential to distort real pain by simply dwelling on surfaces, or on stereotyped imagery.

In addition, through the representation of the body in pain, people are portrayed as mere symbols of suffering and trauma. These portrayals may shift the viewer's attention away from the inner emotions that cannot be presented within the image, as they only capture 'the visible causes or expressions of pain' (142). As such, the true extent of the trauma being experienced is lost. It may therefore be posited that silence itself may be a more accurate and morally sound means with which to represent and communicate the pain of others.

It is with these debates in mind that Art Contre Apartheid may be interpreted and analysed. In an attempt to grapple more thoroughly with the debates surrounding the visual representations of trauma, and the extent to which these discussions may be applied to the ACA collection, the following section will deal with four aspects of displaying the human form in order to convey meaning in the ACA works.

It will comprise of four sections, namely 'Distortion of Form: Face', 'Religious Symbolism,

‘The Barbed Wire Theme’ and ‘The Absence of Form’. These sections will analyse the thematic content portrayed in several ACA works, highlighting the evidence of the body as a site of trauma. This chapter will also deal with the extent to which the collection uses depictions of ordinary aspects of life as complements to the depictions of the human body, and thus analyse these works as a visual language for pain experienced under apartheid.

2.1 Distortion of Form: Face

In considering the many figurative representations in the ACA collection, the depictions of the human face require special attention, as it is a primal physical resource for non-verbal communication. In several ACA art works, the artists chose to depict the absence or distortion of the face in order to illustrate the physical and psychological effect of apartheid. Examples of such works are ‘Le Reveil’ (1982) by Franta, ‘Sans titre’ (1982) by Wifredo Lam, and ‘Apartheid’ (1983) by Gontran Netto. In her book titled *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Judith Butler suggests that the face may be regarded as a vocalisation of pain. She says,



Figure 1. Franta – *Le Reveil* (1982) Chinese ink and wash drawing on pasted paper on canvas, 196 x 130cm

It is precisely the wordless vocalization of suffering that marks the limits of linguistic translation.... The face, if we are to put words to its meaning, will be that for which no words really work; the face seems to be a kind of sound. The sound of language evacuating its sense, the sonorous substratum of vocalization that precedes and limits the delivery of any semantic sense. (134)

Prior to this statement, Butler says that the face ‘does not speak in the sense that the mouth does,’ (133). Instead, the face is able to convey complex messages through visual representations which transcend language; an idea that will be dealt with more thoroughly within the next section.

It is in light of this proposition that an art work by Franta, titled ‘Le Reveil’ (1982), as reproduced above, may be interpreted. This work displays a figure with a distorted face; it is not clear to the viewer if this figure has a face at all. The fact that the figure has no identifiable face limits the viewer’s ability to interpret the emotion which the figure may have been experiencing at the time. Dauphinee discusses the conundrum of interpreting the pain of others through visual communication of their inner emotions: ‘Pain is not simply a private, interior ontology, but rather a mode of knowing (in) the world – of knowing and making known, which is contextual, contingent, specific and often fleeting’ (145). Here, Dauphinee emphasizes the complexity of pain and its existence within the body of another. In recognizing this, one may begin to understand that pain exists within the contours of one’s physical experience in the world. Thus, as the face of the figure is distorted, it is difficult to interpret their experience in the world. Dauphinee continues, saying that ‘pain is not relegated to the realm of immediate physical hurt, but also includes the emotional trauma, psychological distress, grief and mourning that pain often entails’ (145). The face plays a significant role in making this pain visible, hence the absence of this physical communicative

resource in 'Le Reveil' compels the viewer to interpret the body language of the seated figure.

Here, it is worth noting that Judith Butler states the following: 'the face is neither reducible to the mouth nor, indeed, to anything the mouth has to utter' (Butler 133). In Butler's conception of 'face', communication is not limited to verbal utterance (mouth), but can become an expressive function of the whole body. The body is thus illustrated to 'speak' on behalf of those experiencing pain. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the painting avoids the simple reading of emotion on the face, thus complicating one's interpretation of the physical experience of the figure. However, it also highlights the human body as a central communicative tool within this painting.

Thus, it is worth noting that the figure's body is partly transparent, and the race of the figure is inconclusive – the figure is painted with shades of black, brown and white. This seems to suggest that the struggle against apartheid is one which applies to all South Africans, and has an effect on the lives of all races. The figure seems to be an embodiment of this suggestion.

Franta's painting also displays a figure with broad shoulders and a masculine form. One may deduce that the figure is male, as the nude figure seems to have male genitals, while the bald head of the seated figure further supports this theory. The fact that the face (including the mouth) of the figure is distorted complicates the powerful body of the figure – even though the figure may be equipped with the physical ability to liberate himself, he is reduced to a state of silence.

Because of the distortion of the face of the seated figure, the interpretation of the figure's interior pain also seems to be dependent on the visual context available within the rest of the painting. This may be aligned with Dauphinee's statement referenced earlier: 'pain is... a

mode of knowing... which is contextual,' (145). Therefore, other elements, such as the body, the stance and the context within the painting are the primary sources of meaning making.

Therefore, with regards to the context of the painting, the figure in 'Le Reveil' is seated adjacent to what appears to be a black door frame and a black open door, while the rest of the background is predominantly white. The open door, which is just a few steps away from the place where the figure sits, seems to present the possibility of passing through the door, but also problematizes the access that the figure has to it. The right leg of the figure fades into nothing close to the open door, suggesting that the figure cannot use both legs to access the open door. This appears to introduce a sense of bondage, even though the figure's legs are not bound. The figure's hands are however placed behind the back, suggesting that their hands are bound. This suggestion is supported by the title of the painting. 'Le Reveil' means 'Awakening', which in turn means to arise or rouse from slumber, yet the figure remains seated. It is therefore posited that the figure is not able to claim liberty, and may therefore be read as an allegory for the absence of democracy and freedom under apartheid.

Finally, instead of presenting the visage of a man in an attempt to make trauma visible, the artist seems to have chosen to distort the face in an effort to emphasize the silent suffering under apartheid. It is therefore suggested that the figure in this painting is both physically and vocally disempowered. Butler presents a suggestive analysis that helps one to understand this:

In the first instance, there is the Levinasian view according to which there is a 'face' which no face can fully exhaust, the face is understood as human suffering, as the cry of human suffering, which can take no direct representation. Here the 'face' is always a figure for something that is not literally a face. Other human expressions, however, seem to be figurable as a 'face' even though they are not face, but sounds or emissions of another order. The cry that is represented through the figure of the face is one that confounds the senses.... And yet, the face can stand for

the sound precisely because it is not the sound. In this sense, the figure underscores the incommensurability of the face with whatever it represents. Strictly speaking, then, the face does not represent anything, in the sense that it fails to capture and deliver that to which it refers. (144)

It is through this lens that one may gain an understanding of the contradictions displayed in 'Le Reveil'. Butler suggests that, in the context of the face being understood as a representation of human suffering, the face 'can take no direct representation' (144) and 'the "face" is always a figure for something that is not literally a face' (144). Both the blurred illustration of the face and the blurred lines between freedom (awakening) and bondage emphasizes that the face 'fails to capture and deliver that to which it refers' (144). Therefore, through his painting, Franta seems to illustrate the sometimes inexpressible nature of pain and suffering by distorting the face of the seated figure. The absence of facial features and the absence of representation in this painting somehow emphasizes the horrors that remain unexpressed as a result of the distortion – pain, when examined through the theories posited by Butler and Dauphinee, refuses to be displayed within the painting.



Figure 2. Iba Ndiaye – *Soweto* (1979) Oil on canvas, 194 x 114cm

Another ACA painting that uses distortion as an allegory for the bondage experienced under apartheid is 'Soweto' (1979) by French-Sengalese painter, Iba Ndiaye. Ndiaye was best known for his European modernist training in fine arts, and used various media to provide a critique of politics, especially focusing on African politics. 'Soweto' depicts an exceptional level of distortion, illustrating two figures that appear to be male – both figures appear to have bald heads and broad shoulders. The figure in the bottom section of the painting is framed in what appears to be a barred window that resembles that of a prison cell. This frame is particularly striking as the redness that constitutes the frame is reminiscent of blood, and therefore alludes to danger and death. The face of the figure that is caught within the frame is not nearly as distorted as that of the figure in 'Le Reveil'.

However, the unclear features on the face of the framed male figure are emphasized by streams of red that distort the chest, arm and head. The distortion of the bottom figure's face makes it difficult to interpret his emotion, but the bowed head suggests a sense of despair. Furthermore, the left eye is shut by the red substance, thus compromising the sight of the figure.

Similar to 'Le Reveil', which displays a figure that sits close to the open door but does not claim freedom, this figure seems to be imprisoned within the frame, although their left arm is close to what appears to be a way out of the frame. Thus, it may be suggested that the distorted eye of the figure reduces their ability to see the way out. This lack of ability is emphasized by the absence of legs, which also suggests a sense of fragmentation, and in turn emphasizes the figure's state of captivity.

The second figure within the painting looks directly at the viewer. This engagement with the viewer makes the figure seem much more confident than the figure below, whose head is bowed. The confidence in the stance of the figure in the top section of the art work is further amplified by the freedom that he enjoys; the figure above is clearly free from the bloodied

frame that imprisons the other figure. Furthermore, this figure is so blended with the white background that it may be suggested that the figure is a white prison warden, which further supports the confidence in the stance and engagement of the figure above. The distinction between the two figures suggests an imbalance, and seems to highlight the segregation that was supported under apartheid.

Furthermore, the title of the painting clarifies the artist's choice to use the symbol of blood, and the symbol of imprisonment. The title, 'Soweto', seems to allude to the Soweto Uprising which had occurred in 1976 – three years prior to the creation of this work. The news

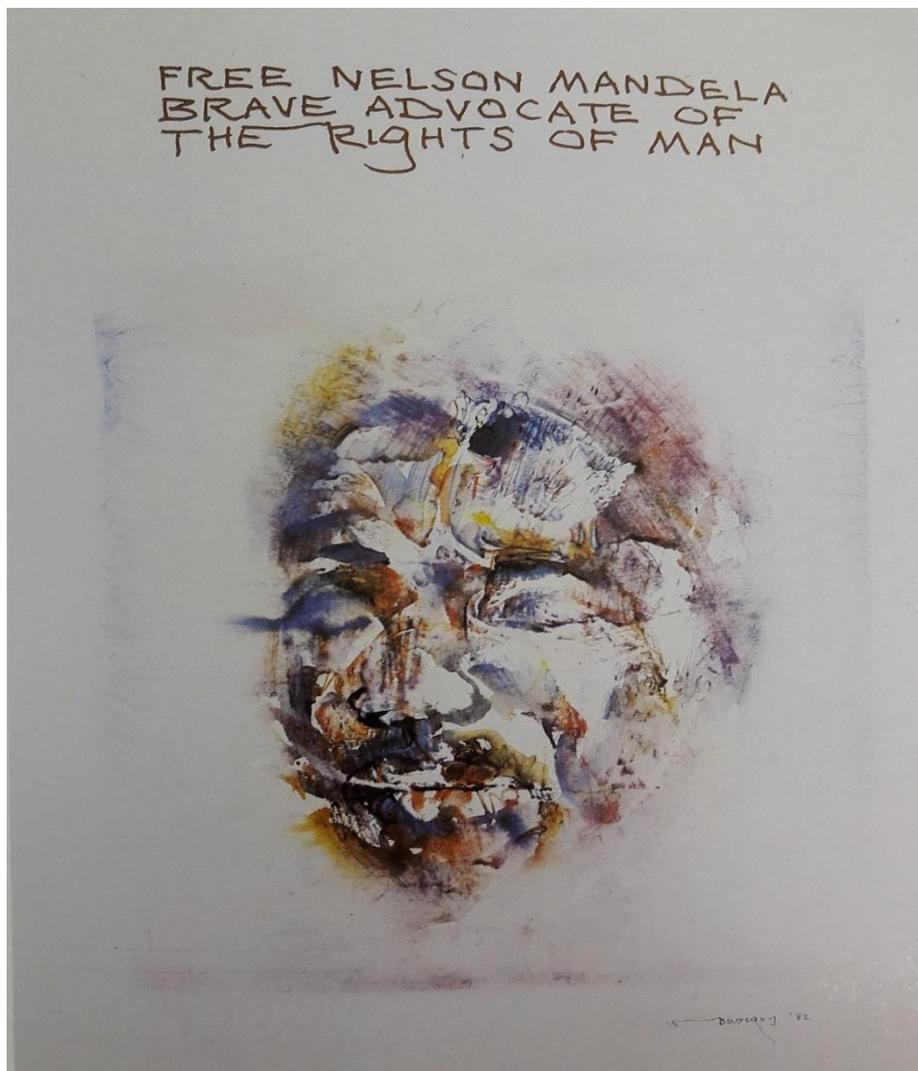


Figure 3. Louis Le Brocqy – *Nelson Mandela* (1983) Original watercolour, 61 x 45cm

surrounding the Soweto Uprising was highly publicized and was a globalised event and therefore attracted international attention to the injustices of apartheid. More specifically, this event saw the detainment of students involved in the protest. The symbol of a prison cell window and blood within the painting therefore seems to allude not only to the detainment of students but also to the deaths of students that were gunned down during the Soweto Uprising.

Another art work in ACA that portrays the human face as a symbol is ‘Nelson Mandela’ (1983) by Louis Le Brocquy, as seen in figure 3 above. This work displays the face of Mandela, and does not include any other parts of the body. As represented in ‘Soweto’, this illustration, according to Butler, is effective as the face in art is a ‘wordless vocalisation of suffering... [and] the face seems to be a kind of sound’ (134). Butler’s work has been instrumental interpreting the ACA works and is therefore worth referring to here. One may suggest that the sound presented to the viewer is seen in the shut eyes of Nelson Mandela, the fading ears and the shut mouth. The fact that Mandela’s eyes are shut in the painting seems to indicate a sense of limitation, as the eyes allow one to see the way forward. This limitation is evidenced in both ‘Le Reveil’ and ‘Soweto’, and is also suggested by the statement that accompanies

Brocquy’s art work. It reads as follows: ‘Free Nelson Mandela. Brave Advocate of the Rights of Man’ (85). The liberty of sight seems to be juxtaposed with the lack of access to freedom – Mandela was imprisoned in 1962 and was sentenced to life imprisonment. The restrictions that accompany his imprisonment are emphasized by the blurred ears that are virtually nonexistent within the image, while his shut mouth suggests a lack of communicative freedom.

However, these three primal resources of communication (eyes, ears and mouth) are complicated by the various colours that comprise the face of Nelson Mandela. Similar to

Franta's 'Le Reveil', the race of face in 'Nelson Mandela' is indiscernible, suggesting an amalgamation of races. This is therefore a direct opposition of the distinct boundaries placed between races under apartheid; these distinctions fail to exist within the painting. Here, the



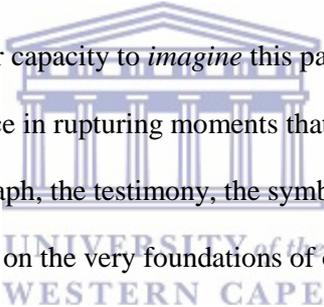
Figure 4. Magdalena Abakanowicz – *Dos* (1982) Sculpture in jute canvas, 65 x 65cm

face of Mandela seems to refer to the hope of democracy and the unity of races that ensured the equal distribution of 'the rights of man' (85). Therefore, in spite of his imprisonment, Mandela is depicted as a man free from the laws of apartheid.

One of the most visually captivating works of the Art Contre Apartheid collection is 'Dos' (1982) by Polish sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz. This sculpture is similar to several of her other art works – Abakanowicz is known to use sculptural mediums that display the human form with missing limbs. The sculpture which she contributed to ACA remains true to this trend, displaying a sculpture without feet, hands and a face. De Jong's statement, as referenced earlier, helps one to understand the artist's choice to display the absence of these

body parts. As will be dealt with more extensively later on within this chapter, according to de Jong, 'the image of the human being, although abstract or even visually absent in form, is generally a key element in the structure of an art work' (de Jong 125). The absence of certain body parts within this art work highlights a lack of autonomy and physical capabilities. This seems to allude to the restrictions placed on South Africans of colour, especially in terms of their places of occupation (the absence of hands), access to 'whites only' areas in the country (the absence of feet) and freedom of verbal expression (the absence of a mouth).

Furthermore, just as in the case of the other paintings referenced above, the absence of a face on this sculpture makes it difficult to interpret the emotions of the figure. According to Elizabeth Dauphinee,



Bodies in pain must rely on our capacity to *imagine* this pain, which cannot be expressed and can only find an imperfect voice in rupturing moments that also work toward the building of narratives – that is the photograph, the testimony, the symbolic aesthetic portrayal through art or poetry. The disconnect rests on the very foundations of our modes of knowing. Imagining requires us to think ourselves into the skin of others, and the consequence is that our looking both becomes and remains ours alone. (Dauphinee 146)

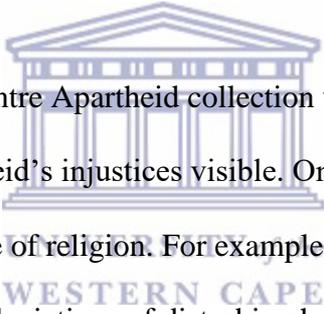
Here, Dauphinee suggests that pain, in its inexpressibility, can only be imagined by the viewer, and it cannot be understood in its entirety; the viewer is tasked with the responsibility of imagining the interior emotions and pain of the figure, and thus interpret their outcry.

'Dos' may be viewed as a visual art work that challenges viewers to 'think ourselves into the skin,' (146) of the figure.

The material that closely resembles stone suggests that the figure had been toughened by their troubles. However, the interpretation of the emotions of this figure is even more complex, as the figure sits with its back facing the viewer. The figure forces the viewer to '*imagine* this pain, which cannot be expressed and can only find an imperfect voice' (146). The back of the

figure suggests an immediate sense of disconnect, which may be interpreted as the imperfect voice which Dauphinee refers to here. In this sense, the absence of the face reverts the viewer's attention to other physical resources that communicate that which the stony figure does not express in words, just as is evidenced in 'Le Reveil' by Franta. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that the collection seemed to aim to portray art works that used the distortion and absence of certain human and referential forms in order to depict the crimes and injustices supported under apartheid. The following section will focus on the presence of art works that capitalised on what will be referred to as 'Religious symbolism' in an attempt to allow the visual to express the sometimes ineffable trauma brought about during apartheid.

2.2 Religious symbolism



Several works of art in the Art Centre Apartheid collection use the theme of torture as a means with which to make apartheid's injustices visible. One of the avenues which the ACA artists used to do so was the theme of religion. For example, several of the artworks protested against the apartheid era through depictions of disturbing human forms taking part in a religious war, as seen in 'Untitled' by Wilfredo Lam, 'Los Engulleran' (1983) by Roberto Matta, and an artwork by Wolf Vostell titled 'Black Cruzification' (1982), displaying the gruesome crucifixion of a human figure. Derrida makes the following statement, which may be used as a framework through which to interpret the meaning represented within these art works. In 'Racism's Last Word', he draws attention to the use of Calvinist religion as a means to justify apartheid in South Africa:

It is in God that political power originates. It remains, therefore, indivisible. It would be a "revolt against God" to accord individual rights to "immature social communities" and to those who "openly rebel against God; that is the communists". This Calvinist reading of the Scripture condemns democracy, that universalism "which seeks the root of humanity in a set of

worldwide sovereign relations that includes humanity in a whole:” it points out that “Scripture and History each demonstrate that God requires Christian States” (Derrida 57)

Here, Derrida sees apartheid not only as a perversion of Christianity, but he also portrays it as the very foundation of the segregation promoted by the political system which his essay addresses, while portraying the brand of Calvinist Christian fundamentalism and repressive politics as “indivisible” (57). Additionally, he quotes from the Bible, suggesting that these scriptures were used to justify apartheid legislation:

“Each people and each nation is attached to its native soil which has been allotted to it by the Creator ... God wanted nations and peoples to be separate, and he gave separately to each nation and to each people its particular vocation, its tasks and gifts...” Or this: ... the “Hebrewistic” mythology of the Boer people... excludes any other ‘chosen people’ Among all the domestic contradictions thus exported, maintained and capitalized upon by Europe, there remains one which is not just any one among others: apartheid, to be sure, is upheld but it is also condemned in the name of Christ. (Derrida 59-60)



Figure 5. Wilfredo Lam – *Untitled* (1982) Pastel / Original pastel 85 x 60cm

In light of the above, the religious themes in the works below expose the way in which religion was used to rationalize acts of evil. This section will therefore suggest that these works undermine the apartheid state's claim to be an authentic and undisputed representative of God's will. The paintings use Christian symbolism to claim its allegiance to the struggle for freedom, and also provide a critique of using religion to justify acts of evil.

'Untitled' (1982) by Wilfredo Lam is arguably one of the most powerful works in the collection, displaying a ghastly figure wearing what resembles a pulpit robe, combining religious symbolism with beast-like imagery. This transparent robe exposes cleavage, thus implying that this subject is a woman. This implication is furthermore cemented by the long, yellow (blonde) hair that stems from the head of the figure. The transparency of her robe seems to allude to a certain level of exposure, suggesting that truth had somehow been hidden and will be known through this depiction. The strange figure has two horns, one of which is reddened with what may allude to blood, referring to both death and violence. This matches the blood stain on the left whisker of the figure. The figure has two miniature horned figures atop its head, and these figures form the shape of sunglasses. Just as in the case of the primary figure, these figures depict evil: they have blank eyes, unsmiling mouths and horns on their heads. However, one of the most striking aspects of Lam's art work is the reference to animals. Peffer provides useful background to the artistic practice of evolving human beings into beastly figures, in an effort to portray what he refers to as 'animalism'. He says,

In South Africa, artistic depictions of human beings reverting to forms of animalism had their roots in an indigenous sacred worldview that was applied to the culture of violence spawned by apartheid. They were also heirs to a tradition among black modernist artists who evoked the burden of living in a divided society, by imagining the human figure in abstracted or nonhuman form. (Peffer 41-42)

Dehumanization under apartheid was therefore a theme used by several South African anti-apartheid artists of the 1980s. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, which will deal more extensively with South African art movements under apartheid. However, it is a point worth noting in this section, as the globalisation of the anti-apartheid movement is identified in the links between the forms of artistic protest portrayed nationally and internationally. Furthermore, André whose work has been instrumental interpreting the ACA works and is therefore worth referring to here Brink's essay, which he contributed to the ACA catalogue, may be regarded as an accompaniment of Lam's painting. Brink portrays his perception of the apartheid era as follows:

I see an entire society slide into a shadow-world of lies, or rumours, or suspicions, denied access to the truth, because that truth would destroy the system.... I see Evil draped in the cloak of Good, Satan putting on the mask of the Church, the Lie masquerading as Truth, Exploitation presenting itself as the Saviour. (Brink 29)

Brink's emphasis on the words 'Evil', 'Good', 'Church', and so forth highlight his perspective of apartheid at the time; he refers to it as a 'masquerade' designed to deceive. Several symbols within the painting illustrate this masquerade, such as the transparent robe and the horns atop the figure's head. In the same way that Brink makes connections between opposing factors, the painting illustrates a juxtaposition of religion (good) and evil. This figure is an amalgamation of the Trinity, which is considered holy to those of Christian faith, and an evil trinity consisting of three beast-like figures that are adorned with horns. Here, the idea of the human form being subject to transformation as a result of apartheid influences is at play.



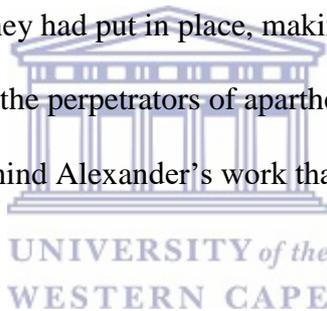
Figure 6. Jane Alexander – *The Butcher Boys* (1985/86) Mixed media, Size unknown

A similar form of transformation is seen in South African artist Jane Alexander's work entitled 'The Butcher Boys' (1985/86). This famous sculpture is an illustration of racial tribulation and turmoil under apartheid and is arguably one of the most controversial and powerful works created by a South African artist during the 1980s. Alexander's work is often referred to as epitomizing 'the role of art in the then politically tense and disgruntled South Africa' (Shibase 20). The life-sized sculpture was first exhibited at the Market Theatre Gallery in Johannesburg in 1986 and is now permanently housed at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town.

This disturbing work of art displays three oil painted, plaster figures that appear to be quasihuman. Each figure assumes a calm position – the figure on the far right sits with arms crossed while the middle figure has its hands placed on each thigh, and the figure on the far left clutches the bench with both hands. Each of these characters have matching cuts travelling along their chests, giving one the impression that they had been subjected to the very butchering which is implied within the title of the work. At first glance, these life-sized figures are menacing and frightening, even though their stances are not ones of action. In a discussion of her works, including 'Dog' (1984-5) and 'Domestic Angel' (1984), Jane Alexander communicates the reason for the choice to create such menacing figures, saying,

I discovered that the more horrific my work, the more readily people looked at it. I began to wonder if people would respond to more restrained images. For me, the work that followed was far more difficult – The Butcher Boys were a radical departure from those earlier pieces – these new ones were living figures. Despite the exposed bones and so on, I was attempting to reveal aspects of violence through passive forms. (Quoted in Williamson 44)

‘Butcher Boys’ may therefore serve as a template for the suffering inflicted during the apartheid era. While they come across as human, the figures also seem to represent a cross between humanity and a beast-like existence that is both terrifying and compelling. It is therefore implied that these figures have been stripped of the ability to perform as human beings; their humanity had somehow been tampered with as a result of the influence of apartheid and the system which they had put in place, making them less human. Thus, it is implied that these figures may be the perpetrators of apartheid. Erin Mosely contributes a useful excerpt on the meaning behind Alexander’s work that may assist in understanding ‘Untitled’ by Wilfredo



Lam. Mosely says,

This assemblage of creatures elicits a visceral sensation of fear and repulsion. They were men, but have transformed into demons; they are human, but simultaneously not human, or at least not anymore. Evoking the larger societal context in which apartheid flourished – a racist, overly militarized, and masculinized regime sustained by authoritarianism and routine use of violence – Alexander’s piece lends stark visualization to the insidious ways in which the apartheid system distorted the humanity of its perpetrators. (128)

Thus, similar to the message portrayed in ‘Butcher Boys’, Lam’s painting seems to suggest that South Africans should be aware of the often blurred lines between good and evil under apartheid. Here, it is worth noting that because the figure in ‘Untitled’ has blonde hair, it may

be deduced that this image displays a satirical analysis of whiteness under apartheid, while the Christian robe and the church bell satirizes the Christian faith.

At this point, the work of theorists who have discussed the presence and absence of perpetrator in images must be acknowledged. For instance, Livia K. Stone proposes that the public display of victims of trauma locates the violence in the image of the suffering body, rather than in the assailant.

Stone expands as follows: ‘a visual focus on suffering bodies—emaciated brown children with swollen bellies, for example, or a black man lying in a hospital bed bathed in blood—obscures mechanisms and perpetrators of violence by simply leaving them out of the frame’ (183). Thus, in representing the perpetrators as the primary figures within their works of art, both Lam and Alexander acknowledge the importance of highlighting the crimes and deception performed under apartheid, and so these artists locate the violence in the assailant instead of the victim.

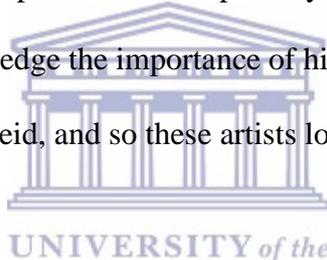


Figure 7. Wolf Vostell – *Black Crucifixion* (1982) Acrylic, radiographs and bones on canvas, 240 x 540cm

Other ACA works, however, place the emphasis on those that suffered under apartheid, and thus highlight the sacred sacrifices of those that sought to see South Africa beyond apartheid. One example is ‘Black Crucifixion’ by Wolf Vostell, which uses religion to illustrate pain, suffering and sacrifice. With regards to its triptych format, Vostell uses the typical form

found in Christian altar art works. 'Black Cruzification' is one of the most thought-provoking artworks within the collection, boasting a 240cm x 540cm depiction of a figure suspended against what resembles the bottom half of a cross, thus referencing the crucifixion of Christ. This choice of illustration is fitting as in Christianity, the Christ figure on a cross represents the epitome of pain and suffering. While 'Black Cruzification' points to the sacrifice of those that offered their lives for the struggle against apartheid, the work also suggests that in the same way Christ was wrongly tortured and crucified, so people of colour were tortured and ridiculed without justifiable reason.

The crucifixion which is depicted here also seems to be a collective event, including several participants – the figure crucified in the center and the two men beside him. Two figures hold each of the dying man's arms, making this art work considerably different to the crucifixion of Christ, which is clearly referenced in several ways. This painting is a combination of the crucifixion of a Christ-like figure and a representation of the story of Moses. Moses grew tired and Aaron and Hur held his arms up in Exodus 17:2. This story seems to be referenced in this painting, indicating a state of unity amongst black South Africans in spite of persecution.

Furthermore, a figure that closely resembles a woman lies down at the foot of the cross. It may be assumed that this figure is Mary, Christ's mother. This figure's gender is predominantly unidentifiable, except for the presence of what resembles breasts. The crucified figure's feet are virtually one with the woman's body, and it may be argued that the figure rests on the back of the woman. It is also interesting to note that this work displays the bones of the dying figure. This depiction convinces the viewer that indeed it is a human figure being crucified, and also spurs the viewer to sympathise based on this portrayal.

However, the bodies of the two figures holding the crucified figure onto the cross are completely transparent, suggesting that they are not human, or that they are no longer alive. It

may be deduced that the figures atop the cross are spirits or angels aiding the crucified figure in their final moments on earth. In the case of the woman at the feet of the crucified figure, her body too is transparent.

Moreover, the left section of the painting depicts a building, but unlike in the case of the figures, one cannot see the inside of the building. From the roof of the building protrudes the globe of the world, making this building very similar to the Church of our Lady Mary of Zion in Ethiopia – the church is believed to house the ark of God’s covenant, which has the globe of the world atop its roof. It may therefore be proposed that, in the same way that the right side of the painting displays one of the most sacred symbols in Christianity, the left side does the same.

Overall, this painting is an amalgamation of a sacred, torturous sacrifice and the possibility of revival, not only for the figure on the cross but also for those that would benefit from the sacrifice being made. This seems to be a demonstration of what Diana Wylie refers to as the fusion of ‘fear and hope’ (58) and ‘defiance and defeat’ (58). Wylie emphasizes the existence of such dualities in her paper on art during the time of struggle against apartheid, and so acknowledges both the dangers that South Africans faced under apartheid and the power of the sacrifices made in an effort towards obtaining liberty.

This message is similar to a painting by South African artist Ronald Harrison titled ‘The Black Christ’ (1962-3). Although this painting was not part of the Art Contre Apartheid collection. It is an important work which draws upon the crucifixion of Christ through the presentation of a black male figure hanging on a cross. Harrison’s painting was considered extremely controversial, as it was completed around the time of the Rivonia Trial and Sharpeville. At the time, artists of colour in South Africa were not allowed to create art portraying the unarmed protestors at Sharpeville in 1960 nor Soweto in 1976.

As stipulated earlier, protest art was not common until the early 1980s. It was also considered a direct challenge of apartheid, as the face of the crucified man was that of the late Albert Luthuli, former president of the ANC, while the Roman centurions that were crucifying him resembled the features of Hendrik Verwoerd, who was the Prime Minister of South Africa at the time, and minister of Justice at the time, John Vorster. Instead of conforming to the dominant narrative that pushed black South Africans to the bottom rung of society, Harrison chose to portray a black man as a hero and a revered figure, while the white men are represented as villains. Similarly, 'The Black Cruzification' depicts blackness as sacred as a means with which to speak out against apartheid.

Another symbol of religion is seen in Roberto Matta's ACA work titled 'Los Engulleran' (1983). 'Los Engulleran', which means 'The Gobbled', displays two figures that are splattered with what resembles blood.

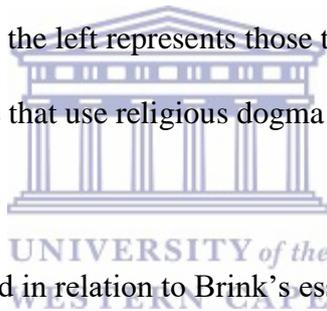


Figure 8. Roberto Matta – *Los Engulleran* (1983) Oil on painted paper on canvas, 160 x 150cm

The neck of the figure on the right resembles the head gear of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), while the head that rests on the neck resembles the dragon on the 'Association of Klans'

emblem. The figure on the right holds what resembles a cross. On the one hand, the cross in the hand of the figure on the right is reminiscent of the Christian cross which Christians cherish. Alternatively, the cross in the painting resembles the KKK flag and emblem. This duality is reminiscent of Wilfredo Lam's 'Untitled', which displays a figure that represents both good and evil.

Furthermore, the KKK, which engaged in the murder and lynching of black people in the American South, believes in the upholding of the Christian faith while using this belief to justify evil acts. Thus, it is worth noting that the figure on the left seems to be covered in much more blood than the one on the right, implying that the seated figure is a victim of violence. The hands of the figure on the left seem to be bound by a snake; a symbol of evil. It may be deduced that the figure on the left represents those that have fallen and continue to fall victim to the evil acts of those that use religious dogma as a means with which to validate their evil actions.



This painting may also be analysed in relation to Brink's essay which made the point that 'if the oppressed are maimed or destroyed physically, the oppressor himself becomes subject to moral and spiritual decay and death' (Brink 29). Through the depiction of the KKK enacting violence upon a seated figure, Matta's painting seems to provide a critique of the apartheid system which was based on a long-standing promotion of (white) Afrikaners as the members of a 'God's chosen Master Race' (Brink 29). It may therefore be suggested that this inequality is depicted as a form of religious violence within the painting, while apartheid seems to be compared to the actions of the KKK. The 'moral and spiritual decay,' (Brink 29) which Brink refers to seems to be displayed in the depiction of the KKK member being splattered with blood. It is suggested that, in attacking the seated figure, the oppressor too is affected by the wounds of the oppressed; the act of enforcing violence upon the life of another taints those enforcing the acts of violence. This is a reminder of South African artist

Jane Alexander's 'The Butcher Boys', which was referred to earlier. Both Matta and Alexander's works lend 'stark visualization to the insidious ways in which the apartheid system distorted the humanity of its perpetrators' (Mosely 128). Thus, these works highlight the ability of apartheid to rob humans of their humanity, and so provide a critique of the racist system.

Several art works in the collection also used satire to demonstrate their concerns, and couple this with religious symbols. An example of this is 'Nelson Mandela' (1978) by Icelandic artist, Erro. This painting displays the saintly, youthful looking head and shoulders of Nelson Mandela, who was at the time the imprisoned leader of the African National Congress (ANC). Behind Mandela's head is a group caricatures of the Western or European establishment, playing a game of cards. On the face of it this is a scene of light bourgeois entertainment, but this setting raises questions about the larger game that is being played, and what is at stake. This group of people is the only group that is vividly painted in shades of blue, yellow and red, while the casual setting is problematized by the pale, white men that occupy the back section of the room.



Figure 9. Erro – *Nelson Mandela* (1978) Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 100cm

The men (among them a priest) on the left sit at a desk and seem to be spurring those on the far right to join their side of the room, alluding to a coalition of forces. The men on the right are a ruffian army, adorned with tattoos displaying the Nazi symbol on the left arm of one man, a Nazi symbol engraved on the chain around his neck, the Ku Klux Klan emblem on the chain hanging around the neck of one man, skull tattoos, a snake tattoo and a tattoo of a knife. Each of these symbols signify danger, death and warring against the innocent.

It is also worth noting that the three men that occupy the front, right section of the art work have large bellies that are tattooed with the words Vietnam, Congo and Katanga. The large bellies indicate greed. The painting suggests that this band of men is being exhorted to move forward and perform a task, and this may be read as an allegory of the way in which colonial occupations were often carried out by irregular mercenary forces in the employ of colonial and commercial enterprise. The various locations identified on their bodies may be making reference to the Congo Crisis, which was a period of intense political upheaval in the Republic of Congo between 1960 and 1965. This period consisted of a series of civil wars and the Congo Crisis (also referred to as the Katanga Crisis) was a proxy conflict in the Cold War. Approximately 100,000 people are believed to have died as a result of this crisis.

This analysis is supported by Derrida's 'Racism's Last Word'; he makes several statements that seem to be directly linked to what Erro demonstrates within his painting. Derrida aligns the rulership and mandate of the apartheid state with that of Nazi Germany, saying the following: 'It happens that this political theology inspires its militants with an original form of anti-semitism – the National Party excluded Jews up until 1951' (60). Just as was seen in Roberto Matta's painting referenced earlier, this dichotomy suggests that two of the world's most discriminatory regimes of the 20th century were apartheid South Africa and Nazi

Germany. In their article titled ‘Why?’, the creators of the Art Contre Apartheid collection make the following statement:

In the same way others before us have done against Nazism, it became clear to us that we were obliged as artists to rise up against this brutality perpetrated against man and his dignity. It was our duty to take part in the growing movement of solidarity that endeavoured to eradicate the globe of this cancer of apartheid. (Saura and Pignon-Ernest 13)

The creators of the Art Contre Apartheid collection therefore typified apartheid as a form of Nazism. Likewise, Erro uses visual representations as a means with which to provide a critique of the weaknesses of political figures by presenting them as Nazis.

It is also worth noting that the theme of pain and suffering is emphasized throughout the ACA collection, and seems to be a constant thread passing through the works in an effort to represent the plights of those in pain. Erro’s painting addresses this plight in his depiction of Nelson Mandela as a saintly figure illustrated at the front of the image with a crown of thorns on his head, depicting the trials of Jesus Christ. The artist also alludes to the fact that Mandela was set apart for a specific purpose, and in turn would undergo persecution as a result of it. This implication is emphasized through the artist’s depiction of Mandela as the only figure within the painting that closely resembles an actual human being; the other figures are highly caricatured, thus emphasizing the satire which the artist employs when depicting their narrative. This illustration appears to be closely based on an actual photograph of Mandela, emphasising a juxtaposition between realism and satire.

In Derrida’s essay titled ‘Luminous Sign’ (1996), which was one of the essays which he contributed to the ACA catalogue, he speaks of Nelson Mandela as a revolutionary forerunner with a goal that may or may not be achieved within his lifetime. This short essay was written after the arrival of the collection in South Africa, and communicates Derrida’s

gratitude towards those that contributed to Art Contre Apartheid, while expressing a desire to see the collection serving its intended purpose in the country. Derrida says,

What is thereby given to us today and given in the first place by all those who struggled, suffered, sometimes to the death, over here, in South Africa... is first of all the good fortune of witnessing such a revolution in our lifetime... a revolution led by a living and still so young Nelson Mandela ... I wondered whether he, Nelson Mandela, would see in his lifetime the land toward which he so firmly, resolutely, and lucidly led his people. (10)

These words followed after the 1994 election of a democratic government. This statement may be regarded as an accompaniment of the painting, as well as a commemoration of Nelson Mandela. In light of Ero's depiction of a youthful Mandela, it is worth noting that the only visible attribute that is reminiscent of Christ is the crown of the thorns on his head. The crown of thorns was one of the most brutal forms of punishment inflicted upon Christ when he was crucified. It may therefore be deduced that the artist intended to display the horrors of apartheid through a reminder of the sacrifice of Christ and his effort towards delivering his people; the artist depicted Madiba as both a saviour and a saint. Thus, just as in the case of 'Black Cruzification' by Wolf Vostell, Ero chose the image of suffering as a means with which to represent the most venerated position within the Christian faith, and used a Black man to portray this message.

Furthermore, in South Africa, Black artists were not allowed to portray Mandela's face in their art, and especially avoided portraying Madiba's defiance while speaking at the 1963 Rivonia Trial – it was considered treasonous to reproduce Mandela's face at the time. One of the reasons why the collection could not enter the country before the end of apartheid is that the collection features a number of works that do not only appear to critique apartheid brutality, but also display the face of Nelson Mandela. The deliberate depiction of Mandela in this painting therefore seems to be a form of defiance against apartheid all on its own.

Lastly, instead of the crown of thorns which was placed on the head Christ at the crucifixion, Mandela wears a crown made entirely of barbed wire. The artist therefore seems to suggest that, in the same way that barbed wire is used to keep people bound, the apartheid government and its segregationist system sought to make Mandela a captive. The following section expands on the prominent use of the symbol of barbed throughout the collection.

2.3 The Barbed Wire theme

In Racsim's 'Last Word', Derrida describes apartheid as a, 'concentration camp... system of partition, barbed wire, crowds of mapped out solitudes,' (54). He suggests that those suffering under the laws of an unjust society were bound and held captive under the siege of the apartheid system. Several of the ACA artists depict barbed wire in order to make injustices and violence evident. The artists that did so were Gavin Jantjes in 'Livre sur l'Afrique du Sud' (1974-1975), 'El Drapo' (1982) Josep Guinovart Arnulf Rainer in 'Autoportrait' (1973) and Fluoman in 'Tribute to Steve Biko. Brimstone. After Apartheid.' (1978).



Figure 10. Fluoman – *Tribute to Steve Biko. Brimstone. After Apartheid*, (1978) Liquitex and fluorescent paint on canvas, 150 x 160cm

Anti-apartheid and Black Consciousness activist, Bantu Stephen Biko (Steve Biko) had a lasting effect on the way black South Africans viewed themselves and their struggle against

apartheid. Biko was a passionate activist against apartheid, leading thousands into opposition against racism and segregation. It was this passion that saw the rise of the South African Student Organisation (SASO), and it was this struggle that led to his untimely death.

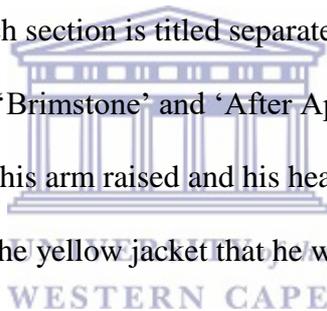
Following a sustained oppositional engagement, Biko was banned in 1977. It was during this period that Biko was detained, and in 1978, Biko was severely tortured, beaten and killed by state security. Nearly 21,000 people attended Biko's funeral. Biko's life, journey and tenacity was praised and discussed posthumously; his biography was documented as the basis for the 1987 film 'Cry Freedom'.

It is on this basis that Fluoman created this triptych entitled 'Tribute to Steve Biko.

Brimstone. After Apartheid.' Fluoman's work seems to be illustrating three phases of history, and thus it may suggested that each section is titled separately in an effort to depict these

phases – 'Tribute to Steve Biko', 'Brimstone' and 'After Apartheid'. In this triptych,

Fluoman depicts Steve Biko with his arm raised and his head bowed. The viewer is unable to see the face of Biko, but only on the yellow jacket that he wears.



In the second section of the triptych, labelled 'Brimstone', Biko is depicted with his back towards the viewer. The emphasis is on the word 'Brimstone', which is written in red. The colour red signifies danger, blood and death. Perhaps more importantly, the word 'Brimstone' figuratively denotes destruction or punishment. This term is therefore closely linked to the fact that Biko wears a yellow outfit, the colour of Azapo – the political movement with which he is associated. Additionally, in Biblical terms, the phrase 'fire and brimstone' refers to God's wrath against evil. The term is therefore a symbol of both South African trials under apartheid and the potential of victory and justice. The potential of victory is emphasized through the depiction of the loudspeaker in his hand. In spite of the presence of the barbed wire which passes above his head, Biko holds the loudspeaker firmly. The presence of the loudspeaker indicates a sense of agency and survival in spite of death – Biko was deceased at

the time that this work was created. It is therefore implied that Biko's legacy and that which he fought for would continue to speak in spite of his physical departure from the world. It is also worth noting that the word 'one' is underlined on the garment worn by Biko. It is implied that the struggle against apartheid was one which required South Africans to stand as a unit in order to bring about the end of apartheid, just as was demonstrated in Wolf Vostell's 'Black Cruzification'.

The third and final segment of the triptych displays the same man with two men alongside him, wearing a jacket displaying the words 'After Apartheid'. He is depicted with his head high and a cigarette in his mouth, suggesting a sense of ease. This illustrates hope, and implies that apartheid would not last forever, or indeed that it has already passed. The man on the left side of Steve Biko has the word 'One' written on his right cheek. This connects the message portrayed in the second phase of this triptych with the third and final phase presented here. It is suggested that, not only would the fight against apartheid require the unified efforts of all South Africans, as depicted in the second phase, but the end of apartheid would also unify South Africans under one consciousness of democracy – hence the emphasis on the word 'one'.

Another artist who used an illustration of barbed wire was South African artist and activist, Gavin Jantjies. For most of the 1970s, Gavin Jantjies was an active and militant critic of the apartheid regime and studied at the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art. He was also a founding member of the German anti-apartheid movement. His contribution to the collection is particularly noteworthy, as he was the only South African to contribute to its formation.

As seen in figure 11, Jantjes' work titled 'Livre sur l'Afrique du Sud', which means 'Book on South Africa', takes the form of a collage and displays several depictions of violence, defence and most importantly, death. On June 16, which marked the first day of the violence and murder of hundreds of Soweto children that would become the topic of a global conversation about the crimes of apartheid, photographer Masana Sam Nzima took a picture that later appeared on the front page *The World*, which was a black-run newspaper. Nzima, who was born in the town of Lillydale in Mpumalanga, learnt the art of photography in the 1950s, and later developed an interest in photojournalism. As a result of continuous exposure to photography, his skill was honed and he soon became a photojournalist at *The World*. Nzima was requested to cover the June 16th event, and the day after the publication of the iconic photograph, Nzima was harassed by security police. As a result, he moved back to Lillydale.



Figure 11. Gavin Jantjes – Livre sur l'Afrique du Sud (1974 - 1975) Series of collages, 85 x 60cm

Within Nzima's photograph reproduced in 'Livre sur l'Afrique du Sud', the limp body of Pieter van der Merwe, age thirteen, is carried in the arms of Mbuyisa Makhubu, whose face reflects the weight and the horror of his burden. The dying child is covered in blood. One of the reasons

why the image of Hector Pieterse struck a chord worldwide was because of its resemblance to the Pieta; the illustration of the Virgin Mary, Christ's mother, as she mourned over his dead body.

Through this work, which is part of a series of 13 collages, Jantjes presents a story of South Africa. For instance, the different images used within the art work are photographs allowing access to actual real and authentic illustrations of the horrific story – none of the images are animated, painted or imitated. Jantjes therefore uses actual reproductions of history in an attempt to tell a South African story; hence the term 'book' in the title of his work.

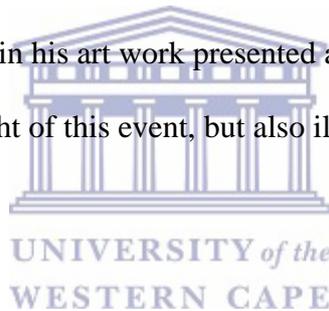
Interestingly, the top right corner of the work displays a helicopter that resembles the Rooivalk, which was an attack helicopter manufactured by the apartheid regime. Here, Jantjes displays an instrument of war that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people. This signifier of death and destruction is furthermore emphasized by the image of bullets, which is placed alongside the photograph of Hector Pieterse. The bullets which are displayed directly next to the limp head of the lifeless Hector Pieterse are an unambiguous illustration of police brutality which became the order of the day during the apartheid era.

The following statement by Andre Brink, as reflected in the ACA catalogue, may be regarded as a backdrop for what Jantjes depicts here: 'I see children killed by bullets when they dare to demand for themselves what in most other countries of the world are regarded as the most basic elements of freedom: food to eat, a place to live, the right to work, the right to learn, the right to think' (Brink 29). This statement can be read as an ekphrastic commentary on the scene depicted in 'Livre sur l'Afrique du Sud'.

Gavin Jantjes uses the photograph of Pieterse's body to point to death, injustice, political violence. The fact that Jantjes is paying homage to Hector Pieterse is emphasized by the accompaniment of the word 'Dead' on the backdrop of black people in the bottom left corner

of the art work. This image of brutality at the hands of the state was therefore symbolic of a bloodletting; a willing sacrifice that would later unite the black community in the struggle against apartheid. Nzima's photograph became an iconic illustration of the newly awakened struggle to see the end apartheid.

Lastly, the photograph of Hector Pieterse is adjacent to a picture of apartheid police forces. This is the only picture with barbed wire passing through it. Here, the barbed wire may be a symbol meant to emphasize the systems of partition that were set in place and upheld by police forces, as highlighted in Derrida's essay. Jantjies also seems to illustrate an opposition against apartheid forces through the depiction of a man with a weapon and a shield in his hands, and another with his mouth wide open, as if to protest against injustices. Jantjies' representation of this picture within his art work presented a unique illustration of the suffering which was caused in light of this event, but also illustrates a sense of defiance and resistance against apartheid.



2.4 The Absence of Form: The Human Body



Figure 12. Rafael Canogar – *P 53 – 79* (1979) Oil on canvas, 173 x 143cm

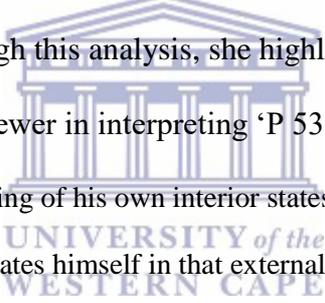
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Art Contre Apartheid is rich in art works that make use of abstractions as a means with which to communicate with viewers; 38 of the paintings are abstract works. However, for the purpose of the thesis, I will only be discussing with three of these paintings. It has been argued that abstract art is often considered to be the most perplexing art forms, as viewers may try to discover or even invent a recognisable component or figurative signifier that does not exist within the painting. Abstraction may refer to ‘art that stylises, simplifies, or deliberately distorts something that exists in the real world’ (Heller 14). Art Contre Apartheid, however, features works that are entirely non-representational, leaving viewers with the task of interpreting their reference to and against apartheid.

Spanish artist Rafael Canogar is one example of an ACA artist that contributed an abstract art work. Rafael Canogar is best known for his creation of abstract art works, which later led to a

period of pop art and the creation of geometrical art works. Canogar's contribution to Art Contre Apartheid work titled 'P 53-79' (1979), as seen in figure 12 above, displays an array of tangled shades of brown. It may be suggested that these shapes are reminiscent of straw or other natural material elements, such as earth or wood. However, the uncertainty surrounding this suggestion makes this abstract work difficult to interpret or relate to the fight against apartheid, which this collection sought to promote. The viewer is therefore faced with the seemingly impossible task of both understanding the meaning of the painting and connecting the visual "message" to politics.

Elaine Scarry provides an analysis of images that are void of form, suggesting that the objectlessness of an image expresses the true extent of a painful situation or that of a traumatic period in history. Through this analysis, she highlights certain aspects of the power of the visual which may aid the viewer in interpreting 'P 53-79'. Scarry explains:



Because of the inevitable bonding of his own interior states with companion objects in the outside world, [man] easily locates himself in that external world and has no need to invent a world to extend himself out into.... But nothing expresses his physical pain.... it is especially appropriate that the very state in which he is utterly objectless is also of all states the one that, by its aversiveness, makes most pressing the urge to move out and away from the body. (Scarry 162)

Thus, it is asserted that desire can be connected to objects outside the human form on the basis of the satisfaction of that desire. Scarry suggests that the physical pain and trauma experienced within the physical form of the figure used in her scenario is objectless, as it cannot refer to any object in the world. This is a theory more thoroughly discussed by Elizabeth Dauphinee, as referenced earlier. Furthermore, Scarry proposes that it, in adopting what she calls an 'objectless' state, depictions of a person in distress displays an attempt to steer away from the depiction of the body in an effort to make their pain visible. On the other

hand, the artist's choice not to represent anything identifiable within this painting, in light of the purpose of the collection, makes evident the inexpressible which Scarry refers to above. This may therefore be linked to Franta's choice not to display the face of the bound figure in 'Le Reveil', and Iba Ndiaye choice to distort certain facial features of the imprisoned figure in his 1979 work, 'Soweto'.

Furthermore, in the same way that one cannot easily interpret the visual meaning of the painting, the meaning behind the title of Canogar's work is not easily interpreted. Scarry provides a useful interpretation of the extent to which pain refuses to be expressed in language. At this point, it is worth referring back to an earlier quote by Scarry who makes a valuable statement on the absence of form. She says, the 'complete objectlessness, the complete absence of referential content, almost prevents it from being rendered to language: objectless, it cannot easily be objectified in any form, material or verbal' (162). Canogar's painting, which is titled 'P 53-79', may be viewed as an example of what Scarry refers to here. It may be suggested that Canogar chose to steer away from direct references to the familiar through both the lack of comprehensive language and absence of comprehensive visual depictions in an attempt to display through absence of form the suffering induced under apartheid.

Elizabeth Dauphinee says that, 'pain is not simply a private, interior ontology... pain is not relegated to the realm of immediate physical hurt, but also includes the emotional trauma, psychological distress, grief and mourning that pain often entails' (150). Dauphinee brings one's attention to the presence of psychological trauma which may be difficult to express through visual depictions thereof. It is in this context that artists may have chosen to represent their concerns surrounding the dominance of apartheid and the effects thereof through the use of abstractions.



Figure 13. Antonio Saura – *Trappe* (1982) Oil on canvas 162 x 130cm

Furthermore, one of the most captivating works in the ACA collection that seems to address that which Dauphinee expresses above is ‘Trappe’ (1982) by one of the organizers of the ACA collection, Antonio Saura. ‘Trappe’ displays a single, strange illustration in the top, middle section of the painting. This illustration takes no identifiable form, and cannot easily be related to a familiar structure. The lack of structure evokes a sense of confusion, as the viewer cannot easily interpret the meaning behind the painting – the image does not represent anything in particular.

This abstract work also displays a confusing combination of grey, white and brown shades that serve as the background of the unidentifiable illustration. The disillusionment and confusion which the painting brings about is therefore heightened by the artist’s sombre choice of colour, which steers the reader towards a sense of anguish, gloom and unhappiness. This suggestion is supported by the translation of the title – ‘Trappe’ is French for ‘Trap’.

The term implies a lack of freedom, mobility and autonomy. Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky speaks of the function of colour in abstract art and proposes that abstract art is able to express psychological trauma. He expresses this as follows:

If you let your eyes stray over a palette of color, you experience two things. In the first place you receive a purely physical effect, namely the eye itself is enchanted by the beauty and other qualities of color. You experience a satisfaction and delight, like a gourmet savouring a delicacy

... And so we come to the second result of looking at colors; their psychological effect. They produce a correspondent spiritual vibration... Generally speaking, color directly influences the soul. (Quoted in Heller 133)

In his interpretation of the complexities of pain, Kandinsky displays an acute awareness of both the physical and psychological effects of colours. In suggesting that abstractions are able to depict more accurately the effects of mental and emotional trauma, Kandinsky brings one's attention to the power of abstract art, but also the limitations of unambiguous visual illustrations of pain. In terms of Saura's painting, the viewer may be disillusioned by the lack of familiar objects within the painting, but the shapes, colours and form of the painting somehow work together to evoke within the viewer the very emotions that are embedded within the title of the painting – 'Trap'. In this way, the message behind the painting may be felt emotionally instead of simply being viewed. Thus, it may be suggested that the internal, inexpressible effects of pain and trauma may be expressed in various shapes and forms, and thus may be visualised through abstractions.

Another art work within the ACA collection that displays abstractions is 'Sol Ixent' (1980) by Catalan artist, poet and teacher Rafols Casamada. The title of Casamada's painting means 'Rising Sun'. This title is in a sense connected to the painting, as the shades of pale yellow indicate sunlight, a new day and joy – rising sun. This painting serves as an illustration of

hope and the desire to see South Africa delivered from the grip of apartheid. The abstract image of a rising sun speaks of renewal and a fresh start, and is therefore significant in terms of the collection's mission to see the end of apartheid, and so constitute a museum against and in memory of a racist institution such as apartheid.



Figure 14. Rafols Casamada – *Sol Ixent* (1980) Acrylic on canvas, 183 x 183cm

'Sol Ixent' also seems to allude to the clarity of sight which is brought about with the rising of the sun; once the sun has risen, darkness no longer reigns, and night had passed. Thus, those enjoying this transition are able to see things that cannot be seen in the dark, their perspective is changed and their ability to function without the impediment of darkness is introduced. Furthermore, along with the rising of the sun comes the possibility of natural growth. These visual suggestions, once again, suggest the hope for a future beyond the darkness of apartheid, and thus a future filled with light, redemption and progress.

Therefore, through this illustration, the artist seems to allow the colours to speak, rather than familiar and identifiable visual clues that indicate the message of the painting. Through the depiction of an abstract form, the artist allows the viewer to make a natural connection

between the colours and the title of the painting. Language, in this case, functions as a supporting factor in the deliverance of the message portrayed in ‘Sol Ixent’.

With reference to the above discussed works of art, it is important to acknowledge an argument posited by Jenny Edkins, as articulated in her book *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. Edkins suggests that pain ‘cannot be incorporated into a narrative’ (40). However, as expressed by Dauphinee, ‘this does not mean that there can be no speaking about pain – to the contrary, the rupture in subjectivity and in politics that trauma causes is precisely the basis for a different sort of engagement with trauma’ (Dauphinee 151). In other words, in the same way that there is often an imperative to speak about pain, there is always ‘a determination to find ways of speaking’ (Edkins 15) about pain and trauma. It may therefore be argued that the images are able to speak in non-narrative ways, and provide space to articulate pain and trauma. A concluding chapter will shift to a discussion of the function of language in the Art Contre Apartheid catalogue, drawing on arguments surrounding both the limitation and the power of language in the expression of trauma under apartheid. In doing so, the chapter seeks to argue that the visual is a more powerful and effective medium of communicating suffering and trauma.

Chapter 3: Art Contre Apartheid and South African Resistance

Art against Apartheid: A Comparison

The Art Contre Apartheid (ACA) collection can be regarded as a cultural and political commentary on the South African dispensation during apartheid, but it is also in conversation with South African works of art under apartheid. In framing this connection, it is important to sketch a brief history of the visual arts in South Africa, specifically focusing on black artists.

This chapter therefore aims to place ACA into the larger context of the politicization of South

African art, exploring the role of art and culture in the resistance movements in South Africa. In doing so, this chapter hopes to provide a framework from which to understand the metaphors, abstractions and symbolism created by artists that opposed the apartheid system, including the ACA artists which will also help us understand the depiction of bodies in pain. The chapter will also compare the themes of the ACA collection and that of the art created by South African artists. This is important as it will allow an understanding of the works of protest endorsed by the organizers of the international collection, and the extent to which this resonated with the resistance art created by those experiencing apartheid first-hand. In this way, this chapter intends to discuss the power of artistic expression both nationally and internationally, and its mark on South Africa's political history. Overall, the chapter will argue that the intrinsic power of the ACA collection lies in its ability to do what Derrida refers to as speaking 'the language of another without renouncing [its] own' (56), while bearing in mind the potential of discontinuities between the collection's 'language' and that of resistance art in South Africa during the same period. In doing so, the chapter aims to serve as a complement of chapter one, which more thoroughly discusses ACA as a visual language capable of communicating complex messages.

3.1 The Polly Street Initiative

The purpose of the apartheid system was the promotion and entrenchment of white minority power in South Africa, while the black majority was reduced to an inferior state in every aspect of their citizenship. Art was no exception to this racist, segregationist ideology. Prior to the 1980s, art instruction at schools for black students was limited to landscape, drawings of natural life, and what Peffer refers to as 'still life studies' (26). This meant the exposure that most black artists had during this period was exceptionally limited, resulting in the creation of works of art that focused primarily on subject matter that was far removed from

the political dispensation of South Africa at the time. Overall, there was a dearth of art teaching accessible to black South Africans and only a few private institutions exposed aspirant artists to contemporary art.

Significant black artists in this period developed their craft overseas, such as Sekoto's exposure to the Parisian art scene. In South Africa, Rorke's Drift, in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN), was a notable centre that was run by Swedish Lutherans. Directed by Otto Lundbolm since 1968, Rorke's Drift evolved into a significant art centre that developed black artists. It focused on traditional media such as weaving, wood carving, pottery and wood cut graphic art. This exposure was important, as many black South African artists were severely hampered by a lack of training and basic materials. The versatility of the training offered at Rorke's Drift was therefore important as it gave South African artists the tools with which to strive for mastery of their craft, though it also has to be noted that Rorke's Drift's approach and practice was crafts-based and did not explicitly engage with contemporary art, nor political controversy.



As the example of Rorke's Drift shows, training in contemporary art was rare at the time in South Africa. In this context, the Polly Street initiative was a remarkable step in shaping the cultural practices of black artists of South Africa. Polly Street, which was located in downtown Johannesburg, was primarily led by volunteers, including Ezrom Legae and Sydney Kumalo, both of whom were former students at Polly Street. David Koloane speaks of the importance of art centers such as Polly Street:

Community art centres, since 1948, have become the only available venues where young black students can learn creative skills in the disciplines of music, drama, dance, and fine art which were absent from the curricula of most (if not all) black schools. (Koloane 213)

It may therefore be posited that one of the crucibles of black South African art of the late

1950s and early 1960s was Polly Street. From 1952 to 1965, the courses offered at Polly Street were directed by Cecil Skotnes, who was a South African modernist artist best known for his woodcut technique that utilized indigenous (San) motifs and themes. In his paper titled 'The Influence of the Fine Art Market on the Work Produced by Black South African artists (Post 1994)', Thembalakhe Shibase states that the work produced by the Polly Street artists, indicates that they certainly adopted aspects of expressionistic painting in their work. The works of such artists as Louis Maqhubela, Ephraim Ngatane, and Ezrom Legae, perhaps, serves as good examples. (Shibase 38)

Furthermore, although the center was established in 1948, it gained popularity during the 1970s and 1980s. As a result of the training and resources offered at Polly Street, a number of South Africa's leading black artists that rose to prominence during the late 1970s and the early 1980s attended classes at Polly Street. While 'both Kumalo and Legae were protégés of Polly Street Centre,' (Shibase 52) other Polly Street students that later made a name for themselves in the South African art scene during the 1980s included Durant Sihlali, Thamsanqa Mnyele, Patrick Mautloa and Ephraim Ngatane. The work of Legae will be dealt with more extensively in the section below. The work of a few of these artists will be analysed briefly in the following section on Polly Street artists and their work.

At Polly Street, black students were offered a range of artistic options which were not afforded to them elsewhere. This exposure exposed them to art that encompassed a variety of styles, using various mediums. Skotnes, who taught at Polly Street, offered students exposure to international art, which included exposure to a range of styles – classical African sculpture and European modernism. Thus, black artists were introduced to an environment where their skills could be honed, allowing for an exploration, not only of their talent but also of ideas that eventually proved to be more intricate than simple still lifes or observations of landscapes. Sue Williamson provides further insight into the instrumental role of Polly Street.

She explains that the work done at Polly Street provided essential training that was not offered to those living in townships during apartheid:

Art facilities in the townships were virtually non-existent at this time, so Polly Street provided those basic essentials for every artist: materials, equipment, a space to work. But the Art Centre, under the direction of Cecil Skotnes, gave much more than that. Like apprentices in the studio of a master, those who came to Polly Street learned not only the techniques but the attitudes and ethos of being an artist. (111)

Therefore, in gaining an understanding of the South African art scene, it is imperative to acknowledge the work done at Polly Street. The center offered students the resources with which to formulate their individual visual language and equipped students to express their individual artistic perception without coercion.

Furthermore, Skotnes was more than just a director of an art initiative for black artists – he was a prominent South African artist who had a significant impact on South African art. Sue Williamson suggests that Skotnes’ own work influenced the approach to the medium which he wished to impart within the artists at Polly Street:

The professionalism he tried to encourage in the artists who came to the centre has always been a hallmark of Skotnes’ own work, represented as he is in almost every major collection in the country. The teacher influences the students and in turn is influenced by them. Stylistically, Skotnes’ work has always been clearly rooted in Africa. (Williamson 111)

Skotnes may be regarded, not only as a pioneer in South African modernist art, but also as one that guided other South African artists to use their skills in ways that would help them engage aesthetically in resistance against the system of apartheid. Although this political activism may not have been foregrounded at Polly Street, the tools afforded to them as a result of their exposure at the art school equipped them to use their skills to be social commentators and activists.

Furthermore, Skotnes called for art that represented the political realities that faced the ordinary South African citizen in their everyday lives; he seemed to be appealing to artists to depict the realities of oppression through their art. Skotnes suggests that art that is influenced and dictated by European influence is a diluted product of cultural expression, thus positing that South African resistance art needed to adopt an authentically South African visual language. Thus, as will be dealt with more thoroughly in the next section, South African artists and theorists such as Skotnes created art with the understanding of the importance of the South African situation under apartheid, and the importance of engaging in an authentically black South African cultural expression.

Interestingly, in several comments on his desire to see a liberated South Africa, Skotnes suggests that artists should steer away from the black-white obsession of racism and should instead be inspired by a multiplicity of colours rendered in art. Skotnes' desire is reminiscent of Derrida's words in his famous essay, 'Racism's Last Word'. In a statement reflecting his perception of the ACA exhibition, he says: 'such is here the creation and the work of which it is fitting to speak: South Africa beyond apartheid; South Africa in memory of apartheid' (55). Both Skotnes and Derrida saw art as a forward-looking medium that could imagine a South Africa that was free of political bondage. It was during this period of critical engagement with the tensions surrounding the South African visual language that ACA was created. Therefore, it is worth noting that the alignment between these art initiatives saw beyond apartheid, and sought to use art in order to express this visually.

Thus, it is appropriate to compare the themes present in the art created during the period of both the entrenchment and creation of the Polly Street initiative and surrounding art movements geared towards equipping artists of colour, and the ACA collective, so as to observe the continuities and contrasts that existed between these art works. In doing so, one

may gain an understanding of the connection and disconnections between South African art and the ACA initiative.

3.2 Polly Street Artists and Art Contre Apartheid Art

In light of the artistic history of South Africa discussed in the previous section, this section will deal very briefly with themes that are evident in both Art Contre Apartheid works (written and visual) and the work of South African artists. It will, however, be dealing specifically with South African artists that were both directly and indirectly affected by the Polly Street initiative, and in doing so will bring the products of Polly Street into conversation with ACA, as both of these art initiative sought to see South Africa beyond apartheid.

Although South African artist Zwelidumile Geelboi Mgxaji Mslaba (Dumile Feni) is not commonly associated directly with Polly Street and received no formal education, his artistry is believed to have been encouraged by fellow artist Ephraim Mojalefa Ngatane, who received formal training at Polly Street. Dumile Feni (1942 – 1991), a visual artist best known for his paintings, sculptures and drawings, is particularly celebrated for his artistic contributions to the cultural struggle against apartheid. One of the most noteworthy events surrounding Feni's work as an artist and activist was his one-man show which was held at the Durban Art Gallery in 1966. While at the Durban Art Gallery, Feni interacted with black students that were later associated with noteworthy art and resistance movements against apartheid.

In Feni's 1965 work titled 'Man with a Lamb', suffering and the evolvement of the human body is made evident. This work is particularly noteworthy as it was created after Feni met Ephraim Mojalefe Ngatane during his time as a patient at a hospital in Johannesburg in 1963

and 1964. It may be suggested that Feni's work was uniquely linked to the freedom of expression that was cultivated at Polly Street.



Figure 15. Dumile Feni – *Man with a Lamb* (1965) Charcoal and wash, 72 x 52cm

Dumile Feni's large charcoal drawing titled 'Man with a Lamb' (1965) displays a lamb that is being carried off for slaughter. What is perhaps most striking about the work is the intertwining of the animal and the man who seems to be struggling with the lamb. Here, the idea of political turmoil is depicted through the depiction of physical turmoil. This amalgamation of forms is a trend which was present in many of Feni's art works during the 1960s-1980s period.

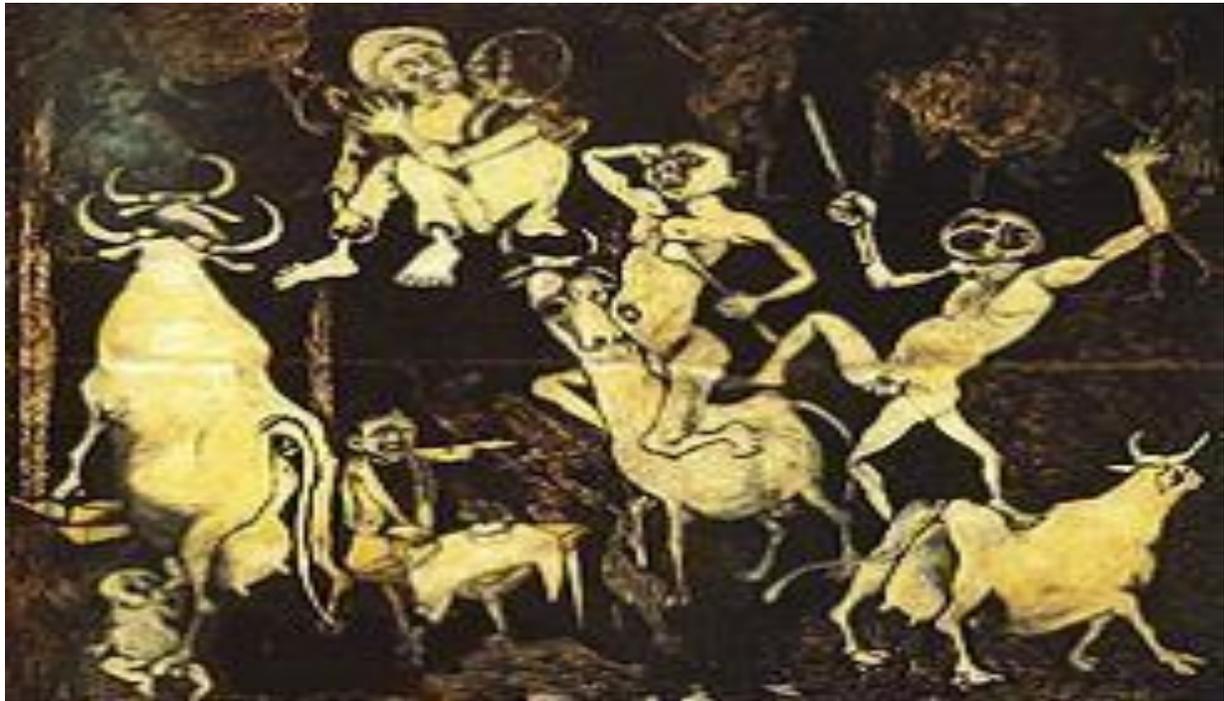
In this image, the male figure is portrayed as a perpetrator, as his face is largely covered in darkness. This complicates the roles of the animal and the human in this context – the animal seems more pitiable than the man. The lack of humanity in the stance of the male human

figure is further suggested by his distorted face, as the face is the primary source of the communication of human emotion. Thus, the absence of a face draws one's attention away from the primary source of communication and to the body of the figure. This is a theme that is constant, not only throughout several works created by South African artists that created works against oppression under apartheid, but also works created by Art Contre Apartheid artists that sought to create a stance of opposition against apartheid, as was discussed in the previous chapter.

This image of a lamb being carried off could also be read as a symbol for the helplessness of people of colour at the hands of the institutors of apartheid, as their basic right to live freely was stolen from them. Ivor Powell provides an important reading of Feni's drawing, stating the following: 'It is as though the two separate entities have become one in the brutality of their encounter, and this effect is also played out on the psychological level' (quoted in Peffer). Here, with regards to the psychological, it must be noted that the captured lamb seems to be making direct eye contact with the viewer, while the man does not. This portrays an important distinction between the two figures – although the lamb may be captured for slaughter, the sense of humanity in the eye-contact seems to suggest a sense of freedom and agency in the face of slaughter, while the male figure seems to be bound by his inclination towards brutality and violence.

Feni is often referred to as a South African artist who portrayed a considerable level of trauma using the human form in an attempt to make visible protest against apartheid. In his drawings, which were primarily made of charcoal and ink, Feni displayed a keen interest in portraying themes of turmoil, providing captivating social commentary and political awareness in several of his works. Art dealers often referred to Feni as 'the Goya of human folly' as his tendency to critique human folly dominated many of his works. Feni created art displaying images where, 'human subjects had "animal proxies" that were stretched and torn

beyond normal recognition' (Maart 63). As dealt with extensively in chapter two, ACA works such as 'Untitled' (1982) by Wilfredo Lam also displays a similar message, as it portrays not only an amalgamation of forms, but also a human being with beast-like features that distort their humanity.



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Figure 16. Dumile Feni – *African Guernica* (1967) Charcoal on paper, 218 x 226cm

One of Feni's most striking works, which also displays the evolvement of the human form, is 'African Guernica' (1967). This work is of particular importance as it can be regarded as representative of the conditions faced under the apartheid state, using turmoil and the human form in a process of evolvement.

'African Guernica' is a large charcoal drawing on newsprint depicting a strange menagerie of figures. Within the scene, animals and humans engage in various acts that give one visual clues concerning the meaning of the work. A male figure, reminiscent of a priest, points a finger bearing no real direction. There are three male figures, and two of them are naked, while the third one is being cradled in the arms of a woman. The scene depicts three cattle,

two of which seem to be depicted as props for the two male figures in the scene. One of the cattle suckles an infant. The other plays the role of a horse, as it bears the weight of a male human figure, while the third cattle serves as a footrest for the other male figure. The male figure that stands on the back of the cattle on the far right is three-legged. This painting therefore displays a sense of disorder and confusion.



Figure 17. Pablo Picasso – *Guernica* (1937) Oil on canvas, 3.49 x 7.77m

At this point, it is also worth noting that the title of Feni's work refers explicitly to Pablo Picasso's famous monumental painting 'Guernica' (1937). While Feni's drawing style is completely different from Picasso's, the composition of the two works is strikingly similar.

For instance, just as is displayed in Picasso's well-known mural-sized oil painting, 'African Guernica' by Feni displays human suffering, trauma, chaos and an exceptional level of violence. Both works were also created on a newsprint.

It is also important to note that Picasso's painting was an artistic response to the Nazi bombing of Guernica in Spain. Interestingly, Derrida makes special mention of Picasso's 'Guernica' within the ACA catalogue. In his essay, Derrida draws a connection between this powerful art work and the mandate of Art Contre Apartheid. He speaks of the painting as follows:

The exemplary history of 'Guernica', the name of the town, the name of a hell, name of the work, is not without analogy to that of this exhibition, to be sure, and it may even have inspired the idea of the latter. That work denounces the idea of civilized barbarism. (Derrida 62) Here, Derrida implies that the purpose of the collection was in alignment with anti-war narratives, such as 'Guernica', that exemplified suffering as a means with which to highlight injustices and thus commemorate those that had fallen victim of crimes against humanity.

Derrida also implies that, in the same way that 'Guernica' critiqued deliberate violence against human beings, Art Contre Apartheid used art to highlight the cruelty of political violence using the same artistic methodology. Derrida's comment, together with 'African Guernica' by Feni, therefore links with the Picasso's signature political artwork. Both Picasso's and Feni's work can be read as critiques of what Derrida refers to as 'civilized barbarism' (62).

Perhaps more importantly, what is most striking about this work is the resonance that exists between the national and the international, and the influence that initiatives such as Polly Street had on an artist such as Feni. Although geographical boundaries existed between the theorists and artists referenced above, in their interpretations of injustice they were uniquely connected.

As referred to earlier on within this chapter, one artist that was closely linked to the Polly Street initiative was South African artist Ezrom Legae, who studied at the Polly Street Art Centre from 1959-1960. During this period, Legae was influenced by Cecil Skotnes and Sydney Kumalo, as he later became an assistant to Skotnes at the art school, taking over from Kumalo after Kumalo left. Legae's work included several media, including terra cotta and bronze, and although he is often referred to as sculptor, he also created sophisticated pictorial work.

Several of Legae's works demonstrate a disturbing suggestion of human-animal fusion similar to that portrayed in 'Man with a Lamb' and 'African Guernica' by Feni and



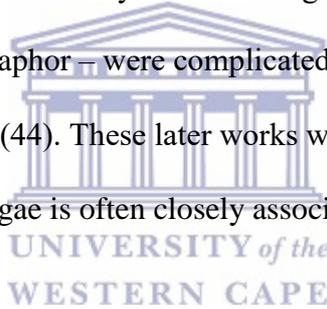
Figure 18. Ezrom Legae – *Copulation* (1970) Charcoal, 53 x 42cm

'Guernica' by Picasso. For instance, several of Legae's charcoal drawings of the 1970s appear to imagine disturbing acts of violent engagements between animals such as horses and goats. One such example is 'Copulation' (1970). This work displays a strange fusion of forms. The two fused figures resemble the skeleton of a horse and a crouched figure of human being. The dark background upon which this scene unfolds contributes to the discomfort and disturbance which this drawing seems to intend to evoke in the viewer.

Although the fusion of the two forms results in a sense of confusion, the title of the work gives one a sense of the meaning behind this portrayal. The title, 'Copulation', suggests that the two figures are engaging in sexual intercourse. The manner in which the horse seems to

be writhing in discomfort and anguish implies that this activity involves an exceptional level of force and violence, which makes the animal the victim and the male figure the perpetrator. In this sense, the male ‘human’ figure has much less humanity than the animal in this context. The lack of humanity is further suggested by the absence of a human face in this depiction, which is strikingly similar Feni’s ‘Man with a Lamb’ (1965), referred to earlier. The switched roles in this drawing seems to shed light on the bestial nature of human beings, referencing the wholesale dehumanization of people during apartheid. The drawing may be read as a critique of a system that subjected people of colour to a set of unjust laws that justified violence and violated the human rights of thousands of people.

According to Peffer, ‘these themes of bodily abuse and regeneration in a disturbed society – as worked through the bestial metaphor – were complicated further in Legae’s graphic artworks after 1977 of the 1970s’ (44). These later works were commonly related to the tensions present at the time, as Legae is often closely associated with the rise of Black Consciousness.



For this reason, it is important to acknowledge the influence of black political movements that played a significant role in orchestrating the use of art of as a tool of resistance. The following section will therefore provide an outline of the rise of Black Consciousness art that was created during the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on South African artists such as Ezrom Legae. It will also bring Legae’s work into conversation with the Art Contre Apartheid collection, and thus juxtaposes South African Black Consciousness themes with the work of ACA.

3.3 Black Consciousness (BC) and Art Contre Apartheid Art

Although founded a decade earlier, South African Student's Organization (SASO), which was led by Steve Biko, rose to prominence after 1976. Promoting black pride and psychological liberation, SASO formed the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in the 1970s. Black consciousness was inspired by Leopold Sedar Senghor's philosophy of negritude and by the militancy of the Black Power movement in the United States. It is also worth noting that the 25th July 1985 declaration of a State of Emergency, issued by the apartheid government, followed after the development of the Black Consciousness Movement, and thus highlights the political potency of the movement during this period.

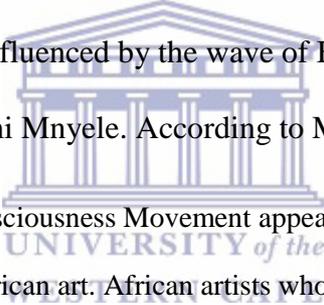
Steve Biko and other youth leaders who assisted him in managing the organization felt that 'mixed-race organizations too often sidelined black voices, and that black activists needed space to examine their own situation first, before joining a non-racial unity movement' (Peffer 50). This included Blacks, Coloureds, Asians and Indians (all of which were apartheid segregationist terms). This formation was designed to empower all black South Africans, and was designed to develop a sense of agency and self-actualization. Steve Biko himself described the functioning of BC as follows: 'at the heart of this kind of thinking is the realization by blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed' (qtd. in Hill 16). According to Shannen Hill, who studied the visual culture of the BCM,

Its central aim is to renew a sense of self-worth within black South Africans in order to combat the racism that permeates their lives. It inspires pride in one's heritage, community, and self.

This awareness enables people of color, all of whom are included under the "black" umbrella, to combat all forms of racism—from interactions between individuals to the once-institutionalized laws of the state—and ultimately force change in social, political, and economic spheres. (16)

This period was characterised by a portrayal of the collective defiance against the racist white government. Black Consciousness can therefore be read as a philosophy that was geared towards a struggle against defeatism, and sought to counter this condition with the promotion self-determination. Perhaps more importantly, the Black Consciousness Movement was perceived by South African artists as a powerful tool that united South Africans, and made them aware of the strength behind that unity.

Although this movement was not explicitly affiliated with cultural movements such as the creation of resistance art against apartheid, BC stood for the freedom of agency and the liberty to express political sentiment with pride and authority. The ideology of Black Consciousness sharpened many artists' awareness of their role within the struggle. Among artists who influenced and were influenced by the wave of Black Consciousness were Lefifi Tladi, Fikile Magadlala, and Thami Mnyele. According to Matsemela Manaka,



In South Africa the Black Consciousness Movement appears to have played a major role in the conceptual development of African art. African artists who were made to relate more and more to the socio-political situation with a certain degree of political awareness. Unlike some artists who were pre-occupied with an African idiom whose concern, to some extent, was an African style, the Black Consciousness artists were more concerned with the content of their work.

Their form was not that different from what was going on in the art world of Europe. The pencil work of Fikile Magadlala and the late Thami Mnyele does indicate how these artists could be mistaken for any European master.... Almost like the early pioneers, these artists were highly technical with an academic polish. (Manaka 16)

The Black Consciousness Movement saw a growing influence of artists that dealt with the political edifice in ways that were not only reminiscent of their desire for political reform, but also their desire to express their individual concerns in authentic ways delinked from colonial

or European influence – a new perception of art as a tool of resistance was beginning to take shape within South Africa during the early 1980s.



Figure 19. Ezrom Legae – *Chicken* (1978) Drawing on paper

In light of these developments, the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the South African art scene becoming a polemical space where political contestations were voiced as a means of resistance, and this action against apartheid was influenced by movements such as Black Consciousness.

One artist that is most commonly associated with Black Consciousness art is South African artist and sculptor, Ezrom Legae, who has been referred to several times above. Legae was one of the first to create works about Steve Biko, depicting that which Biko stood for, the ideals of Black Consciousness, and the racially charged country in which they lived. Legae adopted the role of a cultural commentator, critiquing the event of Biko's death in an attempt to speak out against the unjust detaining of political activists, such as Biko. He depicted the death of Biko using symbolism which served as a metaphor for the suffering which he had undergone prior to his demise. For instance, in his famous *Chicken Series* (1978), Legae used pencil and charcoal to draw various images of chicken in a state of torment. Figure 19 is just one of innumerable art works that Legae titled 'Chicken', and many art critics contend that

these works are allegorical tributes to Steve Biko. I also suggest that these works testify to the growth and black confidence promoted by Black Consciousness, despite the October 1977 banning of several organizations promoting its cause. In terms of its broader implications, Legae's work sought to use the theme of fragmentation in an attempt to depict the victimization induced by the apartheid government. His works were therefore shaped by his political opinions, and his art works often portrayed animal imagery to communicate these ideas. Hill provides useful insight into the meaning of his pencil and charcoal drawing titled 'Chicken' (1978):

Ezrom Legae (1938-1999) was a superb draftsman who created two bodies of works inspired by Bantu Biko.... The artist's choice of ambiguous titles suited the hybrid imagery he drew. The recurrence of specific motifs—fragmented parts of birds and humans, and a glowing orb – prompts metaphorical readings that ultimately become allegorical when taken as a whole. With broken bones and matted or swollen features, the chickens and humans may be regarded as tortured victims sacrificed for a greater communal good, be it religious or political.... Collectively, Legae's metaphors for torture, sacrifice, and regeneration become allegories for the strength of political commitment and its renewal in an ever-wider sphere of influence. Considered within their historical context, works in *Chicken* and *Death of Freedom* respond specifically to Biko's death, but their larger symbolic meaning asserts the renewal of Black Consciousness that followed this tragedy. (18)

In spite of the agony which these works made visible, the symbols of torture, sacrifice and subsequent regeneration are used to illustrate the resilience of black South Africans, even though oppression weighed heavily upon them. While the fragmented parts of the chicken indicate torture and violence, it also indicates an admirable level of sacrifice, which therefore pays homage to those that offered their services to the fight against apartheid. Hill links her analysis with a powerful statement made by Ezrom Legae, emphasizing the message

portrayed through 'Chicken'. Legae's description weaves out the metaphors that serve as a premise for understanding the inclination towards Black Consciousness:

I used the chicken as a symbol of the black people of this country, because the chicken is a domestic bird. Now, one can maim a chicken by pulling out his feathers; one can crucify him and even kill him; but beware —there will always be another egg and always another chicken. If you remember in all these drawings with the symbolism of the domestic fowl, the spirit of Biko hovered and emerged even in the shadows, sometimes behind bars and sometimes free. And then watch out because that chicken suddenly became a vulture and the aggressor. (Legae 2)



Figure 20. Concentto Pozzati – *Ri-Memorie* (1982) Acrylic and collage on canvas, 73 x 104cm

Legae presents a powerful image that demonstrates the power of the collective, and the ability of black South Africans to surmount oppression and claim their right to freedom.

Furthermore, through his art, Legae highlights the resilience of South Africans that had been mistreated under apartheid, and thus indicates the covert and often unpredicted strength available to the wounded.

At this point, it is worth highlighting an ACA work that portrayed similar ideas to those communicated in Legae's 'Chicken Series' (1978). For instance, 'Ri-Memorie' (1982) by Concutto Pozzati uses a similar symbol of slaughter to speak out against apartheid injustices, and also uses domestic animals. For instance, Pozzati's work displays two animals – a pig and a lamb. These animals are accompanied by two pears, which suggests that the animals are to be eaten. This image is complicated by a black arm that is partially covered by one of the pears. Thus, it seems to be suggested that the arm of the human figure may too be subject to slaughter, while the absence of the body suggests dismemberment. This may therefore be read as a metaphor for the violence of apartheid.

However, the arm is raised, alluding to a certain level of defiance, suggesting the symbolic "black power" salute. It may be posited that the unique sense of hope implied with the raised hand can be linked with the title of the work – 'Ri-memorie', which is Italian for 'rememory'. This speaks of reflecting on an event that had passed, and thus suggests that apartheid and its ability to 'slaughter' cannot obliterate resistance. This portrays a similar level of rejuvenation in spite of suffering, which is a theme communicated in Legae's 'Chicken Series'.

It is, however, worth noting that Black Consciousness also became a contested notion during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Theorists, artists and poets, such as Mongane Wally Serote, began to question the mandate of Black Consciousness, and saw it as an example of 'narrow cultural nationalism'. Serote argued against the use of skin colour to deal with cultural imperatives and the history of South Africans:

The emergence of Black Consciousness writers at the time when the historical point of reference for struggle had almost been obliterated resulted, however, in a lack of ideological depth. The writing of that period relied heavily on anger, bitterness, and at times, cynicism and frustration. It was in those days that expletives such as 'fuck off' and 'shit' became poetical

terms. In other ways, through its narrow cultural nationalism, Black Consciousness had a degenerative influence on cultural expression. (Serote 9)

Here, Serote points out the limitations of Black Consciousness as being generated exclusively out of a sense of black pride, which would not easily accommodate a broader alliance of progressive forces. Serote goes on to explain his use of phrases such as ‘degenerative influence’ (9) and ‘narrow cultural nationalism’ (9), saying:

While it was positive for the Black Consciousness movement to unite the oppressed blacks, and hence to isolate the apartheid regime, its ideology became negative at the point where potential participants in nation-building and cultural expression, or outside allies, were judged exclusively by skin colour. A people’s history, and thus their cultural expression, depends on their material life, and not their skin. (Serote 9)

Serote finds fault with the Black Consciousness narrative, saying that the elevation of ‘blackness’ as the primary signifier of resistance continued to trap black subjects in a position marked according to their skin colour. This disapproval seems to be rooted in the fact that apartheid itself sought to isolate and label black people according to the colour of their skin – Serote seems to suggest that Black Consciousness was inadvertently becoming a conduit of the very oppression which they were fighting against.

He also makes a point of mentioning that a people’s history ‘depends on their material life,’ (9). Serote therefore appeals to South African artists to create works that steered away from artistic expression and resistance art that was limited to race, and instead lean towards creating art that used those primal factors that constitute a human life as a means with which to fight against racial discrimination.

Serote’s opinion was one which was supported by other South African art critics – especially those that wrote reflections on the relevance of protest art surrounding the period of the

arrival of the ACA collection in South Africa. Gael Neke, is one of those critics. In her paper entitled '[Re]forming the Past: South African Art Bound to Apartheid' (1999), which discusses the role of art and protest art in South Africa, Neke states that protest art was largely rejected as an art form in the 1990s in South Africa:

From its inception, protest art ran a course of rejection or at best critical ambivalence. The artworld, as many other sectors of society, carried the effects of neo-colonialism, though masked by a liberal facade that enabled those within the art-world to uphold an elitist non-involvement in the horrific political happenings of the time. The choice to use art to protest apartheid was made despite considerable objection, right up to the 1980s, that art could not and should not confront political issues. (2)

Here, Neke refers to the strict laws and boundaries that were placed on artists and their work during the 1980s. At the same time, a lot of the art works created by South Africans during the 1980s portrayed what Neke refers to as 'an elitist non-involvement in the horrific political happenings of the time' (2). In light of this observation, it is therefore important to acknowledge the relation between protest art in South Africa and the role of Art Contre Apartheid in the dispensation into which it entered. Because the collection comprises works that directly critiqued the apartheid system, it is worth noting that a movement such as Black Consciousness had a significant effect on the works of art created during this period.

As introduced briefly at the beginning of this project, the contestation of the Black Consciousness narrative may be linked to the opposition the use of art as a weapon of the struggle against apartheid. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, South Africa was dominated by a culture of violence and protest. However, it is worth noting that not all art created during this time was inflamed with messages portraying an onslaught. Many artists fought with subtle and effective forms of satire and metaphors. Art that was less direct about its message played a vital role in resisting the apartheid government and thus protesting against it.

Perhaps more importantly, art critics began to question and contest the ‘art as a weapon of struggle’ narrative in South Africa. As briefly discussed in the introduction, one of the main voices in this contestation was ANC member, Albie Sachs. In his paper, ‘Preparing ourselves for Freedom’, which was published in *Spring is Rebellious* in 1990, he made one of many statements that received national controversial acclaim:

What are we fighting for, if not the right to express our humanity in all its forms, including our sense of fun and capacity for love and tenderness and our appreciation of the beauty of the world? There is nothing that the apartheid rulers would like more than to convince us that because apartheid is ugly, the world is ugly. ANC members are full of fun and romanticism and dreams, we enjoy and wonder at the beauties of nature and the marvels of human creation, yet if you look at most of our art and literature you would think we were living in the greyest and most sombre of all worlds, completely shut in by apartheid. (21)

Sachs then provides examples of artists that chose to steer away from the dominant narrative of apartheid and its oppressive nature. He uses musicians such as Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba and Abdullah Ibrahim as examples for a transformed perception of their role as artists. In a commentary of their musical works as national artists, Albie Sachs says, ‘you are in a universe of wit and grace and vitality and intimacy, there is invention and modulation of mood, ecstasy and sadness; this is a cop-free world in which the emergent personality of our people manifests itself’ (21). Similar to Serote and Neke, Albie Sachs called for art, literature and music that steered away from the ‘art a weapon of struggle’ narrative and rather acknowledged the lives of people of colour outside of the oppression imposed upon them.

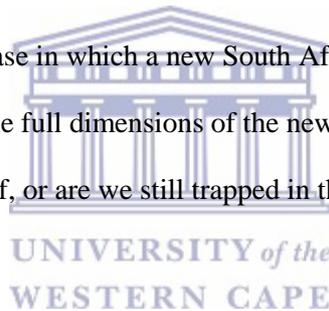
Keorapetse Kgositsile shares his sentiments:

What about the personal, then? After all, have poets not written personal love lyrics and so forth? In our view there is no intrinsic contradiction between the personal and the social in the sensibility of an integrated, whole personality – whether the person is an artist or not. Love,

even the love between a man and a woman, parent and child, friend and friend, is a unifying factor in the wholeness we seek. (Kgositsile 29-30)

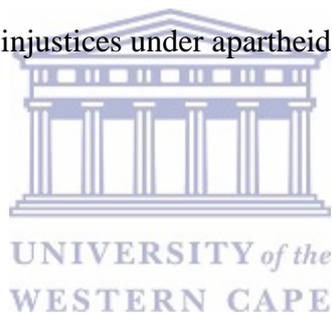
Kgositsile touches on the integrated nature of the personal and the social, implying that the two concepts work together to create the ‘wholeness’ which artists seem to seek through their art, and poets through their poetry. Albie Sachs’ paper, on the other hand, seems to suggest that, in allowing their work to be haunted by the sombre conditions of apartheid, antiapartheid artists were relinquishing their creative capacity, reducing it to narratives riddled by subjugation and torment. He expands as follows, referring to mentalities obsessed with oppression narratives as ‘ghettoes’:

What we have to ask ourselves now is whether we have an artistic and cultural vision that corresponds to this current phase in which a new South African nation is emerging. Can we say that we have begun to grasp the full dimensions of the new country and new people that is struggling to give birth to itself, or are we still trapped in the multiple ghettoes of the apartheid imagination? (Sachs 19)



Here, Albie Sachs seems to be drawing from the ideas of Njabulo Ndebele who, in his book entitled *Fools and other Stories*, depicts the gripping tale of a character that says, ‘every aspect of life, if creatively indulged in, is the weapon of life itself against the greatest tyranny’ (quoted in Sachs 34). Both Sachs and Ndebele acknowledge the importance of a holistic approach to writing about and opposing social and political tensions. Ndebele goes as far as to suggest that life itself is a weapon. As quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Sachs sheds light on the importance of Ndebele’s suggestion with the following statement: ‘It is as though our rulers stalk every page and haunt every picture; everything is obsessed by the oppressors and the trauma they have imposed, nothing is about us and the new consciousness we are developing’ (Sachs 21). Sachs therefore called for a broadened perspective of the conditions that were faced under apartheid.

It is light of the above that one may deduce that South African resistance art was much more intricate and sophisticated than mere protest narratives riddled with images of oppression. Many artists began to fight back against apartheid with less direct tools of opposition, through works of abstraction, satire and depictions of the traditions that were largely despised by apartheid rulers. Just as has been displayed in several works analysed in this chapter, as well as the previous chapter, ACA artists also adopted the difficult task of displaying a multifaceted representation of South African plights that included representations of brutality and suffering through the human form, but also made use of abstractions and domestic symbols to communicate an artistic resistance against apartheid. The following chapter will therefore deal with the use of written forms in the catalogue of the ACA works and so analyse the use language to communicate injustices under apartheid.



Chapter 4: Writings in the ACA collection and South African literature of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

So far, this thesis has focused primarily on visual art works in the ACA collection. This is understandable, as apartheid is itself a privileging of visual, racial markers. This chapter seeks to extend the preceding visual analysis with a textual analysis of the ways in which trauma is evidenced in the written works that are part of the ACA collection, with particular focus on the ACA catalogue of its first South African exhibition in 1996. In this context, select literary texts written during the South African protest and resistance of the 1980s will also be comparatively analyzed. This chapter seeks to answer the following questions: How is the idea of trauma displayed through the language used in the ACA catalogue? What were the debates surrounding the use of language as a tool of resistance in South Africa, and were there limitations to the use of language in order to express pain and trauma under apartheid? The chapter will begin with a discussion of the ACA writings and the use of language as a tool of engagement against apartheid. It will then juxtapose this discussion with a detailed outline of South African literary work, with particular focus on the poetry of Mongane Wally Serote. In detailing these ideas subsequent to one another, this chapter seeks to argue that although language expression of pain and trauma may be considered an effective tool of protest against apartheid, language tends to ‘break down’ under the weight of the trauma that was experienced under apartheid.

4.1 Art Contre Apartheid Literature: The Role of Language in the Expression of Trauma under Apartheid

The ACA catalogue includes twenty written works; sixteen of these works are essays, while the other four are poems. Several of the written works in the Art Contre Apartheid catalogue

introduce the purpose of the collection, provide an outline of the process involved in bringing the artists together, and express the writers' opinions on the term apartheid. However, several works also reflect the dominant narrative of trauma, and range from symbolic representations of the writers' opposition against apartheid to more direct denouncements thereof. In an article printed in the

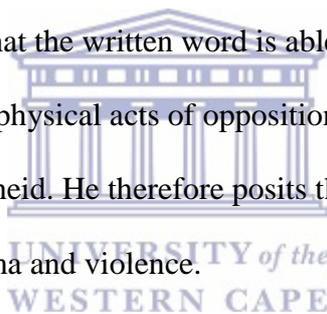
ACA catalogue, titled 'Why?', the organizers, bearing in mind the censorship at the time, describe the collection as follows: 'in spite of the barrier of silence and moneymaking we would be conscious of the magnitude of the oppression, of Soweto, the hundreds of executions, the censure, the barbarity: a people entirely deprived of the most fundamental rights' (Pignon-Ernest and Saura 13). The ACA artists and writers viewed their task to shed light on these traumatic events and protest against apartheid as a direct opposition of what they refer to as the 'magnitude of the oppression' (Pignon-Ernest and Saura 13) that had become commonplace in apartheid South Africa.

One example of an ACA writer that adopted this role is South African novelist Andre Brink. Brink's untitled essay which was published in the ACA catalogue provides an outline of his perception of apartheid. Within this essay, Brink refers to apartheid and apartheid leaders using phrases such as 'Master Race', and 'God's chosen'. In doing so, Brink highlights a problematic segregationist tone, but also emphasizes a sense of disdain with regards to such narratives. Perhaps more importantly, he defines writing as a tool which is itself contaminated by the violence of apartheid:

I write: and from my pen trails not ink but blood. For only through the word can that terrible silence be conquered which distorts truth and celebrates the lie: only through the word can the deafening roar of the gun be converted into sense and significance. (Brink 29)

In making a direct correlation between ink and blood, Brink associates the written word with death and violence, thereby reflecting the trauma of apartheid. Here, language is viewed as an

accurate tool with which to express trauma. He also posits that language can overcome traumatic violence, death and silencing: ‘only through the word can that terrible silence be conquered which distorts truth and celebrates the lie’ (Brink 29). He seems to suggest that the written word has the intrinsic ability to destroy silence and thus compel the reader to address the truth, while acknowledging the presence of lies. Similarly, the writer is liberated from silence through writing. Although Brink does not provide detail surrounding the truth and lie which he refers to, this extract shows that a writer is able to influence a reader to expand their knowledge and steer away from ignorance. Finally, Brink suggests that only the written word is able to convert the ‘deafening roar of the gun’ into ‘sense and significance’ (Brink 29). Here, it is suggested that the cultural act of writing against apartheid is more effective than acts of violence. Brink suggests that the written word is able to communicate more successfully and powerfully than physical acts of opposition, especially in light of the culture of violence promoted under apartheid. He therefore posits that language has the power to communicate and overcome trauma and violence.



It must also be noted that other writers that contributed to the ACA catalogue used a much more light-hearted tone as a means with which to express their disdain towards apartheid, yet managed to communicate the horrors of apartheid through the written word. One example of this is an essay titled ‘The Great Blood Divide’ (1983) by French writer Michel Butor. This essays provides a unique critique of apartheid and its segregationist ideologies through an outline of its racist laws. He writes:

You may not walk here, for in the course of centuries you are the one who has laid out paths we have followed in order to settle here – and it would be far better for us if you laid out other paths through the dust so that we might unearth our diamonds.... You may not eat here, for you were here before us, and you might ruin our appetite by having us imagine an impending wave of conquerors... who would fence us in or... ban our cute English-style homes, prevent us from

worshipping our movie stars, and impose other rituals upon us.... You may not bear pain here.... You may not cry out here, for you introduce into our language a tone, a texture, a quality.... You may not die here, for your forbears are already buried here, and it is indeed our turn to lie down and also to die... (Butor 33)

What is perhaps most striking about this essay is that it adopts the very political language of apartheid, using a segregationist narrative. For instance, Butor makes repeated use of the phrase, 'you may not,' (33) which is a phrase suggestive of the apartheid laws that altered the lives of black South Africans. In a sense, the written word is being used as both a critique and a reminder of apartheid, making this narrative a historical document and a conviction. In addition, Butor inadvertently states that white South Africans who instituted apartheid were imposters that benefited from the labour of South Africans of colour. He says, 'you are the one who has laid out paths we have followed,' (33) thus implying that the true leaders of South Africa were those whose efforts were being exploited under apartheid. This implication is supported by the phrase, 'you may not eat here, for you were here before us' (33). This essay therefore seems to be aimed at shedding light on the injustices facing those South Africans who were denied the right to live freely in the country of their birth. In a sense, the author suggests that marginalized South Africans are in fact the original and rightful citizens of the country, and thus the author highlights one of the many issues surrounding apartheid legislation.

The author expands on this critique, employing a certain level of satire into his essay, stating the following: 'you might ruin our appetite by having us imagine an impending wave of conquerors... who would... ban our cute English-style homes [and] prevent us from worshipping our movie stars' (33). Here, the author satirizes the traditions and material assets of racist institutors of apartheid. He also uses this satire to frame a contradiction – Butor suggests that apartheid leaders feared seeing apartheid South Africa conquered by opposing

forces, yet apartheid leaders themselves obtained leadership positions through the forceful conquest of the country. In this sense, language is used to provide a critique of apartheid, not only outlining the problems surrounding racist laws but also using satire to emphasize the limitations surrounding apartheid ideologies.

4.2 Art Contre Apartheid: The Limitations of Language in the Expression of Trauma under Apartheid

However, as the ACA collection is rich with visual works that register the trauma of apartheid, the following pertinent statement by Jenny Edkins must be addressed: ‘the experience of trauma cannot be incorporated into a narrative; it cannot be made to make sense’ (40). While the intersection of language and the visual is an important point of discussion, the following section will instead seek to highlight the debates surrounding the limitations of language in the expression of trauma, and in this way support the argument made in chapter two – that the visual is a form of communication of trauma in its own right. Select works from the ACA collection will be analysed to frame this argument.

Several of written works contributed to the ACA catalogue can be read as direct denouncements of apartheid, but also demonstrate language breakdown. One example of this is ‘The Invention of the Word’ (1983) by French poet Edmond Jabes. This poem is rich with protest against racism under apartheid, but may also be regarded as an illustration of the limitations of language in the expression of pain. One may even posit that language itself seems to collapse under the weight of the trauma being conveyed in the poem. The speaker says:

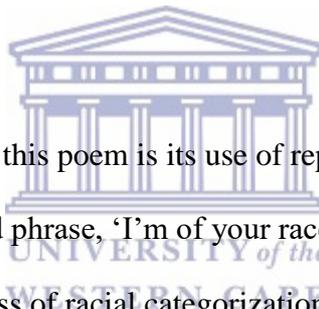
In the wake of a book already old, yet still present. In the wake of a book’s cry of pain. The one who speaks died of speaking. His death is a saying in itself.

We do not cease to die from this saying:

“He told me:
My race is yellow.
I answered:
I’m of your race;

He told me:
My race is black.
I answered:
I’m of your race;

He told me:
My race is white.
I answered:
I’m of your race (Jabes 75)



One of the most striking aspect of this poem is its use of repetition, and its gesture towards futurity. For instance, the repeated phrase, ‘I’m of your race’ (Jabes 75) implies a sense of unity between all people, regardless of racial categorization, while the same statement sees South Africa beyond racial markers by indicating a sense of continuity and connection between races. In addition, with the mention of the ‘book’s cry of pain’ (Jabes 75), the speaker suggests that words, which seem to be indicated through the term ‘book’, have the autonomous ability to express pain. Here, language is not the mere conduit of a message, but the carrier of the pain attached to the message. Thus, the written word is presented as a valuable and effective tool all on its own.

However, the speaker goes on to express the dangers surrounding language, saying, ‘the one who speaks died of speaking’ (Jabes 75). This statement is indicative of the consequences of speaking out against the injustices under apartheid; the mere act of speaking resulted in death. Here, it is implied that the difficult message that was being communicated caused language

itself to be the cause of violence. This introduces a limitation surrounding the use of language in the expression of painful experiences under apartheid. This statement also seems to imply that trauma could not be communicated in words without ‘destroying’ the one speaking. Thus, it is suggested that the true extent of the pain being experienced cannot be verified in full through language.

In her paper titled ‘Trauma and the Representation of the Unsayable in Late Twentieth Century Fiction’, Katina L. Rogers argues that when ‘writers write about trauma, the double pull toward language and toward silence is even stronger, as the writer must engage with both the tension present in processing trauma, and that inherent in writing itself’ (iii). As displayed in Jabes’s poem, the act of both writing and speaking of unity in the face of a racist political regime resulted in a certain level of violence that made language insufficient in the expression thereof. Thus, the struggle between silence and expression through language is emphasized, and the difficulties facing writers tasked with recalling traumatic experiences as seen under apartheid is emphasized by the inclination towards silence.

Furthermore, well-renowned American beat poet and philosopher Allen Ginsberg and contributor to the ACA catalogue wrote a poem which deals with a different form of silence and trauma compared to Jabes’s poem. Ginsberg is considered a leading writer of the 1960s, with a strong influence on anti-establishment and anti-war activism in the USA. His approach to apartheid seems reflexive of his passion for justice. However, his poem also seems to indicate the limitations of linguistic expression with regards to pain and trauma. For instance, in his poem titled ‘Far Away’ (1983), Ginsberg highlights apartheid’s injustices through a brief outline of the mistreatment of black workers:

They say Black men work sweating
in hot mines thousands of feet
deep inside mountains in South Africa

to bring up Gild shining on earth into the hands
of white bankers, politicians, police and armies. (Ginsberg 67)

Here, the speaker critiques an unjust economic system in which black labour creates white wealth and suggests that this labour financed the very tools that were used to oppress workers under apartheid. The speaker communicates this using terms such as ‘sweating’ and ‘hot mines’ in an attempt to highlight the system of oppression that caused black labourers to suffer for the benefit of oppressive white leaders. In the beginning of the poem, the writer emphasizes the term ‘Black’, so as to associate phrases such as ‘labour’ and ‘hot mines’ with blackness, while the term ‘Gold’ is also capitalized, but is instead surrounded by phrases such as ‘white bankers’ and ‘armies’. In terms of the structural composition of the poem, the differentiation between these two factors seems to emphasize the unjust system of apartheid that benefited whites and exploited the labour of blacks.

However, with regards to the unsayable, the speaker in ‘Far Away’ (1983) chooses to allow the words and phrases within the poem to communicate their own message. For instance, the poet seems to choose not to represent the voices of the Black men being written about. The silence of the Black workers represented in the poem is emphasized with the opening phrase, ‘they say’, which is in turn supported by the title of the poem itself – ‘Far Away’. Similar to the phrase ‘they say’, the title indicates a certain level of distance between the black workers being written about and the reader. It is implied that the workers are so ‘far away’ in the ‘hot mines’ that their stories could only be recounted and retold by another.

In gaining an understanding of the poet’s choice to represent the silence of the black worker, it is worth noting Elaine Scarry’s suggestion that, ‘torture inflicts bodily pain that is itself language-destroying’ (19). Thus, the silence which is portrayed in this work seems to be indicative of the language-destroying properties of pain. In a sense, language seems to be insufficient in the deliverance of the stories of the workers, as trauma itself has the ability to

destroy the confines of linguistic rules. This suggestion is also implied in the fact that the experience of the black characters is placed in the hands of the speaker – it is assumed that the characters are unable to portray their own story. Here, the effects of trauma experienced under apartheid, as well as the silencing of those that suffered under apartheid, is alluded to. In this sense, the silence which is offered in this poem is a much more accurate depiction of their experiences, as the details are not tainted through second-hand expression. Berel Lang provides useful insight into the use of silence, and also the risk of representation:

The most fundamental limit for all writing [is] that of silence, a silence that emerges as a limit precisely because of the possibility of representation and the risks that the possibility entails. In these terms, silence is a limit for every individual representation or image, establishing the barrier of a simple but universal test. This is the question of whether, in comparison with the voice heard in the representation being considered, silence itself would have been more accurate or truthful or morally responsive. (Lang 71)

Although Lang does not explicitly state that trauma resists linguistic representation in the recognition of silence as a necessary facet of representation, he alludes to the sometimes unspeakable nature of traumatic experiences. In light of Ginsberg's choice not to represent the voices of black workers directly, it may be suggested that the poem communicates a much more accurate account of the trauma induced within these labour conditions under apartheid. Instead of introducing readers to a more personal understanding of the crises brought about under apartheid, the writer seems to steer away from this personal representation of their trials. These suggestions are indicative of Katina L. Rogers' discussion of trauma and representation. She explains that pain is a personal experience which is not easily interpreted by an outsider:

Because pain is so highly individual, explaining exactly what one feels is not a simple task. This is part of the reason why fiction and nonverbal art forms are important ways of depicting pain:

they allow the victim to allude to what he or she is experiencing, rather than trying to explain it in precise terms. (18)

In other words, visual representations of trauma is considered preferable, as it has been argued that linguistic terminology seems to tamper with the true extent of the pain experienced by the victim. One may therefore posit that while language played an instrumental role in the protest against apartheid, language insufficiency within this context must be acknowledged. With regards to a broader discussion of this tool, it is also important to discuss the use of language as a means of engagement within apartheid South Africa. The following section will therefore engage in a discussion of the work of one South African author that used poetry to provide a denouncement of apartheid, but also provided instances where language failed to express the trauma experienced under apartheid.



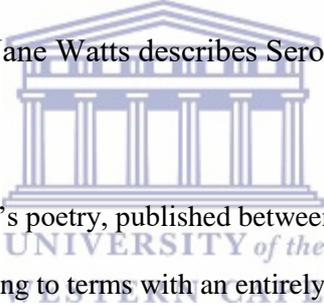
4.3 Writing trauma under apartheid in South Africa during the late 1970s and early 1980s: The work of Mongane Wally Serote

South African literature and poetry of the late 1970s and early 1980s was closely associated with the political climate of the country. South African authors and poets such as Nadine Gordimer, Alex La Guma, Athol Fugard, Dennis Brutus and Mongane Wally Serote wrote in such a way that literary works could be regarded as engagements with the political situation; these writers responded to the violence of apartheid. Gayatri Narismulu elaborates:

Just as literature has functioned on behalf of the dominant to establish hegemony, many resistance writers/composers conscripted it into the service of the oppressed. Activist writers and composers used their texts strategically to intervene in various discourses of power and to exert pressure that was otherwise impossible given the conditions of repression. Writers such as Serote (1972; 1978; 1982b), Van Wyk (1979), Cronin (1983; 1985; 1988), Malange (1989) and Ndebele (1983; 1988; 1991) have attempted to constitute, enunciate and conceptualize oppressed voices in fiercely guarded cultural arenas. (Narismulu 14)

These writers who contributed to the resistance against apartheid are often referred to as artist-activists, as their works were often regarded as political interventions made possible through the use of cultural tools. Put differently, contrasts between their text and action, historical contributions and words, political opinion and literary skills became undistinguishable; language itself was a form of protest in South Africa during this time.

For the purpose of this section, I will however be focusing primarily on select work of renowned poet and author, Serote, who is often referred to as ‘the most prolific and probably the most accomplished poet South Africa,’ (Mzamane 7). Several of Serote’s works created during the 1970s and 1980s demonstrated a significant sense of determination to see the end of apartheid, but also registered apartheid violence in the language itself. In her book titled *Black Writers from South Africa*, Jane Watts describes Serote’s work of the 1970s and 1980s as follows:



The corpus of Mongane Serote’s poetry, published between 1972 and 1982, is in effect the autobiography of a writer coming to terms with an entirely new function for literature, and the personal record of a man moving from the anguished bewilderment of a sensitive youth attempting to reconcile an overwhelming faith in humankind with the implacable brutality of an apartheid regime, to the serenity of a mature and dedicated worker for the creation of a new society: a worker who has recognised that such a society has to be paid for in blood, as the old society has been, and still is being, paid for in blood. (Watts 153)

Serote began to publish his poetry during the early 1970s, his work reflecting protest verse that helped him to develop a distinct narrative and poetic voice within the context of the South African experience under apartheid. Serote’s inclination towards using his writing to come to terms with the sacrifices required to see the end of apartheid and to contribute to the creation of a new and liberated society is especially seen in his description of the role of writing in apartheid South Africa. In his book titled *On the Horizon* (1990), Serote describes

writing as an evolving practice that played an invaluable role in the fight against apartheid.

He expresses this as follows:

The writers then located themselves within the life and death struggle for freedom. It is within this struggle that the role of South African writers, black and white, is located and defined. By being... part... of the struggle for liberation, South African writers shall also... enter collectively into the future of a united South Africa, of equal men and women, black and white. This process remains a possibility; it has been set in motion. Now it needs to be defended by writers, through their writing, by writing. (Serote 15)

With this statement, Serote suggests that writing itself may be considered a tool capable of bringing about change and altering political situations. Thus, Serote suggests that literature enabled writers to become activists against apartheid. The act of writing had become a tool of engagement that enabled black writers to provide a critique of apartheid, and so find a sense of liberty through language. Els van Dongen provides useful insight into the importance of literature as a tool with which to deal with trauma and process painful experiences:

South Africa deals with its complex and specific past and the effects of a brutal history. Art is one of the spaces in which memories of collective experiences come together. Literature, and other forms of art as well, are ways to remember the past or to forget; they are means to come to terms with trauma and unrepresentable events. (Van Dongen 127)

Here, it must be noted that both literature and art are regarded as modes with which South Africans could heal and deal with difficult past events. As such, cultural tools have restorative properties. In addition, that which victims of pain and trauma may not be able to communicate using other modes are able to find expression through cultural modes of communication, such as literature.

As will be seen in Serote's poetry, during the late 1970s and the early 1980s, literature became one of the most powerful tools of engagement – instead of *l'art pour l'art* (art for

art's sake), to many South African writers, the responsibility resting on their shoulders was geared towards resistance and protest. Former ANC activist, poet and author Keorapetse Kgositsile provides useful commentary on the importance of what he describes as 'literary art' (29) in expressions of life under apartheid Kgositsile emphasizes the power of literary works in combatting apartheid. He says:

What happens in life and social consciousness finds expression in artistic creativity. Everything in society results from human activity, interaction and interests. This applies as much to the creation of literary art as it does to mobilizing workers to go on strike or to pick up arms against their oppressors and exploiters. (Kgositsile 29)

According to Kgositsile, artistic creativity is significantly influenced by social, political and cultural developments that surround an artist. Similarly, the act of writing against apartheid had the intrinsic power to create awareness surrounding the lives of South Africans living under apartheid, and a South African writer's disagreement with apartheid. According to Kgositsile, 'there is a body of literature, oral and written, in practically all the languages in southern Africa, which is an important part of our heritage of cultural resistance' (30). It is therefore not surprising that several of Serote's works may be read as powerful tools of opposition against apartheid. However, for the purpose of the thesis, this section will focus primarily on works of poetry that indicate language breakdown in the expression of trauma under apartheid.

One example of this seen in Serote's 'Time has Run out', which is one part of a three-part collective titled 'A Tough Tale' (1987). This poem recalls and records the painful histories and stories of those that had been oppressed under apartheid, and so seems to provide an attempt to construct a new South African identity. Perhaps more importantly, 'Time has Run out' may also be read as an example of what Serote refers to as South African writers locating themselves in the, 'life and death struggle for freedom' (Serote 15). It reads as follows:

... days came and went
we built and built when we could, thoughts burnt into our memory
by acts of struggle
when then we stood faceless before this time

knowing that once we were defeated and conquered

knowing the act of rape called racism

and the down trodding despair of being exploited

it seemed then that we offered (130-131)

One of the most important ideas in this poem is that of facelessness. The speaker says that they ‘stood faceless before this time / knowing that once we were defeated and conquered,’ (302). Here, the direct correlation between facelessness and the knowledge of their collective defeat seems to imply that their defeat had left them robbed of their primal communicative resources which are located on the human face. Put differently, the speaker seems to suggest that the suffering brought about under apartheid could not be expressed using common communicative functions located on the human face. The speaker confirms this with the following lines: ‘we offered / thousands and millions of silences / as we toiled,’ (302). In this sense, the speaker posits that the hardship of labour under racist conditions rendered them silent. The silence referred to in this poem is indicative of the extensive discussion on both facelessness and silence as covered thoroughly in chapter one.

Apart from the immediate sense of violence, destruction and hopelessness which facelessness suggests, the absence of the face may also be regarded as the inability to communicate the details of trauma experienced under apartheid. Judith Butler provides the following argument which does not only speak of the limitations of language but also the function of the human face in communicating trauma as experienced under apartheid. She explains: ‘someone or something else speaks when the face is likened to a certain kind of speech; it is a speech that

does not come from a mouth or, if it does, has no ultimate origin or meaning there' (133). In other words, Butler locates communication in modes outside of the limitations of the human mouth. Thus, speech itself is able to find expression, even in the absence of a human face. Here, the unrepresentable nature of trauma is emphasized, while the absence of the human face as a communicative tool is also highlighted.

The people referred to in Serote's poem were denied access to human face as a communicative function. The speaker expands on this implication, stating that racism is the 'act of rape,' (302) which draws the reader's attention back to the image of the body as a manipulated, abused, broken and destroyed object at the hands of the perpetrators of apartheid. Therefore, it may be suggested that while the speaker implies that those suffering could not communicate the horrors of apartheid, the black African condition is represented through the image of an abused body at the hands of racism.

Furthermore, Serote wrote a collection of poems in 1974 that comments on and provides a critique of the social and political trials faced during the 1970s. The cover of *Tsetlo* (1974) is indicative of the theme of suffering and trauma which is a common thread throughout the collective. The cover, which was illustrated by artist Thamsanqa Mnyele, whose work was discussed earlier on within the thesis, is a display of shades of pale grey, black and white. A figure sits in the bottom center of the illustration, its limbs closely resembling that of a human being.

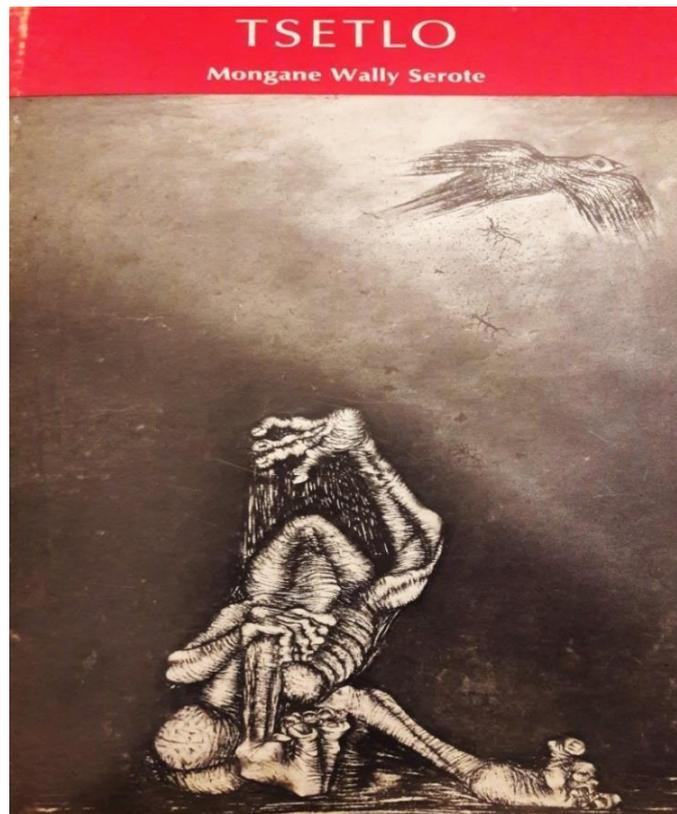


Figure 21. Mongane Wally Serote – *Tsetlo* (1974) Cover illustration by Thamsanqa Mnyele

However, this figure has been denied the natural beauty and form of a human being. This once again leaves the interpretation of the figure's experience and emotions in the body, which was a theme discussed extensively in chapter one. The figure's arm is strangely connected to a ribcage, an oversized foot protrudes from what resembles a back and a shape resembling a neck hides the face of the figure. The absence of recognizable structural components of the human body suggests an extensive level of dehumanization, while the dismemberment displayed within the image posits that the figure had been subject to a transformation that left them incapable of functioning as a human being. The contorted, mangled state of the figure also suggests that they are in a state of pain. Mzamane provides a description of the collective that sheds light on the pain portrayed in this painting: '*Tsetlo* has a more violent, more aggressive thrust consequent upon Serote's growing recognition that

neither protest nor appeal would be heeded in the state in which he was trapped' (157). It is therefore not surprising that several of Serote's poems in *Tsetlo* contain instances where language is used to portray an exceptional level of suffering and sorrow under apartheid – 26 of the 41 poems in book expresses anguish and trauma.

The image of the strange figure on the cover of *Tsetlo* is complicated by the presence of a bird in flight in the top right section of the illustration. Although the bird is depicted as ragged – its wings are torn and broken – the fact that it is in flight indicates hope. Thus, the dismemberment and fragmentation illustrated in the figure on the ground is somehow offered a sense of hope through the bird in flight. Serote begins his book with a short poem that seems to attest to the role of the bird in the illustration:

Tsetlo is a bird. It is a tiny bird.
It has a mysterious, weird sweet
whistle which it plays while it flies
from branch to branch in the bush,
luring people to follow it...
And then it stops.
It may lead you to sweet honey, to a
very dangerous snake or to something very unusual.
So says Thami Mnyele.
Tsetlo!



Therefore, it may be suggested that the cover of Serote's books reflects the content of the poems within it. This may be regarded as an example of ekphrasis, which was discussed in chapter one. With the suggestion that the Tsetlo is a bird that lures people to follow it, and may either lure them to danger or a place which one may describe as 'sweet honey', the speaker seems to suggest that the voice, of music or of poetry, has the power to guide. In the introduction to a collection of Serote's poems of the 1970s and 1980s titled *Mongane Wally*

Serote: Selected Poems, Mbulelo Vizikungo Mzamane provides the following commentary on *Tsetlo*:

It is fitting that that the emblem of one of his collections should have been a bird with ‘a mysterious, weird sweet whistle which it plays while it flies from branch to branch in the bush, luring people to follow it.’ Serote’s poems have a similarly luring quality to the Black community of South Africa. (Mzamane 7)

Although Mzamane’s analysis outlines the positive aspects of the guidance offered, the form of guidance presented here is challenging, as the follower is unaware of the destination. One may therefore assume that the image of the bird is somehow connected to the broken and distorted figure on the ground. This suggestion is further supported by the phrase, ‘luring people to follow it’ (Mzamane 7). The conundrum depicted in this illustration is that, although the bird has the power to guide, the possible dangers surrounding this guidance speaks not only of the tensions surrounding writing against apartheid, but the hopelessness and helplessness of the figure on the ground. Jane Watts sheds light on Serote’s choice to make evident this conundrum, both on the cover of *Tsetlo* as well as in the collective as a whole:

It is tempting in assessing the corpus of Serote’s work to evolve a neat theory about his poetic development from a highly sensitive and sometimes violently angry young individual seeking his identity and attempting to come to terms with the damage apartheid has done to him, through a middle period of awakening consciousness of the whole community of black people... to a final commitment to the liberation struggle.... Such a line of development is undoubtedly present in his work, and can be traced in a number of its features: in the gradual change of mood from one of frustration and despair to one of confident optimism. (Watts 155)

Thus, while the poems in *Tsetlo* represent the horrors, suffering and dehumanization experienced under apartheid, as depicted through the figure, the poems try to bring about a

sense of hope, the dream of a better future, and redemption from apartheid, as depicted through the bird. In a sense, the writing in the entire collection is depicted as a tool with which people could be set free.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the possibility of verbal or linguistic communication is not available to the figure – the figure’s face is indiscernible. The figure seems to be looking upward, displaying a strangely elongated, and protruding neck. The upturned neck suggests that the figure has no identifiable face, or that the face is hidden from the viewer. Thus, the artist seems to be drawing the viewer’s attention to that which is above the figure, while communicating that pain is an ineffable experience that sometimes refuses to be represented using common communicative tools.

Therefore, returning to the language of the collective, it must be noted that several of Serote’s poems in *Tsetlo* contain instances where language itself seems to steer away from the expression of the trials and horrors faced under apartheid, and so highlights the extent of the injustices that were condoned during this period. For instance, one poem which functions as the prelude to *Tsetlo* demonstrates an insufficiency of language throughout. It reads as follows:

When I take a pen,
my soul bursts to deface the paper
pus spills –
spreads deforming a line into a figure that violates my love,
when i take a pen,
my crimson heart oozes into the ink,
dilutes it
spreads the gem of my life
makes the word i utter a gasp to the world, -

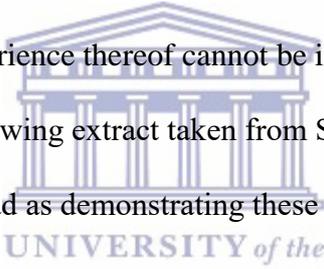
my mother, when i dance your eyes won't keep pace
look into my eyes,
there, the story of my day is told. (Serote 9)

The speaker begins this poem with the phrase, 'when I take a pen' (Serote 9). This statement directs the reader's attention to the speaker's written words, and indicates that the entire poem would focus on the discussion of the written word. The speaker continues, stating that their 'soul bursts to deface the paper,' (Serote 9). Here, it is suggested that the contents of the speaker's soul could not be translated into language without destroying the template upon which it was written. This suggestion is furthermore demonstrated with the phrase, 'deforming a line into a figure that violates my love,' (Serote 9). The deformation of the words is reminiscent of Brink's untitled essay, which has been referred to several times within the thesis. In Brink's essay, he makes a direct connection between ink and blood, and so associates the written word with violence and trauma under apartheid. The defacement of the paper in Serote's poem may therefore suggest that the contents of the speaker's soul defied language, making it impossible to transcribe into written words, while also indicating an extensive level of trauma and its effects upon the speaker.

Furthermore, the speaker suggests that his 'heart oozes into the ink' (9) and seems to deliberately isolate the phrase 'dilutes it' (9). With these statements, the speaker seems to suggest that the written language becomes less potent when it attempts to represent the stories buried within the heart of the speaker. Here, language insufficiency is once again alluded to. This suggestion is once again confirmed when the speaker says that the oozing of their heart into ink, 'makes the word i utter a gasp to world' (9). The speaker seems to contend that the importance of the 'word' which would be portrayed is diluted once it is transcribed in written terms.

The speaker ends the poem with a sense of hope that seems far removed from the ability of the written word. Instead, the speaker brings the reader's attention to the eyes, stating: 'look into my eyes / there, the story of my day is told' (9). This alludes to the visual. Here, it may be suggested that Serote's poem highlights the limitations of language and argues that that which is seen with the eyes is more capable of telling his story.

However, it is important to acknowledge that theorists have posited that trauma narratives themselves seek to highlight the limitations of the narrative function in the expression of trauma: "'new modes of referentiality", that is, fictional practices [that] are necessary to deal with events ... whose very nature seems impossible ... to represent: "trauma... seeks to foreground the ... limitations of narrative"' (Garrett 6). Thus, Robert Garrett posits that the true extent of trauma and the experience thereof cannot be incorporated into a narrative. An example of this is seen in the following extract taken from Serote's poem titled 'Behold Mama, Flowers', which can be read as demonstrating these limitations:

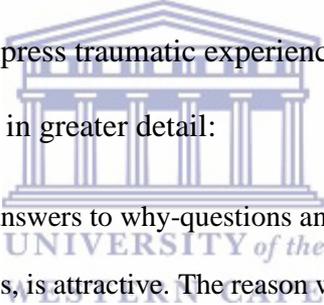


you must know that one day the storm will hit me and I will fall
and I will never ever be able to say it the way I should say it
what I really know (Serote 60)

Serote's poem, which was written during his time as a student at Columbia University in the United States, introduces an unspeakable experience of trauma, which in turn results in the inclination towards silence. Here, through poetry, Serote suggests that the extent of trauma experienced under apartheid could not be expressed through language. According to H. James Garrett and Sandra Schmidt, 'traumatic events leave people speechless, without direction, jarred loose from the moorings of linguistic stability' (Garrett and Schmidt 191). Serote's poem may be read through this lens, which in turn suggests that the cultural struggle against apartheid will always be characterized by the sometimes unspeakable historical turmoil of apartheid. Here, it is worth noting that Garrett and Schmidt reflect on the rich resource of

Holocaust theory and the scholars who discuss Holocaust writing, positing that World War II and the Jewish experience thereof, 'defies one's ability to represent it' (9). Thus, similarly, traumatic South African experiences under apartheid failed to find representation through language.

One may therefore argue that visual representations of pain and trauma provide a more accurate representation of the experiences of those that suffered under apartheid. The following statement seems to clarify a possible reason why the ACA collective chose to emphasize the use of art works as opposed to written works. Art and the visual, according to Els van Dongen, has the ability to use aesthetic resources to express that which resists all other forms of communication of traumatic experiences. As discussed more thoroughly in chapter two, art is often used to express traumatic experiences through visual expression thereof. Van Dongen explains this in greater detail:



The idea that art may provide answers to why-questions and even can heal pain and suffering, and can construct new identities, is attractive. The reason why art may be preferred as a mode of expression for people who suffered, could be that everyday lives and traumatic events are beyond imagination and may only be expressed through aesthetisation and metaphorisation.

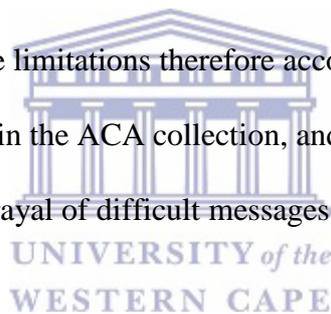
(Van Dongen 124-125)

Van Dongen seems to suggest that art functions therapeutically, and thus that it is able to heal pain and assist people in the construction of new identities. In the context of apartheid, this possibility was important, as South Africans living under apartheid were in desperate need of a means with which to retain a form of pride and identity, as the right to creating an autonomous identity was taken away from them. Van Dongen also proposes that art may be a preferred mode of expression, as trauma and its effect has the ability to resist the confines of imagination, and may therefore only be translated in metaphors and aesthetics. At this point, it is worth noting that Jacques Derrida, a key contributor to the revised ACA catalogue when

it arrived in South Africa in 1996, states the following: ‘no tongue has ever translated this name, as if all languages were defending themselves, closing their mouths against a sinister incorporation of the thing by means of a word’ (Derrida 54). Here, Derrida seems to suggest that language itself chooses not to translate the horrors associated with apartheid.

In this sense, as has been argued throughout the thesis, silence itself may be considered a more accurate morally sound means with which to deal with traumatic experiences.

Therefore, in terms of the function of language in the expression of trauma, and thus the function of language as resistance, one may argue that although language played a significant role in the cultural fight against apartheid both in South Africa and globally, there were also a considerable number of limitations to the use of the written word in the expression of experience under apartheid. These limitations therefore account for the dominant use of visual expressions of trauma within the ACA collection, and so emphasize the power of visual communication in the portrayal of difficult messages.



Chapter 5: Conclusion – Art Contre Apartheid in Post-Apartheid South

Africa

The visual arts have played a significant role in various phases in South African history, and this thesis has looked at one global initiative of visual protest against apartheid, namely the “Association of Artists of the World against Apartheid” and its Art Contre Apartheid (ACA) collection. The exhibition was an unprecedented global acknowledgement of the impact of South Africa’s apartheid policies, and the resulting works of art opened up connections and conversations with South African resistance art. Social awareness is important in order to enact social and political change, and one of the primary goals of an initiative such as Art Contre Apartheid was to create social awareness of apartheid, which would translate to global awareness. Furthermore, through the art works, pain and suffering was no longer considered an interior or abstract idea, but could be used as a powerful visual language, and thus a tool to create awareness, empathy and solidarity.

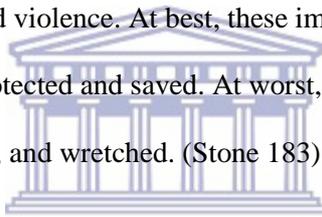
My research has found that many of the ACA works, as well as South African protest art and literature as created during the 1970s and 1980s, used the human body as a means with which to make the inhumanity of apartheid evident. Art is able to represent, affirm, and express that which often cannot be easily measured, diagnosed, and weighed, but recurring depictions of the human body in the ACA works constituted a visual language which viewers could readily access and identify with. In many cases, the ACA art works used themes of fragmentation, dismemberment, animal imagery, the manipulation of the human form, and the absence of a recognizable and whole human body as a means with which to signify suffering under apartheid, and in that way protest against it. Thus, the artists sought to use the illustration of bodily suffering as a means with which to make evident apartheid’s crimes, and so create social awareness of these crimes.

My research has therefore paid specific attention to the display of the human body in ACA art. Ben Carrington argues that paying close attention to representation through human bodies will allow ‘us to map dominant ideologies as they circulate through culture and produce themselves as sites of interpellation of individuals in specific gendered, classed and racialised subjectivities’ (Carrington 4). This is the case because, according to Federico Settler and Mari Haugaa Engh in their paper titled ‘The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Public Discourse in South Africa’ (2015), ‘the body has come to occupy a central position within both social theory and contemporary media culture, particularly through its representational power and symbolism’ (131). Thus, the display of the human body in art is still a useful tool of communication in contemporary culture. It is therefore not surprising that many ACA works made use of the human body as a means with which to express trauma and several forms of injustice as experienced under apartheid, thereby reflecting on a difficult history. However, although these works do have extensive curatorial potential, it must be noted that direct representations of the human form in art has been subject to considerable debate and contestation. In her book titled *On Photography* (1977), Susan Sontag argues that the overexposure to images of suffering and turmoil, ‘has done at least as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it,’ (21). Sontag’s book titled *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) provides a more direct revision of her argument more than 20 years later. She states the following:

People don’t become inured to what they are shown—if that’s the right way to describe what happens—because of the quantity of images dumped on them. It is passivity that dulls feeling ... The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others, that is granted by images, suggests a link between the faraway sufferers ... and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power. So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. (102)

In other words, those of relative privilege illustrating the suffering of underprivileged people may aim to assist those in need, but instead reproduce images of helplessness and dependency on those in more superior positions, which in turn is reminiscent of colonial practice. Livia K. Stone provides further insight into the issues surrounding the representation of the African human form in a state of suffering, stating that one,

characteristic of images of suffering bodies and victimization is the failure to disrupt dominant conceptual frameworks. Kleinman and Kleinman (1996) have criticized using images of suffering African bodies to raise money for nonprofit organizations, arguing that images of suffering naturalize the victimization of already oppressed populations.... They argue that audiences in the Global North view images of suffering bodies in the Global South and connect those bodies with suffering and violence. At best, these images communicate the idea that the suffering bodies need to be protected and saved. At worst, they reproduce the idea that these bodies are worthless, inhuman, and wretched. (Stone 183)



Put differently, Stone suggests that visual displays of ailing South African, and African bodies, fail to disrupt dominant narratives concerning the ‘superiority’ of the Global North, or the desirability of economic ‘development’, and may suggest that the viewing of suffering may be considered the perpetration of a crime against victims. In other words, it is posited that these images do not confront privileged viewers with the extent to which they may be inadvertently or directly involved in various systems of oppression. This narrative may therefore prove to be potentially harmful to those suffering. In addition, as covered extensively within my research, it is worth acknowledging that several theorists have argued that pain cannot be objectively verified. The representation of suffering black bodies is therefore not without controversy, and this discussion extends directly to representations of the human form in art. For instance, Elizabeth Dauphinee states the following:

Bodies in pain must rely on our capacity to imagine this pain, which cannot be expressed and can only find an imperfect voice in rupturing moments that also work toward the building of narratives – that is, the photograph, the testimony, the symbolic aesthetic portrayal through art or poetry. The disconnect rests on the very foundations of our modes of knowing. Imagining requires us to think ourselves into the skins of others, and the consequence is that our looking both becomes and remains ours alone. (Dauphinee 146)

Here, it must be noted that pain and trauma, as experienced under a regime such as apartheid, cannot always be easily understood and interpreted in visual modes. Those experiencing trauma first-hand adopt what Dauphinee refers to as an ‘imperfect voice’ with which to express their experience, which may be read as distorted, abstract imagery that can only be imagined by viewers. This puts forth the idea that visual communication of pain and suffering has limitations. It is therefore important to note that ACA artists also depicted abstract art works that made indirect references to pain, rather than referring to it through the use of more direct visual clues with which to communicate. Interestingly, the abstract, dismembered and distorted images also play a significant role in contemporary art in South Africa. Anneleen de Jong argues that distorted images represent a struggle towards finding a South African identity. She explains:

In contemporary art, strangeness of the image plays an important role. More than affirming identity and the conventional level of our perception, it attempts to influence the way we see things, and to make us aware of a reality that we are unable or unwilling to see. It is used to bring back those events or facts that we in our actuality would like to forget, or whose form we are not willing to accept. The dialogue with the past is very sensitive because our vision of the past is subjective and always subjugated by our own experiences. Therefore, the past is never neutral or without guilt, because it has formed the horizon in which our identity has taken shape. (De Jong 128)

Here, De Jong highlights the importance of memory. She also posits that the distortion of forms may be represented to confront and address viewers with a reality which they may be unable or unwilling to recognize. It must therefore be acknowledged that the illustration of distorted or abstract images plays a significant role in the construction and expression of identity in contemporary South Africa. De Jong also states that in contemporary South African art, ‘we can see that not being able to handle the past in a homogeneous way also affects the representation of the human being’ (127). Therefore, De Jong aligns the scattered and confusing visual representation of the human being with the difficulty surrounding the construction of an identity in the midst of a difficult past.

Thus, the dismembered and in certain cases abstracted representations of bodies in the ACA collection, may be interpreted as an effort towards presenting memories of South African identity that reflect the suffering inflicted under apartheid. To a certain extent, the distortions and confusions represented through the ACA works may be read as a mirror of the turmoil that was commonplace during this period. Thus, with regards to the future curation of these works, it is also important to contextualize the repeated use of abstractions within ACA, and bring these works into conversation with South African art that also uses abstractions to communicate important political messages surrounding memory, identity and restoration.

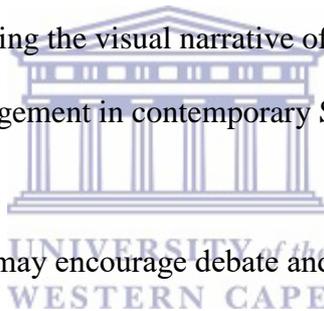
It is with these debates in mind that one must acknowledge that the ACA works, which capitalize on the display of the human form in various states of suffering but also make extensive use of abstractions, must be curated in such a way that the progressive, liberatory message of the collection is not forsaken. Because South Africa is rich with works that portray the human body in various ways of oppression, the ACA works would be best curated in conjunction with South African works of protest created during the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as contemporary South African works that explore similar themes and content. In order to communicate the ideas of the collection, the ACA works could also be curated

along with the written works which were submitted by several writers globally. As demonstrated in my research, these essayistic and poetic works play an ekphrastic role with regards to the ideas which the creators and the artists alike sought to convey, and may therefore aid in the interpretation of the art works, but also open up debates surrounding the use of language in the communication of trauma.

The current state of the ACA art works, namely the fact that they continue to be stored in packing crates at the Center for the Performing Arts at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), may raise concerns surrounding the collection's curatorial future. The organizers of the collection, as outlined in the Introduction, sought to see ACA constituting a museum. The ACA collection could therefore be exhibited at UWC, in a museum or gallery primarily dedicated to its curation and exhibition. As desired by Nelson Mandela, as well as the creators of the collection, the works would therefore be celebrated and appreciated by the immediate university community, and also the broader public. UWC has not only been recognised as a public location in tribute of the late president, Nelson Mandela, but it is also the home of the art works themselves.

When UWC chose to honour the legacy of Mandela, it sought to both acknowledge and remember the consequences of his desire to see educational transformation in South Africa. Here, it is worth noting that several of the art works in the ACA collection seek to honour the sacrifices of Nelson Mandela. In addition, the development of the Mayibuye-Robben Island Museum, which was the initial home of the ACA collection, demonstrated the shared political goals between Nelson Mandela and UWC, and also epitomized the University's efforts towards re-writing the history of segregation and oppression. It would therefore be fitting for this collection to be exhibited at the University, as the messages communicated in ACA are closely aligned with the political goals outlined above.

Alternatively, because existing museums and art galleries in Cape Town have the capacity to curate these works, it may be suggested that the collection be moved to such an existing location. One gallery that may be regarded as a potential alternative for the curation of these works is the South African National Gallery (SANG). SANG has exhibited several of the works created by South African contemporary artists, and also hosts and curates a few of the art works referred to in my research, such as ‘The Butcher Boys’ by Jane Alexander and ‘The Black Christ’ (1962-3) by Ronald Harrison. Thus, select works from the ACA collection could form part of various exhibitions hosted by the Gallery, and thus may be brought into conversation with the works such as those created by Alexander and Harrison. In this way, the continuity that still exists among these works may be seen by the public, thus opening up avenues for a discussion surrounding the visual narrative of trauma and the extent to which this may be used as a tool of engagement in contemporary South Africa.



Examples of ACA art works that may encourage debate and discussion include Franta’s ‘Le Reveil’ (1982), which displays the distortion of the human face, Wolf Vostell’s work titled ‘Black Cruzification’ (1982), which illustrates the gruesome crucifixion of a human figure, Polish sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz’s ‘Dos’ (1982), as it displays dismemberment and fragmentation, and ‘Untitled’ (1982) by Wilfredo Lam, which illustrates a beastlike figure in an effort to undermine the apartheid state’s claim to be an authentic and undisputed representative of God’s will. As discussed in detail above, these works do not only use illustrations of the human form to critique apartheid, but they also spur the viewer to think critically about the human condition under apartheid, the implications of the suffering experienced under a racist government, and the extent to which the conditions under apartheid shaped black memory. A critical reflection on these works may therefore contribute a valuable viewpoint into existing discussions surrounding the current political state of South

Africa, and the social impact that South Africa's apartheid past has had on marginalized South Africans.



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