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On Passage and Place: Into The Neo-Archive Sighting Black Femme Artists, our Communities and the Cultural Immortality of Drawn, Printed and Digital Media in Southern Africa

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School of Arts

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University of Witwatersrand

Wits School of Arts

Department of Fine Arts

2024

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MAFA Research Paper

Written and Submitted by Bongiwe Buthelezi (1826293)

In fulfilment of a Master of Arts in Fine Arts, by Research

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Supervisor

Bettina Malcomess

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On Passage and Place: Into The Neo-Archive

Sighting Black Femme Artists, our Communities and the Cultural Immortality of Drawn, Printed and Digital Media in Southern Africa

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Abstract

On Passage and Place is a publication based on the theoretical framing of BLAQ NOIZE, Hauntology, Representation, Genealogy, Feminism, and the *Neo*-Archive. BLAQ NOIZE encapsulates the intergenerational remnants of unresolved familial experiences, otherwise categorised as memories – which are held, recreated or transmitted within and outside of Black familial spaces. The word '*Neo*' references a name in Sesotho that translates to 'gift' in English, and as such, the *Neo*-Archive is read herein as a collection and space within which BLAQ NOIZE and/ or the 'gifts', contributed and created by Black people are kept, preserved and revisited. The paper expands on how the recording and participation of Black femme[1] artists within Drawing, Print and Digital praxes in the Southern African art scene, advocates for their survival, and the survival of these media. Additionally, I discuss how in the art made between the 1980s to the 2020s, the aforementioned theoretical frameworks have become integral to the mapping and '*sighting*' of artistic and socio-political trajectories of Black femme communities throughout Southern Africa. Furthermore, I elaborate on the ways that representations of Black femmes within Drawn, Printed and Digital media have added to the cultural immortality of this media in and beyond Southern Africa, while also maintaining that Black femmes have upheld the *Neo*-Archive on an intergenerational scale. The publication thus recalls the contributions of Black femmes towards the sustenance of artistic media within Southern Africa, theorizes the vitality of the *Neo*-Archive, and offers insight into the immortalisation of Black femme experiences, through artistic and/ or *Neo*-praxes[2].

Key Words: BLAQ NOIZE | Hauntology | *Neo*-Archive | Representation | Genealogy | Feminism | Print | Drawing | Digital Media | Black Femme Artists | Southern Africa

1 ***Black femmes*** in this context, encapsulate a group of Black, feminine, female-presenting, female-identifying and/ or queer people. Whilst acknowledging the historical tie that the term 'femme' has signified within the queer community, my use of it throughout this text lends space to the inclusion of queer, non-binary and/ or heterosexual people who subsequently resonate with the aforementioned identifiers..

2 ***Neo-Praxes*** are artistic practices taken up by Black artists and invoke familial, historical, psychological and/ or spiritual subject matter through their use.

Introduction

Since creating THE BLAQ INC. PRESS (TBIP)[3] as a research-led publication in 2021, my artistic praxis has been aimed at discussing and disseminating Black, femme-centric narratives, lineages and lived trajectories within South(ern) African art-related histories, mediums and spaces. This has is also sustained through my notion that there are specific global and social identities, cultures, artistic media and histories that have, in addition to other causes, been secured through employing methods of recognition, representation, and validation towards Black femmes and their communities, and these methods are defined as 'praxes of sight'[4].

I argue that these praxes have become integral to the survival of Black femme artists and their broader communities' careers, legacies and states of visibility, in addition to the artistic media and creative spaces that they harbour. This is primarily due to '*sighting*' as a practice informed and prompted by an inherently human desire to 'see' (i.e. visualise, experience, understand) and 'be seen' (i.e. be visible/ visualised, experienced, understood). Furthermore, I argue that people naturally possess the potential to project our (un)conscious requests to be seen, noticed and valued through our own perspectives and through the perception of others – which ultimately suggests that when these requests fail, or happen to yield our preferred results, the outcome may affect our physical, mental, and spiritual 'survival'.

As such, while the basis of my research is aided by the context of being a Black femme artist myself, it is presented as my attempt at deepening the contemporary, public interpretations of art-related, gendered and historical discourse which is, or has been produced, disseminated, known or (un)recorded by Black creators between the late-twentieth-century (i.e., 1970s - 1990s) and present-day 2020s. As this is discourse that reflects the realities and trajectories of Black, Southern African femme artists, communities, roles and survival within Drawing, Digital, and Print-based artistic praxes. Thus, throughout the publication I am discussing the theoretical frameworks that have continued to sustain certain print-led, and illustrative praxes which depict Black bodies, narratives and culture, because they have been integrated into the social and creative frameworks of Southern African art histories and academia. These

[3] ***THE BLAQ INC. PRESS*** (est. 2021) was initially the title my BAFA 4th year thesis/ publication, but has since been set up as an online media-sharing platform (i.e., via Instagram), used for the dissemination of resources and/ or discourse about art produced primarily by Black people, in addition to conversations about various praxes of intergenerational healing and mental-wellness.

[4] ***praxes of sight*** are acts of representing, citing, validating and/ or making visible the life, legacy and identity of an individual or a community (i.e., commonly employed through visual, textual, sonic and/ or additional modes of art and media.)

frameworks have however, been continually reinterpreted herein, as the core contributors to both *Neo*-praxes and the *Neo*-Archive. Furthermore, I outline how within the context of Southern African art histories, these are praxes which have been timelessly influenced by the efforts, placements and roles of Black femmes, despite inadvertently or previously lacking more moments of authorship, accreditation and/ or autonomous 'sighting' or citing of us.

My research is thereby aimed at investigating historical and contemporary archives, texts, artworks produced and protected by Black creators – in an effort to discuss the ways that contemporary art-making methodologies have been informed by them, and how these have later been applied by younger generations of Black artists i.e., as a means of presently sighting/ citing themselves and their communities in and outside of academia. The framing through which I discuss this research, however, will be presented in three chapters which have been laid out as discursive essays discussing praxes of sight, BLAQ NOIZE, the *Neo*-Archive, Academic-Incense[5], and the transfiguration – through visual arts, of Black femme bodies as reservoirs of culture and time.

Furthermore, the publication features a case study wherein I reference some of the work/s of Black femme Drawing artists, Printmakers and Digital media-based creatives, who work in and beyond Southern Africa, and who have impacted the trajectories of their respective praxes, and significantly influenced my own artistic practice. The purpose of this paper is therefore, to reposition attention paid by Southern African structures of academia, and media-dissemination, towards the socio-political, personal, spiritual and artistic contributions of Black femme artists and communities, upon the contemporary states of their creative praxes, and on the survival of the cultures that they have timelessly been reflected and placed in. The paper calls for a weighted emphasis to be placed on the methodologies (e.g. praxes of sight) which exist in contrast to, in response to, and despite any historical absences of Black femme authorship and/ or autonomy which had been previously identified within certain facets of South African art history (i.e., primarily in Printmaking, Illustration, and Poetry) and are therefore, substantiated through the existence and expansion of contemporary Black-owned or headed spaces, positionalities and praxes.

[5] ***Academic Incense*** is a poetic phrase I coined in referring to historical and educational discourse that is 'prepared', written, printed, disseminated and then 'burned', consumed, accepted and culturally-integrated by groups or communities of people, through educational institutions, and is later used to promote certain ideas or ideals, rules, techniques, or practices. (e.g. documents, books, newspapers, posters, blogs, scriptures, and/ or textiles).

Placing a great degree of reason and meaning behind the acts that are performed by Black femme artists, is where my thesis pulls the essence of its value. Within my decision to employ an intentionally auto-ethnographic 'praxis of sight' towards myself and my discussions about additional Black femme artists residing within Southern African frameworks and contemporary spaces, I am seeking to theorise a site of redressive 'seeing' (i.e., sighting, citing) that is inspired by the "will to heal" from the past, and "help… imagine what was lost" in the past (Gordon, 2008:57). This is to acknowledge the intergenerational 'matter' presently attached to my identity as an artist, and to what I discuss as a subliminal sense of Black femme obligation[6]

This concept, which I observe as being present in the work/s of many Black femme artists, art curators or critics, essentially depicts the result of having one generation metaphorically plant 'seeds' of social, psychological and spiritual ideologies (i.e., by way of conversation, conflict, loss, or art-production), which possess the potential to grow into 'forests', bearing only 'fruits' of a repetitive history. What I mean to demonstrate through this visual metaphor, is that especially within the context of Southern African art-history and contemporary art-spaces, the historical 'seeds' of state-inflicted censorship, invalidation, muted autonomy or erasure which had initially been 'planted' within the 'soils' of Black, femme identities, positionalities and livelihoods, have since grown and expanded into 'forests' i.e., archives that have 'fed' or encouraged a set of narratives and perceptions about them and their impacts – and have been perpetuated, within the context of my argument at least, through South African artistic media (e.g. Drawing, Printmaking and Digital Media), and art-historical academia, despite previously having little-to-no authorship from Black femme individuals.

As such, the essays within my thesis will explore further, what these 'seeds' entail, and whether they have disintegrated over time, or grown into ghostly organisms that still (re)produce and echo similar, outdated 'outcomes' of removal.

Sighting My MAFA Practice

My artistic practice forms the initial point of enquiry in my research, since I am a young Black femme artist working with the mediums of Drawing, Print and Poetry, and I have consequently come to grapple with hearing and bearing witness to the historical seeds or "ghostly matters"

[6] ***Black femme obligation*** implies an intergenerational passage of a particular sets of beliefs, customs or practices (i.e. which Avery Gordon better theorises as 'ghostly matter'), which are embedded in the upbringing of young Black femmes, and this 'matter' is what causes them, particularly in adulthood, to experience a haunting sense of 'obligation' or responsibility towards continuing or perpetuating similar practices onto generations of Black femmes born after them.

(Gordon, 2008) that continually echo specific moments in South African timelines wherein Black femme bodies, although positioned as placeholders and sustainers of Black culture, history and survival within our communities, were or are still discriminated against within a broader society, the arts and within our own homes.

In my creative processes, I have been able to recognise the importance of learning how to produce and distribute my work despite any historically or psychologically-induced moments of fear, insecurity, inaccessibility, invalidation or exclusion, especially since recognizing that my ability to produce and conduct research relative to art, has been continuously encompassed by my struggle to accept or disregard a heavily historicized relationship between lineages of Blackness within the context of African visual arts and media, and to then enact something 'new' within myself, or my work which extends beyond this. My realisations and reflections form part of the collection of references that I draw from throughout the paper, in order to theorise the psychological (creative), cultural, spiritual expectations or obligations that I argue, have remained subconsciously etched and perpetuated into several lineages of Black, South African artists, specifically Black femme practitioners of Drawing/ Illustration, Printmaking, and Poetry.

As such, the thesis is compiled through an auto-ethnographic voice, narrativized through personal experiences that I encountered and outlined herein, as both an artist and art-scholar. I later reference four artists[7], select collectives[8] and spaces which have demonstrated the significance of applying *auto-ethnography* towards the production and dissemination of artistic work and research.

- **Auto-Ethnography** is a research method that is employed by researchers, scholars and in this discussion, artists who use their personal experiences to broaden, understand and dissect topics linked to society, culture and other themes. My fascination with it is personal because I have always had many opinions and experiences that I have sought to share, relative to various topics, although I have been incredibly reserved and shy for most of my life, and so observing the world through a personalised lens while also learning about the lenses and perspectives of other people, is a mode of working and researching that naturally aligned with me and my work.

Additionally, I look to writers and/ or poets such as Steve Biko, Koleka Putuma and bell hooks for example, who discuss with great precision, a series of pro-Black, redressive and feminist approaches towards both future and contemporary issues which have been faced by Black, femme communities. I cite this discourse, amongst others, because it provides a clearer lens

7 ***Four artists*** include Puleng Mongale, Karabo Poppy, Naledi Modupi and Helena Mbembe

8 ***Select collectives*** include Rorke's Drift Art Centre, Philani Printing Project and the MEDU Art Ensemble.

into the significance of auto-ethnography used within the context of my research and academic writing, which I intentionally aim at themes of Blackness, haunting and contemporary representation. hooks, in her insertion within the '*Off Our Backs*' women's journal for example, writes that "future feminist moves must address more directly the experience of everyday life." (hooks, 1990: 90), and this notion, along with Biko's in '*I Write What I Like*', which states that "a lot of attention has to be paid to our history if we as blacks want to aid each other in our coming into consciousness. We have to rewrite our history and describe in it the heroes that formed the core of resistance." (Biko, 2004) – platforms where my argument for employing auto-ethnography in my paper and my praxis is pulled.

Within my writing process I have also been made aware that the experiences I discuss are not navigated solely by Black, femme communities, and I incite moments of recognition towards the sites and communities wherein specific commonalities, intersections and moments of harmony take place between the intergenerational effects of historical wounding– all of which, reside within the diverse psychological frameworks and/ or artistic praxes of additional groups of people residing within the Southern African art-based demographic. An example of where this occurs, can be noted through the Philani Printing Project which was initiated in 1997, and was created by a community of Xhosa women, as a means through which those living within the township of Crossroads in the Western Cape, South Africa, could communicate or produce "powerful visual narratives that call attention to their own personal experiences." (Miller, 2003: 619)

A Brief Historical Deep-Dive

- The *Philani Printing Project* focussed on discussing and documenting their mission and pursuit of "human survival" (Miller, 2003: 620). The women who were part of the project commonly featured "subjects of which are typically autobiographical narratives" (620) within their works, especially since these artworks platformed the "issues that are important to most South African women". (621).
- Additionally, the issues documented in these works were created within a timeframe (i.e., the 1990s) wherein socio-political issues experienced by women were witnessed and addressed according to the cultures associated with that era. However, I mention the timeframe that these issues were being discussed or experienced, to draw a direct correlation between the fact that not much has 'changed' regarding the issues faced by women across South Africa, even within contemporary timelines (i.e., the 2020s). These issues, which the women of Crossroads were facing during 1997 and onwards, included "labour exploitation, physical violence, sexual objectification, unsatisfactory education, scarce natural resources, HIV/AIDS, and the political possibilities of motherhood." (621).

Since my practice is inclusive of Drawing, Poetry and Printmaking, and is equally informed by specific thematics of Black history, spirituality and mental health, I find it important to trace and navigate through moments in my own and/ or public histories, where intergenerational wounding, grief and healing have occurred, especially within the contexts of Black households, lineages and communities. This is partly due to the awareness I have held about the histories of South Africa as a formal country, and the multisectoral trajectories undertaken by its current inhabitants for them to live, produce and eventually die here. Thus, when discussing a selection of trajectories and (un)recorded autonomous positionalities of Black femme bodies, artists and/ or presences, I navigate the links that they carry between histories of dispossession, demolition, violence, or relocation, and more contemporary the realities of bodily autonomy, perpetuated violence, reclamation, self-love and unlearning experienced by them.

These are concepts that, alongside the issue of tracing sites and/ or *sightings* of Black femme artists within the industry and praxes of Southern African art, continue to resurface in my work as that type of 'ghostly matter', especially because I argue that wherever Black femme artists find themselves situated, or *placed*, there is always an inevitable dance or exchange taking place between their presently living selves, and the lineages, histories, and requests relayed onto them, via people who are either living, *passing* or who have passed. Therefore, I present my work throughout this paper to aid my argument that Black femme artists, despite the respective timelines they live(d) within, are in some cases called to effectively make one, out of three choices within their careers.

These choices include; to note or become ignorant to internal/ external BLAQ bleeding[9] that is instigated by way of intergenerational wounding or trauma, to continuously live with the discomfort that this brings up, or to take up an arguably 'necessary' task of healing and closing these wounds.

- In my work ***The Fourth*** (Fig. 1) - as seen below, I depict an embodiment of *BLAQ bleeding*, which is not as graphically depicted as one might think. I am not depicting the potentially harmful truths that come with the experiences which are passed down through familial, intergenerational relationships, rather I seek to demonstrate how there is always a weight, unseen or not, that sort of 'anoints' us Black bodies, with a haunting of the characteristics, behaviours, experiences and narratives that whatever we are surrounded by, brought up in and/ or accustomed to in our personal and public lives.

[9] ***BLAQ bleeding*** in the context of this paper, refers to the experience of intergenerational wounding within a Black person or familial context, which has been left unresolved and unattended to, throughout the passage of time.

As such, the decision to discuss my MAFA practice within this publication demonstrates how I seek to combine an auto-ethnographic framework within the structure of the work, with an equally objective, academically-informed stance. I have taken this approach to the writing, because it substantiates the aim of me 'publishing' the research itself, which is primarily to ignite a sense of urgency or acknowledgement within the eyes and minds of present producers and disseminators of Southern African art-based academia and media to locate (*site*), and represent (*sight*) the impact, work and authorship of Black femme artists and additional members of their communities. Therefore, this task is one that is integral, because there is, and has for several decades been a unique variety of discourse to be collected, preserved and presently taught within, and outside of the kinds of *Neo*-Archives that Black femmes have always been a part of.



Figure 1: ***The Fourth***, 2023, Ink on Paper, 42 x 30cm (Framed)

- A Personal Note

  I do argue that there is substantial value resident in the efforts being made by larger academic institutes (e.g., schools, libraries and universities), creative spaces (e.g., galleries, studios and museums), and/ or less formal sites, to direct attention towards the influence and authorship of Black femme individuals and communities in contemporary, popular, and artistic culture – especially within digital, print and illustrative media, and so this work presents an additional opportunity to give or *gift* a sense of placement to the voices, works and legacies of Black femmes working or residing within those structures.

The structure of this paper thereby enacts a methodology of making visible, and effectively integrating a wider acknowledgement of Black, femme presence within Southern African art spheres (i.e., relative to Drawing, Digital and Printed media), and it thereby seeks to platform the impact of, or value in recognising the role of key theoretical frameworks that exist within contemporary formulations of Black femme artistic identity in and beyond Southern African artistic cultures. Therefore, in citing the effects of implementing auto-ethnography as a method of academic and/ or personal inquiry within this work, the publication encapsulates the value of sighting of Black, femme perspectives and visibility, as it now exists within and in conjunction to discourse pertaining to Blackness and Southern African art.

BLAQ NOIZE

Throughout history there have been records (e.g. found through historical, sociological studies) of an intergenerational practice employed by living organisms, which involves leaving behind or 'passing on' legacies, traditions, histories and customs throughout their lifespans and deaths – to ensure the sighting and cementing of lineage, custom and passage. Even in cases where organisms are born without any traceable record, it was and has essentially, always been their biological or genetic make-up that constituted as evidence of the lineages of kin that led them towards their birth, and their arrival to wherever they establish life. I mention this because whether it has been a conscious effort or not, the act of 'leaving a mark' in efforts to record or make known the presence of our lives and the lives of our communities, so that the people who later find, or are born of that same lineage have a connection to refer back to – is an act that is inherently natural, traditional and almost crucial to the survival of most living beings.

This argument directly correlates to what I discuss herein as '*BLAQ NOIZE*', as the term within this publication, elucidates the recognition of work or artefacts that presently exist as results of the input, skill and contribution of Black artists. More importantly, the works created through these processes serve as the physical evidence, histories and mementos which signify and furthermore, sight the presence and validity of Black artistic life/ identity.

If one is to observe the act of creating something and then preserving it as a subconscious practice of 'leaving behind' a legacy, or trace of ourselves within the fabric of time, then it is fair to suggest that there is a reason behind *why* people do this. I suggest that there are different cases, wherein a human desire to be seen, remembered and or memorialised in some form, actually dates back centuries before our current timeline, and especially in the case of creative individuals, one may recognise that artists possess more of a tendency to "...express a gendered political consciousness in that they depict their life experiences with an awareness that being … is a factor in their oppression as well as a basis from which they can resist." (Miller, 2003: 621).

Arguably, this may hold the evidence behind why, for example, Black femme artists may feel this necessity or responsibility, since it is in theory, rooted in the relationship that 'sight' or the act of seeing/ being seen and validated in their daily lives, directly correlates to whether they will feel or know that they are alive, and valued (i.e., in life or in death). Black femmes may

recognise the heavy impact of what the opposite rendition of this practice would, or could do to an individual and/ or community of people, especially since historically speaking, it has been both the visual, and attempted erasure of particular racial or ethnic groups for example, and the ways that they had once lived as and presented themselves throughout the time periods that they were alive, which has subverted opportunities for their contemporary descendants to 'know', or learn about their origin – and as such, with an inability to sight their origins, they are unconsciously called to either hold minimal attachments to their socio-cultural identities, or to in some ways (re)create modified versions of them. This sense of disorientation may cause generations of people to live in a state of consistent limbo – constantly wondering where their deceased relatives and/ or personal, ancestral lineages originate from.

I see this discussed by Avery Gordon in her critical engagements with traditional methods of sociology, as she argues that "sociological analysis is limited by its "restrictive commitment to an empiricist epistemology." Equally, her notion towards this outdated aspect of the field, cements why I argue that an intergenerational, or perpetuated loss in some ways, significantly impacts the individualised and communal senses of survival, positionality and identity within a person.

- Gordon's iterations about the 'haunting' truths that lay resident within loss that has been imparted upon the psyche and "complex personhood" of someone, demonstrates a theme within the praxis of sighting BLAQ NOIZE that greatly piques my interest. She notes that the social bases of this personhood is ultimately "inflected by race, class and gender dynamics" and creates avenues wherein people "remember and forget", are "beset by contradiction… recognise and misrecognize themselves and others" and ultimately "tell themselves stories about themselves and their societies problems." (2008).

As such, when people do recognize the presence of objects, traditions, songs, images, artefacts etc. that *have* been left behind, and that essentially denote that the past is indeed 'visible' to some of them living within the present timeline – a greater sense of security may be attained. One might begin to (re)learn, validate and even heal themselves, if they are privileged enough to gain access to the remnants, or the residue of the extensive lineages of people who are, and have been related to them, who lived long before they did and who, in so doing, left behind enough '*NOIZE*' for them to hear, 'see', identify with and/ or know themselves with greater levels of context.

First Essay:

Rearview-Residual: Exploring the Parameters & Impacts of Sighting 'BLAQ NOIZE'

Defining BLAQ NOIZE

BLAQ NOIZE is a theoretical framework of which I have coined to describe and encapsulate moments or sites wherein expressions of Black identity, reclamation and recognition within artistic cultures and spaces, especially those of which have been adapted and sustained by Black artists and communities, between the late twentieth century (i.e., 1970s), and this present timeline (i.e., 2020s) – take *place*. The places where these expressions of Black sighting are found, exist as 'geographies of Blackness' (McKittrick, 2006), and these locations have been mapped, reproduced, recognized and recorded via artistic praxes, employed by Black creatives who have been working in and beyond Southern Africa, while collaboratively being sustained through timeless spaces such as the *Neo*-Archive.

Thus, this term encompasses autonomous narratives, memories, praxes, and presences of Black artists and our lineages, especially those of which have, or will have been placed i.e., with or without an intergenerational gravitas, into specific collections of academic or archival research, artistic work and recorded trajectories of our respective creative cultures. Whilst drawing on discussions about hauntology, which I argue as present or embedded within come Black artists' desires to create or reference Black artefacts, imagery or literature for example, BLAQ NOIZE also is built upon the construction and contemporary concepts of sociological expressions. Gordon states that it is in fact "the definition of the social that primes us to see" and/ or sight aspects of the past that are perpetually residing within our present timeline. She further communicates that attuning to (i.e., sighting) 'ghostly matters' in our contemporary contexts formulates "a knowing that is more a listening than a seeing, a practice of being attuned to the echoes and murmurs of that which has been lost but which is still present amongst us (2008: x).

Additionally, BLAQ NOIZE is a recalibrated phrase that grammatically plays on the term 'black noise', which may be defined as silence and/ or an absence of identifiable, readable sound. "Black noise is a type of noise where the dominant energy level is zero throughout all frequencies, with occasional sudden rises; it is also defined as silence. Contrary to general consideration, sound and silence are not each other's opposite, but they are mutually inclusive." (Ertan & Önol, 2017). Thus, to supersede its meaning within the context of this paper, is to intentionally signify the presence of Black 'sound', and a continuous sighting of

Black artistic life and survival – which is what I reference throughout my own work, and in the analyses of artworks produced by other Black, femme artists discussed herein, who have been cultivating their individual praxes and creative work by way of making 'NOIZE' throughout time.

Ultimately, BLAQ NOIZE is an idea that signifies the relationship between Black lineages and legacies, as it references a variety of historical subject matter – which, for the context of this discussion, includes the erasures and/ or absences of Black (femme) presence, practice and authorship within Southern African illustrative/ printed histories. Additionally, through sighting the effects of those erasures/ absences, BLAQ NOIZE also elucidates the value in acknowledging the remnants, residue and evidence of creative expression which have been produced, disseminated and 'left behind' by Black artists, communities and spaces, throughout historical timelines (e.g., the mid-to-late twentieth century).

Equally, I find it important to note that an additional source that I have used to encapsulate the pertinence and value of BLAQ NOIZE, comes from my reading of the concept of 'Black reason', which Achille Mbembe writes about in his book '*Critique of Black Reason'* (2007). In the text, Mbembe discusses in varied instances, the impact of creating moments of visibility and/ or representation which are incited by Black people, as opposed to those created and disseminated by primary Western or White consciousnesses. He mentions how this affects the possibilities of Black people seeing themselves through a lens *reasonable* and in fact, relative to them. He goes on to note that an opportunity to be represented as a Black person through a Black lens and/ or Black consciousness demonstrates how "...the Black Man affirms of himself that he is that which cannot be captured or controlled" (2007: 28), neither by a lens foreign and/ or unfamiliar to himself, especially since, it is through the 'Black Man's' autonomous decision to be seen through Black lenses, that he possesses an agency to live as "the one who is not where they say he is, and even less where they are looking for him. Rather, he exists where he is not thought." (28).



Figure 2: ***side effects May include***, 2024, Mixed Media on Paper, 30 x 43cm (Framed)

- ***side effects May include*** (Fig. 2) is a piece that was created to communicate as well as represent the dynamics within a Black familial setting wherein silence is prevalent, detachment is imminent and the 'side effects' of misunderstanding or misreading one another results in the degradation of a familial community. It is a work that demonstrates how to apply more intentional attention towards one another, especially within the gendered avenues of Black femininity and masculinity, because then we embody a form of Black consciousness towards our own 'Black Reason'.

Tracing and/ or recording the moments wherein BLAQ NOIZE appears within the frameworks of Southern African art-related timelines, is thus a vital activity to begin with, when reading, analysing or making visual work as a young Southern African artist – especially if you are a Black femme artist working with mediums that carry histories of limited-to-no access for, or a sense of authorship towards Black femme people (i.e., histories in Printmaking, Photography, Drawing, and Poetry). Thus, in making the decision to locate or create BLAQ NOIZE, one actively employs a *praxis of sight* towards these artistic methodologies and the ways that Black artists or art scholars corroborate with them, to express themselves in the twenty-first century.

It is important to note this, because whenever art created by Black people is analysed,

produced and/ or critiqued by their own words or those of their communities and counterparts, they remedy a practice that was historically designed to (re)define them through lenses that had at once, been entirely misinformed or foreign to them (i.e., through primarily Westernised or colonial perspectives) – and thus, in redressing that same practice, they gain access to and essentially master a process that is heavily reliant on the impact and relevance which sighting Blackness embodies, in the present timeline.

I argue that a praxis of sight that is employed by them, towards unpacking Black femininity and/ or Black familial lineages for example, via their own production, dissemination and/ or understanding of their own or other Black artists' works (e.g. prints, photographs, drawings, conversations, poems, novels) – should be considered an integral praxis that exemplifies the value in sighting BLAQ NOIZE.

By implementing this praxis into the reading, analysis and/ or making of artistic work in Southern Africa, one holds the potential to presently reinform or redress (outdated) records of artistic praxes, identities and discourse, (e.g., those emphasised in colonial depictions of Black femme individuals) which have at times been inaccurate, exaggerated, or known to lack the authorship and consented input of Black voices or artists, and that thereby perpetuate a heavily weighted culture of censorship, erasure and invalidation. Thus, I argue that sighting BLAQ NOIZE must be considered a highly useful skill to adopt for art scholars in their academic research about Black artists, as it is not an entirely new concept, nor has it been one neglected throughout the passage of time – it is only a framework that has allowed for the practice and tradition of certain mediums to persist, and survive within contexts such as the social climate of Southern Africa.

Origins of BLAQ Sight

"What matters is what is seen. Thinking is secondary to seeing." (Ndebele, 1986: 147)

The premise of my work as an Illustrator, Printmaker, and Poet, is informed by a consistent referral to, and a revisitation of Black historical narratives, recordings, images and texts. I recognize the value that resides in acknowledging and understanding aspects of a culture or an artistic medium that for example, has existed and survived for decades, and as such I hypothesise that the artists who have been historically disadvantaged, marginalised or forcefully removed from positions of production, authorship or ownership within the media and praxes they work in, may find solace in learning that they may have not been the first or only ones within their specific societal group to experience this inaccessibility.

In acknowledging this, they may be called to establish *Neo*-pathways[10] of accessibility, inclusion, celebration or validation in their own modalities of working – especially as ways to potentially *gift* themselves and their communities, revised adaptations of creative practices and cultures which recognise and honour them i.e., as opposed to simply countering the ones that have existed over centuries, and that have attempted to outcast or silence people like them.

It is important to note and argue that if one feels any urge to establish these pathways, they are not experiencing a feeling that exists solely within the present timeline, and of its own accord. Instead I suggest that there is actually an origin to the feeling, and that it is highly likely that an artist choosing to revisit or reference their own histories and/ or those of anyone else, in an attempt to rectify or redress the unjust, inaccurate or harmful ideas, representations and practices linked to them, or certain members of their social and cultural groups (e.g. gendered, ethnic, religious, racial) – is considered an artist that has been subconsciously or directly exposed to, and has since drawn their personal sense of urgency, from a theoretical framework called *hauntology*.

Hauntology

This is a term that has been referenced throughout various academic texts and recalls the writing of numerous thinkers whom I have referenced, even in my undergraduate writing such as Jaques Derrida, Ayo A. Coly, and Avery F. Gordon for example. They have all formulated different arguments which stipulate how haunting or hauntology incubates the presence of historical matter that has, in one or more ways, travelled through and thereby transcended its own original timeline, and is still active, effective or recognised within the present moment. Equally, hauntology can be and is often experienced through the minds and bodies of people who have been deeply affected by a personal memory, or specific moment/s in history which had essentially marked, followed or more specifically *haunted* them.

Although Derrida's discussions on hauntology were met with some oppositional stances and critiques by Coly, his writing on spectrality, in relation to the effects of Marxism and/ or the outcomes of living in a world after the deployment and later rejection of the ideology, is what had drawn me to his introductory discussions on hauntology. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida makes notations towards the ways that Marx had quite frequently referenced the play Hamlet, written by William Shakespeare, and he discussed the ways that through this play, one is given

10 ***Neo-Pathways*** refer to psychological and traceable routes one may take as a researcher or artist, wherein they mark directions, advice and/ or findings within their present timeline, for generations after them to encounter and/ or benefit from.

insight into the dealings and discrepancies of spectrality, and more importantly, the effects of being 'haunted' by and encountering some sort of entity or being that is neither commonly or collectively visible to people, within a contemporary context He writes that "a specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back." (Derrida, 2006: 11) and he thereby maintains that at the core of hauntology is this uncontrollable interaction with, apparition of and inheritance of 'the spectre' by the individual who encounters it. Furthermore Derrida states that it is a scholar who is least likely to come into contact with a spectre, because the scholar and the institutional framework that they are educated within, "does not believe in the sharp distinction of the real and unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being" (Derrida, 2006:12).

- This view intrigued me because it allowed me the capacity to understand something key about hauntology within the context of certain modes of thinking and education ie., during the times of Marx. In my ongoing arguments for Black and/ or African educational systems which date back to a time of precolonial disposition – I state that these frameworks have been historically, culturally and fundamentally built on the experiences and sights of its 'scholars' (i.e. what they have seen and believed).

- However, the alternative to these educational systems is one that I find, discredits whatever is experienced by a scholar, especially if their experiences contradict the written, traditionalised, ancient or perhaps restrictive teachings that have been repeated to them over time.

- What I recognised leads me to more of a rhetorical question, which is based on the paradox of scholarship when applied to different contexts around the world. This paradox is quick to cause friction because if I reference the hauntology associated with Black femmes as something that is widely experienced, related to and thereby 'real' within their own mental and educational credibilities, but a university predicated on structures that make little room for spectral, or spiritual realities to come forward because these are viewed as mystical, fictional or unscientific, then where does a paper aimed at holding space of those spectres, find its place academically?

In addition to Derrida's points, I am more so drawn to, and referencing the concepts attached to hauntology, as revised by Coly and Gordon in their writing. Coly's text "*Postcolonial Hauntologies: African Women's Discourse of the Female Body*" (2009), for instance, explores the parameters, issues and effects of post-colonial hauntology in relation to the bodies and bodily autonomy of African women. I look to this text because since reading it, I have been engulfed by the possibility of accrediting an 'academically-acclaimed' theory to the reasons that even *I* have at times experienced and even witnessed a subconscious 'obligation' to fulfil a role, to re-enter or occupy spaces that had been historically made inaccessible to Black femme bodies – by individuals, systems and institutions that were never interested in the autonomy, rights or ultimate survival of Black people in general, and instead primarily concerned themselves with the ways that they would or could capitalise off of them.

As such, I reference this specific reading and relate it to the ways that I have arrived at the concept of BLAQ NOIZE created by Black femme artists, because I think that their autonomy, access and authorship have been three core themes which are at the forefront of their individualistic and collective experiences, especially within postcolonial, Southern African art-related industries (i.e., dating back as far as the late 1950s).

Coly's text thus proceeds to offer readers an alternative approach to discussing the politics of representing and policing the African female body, especially within the contexts of various postcolonial African states such as Senegal, Uganda and Nigeria. Her core argument negates how the African female body has throughout both a precolonial and colonial history, been used as a placeholder, or a "timescape" wherein a "postcolonial present is bound in conversation with the colonial past… overwhelms the present, and… becomes noncontemporaneous with itself." (Coly, 2009: 16 – 18). What this denotes is a state of hauntology that survives within the reality of a contemporary timeline, despite being far removed from the time of its original conception, *because* it happens to be more prevalent within the communal, and individual construction, policing and/ or psyches of African women i.e., due to our direct correlation to time, and culture.

Black Femme Representation & Visibility in Southern Africa

If one is called to discuss the origins of *sighting* BLAQ NOIZE, and perhaps to reference the ways that hauntology is subdued somewhere within the value of doing so, an argument can be made that colonial representations of Black femme autonomy, beauty, sexuality and power (i.e., which have at times, historically been constructed and disseminated to pacify, devalue, erase or perpetuate singular dimensionalities of this identity), have in some ways, been a foundational point of inquiry for the reactive efforts made by Black femmes to presently redress or remedy those representations – by way of sighting ourselves through our own lenses.

- ***Yakhal'inkomo*** (Fig. 3), as seen below – is my first visual iteration of hauntology within a Black figure, since creating ***The Fourth*** in 2023. It features the depiction of a Black femme, and deity-like character who stands in a puddle of blood. The title of the work tells of or translates to the cry of a cow, and is inspired by Dr Mongane Wally Serote's book of poems '***Yakhal'inkomo***' (1972) - see Figure 4, which title accounts for the same meaning. The symbolism behind this piece however, is found in the fact that the femme figure depicted is not a cow, but only suggestively wears the horns of one, to draw a metaphoric parallel between the way that cows are born, bred and how they ultimately die.

- This figure, now holding a bouquet of flowers for her own grave, and the barbed wire that once restricted her movements, stands in a puddle of blood that is intentionally made unclear of being hers, but she survives. The meaning imparted here, is the idea of being mentally haunted or tortured by a lineage of people who were seen as possessing a somewhat directed life-trajectory,

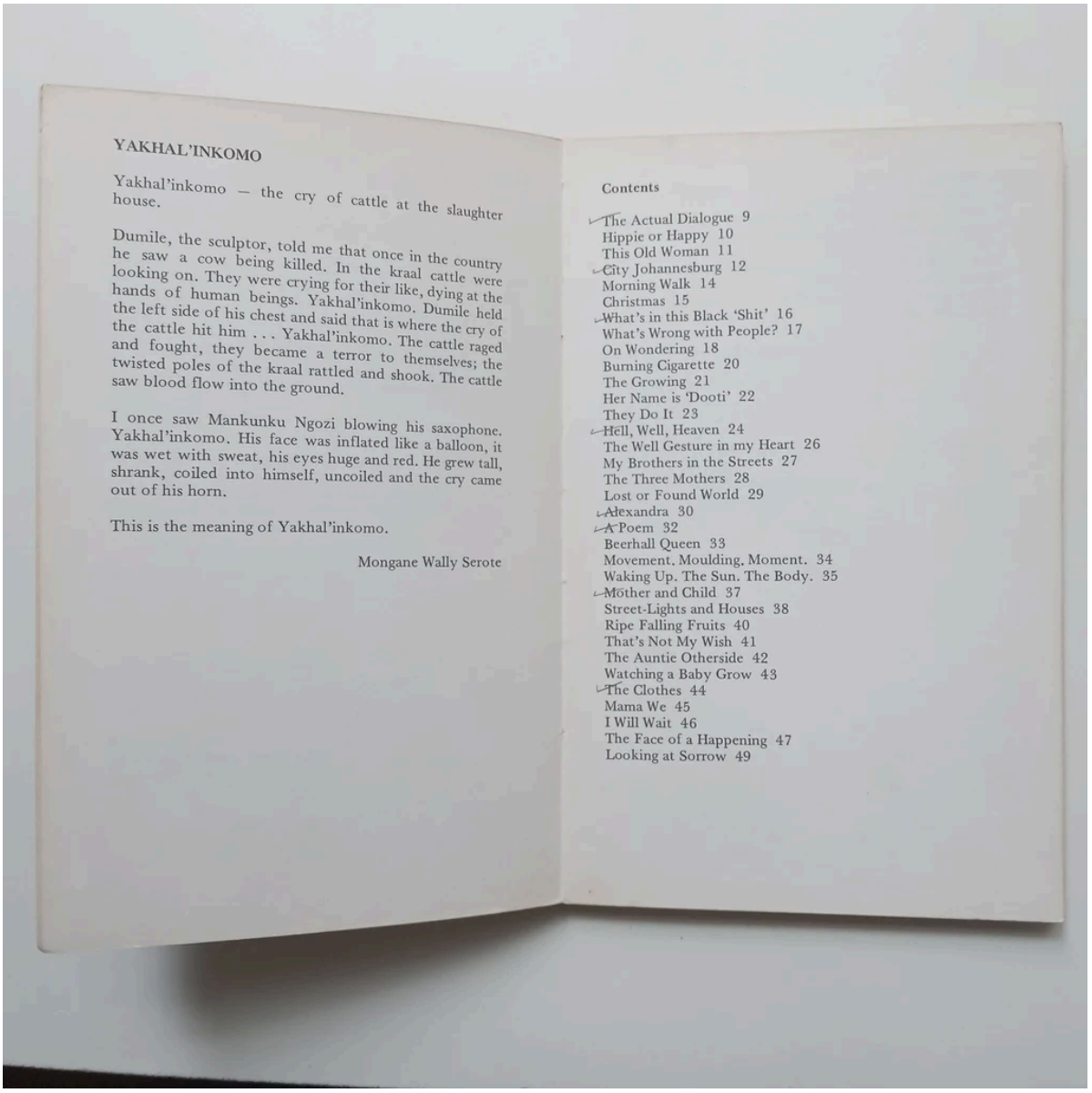
> purpose and value, despite their inclination or personal wills to choose otherwise – and despite this haunting, the present figure stands, alive and distanced from her spectres, after a fight to survive her 'slaughter.'

In reading more about the women artists who produced work through the Philani Printing Project, another anecdote that was made visible in the themes that the artists included in their work, was the knowledge that there is, embedded within the praxis of Black femme artists, "an acute consciousness of the status of South African women, both past and present, and an appreciation for the importance of telling their stories and linking them to her own." (Miller, 2003: 623-624).

To place this argument into a more specific context, it must be said that Black Southern African femmes have both historically, and presently battled against external structures and systems (e.g., patriarchal customs within their respective or adoptive cultures, the occupation/ colonisation of their land and property by both African and European powers, followed by the implementation of segregation laws and the Apartheid regime).



Yakhal'inkomo, 2024, Mixed Media on Paper, 43cm x 30cm (Framed)



YAKHAL'INKOMO

Yakhal'inkomo — the cry of cattle at the slaughter house.

Dumile, the sculptor, told me that once in the country he saw a cow being killed. In the kraal cattle were looking on. They were crying for their like, dying at the hands of human beings. Yakhal'inkomo. Dumile held the left side of his chest and said that is where the cry of the cattle hit him . . . Yakhal'inkomo. The cattle raged and fought, they became a terror to themselves; the twisted poles of the kraal rattled and shook. The cattle saw blood flow into the ground.

I once saw Mankunku Ngozi blowing his saxophone. Yakhal'inkomo. His face was inflated like a balloon, it was wet with sweat, his eyes huge and red. He grew tall, shrank, coiled into himself, uncoiled and the cry came out of his horn.

This is the meaning of Yakhal'inkomo.

Mongane Wally Serote

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Figure 4: ***Excerpt from 'Yakhal'inkomo' by Dr Mongane Wally Serote***, 1972
(Image provided courtesy of Bookdelaers.co.za | Copyright: 2025 Bookdealers).

These systems sought to police not only the personal cultures, traditions, places and histories that belonged to them, but had also began warping and actively controlling their career paths, styles of dress, movement, representations and standards of beauty, sexuality or desirability, which are aspects of our identities that have continuously been attached to our bodies.

"Apartheid created a particularly hostile environment for Black women." (Miller, 2003: 634), and while this was/ is an experience not solely known and felt by Black femmes, it is still important to note for the purpose of understanding how *sighting* BLAQ NOIZE, serves as an

integral praxis to incorporate into the study of Southern African art/ historical academia pertaining to the subject of Black femme identity.

- ***Recorded in The Rubble, Stone and Staircases of Time…"*** (Fig. 5) - as seen below, includes an image of a print that I produced during the final year of my undergraduate degree, and that equally prompted the writing of this thesis, and the making of my MA body of work which exists presently. The piece details a collaged visualisation of the positionalities of Black women in South Africa during the Apartheid era, especially because in my then, fourth year thesis (i.e., THE BLAQ INC. PRESS), I wrote about the positionalities that Black women were positioned in relation to printmaking spaces.

- In this way I was able to document and pay homage to the places or sites that *were* holding space for them. I depicted Miriam Makeba along with other renditions of women photographed by male photographers during the years wherein forced removals (i.e., 1950s and 1960s) were happening. I have chosen to feature it within this context because it demonstrates the earliest stages of the interests which have led me to my present praxis. It demonstrates the observation and reinterpretation of BLAQ NOIZE, (i.e., photographs, song lyrics) that is used within the creation of a new, gifted meaning.



Figure 5: ***Recorded in The Rubble, Stone and Staircases of Time…"***, 2021, Intaglio Etching on Hahnemühle, 21cm x 30cm

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In referencing a discursive reading by Desiree Lewis that was published in 2005, and looked at the work and praxes of two highly influential, Black femme photographers i.e., Zanele Muholi and Ingrid Masondo, I offer an example of how sighting BLAQ NOIZE may be validated as an

integral praxis. Lewis both analyses and accounts for the varying avenues, techniques and praxes that both photographers use in their works, stating that because "Deconstructing textual and visual misrepresentations of black women's sexuality now constitutes a significant trajectory in scholarship by or about black women." (Lewis, 2005:11), it is crucial to note the ways this 'deconstruction' is executed in a contemporary timeframe.



Figure 6: ***Aftermath***, Zanele Muholi, 2004, Silver gelatin print, 600 x 395mm, Edition of 8 + 2AP, Image courtesy of Michael Stevenson.

Her analyses of the two artists' photographs, includes an argument towards the reading of 'social code' since it offers artists the opportunity to "locate moments when signifiers are dislodged from established routes to represent what is unexpected, compound and new." (2005:13). Additionally, her discussions pertaining to for example, Muholi's photograph titled

'*Aftermath*' (Fig. 6), amplify what I argue is an important part of sighting BLAQ NOIZE, since she pays attention to key details within the work, such as the composition of the image, pose and body of the subject, and the lighting, in order to communicate the artist's intentions with this image – which have been synonymous with her praxis. In analysing the photograph, Lewis recognises, advocates for, and understands 'code' specific signifiers which are embedded within the work and thus, stem from Muholi's 'dialect' in artistic messaging i.e., a dialect built on the representation of realities faced by Black femme, queer bodies.

Additionally, in making it a point to understand or learn more about Muholi's praxis, Lewis *sights* how specific "motifs of an inherited tradition", relative to documentary-photography, "are subverted" (18). Since this analysis is substantiated for example, through context and discourse (i.e., NOIZE) provided by, and made accessible to its readers, through Muholi's decision to create and share this work – the *visibility* of the work, and our collective access to this representation of it, communicates its importance and prolongs the survival of it or its impact. Lewis' text also demonstrates that when visual work offers aspects of new and/ or *Neo*-concepts, it brings attention to the ways that social "coding can yield important insights into visual languages that are subversive, oppositional, iconoclastic and innovative." (13). This means that in the moments wherein BLAQ NOIZE, such as the photo mentioned herein, is written about, viewed, or understood – artistic languages that work to presently rectify and respond to the past, are ignited.

When reading the histories of Black femme communities in South Africa and the individual, or collective experiences that have been shared between them, it was made clear to me that as opposed to their respective Black male-identifying counterparts – who were and are still valued by a standard or weight of how visible, expendable, accessible, and affordable they could be i.e., as staff, and in terms of being hired or fired by White colonialists, government officials, and employers, who had orchestrated and sustained the eras of segregation and Apartheid for example. Black femmes were viewed and (under)valued through somewhat lesser standards. Instead of having access to primarily city-based jobs, there were many Black femme people who were subjected to occupying roles that placed them directly within more domestic or subservient spaces (e.g. schools, homes, clinics/ hospitals, kitchens), and if they did branch out of those spaces, they were *placed* in more paradoxically social and/ or spiritual locations (e.g., churches, music clubs/ shebeens).

Examples of the Black femmes whom I discuss as being subjected to occupying roles that were domestic, subservient, social or spiritual in nature, have been visually depicted within historical

South African artistic media, and have in many instances, remained somewhat anonymous or generalised (i.e., between the 1970s - 2000s). We see examples of this in artworks that had been produced through collectives and spaces such as the MEDU Art Ensemble and Rorke's Drift Arts Centre, because the artists working in these environments were, given the context of when they were producing these types of images, actively involved in depicting, through multimedia, the realities and positionalities of Black bodies.

Alternatively, there was in the case of these artworks, a broader theme of necessity to depict and popularise imagery of Black faces, bodies and stories without a specific need to name and/ or speak for specific individuals. I mention this because while there may have been a lack of authorship and/ or specified identity present in the subjects (i.e., at times Black femmes) depicted in these works, their appearance in mass-disseminated or mass-read visual art, was an appearance that was sufficient enough for the purpose of the art being created at the time, by these collectives.

I find that in my own practice, I am inspired by the myriad of works produced by Black artists, which creatively relayed the realities and narratives of Black people during the twentieth century, and as a result, I depict renditions of the Black femmes and communities of whom I refer to and reflect on throughout this paper. My praxis thus involves producing images with a sense of intentionality, intimacy and familiarity, as I am often depicting figures who are based on people I know, or have met, and they possess specific, personal clues about who they *actually* are, but instead of capturing their distinct features, I have reimagined their faces and render that part of the composition, from my imagination.

- This is a choice inspired by the fact that I want to create images inspired by the people closest to me, whilst offering readers of my work an opportunity to also *sight* and perhaps recognise, a gesture, figure, setting, object or pose, for example – within the composition, and relate to it personally.
- However, I also note that as my artistic practice evolves and I am granted the chance to be honest with my work and the readers of my work, I do account for the harmful irony that I invoke at times, by neglecting to represent the real identities or facial features for example, of the people close to me. I acknowledge that there is a level of safety and privacy that I wish to embed by not depicting the accurate details and faces of the people referenced throughout my body of work, although this practice does still radiate a problematic repetition of autonomously deciding for oneself how to 'represent' someone who is not the artist, but is instead an external, personally related human being.

While my conceptual processes and style of image-making for my work, draws its illustrative quality and tone of storytelling from film posters (i.e. from the 1980s-90s), newspaper cartoons, popularized graphic novels, and Japanese manga, and these genres of image-production have

been and continue to be deliberate in their depictions of caricatures and symbols which mostly represent and yet in some cases, protect the privacy, and intimate personhood of the real-life people, real human behaviour, as well as the individual narratives and experiences that they are based on. Thus, the 'characters' in my work, have their facial appearances reimagined, although they still embody the realities of Black people and communities in South Africa, and thus I create a moment for my readers to picture themselves in the place, posture or position of those depicted in my compositions.

In a way, my praxis has always been one rooted in empathy – in the sense that it relies on a constant evolution of unlearing, repositioning and reassembly of one's point of view, in order to understand or feel that of another person. In the broader conversations of how my work then differs from art that I argue, has 'erased', eradicated and/ or unnamed the identities of Black women in their depictions, I maintain that it is my deliberate usage of an auto-ethnographic approach to my writing and my artistic praxis, as well as the graphic novel-like style that I adopt which distinguishes me, and other Black femme artists who approach their work in similar ways, that are not restrictive and/ or counter-progressive.

- As mentioned earlier, I do recognise the dangers of neglecting to account for the muses and identities of the people Black femme artists reference and/ or depict in their works, because even if the people featured in the work have consented to being represented, and not having their identities published, there is a careful consideration of ethics that is to be employed and sustained in these types of *Neo*-Praxes.

What I am implying is that a Black femme artist's decision to sight within their works – the themes, people, places, objects and experiences (i.e., BLAQ NOIZE) which are innately personal to them, despite being shared on intergenerational scales, within their communities – is what essentially creates and sustains the essence of *Neo*-Praxes. These praxes are naturally auto-ethnographic especially because they are employed by Black artists, for whatever duration that their communities (autonomously) choose to make use of them, and thus, it perpetuates a praxis that has timelessly been applied by generations of Black artists which is one rooted in freedom of expression, choice, subject matter, personal history, memories and/ or their lived experiences. These methods of working, whether valued, seen or platformed by, for example, Apartheid-governed spaces or not, has never stunted the willingness to employ *Neo*-Praxes as Black artists in response to and in efforts to remedy the haunting realities of their histories, and their contemporary lives in South Africa and abroad.

- My work as an artist and the premise of my research is based on a continuous referral to my own, my familial and more public histories pertaining to Black femme creatives, in addition to our sub-cultures and communities.

- For the purpose of gaining greater insight into the ways that my mind operates, in relation to the traits, features and practices I possess within my daily life – I continuously set my focus upon the histories taught, cultivated or disseminated throughout the spaces that were, or are familial, educational, spiritual and artistic in nature (i.e., my grandparents'/ parents' homes, schools/ university, libraries, churches, fields, studios, galleries/ museums etc.), and I draw most of my inspiration from these sites.

Ultimately, Black femmes 'value' much like the Black male-presenting people living in Southern Africa, during the twentieth century, had been preemptively documented or sighted through the perspective of authoritative figures who 'ran' the country, and what this often correlated to is the fact that printed narratives – which were often written, photographed and/ or illustrated and would be mass-produced and disseminated through a similar lens. In essence, the media – which at the time (i.e., the twentieth century) was largely dictating most forms of education, news, ways of thinking, and popular culture within South Africa, and had been produced and approved through White-led systems of oppression like the Apartheid regime – had further established a culture of diminishing the voices, consent, authorship and truth of Black bodies and communities, and it had thereby secured a notion that for as long as Black people, Black femmes especially, had limited or controlled access into spaces that prohibited them from openly representing or freely living as and expressing themselves, and for as long as the media made it seem as if this was a normalised way of living, there would have been no reason to think or believe otherwise.

Despite the reality of how printed media was shaping or perpetuating the view and visibility of Black bodies, it is also important to consider the fact that what mattered more to Black femmes and their communities, was not necessarily how they were viewed, understood or valued through a gaze of the White government or its counterparts. This is an argument sustained through what I consider to be a 'gift' and an integral solution towards the issue of Black (in)visibility, which persisted during the twentieth century, and this 'gift' was the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)[11].

Widely known to have been headed by Stephen (Steve) Bantu Biko, the BCM encompassed a wide variety of subject matter and far exceeded the boundaries of psychological unlearning of personal oppression, as it encouraged Black people to reframe the ways that they had been seeing *themselves*, to reaffirm their value by their own standards and detach what they may

11 ***Black Consciousness Movement*** is an anti-Apartheid movement that was headed by several Black activists in South Africa during the 1960s – most notably Steve Biko. Its primary focus was to promote the psychological and social liberation of Black communities that were oppressed and discriminated against by the Apartheid government and its policies.

have come to believe about themselves, based on what had been taught and in many ways forced upon them, by White colonials and/ or the Apartheid government. Biko argued that it was within the Black individual's power to reclaim their worth by simply asserting themselves with the mentality that they had been and would continue to be deserving of rights, of respect, of land, of being treated like a human being – simply because these were aspects of life that belonged to them with or without the presence of colonisation.

He believed that "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor, is the mind of the oppressed" (2004), this elucidated that while or whether White people largely dominated the media that Black people consumed or were documented within (i.e., the printed newspapers/ newsletters, novels, school textbooks, magazines, signages, posters, packaging, clothing, religious scriptures, flyers etc.), it would still be necessary for them to be able to discern *for themselves* that they are of their own sound body and mind, that the definition and representations of themselves and their communities were *theirs* to hold, to believe and to perpetuate.

Acknowledging that it was even 'possible' to separate whatever was being printed, and essentially 'validated', disseminated and cemented as 'truth' by White colonials and the members of the Apartheid government, from whatever was being *seen*, lived, experienced, and thereby valued by Black communities, was a key point in the effectiveness of the BCM, because Biko understood that what is fundamental to the fabric of Black belief, is what is *known* i.e., especially through being passed down, seen, taught, spoken about and experienced by people who look like and are relative to our communities.

Therefore, when it is observed that what the psychology of the Apartheid regime hoped to attain was in essence, the collective and psychological control or degradation of Black people, by undermining what was fundamental to them as individuals and communities, prior to the arrival of White colonials, one may also observe how this could have likely been possible since the regime was established through initially attacking aspects of Black reality that were and are crucial to its value and its survival i.e., visibility, art/ expression, safety, space/ location, spirituality/ religion, familial/ communal proximity, ownership, financial security, freedom of speech/ language etc. Where Biko emphasises that "Further implications of Black Consciousness are to do with correcting false images of ourselves in terms of Culture, Education, Religion, Economics." (Biko, 2004: 57) – I recognise that the act of correcting within Black communities, a false visibility or sighting of themselves that had been established

through the lens of anyone who is not Black, establishes what I argue is the main point behind 'sighting BLAQ NOIZE'.

- In ***Love as Sight*** (Fig. 7) - as seen below, I depicted a memory held by my mother in her youth; recounting the moments where she had enacted a practice of seeing and/ or locating, in any form or capacity, herself, the people who surrounded and nurtured her, and those she loved – so as to establish and sustain a 'seed' of legacy.

- This specific memory cites a time in her life when she would return home with a bundle of spinach wrapped in newspaper, as a 'gift' for helping an elderly woman whom she knew as "Kokwana". Kokwana sold spinach at the robots (i.e. traffic lights) near the 'Makhedama General Dealer Store', and thus, my mother would assist her, head home, prepare the greens in preparation for her family's 'Sunday lunch', and save the excess supply for the week.

- This almost-weekly 'practice' was one that, when I first heard it as a young girl, I would repeatedly use it as a reference to how I might connect with people who in some ways contribute to my growth and nourishment. It was in this story that my mother taught me the value of helping people without expectation, and reminded me of what we might gain in abandoning our 'ego', in pursuit of empathy and thoughtfulness.



Figure 7: ***Love as Sight***, 2023, 42 x 30cm, Ink on Paper, 43 x 30cm (Framed)

Naturally, there are key ideas like the BCM, which form part of what I am referring to as the 'rearview' or origins of sighting BLAQ NOIZE, since it dives into the theoretical skeleton of hauntology, as something that may be redefined as *BLAQ hauntology*, through establishing Black Consciousness as its theoretical foundation. Since BLAQ NOIZE represents the objects, texts, art/ artefacts, and/ or sounds which have been created by Black people, and have also presently been sighted (i.e., located, preserved, exhibited, shared) or referenced (cited) by them – the ways that it relates to the work of Black femme artists in the contemporary sphere of Southern African art, is through the ways that some of these artists access and later reference traces of it, within the public and/ or personal historical archives that they have access to i.e., in order to inform their respective praxes and works.

Ultimately, it is Black femme artists' individual ability to reference BLAQ NOIZE within their work/s, which combines the act of searching within the historicized collections or archives that house it (i.e., reaching into our 'rearview'), and the act of essentially creating something new i.e., while the past may be "haunting us with the residues of what we have lost" (Gordon, 2008: 51), for the purpose of gifting that, to whichever generations of people may find, study or reference it thereafter – which creates what I refer to as a '*rearview-residual*' effect.

Residual – Making NOIZE

"The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life." (Gordon, 2008: 8)

In cementing the importance and impact of sighting BLAQ NOIZE, it is crucial to recognise that there is always some form of 'residue' that remains 'active' within a present timeline as a result of the numerous historical moments wherein inaccurate, discriminatory, inauthentic and/ or harmful messaging i.e., directed towards Black people, had been published, disseminated and reinforced through print, sound, and/ or violence for example. Examples that are relative to this 'residue' may include discussions of 'spectres', as referenced earlier in the text, by Jacques Derria & Avery F. Gordon. As such, I argue that there is something to be said about the residual effects of the more personal histories which have been left unresolved, undocumented, narrated and sighted by, or of Black femme artists in our respective works and praxes, because the gaps in representation have prompted a particular *Neo*-culture of art-production within Southern Africa.

Moreover, I believe that this is a culture that inevitably manifests within the psyches of Black femme artists – because they are made up of, and raised by communities who have historically been censored, silenced and excluded from the spaces and practices of art-production that have too often, informed, depicted and/ or drawn from them for inspiration (e.g., galleries, studios, museums) and the overt outcome of this within the contemporary timeline, is one I believe to be most noticeable in the physical, psychological, spiritual and the conceptual framing of the works created by Black femme artists.

Black Femme Artists: Psychological & Spiritual Subject 'Matter'

Through my continuous reading of "*Ghostly Matters"* by Avery F. Gordon, I had been introduced to the influence of Sabina Spielrein, who was a writer and psychoanalyst once

acquainted with Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. She had been diagnosed with schizophrenia, and in addition to this, her contributions to broader discourse pertaining to psychoanalysis, its relation to hauntology, and her personal additions to this field of study, made it clear that there is perhaps a need, and an opportunity for individualised or psychological experiences to be cited as credible within psychoanalysis. In referencing her writing in *A Secret Symmetry*, Gordon accounts for the way that Spielrein's work denotes that what is *seen*, witnessed and therefore made visible by an individual, in some capacity, impacts one's cognitive recognition of what is distinctively real.

I don't believe however, that this argument is made to discount the validity and/ or truth in the cognitive recognition of an individual such as Spielrein, but I observe that noting this particular perspective on the topic of psychoanalysis, is something that should be considered as important. Otherwise one runs a risk of continuing a historical and perhaps traditional act of misunderstanding, and thereby misrepresenting information that is shared or documented consensually, by someone who is aware of and experiencing symptoms that, to an understudied field, may appear to be *new* or somewhat divergent, while also being acutely intimate, personal and 'real' to the individual who is *sighting* them.

Her argument is that one's state of mind, and their ability to confront and describe it provides an intimately crucial part in better understanding, and perhaps reasoning with the existence of historical and personal spectres of the past or the 'other worldly', which seem to reside within the psychological components of human beings. These are spectres which I argue are actively playing an integral role within the cultural, creative, spiritual fabric of contemporary realities, and they are also explored in some cases of Black, femme artistic expression. I see this in the work of Puleng Mongale for example, because in her work '*Grounded*' (Fig. 8), and in her praxis she tends to confront and deal with her individuality, along with her personal and familial renditions, or recordings of spiritual, emotive and surrealistic subject matter, all of which appears to be linked to, and conveyed through her psychological processings of these moments.

- "My work is about taking a chance at creating myself. It is about saying I am here, and this is who I am to the world instead of being dictated to by my geographical and political positioning. Being a young black woman in South Africa, born into a world where I mostly feel unseen and unheard, art is a political and spiritual exercise for me. I use it to practice my resistance, agency, and faith, and generally to take my power back." (Mongale, n.d.)



Figure 8: ***Grounded***, Puleng Mongale, 2021, Photogravure with colour roll on surface gampi chine collé and Hahnemühle, 48.5 x 62.5cm, (Image provided courtesy of 'Latitudes Online & Jillian Ross Print').

Equally, I agree with the notion that the mind is a key site for the formulation of, and for cementing the acceptance of there being a presence of past ideas, issues or impacts, within the psyche of a body that is living in an entirely different timeline. Gordon states that "To be haunted… is to be tied to historical and social effects." (Gordon, 2008: 190) and this notion is something that in this text at least, cannot be disputed because haunting is ultimately a call or reach from the past into the present, and thus, the one who is haunted always becomes a site upon which those historical or social effects are inflicted.

The potency of this argument is amplified through recalling the notion that (African) women often exist, consensually or not, as the centrepieces of societal culture, and that in essence they are often viewed as direct representations of the timeline wherein specific human societies find themselves situated. Therefore, this signifies that Black femme identities may be theorised as vessels or sites upon which several historical, cultural and social effects have been inflicted, represented or measured against. A Black femme then becomes an exemplary site of hauntology. If this is believed, then BLAQ NOIZE or the 'residue' of hauntology become primary references for the work that some Black femme artists, and/ or their broader

communities are at times, subjected to doing or making, because it implies a theoretical framework which defines an 'obligation' to address, notice, ignore or alchemize the historical and social effects that have been imprinted upon the trajectories of these communities, familial structures, relationships, identities etc.

Whilst this concept is one that is addressed in both Coly and Gordon's writing, it is also one that I have incorporated into many of my works, although for the purpose of this paper, I refer to '*healing*' (Fig. 9) and '*Her Memory*' (Fig. 10):



Figure 9: ***healing***, 2023, Mixed Media and Collage on Paper, 43cm x 30cm (Framed)

- '***healing***' (Fig. 9) features a collaged composition of text, cut-outs and two faceless figures who are caught up in an entangled dance between themselves. The figure positioned within the top right corner inhales the smoke (i.e., my motif signifying a journey of personal prayers), that the figure in the foreground has exhaled, and this is how they exchange secrets or prayers with each other, about what has possessed them. Equally this exchange features the transference of stories that both figures are healing from.



Figure 10: ***Her Memory***, 2023, Ink on Paper, 42 x 30cm (Framed)

- ***Her Memory*** (Fig. 10) depicts a scene within a living room that houses a woman and a child. While the child is seated and amused, her caregiver remains lost in thought. This image is meant to be devoid of a background because it signifies a memory, captured between the blank spaces of the mind.

- The meaning behind the piece however, is based on a question of whose memory the readers of the image are encountering, and, what either character will one day remember when they speak on the moment they have been captured in. Both works lend to the idea of an extended narrative, in fact all of my work is a branch of one cohesive narrative. Every character depicted in my work is an expression of a moment, memory, trait and/ or narrative that has been embedded within them through hauntology or, that has been expressed by them, in how they look or act.

There is great value found in accounting for the fact that much of the contemporary work done or created by Black artists is in some capacity, either a result of, or response to the 'truth' that they are a 'haunted' people. It is simply their choice/s to sight, ignore or change whatever that

signifies within their individualised or communal contexts, and then place those findings somewhere. In this instance however, I make the argument that Black femme artists place that argument within the praxes, works and the *Neo*-Archive wherein their works reside, and simultaneously stem from.

As such, the work that artists produce in this lifetime may form part of an archive or collection that may later be observed, appreciated or neglected by generations of artists and art-scholars who are either born now (i.e., 2020s) or sometime after this period, although what this thought often provoked within my own practice was a fear that my work would not be visible or valid enough to be a part of those collections, and that it would be lost to time. This was at first, a feeling that I subconsciously deemed irrational, but later categorised as relative to experiences held by some of the Black women within my own family i.e., my mother, aunts, grandmothers and late great-grandmothers. Through holding and citing multiple conversations with them and their extended relatives about the ways that they were brought up and how they overcame certain obstacles within their lives – I learnt that by living as a descendent of my familial lineages, I am in some ways "the last of my kind at the beginning of hope" (Vuong, 2022: 14).

What this means is that I am one of the children who were born from a lineage of femmes who experience moments that were doused in adversity, fear, insecurity, poverty, inaccessibility, discrimination etc., and although these were experiences that were innately human, they were enhanced through the context of them being experienced by Black femmes. I mention this because even without my personal attachment to this argument, I can substantiate that without the ability to return to the people, spaces and/ or histories that have in some way contributed to the lineages related to Black femmes – they, and for the context of this discussion, Black femme artists especially, bear the risk of being haunted or cornered by a history that had once made the progression of their livelihoods inextricably difficult.

In diverting this discussion momentarily, towards the works of additional artists who appear to grapple with these types of themes in their praxes, I find it pertinent to speak about Helena Uambembe. She is a Black South African artist working with multimedia e.g., Printmaking, Photography and Performance. Additionally, she pulls from "her own life story" and "reflects on the erasure of histories of conflict and complicity of South Africa's wars in Angola and Namibia, and the unspoken legacies of those wars that shadow the present." (ASAI, n.d), to create her works. The reason I found her to be informative to my own praxis is because she too, appears to revere the importance of her own personal life and the narratives which have

impacted it, or the trajectory of her identity.

I am drawn to the collaged elements of her work which stylistically stick to muted or monotonous colour palettes and a carefully executed use of layering, lighting and layout. In her work '*The day that I left my home*' (Fig. 11), Uambembe demonstrates a scene pieced together in a collaged fashion, to form a composition which appears solid and cohesive, despite its disjointed figures. They move from the left to the right side of the frame, with one of them, positioned in the foreground, crouching to avoid the aimed gun of the figure on the outermost right side of the work. This image recounts the movement and transfiguration of personal memory that remains for us i.e., as readers of the work, frozen amidst an incredibly tense moment – but that is boldly outlined and visible for Uambembe.



Figure 11: ***The day that I left my home***, Helena Uambembe, 2019, Paper lithography on Fabriano paper (Image provided courtesy of artist: Helena Uambembe).

Her visual description of a day placed somewhere within her memory, is what I find alluring and important. It exemplifies the act of *sighting* the experiences held and shared within her and her (familial) community. The work additionally, suggests i.e., through the title as well, that the artist has survived, despite the event she has documented. In some ways the work acts like a journal entry, wherein once more, the auto-ethnographic point of view employed by a Black femme artist adds to the nature of the work, and perhaps contributes to a larger scope or genre

which has engulfed the subject matter and/ or praxes of a few Black femme artists nationally.

The ways to counter the personal experience of being haunted by 'ghostly matter', which enacts histories of inaccessibility or censorship, is through creating or contributing to a collection of work, discourse and/ or branches of culture that both reference these histories and encourage the production of something new. In doing this, one creates NOIZE, as the residual evidence that they have made something, and have thus, in the same capacity, left it behind, to be picked up by future generations. This practice aligns with the essence of hauntology and ghostly matter since it relies on the premise that whether someone is being haunted by a specific issue or subject for example – it is only the residual and somewhat diluted version of that issue, as it has had to change or adapt to transcribe itself within a contemporary timeline.

When this concept is applied to the reading of Black residual work[12], one denotes that it is only the representations of this work, as opposed to the originals, that may haunt, influence and/ or inform presently-living Black people. The same is true whether we sight the original with our own eyes, or see an image of it – it is still our perception of the works that we reference, and not the work or its conception, itself. Thus, the artistic objects of BLAQ NOIZE are the same as the 'residual works' that I refer to, and must be no different, because the NOIZE created in the past, and that which is presently being discussed or studied by Black artists/ art scholars – is still remain representations of what once was. As such, the value in citing or sighting these works regardless, is found in the fact that it remains intact, preserved, appreciated and analysed for future generations and thus, *sighting* BLAQ NOIZE becomes necessary for their survival.

Although the term BLAQ NOIZE has come through references (i.e., the BCM) that have existed for extended periods of time, its definition is integral to this paper because it relates to what I am consistently arguing for within my practice i.e., the visibility of Black, femme communities and the reclamation of their bodily, creative and intellectual autonomy, which had historically been attacked and targeted throughout, and prior to the Apartheid era for example. In the artistic spheres of Southern Africa, Black femme people and artists alike have historically, and recently become topics, objects and sites of popular culture, tradition and messaging – a truth that is not entirely new to scholars of Black Southern African history, but it is one that holds much importance because it suggests the impact of Black femme presence and representation and survival. Black femmes are viewed and theorised in many instances as

12 ***Black residual work*** may be defined as genres of art that were practiced out of necessity, limitations and/ or a lack of choice i.e., anti-Apartheid work, and that resurfaces within the timeline as a means to educate and remind contemporary artists about that history.

the centrepieces of culture because they physically perpetuate a *literal* transfer of life and tradition through their bodies and are equally placed at the core of most socio-cultural spaces for the same reason. Thus a refusal to *sight* them, renders the possibility of, or opportunity for the death of a culture and lineage. As such, when I speak of the importance of *sighting* Black femme artists and the NOIZE they create – especially within the realms of illustrated, printed, digital and even poetic media, I speak on the survival of those praxes and of the cultures directly affiliated with them. Thus, the value found in employing one's own praxis of sight towards objects or sites of BLAQ NOIZE, especially as Black artists, is a powerful act of reclamation, gifting (i.e., *Neo*-Archiving), and transgenerational remedying – and is thus, a practice that ensures our own and our extended communities' survival, visibility and legacy.

Chapter Two: Di*neo* tsa rona

A Principle of The Present: Navigating *Neo*-Archival Praxes in Southern African Art-Media

"Some people say history moves in a spiral, not the line we have come to expect.
We travel through time in a circular trajectory, our distance increasing from an epicentre only to return again, one circle removed ." (Vuong, 2019: 27)

If or when one's decisions are to confront, heal from, or lay-to-rest the haunting debris of unresolved and seemingly untreated forms of generational disdain i.e., through their praxes or artistic works – then the following argument implores the notion that Black femme artists are, or at least should be recognised as the most essential collaborators and contributors to the establishment of the *Neo*-Archive. In referencing the name '*Neo*', which is of Sotho origin and translates in English to the phrase 'to gift', I present the concept of this metaphysical space within which the main 'gifts' presented by its contributors, are those that are intersectional, intergenerational and primarily rooted in healing grief, trauma and erasure.

In theory, a *Neo*-Archive houses and *gives* access to the works, items, belongings and identities of Black people, and especially Black femme artists i.e., on an equally seen, celebrated or recognised footing, while existing as a collection of discourse that has been positioned in both, tangible realms of space, and within the moments that intergenerational healing is able to occur effectively and safely (e.g. in the mind, temple, church, home, vehicle, school etc.). In essence, through writing about historical and contemporary presences or praxes of Black, femme artists (i.e., Illustrators, Printmakers, Digital Media creators) including myself, and our contributions to an archive that is not necessarily theorised, mass-disseminated, forefronted or widely familiarised to everyone globally, I maintain that establishing and sighting the *Neo*-Archive is an act or project that exists beyond counter-argumentative measures that have been employed in sole opposition to, or as a rejection of existing archives in Southern African art/ history which had been exclusionary in their earliest construction.

As such, this is a project that relies on its contributors to employ their own variations of sighting or citing Black artistic progression, skill and work, within the context of an archive, that has been created and sustained by Black people, so that it houses collections of NOIZE which has been produced, preserved, shared and reimagined by Black authors. For this reason, it can be said that there had once been a dominating impression that the archives or spaces that acknowledged artists and the impact, relevance and/ or skills that they possessed were for

decades, spaces that Black artists were *not* necessarily seen, valued in, nor granted access into and thus, without this 'value' there had been little-to-no recognition, *sighting* or potential survival for them.

If a "culture shared by the majority group in any given society" denotes "the broad direction taken by the joint culture of that society." (Biko, 2004: 26), then one might argue that it did not actually matter – at least on a cultural level, whether Black artists were seen through the gaze of these spaces, because it had never been a cultural norm to see ourselves through that lens and that is even before the arrival of White colonials. By that notion, it can be argued that if a culture of creating, sustaining and preserving archives and/ or spaces such as museums, galleries, newspapers or publications, is somehow adopted and practised amongst Black people living in Southern Africa especially, then it would become part of a 'joint culture' that is adhered to, especially since we make up the majority of the region's population.

Conceptualising The Neo-Archive

"If Blacks were to reclaim their history, the foundation of an archive was the first step. (Mbembe, 2017: 28)

This idea is essentially what the foundation of the *Neo*-Archive represents, or argues for – this necessity for abandoning of the urge to oppose, rebel against and/ or be provoked by the absence of widely talented Black artists from the more globally and/ or conventionally accepted archives and spaces that produced these conventions through standards of Western ideation or Eurocentricity, neglecting the important fact that Black people have held standards and conventions of our own for many generations. These standards are thus, what inform the idea behind a 'gifted' collection of work, objects, memorabilia, artefacts, texts etc. that we might house within our own familial and/ or personal structures, and I argue that these are just as valid as those validated by a Western world.

In calling the home, yard, school, church, taxi, diary, photo-album, couch, shebeen, park-bench, or simply the presently living body – a *Neo*-Archive, we proclaim the historical truth that Black people have consistently seen themselves as diversified group of people who are worthy of accessing, curating and/ or celebrating ourselves, our traditions, customs, lineages and our survival within spaces and platforms that need not be housed within whitened walls of state-verified institutions or media. Equally, our legacies are not less real if they have not been recorded within the schools of thought that did not have us considered within their conception.

While this is true, it is in making note of this stance, and in cementing the fact that it is not necessary for something to exist solely in relation to another thing, that I argue my own reason for wanting to theorise and thereby offer access into what I have come to know as a personal, familial *Neo*-Archive. It is a space through which I gain access to a profound syllabus of historical context, fact, feeling and healing, and I find it necessary to emphasise that discussing the *Neo*-Archive as a theoretical framework, or speaking on the value derived from pulling from it to create artistic work, sustains a methodology that both, disarms and deviates from what Biko claims was an Apartheid government's 'hope' to control Black people through "not only provoking us but also controlling our response to the provocation." (Biko, 2004: 55).

Thus, in observing how I approach my own practice, it is equally important to note that my choice to integrate and reference a certain level of hauntology in my work, the fundamental ideas of the *Neo*-Archive still apply, because I am not creating work simply to counter the erasure and/ or invisibility of Black femme representation in the praxis of print and illustration, I am instead documenting the subject matter that I consider important in my own historical lineages, thus gifting myself, and those who choose to view my work, a chance to gain access into my familial *Neo*-Archive. What this act does is employ, secure and sustain the traditional aspects of Black historical archiving in the present, and it also places autonomy back into the hands of the artists, writers and creatives who once lacked it, or experienced the aftermath of what it did to families and community members who were not always permitted to *access* it. Thus the idea at the center of this process is that my own artistic praxis becomes a Neo-Archive, formulating the archive upon the promise of adding to it as I produce work, and as I discuss a collective of Black Femme printmakers, illustrators etc. within my work.

Since this publication is dedicated to acknowledging and/ or *sighting* the work of Black femme artists in Southern Africa, the topic of our inclusion within a *Neo*-Archive of Black contemporary art is important to discuss because it forms part of an ongoing culture related to art-production, exhibiting, curation and/ or consumerism that has been present in Southern Africa since the 1950s. The culture in question was heightened via the implementation and integration of Apartheid within South African society, which at the core of its inception existed as a primarily economic, highly strategized and lethal system of control and power. In noting the objectives of the regime, one might recognize that its means of distributing news, information and socio-political messages throughout society at the time, directly correlated with and thereby affected additional avenues of social expression i.e., art, fashion, sports,

consumerism.

This was primarily evident in the types of publications, signage, advertising and broadcasting which had been disseminated through printed (i.e., textual), sonic and visual media during that era. It is important to note that because Apartheid survived on the premise of maintaining separatist activity, the media which was put out through newspapers, via radio, television and the arts was largely responsible for nurturing that activity, in addition to eventually dismantling it. However, it is important to note that publications and counter-media/ counter-propaganda had formed a major part of the anti-Apartheid struggle as well, as the many anti-apartheid publications in archives based both off and online, attest.


Published by the Anti-Apartheid Movement July—August 1965 number 6 price sixpence

apartheid news

An appeal to every British cricket fan

BOYCOTT RACIST SPORT

GOING TO SEE THE SOUTH AFRICAN 'WHITES ONLY' CRICKET TEAM?

(IT'S NOT CRICKET)

Figure 12: ***An appeal to every British cricket fan***, 1965, An excerpt from the Anti-Apartheid Movement Newspaper - Number 6. (Image provided courtesy of AAM Archives Committee).

What this suggests is that in addition to these various forms of media which had been disseminated, the key optics or frameworks of the regime had simultaneously been embedded in, and then further perpetuated through other facets of social expression, which did not exclude art-production, curatorship, and consumerist cultures within the Southern African artistic industry. These were cultures that ultimately existed in opposition to, or through following the status quo of Apartheid, which mean that they inherently possessed a history of the 'dance' between Black femme inclusion or exclusion within their inception and their survival. Therefore, my argument for including the work/s and citing the trajectories of Black femme people within the *Neo*-Archive is maintained through acknowledging that this archive has been formulated throughout history and existed despite the various forms of media that were popularised throughout and after Apartheid. While the inception of the *Neo*-Archive did not require nor lean on much of the media that the western/ White governmental systems had framed as credible, to exist – it is the contemporary position of this archive that has evolved and been used by Black femme artists in the reconfiguration of media in this present timeline, wherein we have cemented our autonomy, our positions, opinions and perspectives. This is evident Black femme artists' contemporary approaches to media such as publication making (e.g., magazines, novels, catalogues, posters), Printmaking, Illustration, and Poetry, and the evolution of these types of media through rapid digitization.

Within the praxes of Black femme artists who utilize Publication, Drawing, Printmaking and/ or Poetry as their main medium, and who have additionally recalibrated ways to digitise their chosen medium – it is the work that they produce i.e., especially with subject matter pertaining to familial histories, personal experiences, generational wounds, traumas and/ or moments of healing – that become key contributions to the *Neo*-Archive. Therefore the praxis of creating work that either aligns with this set of subject matter or subverts it, is *Neo*-Archival in nature because in creating work within any timeline, for the purpose of contemporary and future appreciation, study, purchasing and/ or preservation by Black people, one aligns their creative process with the concept of *gifting* their artistic skill and/ or voice to the broader public, or more intimately situated communities. This is a practice that may be considered a 'principle' to apply within our present timelines, for the purpose of assigning meaning towards the value of legacy, and lineage.

- Additionally, in the initial phases of writing this paper I had titled the archive 'neo-archive', in an attempt to introduce the notion that this was a newer (i.e., neo) way of looking at archiving within the academic and popularised art world.

- I still hold the opinion that the *Neo*-Archive brings up a refreshing approach to how Black artists and many other communities may begin to view archives and/ or the credibility of them in contemporary settings. With that said this archive is something that at least feels new to speak about in an academic context, but it is something that embodies more of its present meaning of being a gift that is offered from and to Black people.

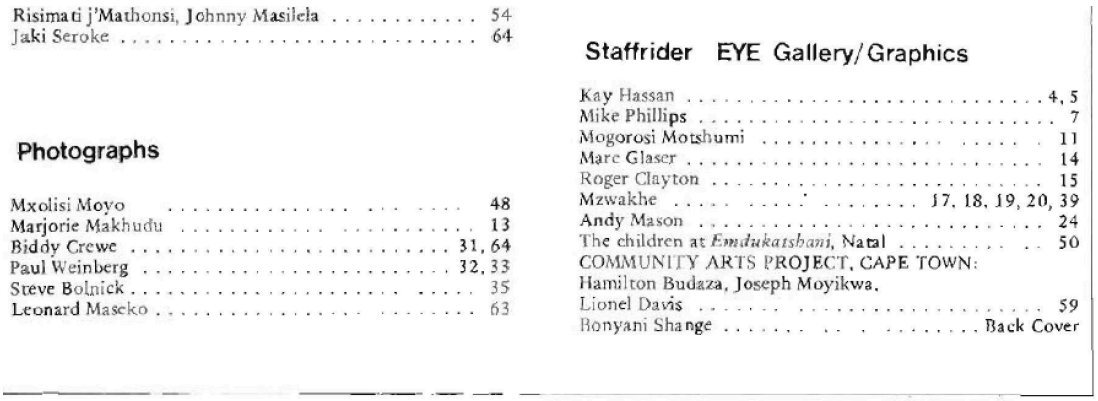
- As I begin to discuss several examples of contributions to the *Neo*-Archive, I find that it is valuable to bring up how historically, there have been works created by notable Black artists, which have been well documented from the establishments that actually celebrated and included Black artistic work. A few of the spaces and collectives that have inspired this notion in addition to inspiring my praxis, include **Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre**, **MEDU Art Ensemble**, **Artist Proof Studio**, **The Bag Factory**, and the **Philani Printing Project**. These spaces housed the production of work from some of my favourite Black visual artists from Southern Africa. For the purpose of this paper however, I will reference some of those artists and highlight the Black femme artists that stood out from this group.

Additional sources that have spoken the spaces I mentioned earlier vary, however in an article reviewing '*RORKE'S DRIFT, empowering prints, twenty years of printmaking in South Africa*' authored by Phillipa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin – a book that legitimises a truly South African print tradition emerging from Rorke's Drift, as it provides a counter reading of the Western historians who located it, journalist Niren Tolsi writes about how Hobbs and Rankin believe the conventional analysis of the centre's role as a fountain of primitive African art was "engendered by the views of white clients who favoured works which fitted their preconceptions about African art, and which were less overtly confrontational" (Tolsi, Mail and Guardian, 2006).

- As Tolsi argues: "For the authors, the amalgamation of African naturalism, European aesthetics and a Christian tradition produced work that confronted apartheid society while reclaiming and subverting traditional Christian icono-graphy, especially in the Seventies" (Tolsi, 2006). However, the lack of Black femme Printmakers in this history and in the archives for example is striking. As such, accounting for this lack of presence substantiates my proposition for the Neo-Archive which is elaborated below.

Furthering this discussion and referencing more sites and archives which have inspired the *Neo*-Archive, I also note alternative publications such as '*Staffrider*', wherein Printmaking had been featured as part of their covers and images, and while I recognise its impact, I also note that even in more contemporary publications there is always more work to be done in tracing the Printmakers and artists working for these historical, counter-apartheid and/ or *Neo*-publications. While the Staffrider (1979) issue below features women on the cover, the artist is difficult to identify and are often not women, as the image of the credits page below shows.





Risimati j'Mathonsi, Johnny Masilela 54
Jaki Seroke 64

Photographs

Mxolisi Moyo 48
Marjorie Makhudu 13
Biddy Crewe 31, 64
Paul Weinberg 32, 33
Steve Bolnick 35
Leonard Maseko 63

Staffrider EYE Gallery/Graphics

Kay Hassan 4, 5
Mike Phillips 7
Mogorosi Motshumi 11
Marc Glaser 14
Roger Clayton 15
Mzwakhe 17, 18, 19, 20, 39
Andy Mason 24
The children at *Emdukatshani*, Natal 50
COMMUNITY ARTS PROJECT, CAPE TOWN:
Hamilton Budaza, Joseph Moyikwa,
Lionel Davis 59
Bonyani Shange . . . . . Back Cover

Figure 13: ***Staffrider Cover & Contents Page - July/ August***, 1979, (Image provided courtesy of Staffrider)

My participation in, and formulation of my artistic praxis holds the consistent need to apply a principle of working for the betterment, expansion, healing, or evolution of the *Neo*-Archive within everything I do and make. In some ways this experience is weighted and strenuous because considering that which cannot always be seen or accessed, proves difficult in the face of an industry and/ or space that appears to not value the same practice. Thus, adopting a *Neo*-Archival praxis signifies constantly keeping the past, present and future timelines in mind,

and considering the ways that your own work will or won't impact the trajectory or survival of that space. Notably, the artists that have been employing this practice had or have been creating work for extended periods of time, and this is notable where we observe the contributions of Black Southern African art (BLAQ NOIZE), which have been put forward and/ or gifted by numerous, highly skilled Black artists during and after the mid-twentieth century.

The artists who have influenced my practice and have since stood out as exemplars for how one creates and secures visual work that impacts not only their present generation, but those who are born years after, include MaBongiwe Dhlomo-Mautloa, Gabisile Nkosi, Tamsanqa (Thami) Mnyele, and Dumile Feni, and this is prevalent in how I choose reference their work in relation to mediums such as Drawing and Printmaking.



Figure 14: ***Just take a look***, Gabisile Nkosi, 2004, Linocut, 35, 5 x 57cm, Unframed (Image provided courtesy of Stauss Art)

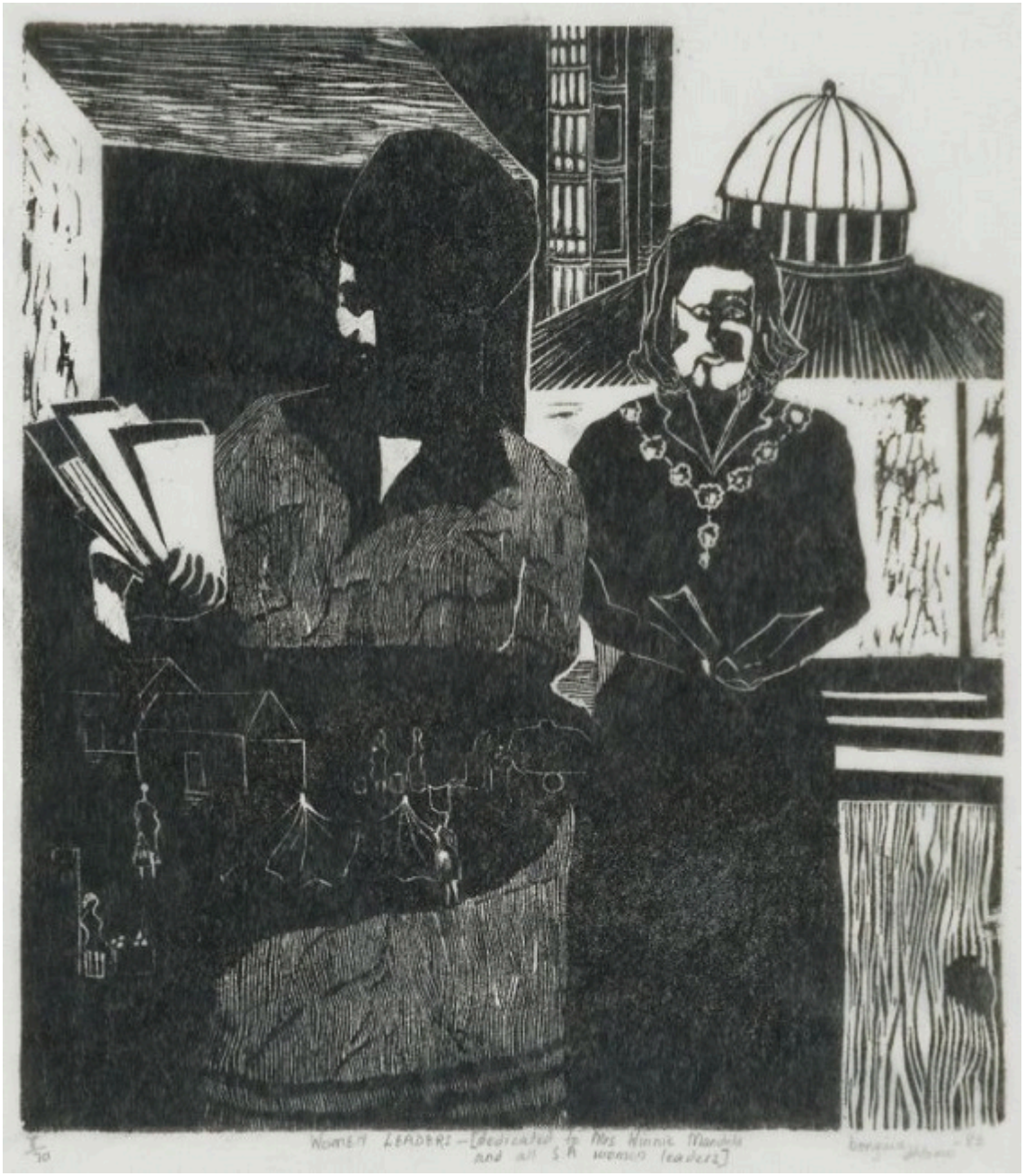


Figure 15: ***Women Leaders (Dedicated to Mrs Winnie Mandela and all S.A. Women Leaders)***, Bongiwe Dhlomo, 1983, 32 x 28cm (Image provided courtesy of artist via Africa South Art Initiative)



Figure 16: ***Natal Where Art School Is.***, John Muafengejo, 1974, Linoleum Print, 61 x 86 cm
(Image provided courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art)



Figure 17: ***… the best of our kind …***, Thami Mnyele, 1974, Mixed media on paper, 52.3 x 37.9cm (Image provided courtesy of City of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality)

Their works, impacts and legacies have been acknowledged nationally and internationally despite the constraints they endured under the Apartheid regime, and in addition to artists such as Sam Nhlengethwa, Dr Mongane Wally Serote, and David Koloane, they had played an integral role in communicating the realities that they were faced with personally, and those that their communities and/ or collectives would equally be familiar with, in their work i.e., thereby creating large bodies of work that would form part of an incredibly valuable collection of Black Southern African art, and stem from what I now refer to as the *Neo*-Archive.

MEDU

From an objective standpoint, the origin of the *Neo*-Archive being both a theoretical and

metaphysical collection, and the result of inciting preservatory actions towards the art of Black creatives, stems from my interest in the MEDU Art Ensemble and more specifically the ways that they operated as individual members, collaborators, artists and messengers. The key point of my inspiration comes from the history of MEDU, because it was an organisation founded in 1979, in Gaborone, Botswana i.e., for creatives or "cultural workers" (MEDU, 1999) who had been aiding the fight against the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

They were responsible for "establishing closer relations and practical cooperation amongst Southern African cultural workers" (MEDU, 1999) in addition to recruiting a unique demographic of people who possessed skills in publishing, Printmaking, Drawing, Writing and Performance. Ultimately, they had structured themselves as a group that prioritised the dissemination of information and culture that was not always political, but ensured a focus towards putting an end to Apartheid. One of the notable contributions towards my framing of the *Neo*-Archive i.e., which MEDU's legacy inspired, is derived from the 'Thami Mnyele + MEDU Art Ensemble Retrospective'.

The catalogue was created in collaboration with numerous authors and the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2009, and in reading through it, I gained access into the ways that the collective operated in terms of producing media i.e., posters, artworks, holding meetings and symposiums, plays and small concerts, and how this existed as work that had mostly been opposed by the Apartheid government and had thus, qualified itself as a necessity in South Africa, despite the fact that it was being created from the neighbouring Botswana. It was the creation of these works, despite the level of censorship that awaited MEDU on either side of the border, that aided many of their supporters whether they had been exiled or based within South Africa – to stay informed about important events, historical moments, people who had been greatly impacting the fight against Apartheid etc.

As such, from the work to the lasting impact it held even after the raid in July of 1985 – which saw their headquarters in Gaborone destroyed, and several of its members killed – the influence that MEDU has had on the practise of artistic mass-messaging, especially through the act of calculated methods of smuggling, rallying, is what inspired the foundational aspects of what a *Neo*-Archive holds the potential to be or do.



Figure 18: A photograph of myself at my maternal grandmother's home, 2003

Preservation

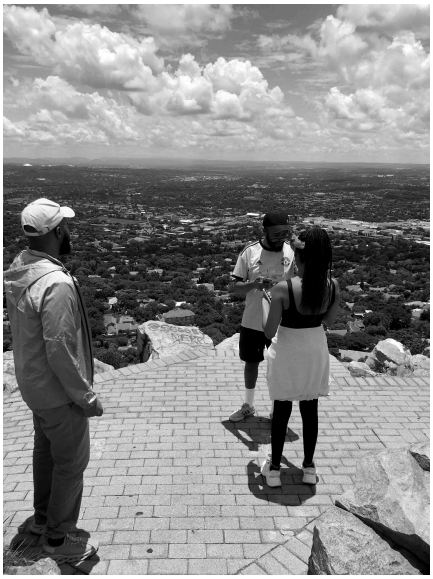
"before feminism became a movement with a global and political agenda, African women both 'theorised' and practiced what for them was crucial to the development of women, although no terminology was used to describe what these women were actively doing…" (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997: 10).

Housing and thereby 'gifting' a place to the aspects of everyday life that may or may not presently matter to the broader scope of society and yet still exist within our own homes, storage units, private collections – is an act that directly reflects the premise of a *Neo*-Archival praxis. This means that there remains a subconscious, although active decision by someone to keep their most valuable and intergenerational items preserved, whether these items were clothing, photographs, video tapes, CDs or vinyl, artworks for example, and this decision is what solidifies how they create an archive of their own priceless possessions, moreover, if they share these objects with anyone else, then they gift that person or those people access into that realm of personal, historical discourse.

This is what the basis of a *Neo*-Archival praxis is and because there is something innately auto-ethnographic in its theorisation, when one factors it into a reading of work made by Black femme artists in Southern Africa, it can be said that the works too, employ a certain level of this *Neo*-Archival activity.

Familial Reference Images That Inspired My MA Exhibition: 'NOIZE From The Neo-Archive'









*Note: the above images are to be read from left to right, since they are labelled in that order.

- Figure 19: A photograph of my maternal grandparents, undated
- Figure 20: A photograph of my late maternal grandfather, undated

- Figure 21: A photograph of my siblings January, 2025
- Figure 22: A photograph of my parents in Kwa-Zulu Natal, July 2024
- Figure 23: A photograph of my sister and family housekeeper, 2004
- Figure 24:A photograph of my paternal great-grandmother and her daughters-in-law, undated
- Figure 25: A photograph of my two brothers and I, 2003

Furthermore, I think that if one considers more recent or contemporary timelines, and the visual work produced by Black femmes, it is evident that there is a sort of unspoken principle that we are choosing to apply in our work/s, this echoes of *Neo*-Archival custom. As seen throughout this paper, I detail the roles and works of artists such as Puleng Mongale, Karabo Poppy, Naledi Modupi and Helena Uambembe as people who have greatly influenced my work, but who also exemplify the premise of an innately Black femme experience of returning to their respective perimeters of the *Neo*-Archive, to draw personal and/ or communal subject matter from, and communicate an idea.



Figure 26: ***World Kindness Day Coca-Cola (Time Square Billboard)***, Karabo Poppy, 2019, Digital Illustration (Image provided courtesy of Karabo Poppy Moletsane - Behance)

Although these artists are not the only people who have hallmarked the culture of referencing one's personal archive for the purpose of creating work and materialising ideas, their praxes are great examples of how the potency and consistency of outputting work that draws on innately Black femme, familial, and historical perspectives, as Black creatives, for the purpose of producing contemporary art, fuels the survival of that art and ultimately, immortalises the work, the worker and the source of raw material that they pull from.



Figure 27: ***Accept Being Different***, Naledi Modupi, 2023, Digital Print on Felix Schoeller True Fibre Matt, 210 x 297mm (Image provided courtesy of MODUPI STUDIO)

As such, when I refer to a *principle of the present* applied to the production, reading and/ or curation of Black femme art in Southern Africa, I am alluding to the fact that even in our respective unique praxes of art-production, there appears to be a synthesis or a sense of common-ground between the subjects we sometimes pull from to create (e.g., some of us are drawn to creating work that speaks directly to our own identities and/ or experiences through which topics of gender, love, grief, trauma, race, body-image, mental health, spirituality etc.,

may come through). In essence, this means that whether it has been packaged or disseminated as 'news' to the broader public and/ or the communities that exist outside of ourselves, the theory behind the *Neo*-Archive and the constant return that Black femmes have made to ourselves i.e., to feed and fuel our work, is something I am arguing to be an indisputable truth.

If there has not been a return to an archive or personal collection that seems to so carefully house and protect the memoirs, records, moments, artefacts and objects that have, in some way, informed ourselves or our familial lineages, and we do not return to this for some sense of inspiration, then within the context of this publication, I am open to debunk the importance and the significance of the *Neo*-Archive.

More importantly, the return to speaking of this archive in direct relation to the praxes of Black femme artists in South Africa stems from the fact that historically speaking, we have not always been regarded or authored as mass-contributors to the artistic trajectories of a lot of the Black male-presenting artists who were afforded opportunities to produce and even exhibit work, and eventually establish a career from there i.e., especially when in some instances the very subject matter being depicted by them, at times centred around Black femininity or femme positionality within domestic, intimate, spiritual and political spheres.

This is to say that in the range of opportunities awarded to Black femme bodies to both enter and work within spaces that would recognise and celebrate them along with their legacies and societal contributions – there were at times, moments that they were not on the same level of access to their male counterparts. Instead, their impacts, roles and visibility remained important and memorialised through other mediums, which inadvertently are the building blocks of the *Neo*-Archive such as music (e.g., performances, choirs, recorded songs), conversation (e.g., rallies, meetings, classes), and presence (e.g., in the home/ homestead, clinic, school, shop, restaurant etc.). Thus, my argument that the current decisions of Black femme artists to be reaffirming, establishing and sustaining for themselves, their own variations of their roles, impacts and/ or legacies within Southern African art spheres, is one of considerable value and recognition, especially because they truly platform the presence and relevance of the *Neo*-Archive, while they actively add to it for future generations.

Additional Visual Work Created Throughout My MAFA

My exhibition became the holding ground for these works and the works that I featured in the paper thus far, and my decision to curate the exhibition with vintage, home-like frames, an old

wooden table, and then include a mural, was a decision that aimed to demonstrate themes that were home-based, familial, urban/ city-based and deeply sensitive. Each work brought its own relevance to my broader conversation about BLAQ NOIZE and the *Neo*-Archive.



Figure 28: ***Contemplation***, 2022, Mixed Media on Paper, 30cm x 30cm (Framed)

This artwork references a theme that was becoming increasingly evident and visible between the late 2010s and early 2020s, which was that of body positivity amongst femmes, specifically when applied to conversations about autonomy, women's rights and the agency they have over their bodies. In a moment of contemplation this character finds herself surrounded by the sentence "hollo lay the body where the mind lay still", and it serves as a reminder that if one lives in a state of mental stillness or stagnation for too long, then they risk losing 'hollowing' themself and losing out on living a life that is full of movement and progression.



Figure 29: ***January***, 2023, Mixed Media on Paper, 29.7cm x 21cm

This artwork depicts someone's state of mind before the beginning of a new year, four figures act as guardians and pillars within the mindscape that we're looking at, and each one serves a purpose i.e., to uphold the memories of the subject's mind, to refine and decorate the subject's way of thinking, to balance the subject's state of mind, and to protect the subject's state of mind. Who performs which role? I have left the answer up to the readers of the work to find.



Figure 30: ***Eve***, 2023, Ink on Paper, 42cm, x 30cm (Framed)

As mentioned earlier in my writing Black femmes occupied several roles and positionalities throughout Southern African histories. One of these roles existed in musical performances, where Black femmes, such as the character I have nicknamed ‘Eve’ would perform in restaurants, homes and bars in areas such as Sophiatown. This piece is simply a visual reflection of that reality, which I recalled in conversations with my parents about our relatives.



Figure 31: ***Seeing is Believing***, 2023, Ink on Paper, 42cm, x 30cm (Framed)

This work recalls an urgency for recognition, listening and connection amidst communities of Black femmes and their families, especially in the contexts where mental health is concerned. Issues of self-harm, suicidal ideation and depression were what fueled the creation of this work, the title simple alludes to the age-old notion that if people do not or cannot 'see' something, then it makes it hard for them to 'believe' that it is there. This woman holds a blade in her hand, close to her neck – indicating and suggesting that what she 'has' or holds, actually possesses the potential to harm her, and so since we 'see' that, we could finally believe that.



Figure 32: ***Tale of the Rising Son***, 2023, Graphite and Ink on Hahnemühle, 29.7cm x 21cm

This work depicts an estranged relationship between a son and his mother – whom he did not know. Despite not knowing much of her life, he holds a disjointed image of her in his mind, and attempts to live up to an idea of her. The work is a reflection once again of a narrative that is deeply personal to me, through the person who has inspired it, although the imagery does leave more room for readers of the work to interpret it in whichever way they see it.

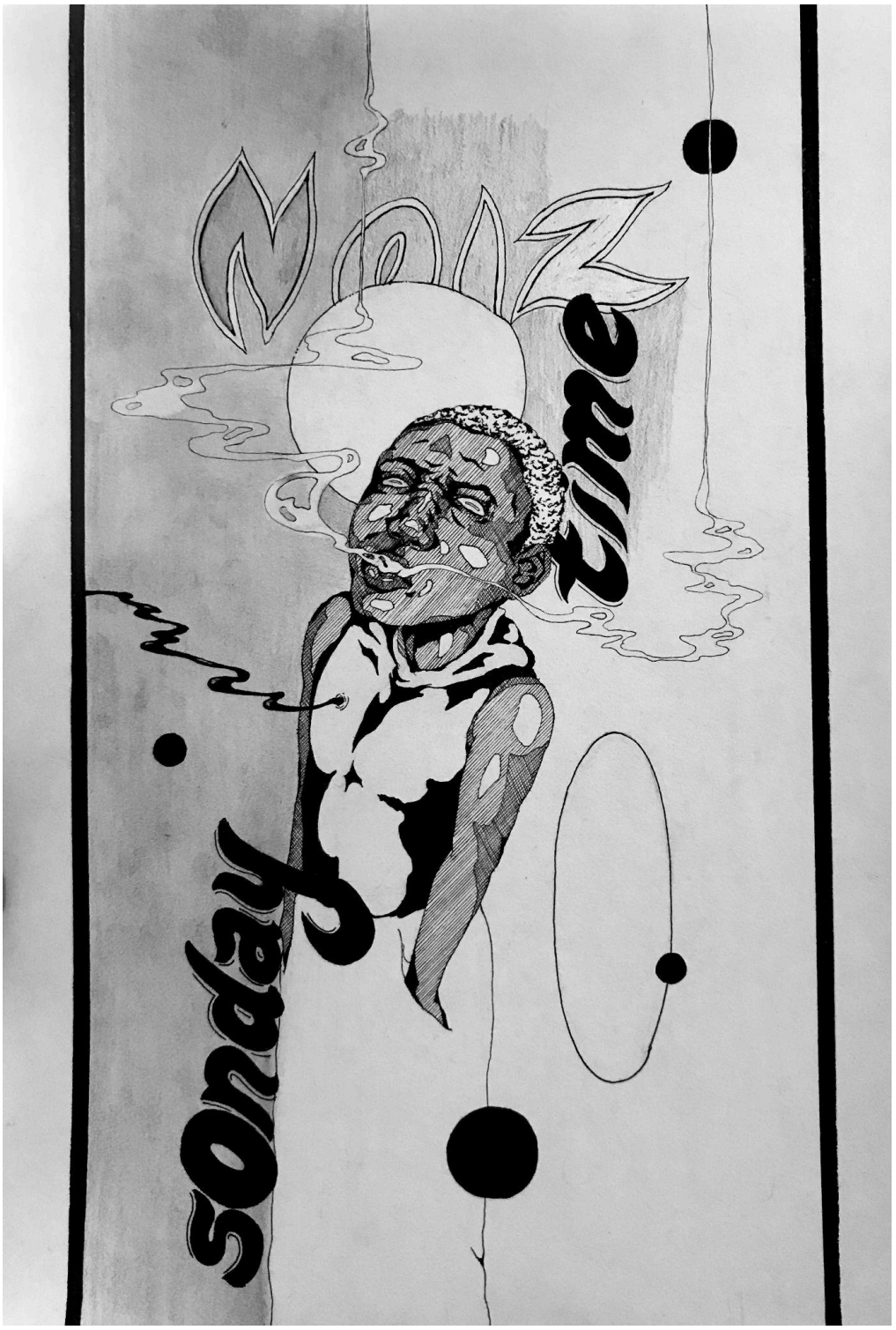


Figure 33: ***Sondays***, 2023, Ink and Graphite on Paper, 42cm x 30cm

This work demonstrates the solitary and seemingly peaceful nature that Sundays invoke, however, it also features a depiction of someone who is frozen, and in some ways feeling stuck in a moment of empty thoughts, surrounded by 'NOIZE' and somehow incapable of paying it any attention. It is a work reflective of a mental battle with rest (i.e., designated for Sundays), and feelings of being stuck.



Figure 34: ***Interrupted***, 2024, Mixed Media on Card, 42cm x 30cm (Framed)

There is a recurring imagery that I always feel drawn to and its of four figures, perhaps it stems from my siblings and I being a group of four 'friends' who each brought something to the table, but regardless, this work demonstrates a relationship between four siblings, and they are all older now, yet still stern, playful, contemplative and/ or reserved. These four have been interrupted by the viewer that becomes a witness to their dynamic.



Figure 35: ***Glass Bois: Interlude***, 2024, Mixed Media on Board

This piece was created after a series of personal and disconnected occurrences pertaining to conversations held with male-presenting people that I have met and known personally. These various conversations echoed in my head for about two years, and then found themselves embodied, collaged and reassembled here. The conversational themes referenced herein are about love, strength, body dysmorphia, insecurity in relationships, faith and spiritual practice, vanity, ego and death. The words "Given Any Sunday" are meant to signal that these are themes that have repeatedly shown up on a weekly basis, and thus remain in a cyclical state.



Figure 36: ***October (Series)***, 2024, Mixed Media on Paper, Multiple Dimensions

In October of 2024, I took on a challenge to depict an image everyday for a social media challenge called 'Inktober', this had caused a spark in memories that ended up resurfacing through these illustrations, some personal to me and some related to other people, each one held a strong emotion and I allowed readers to engage with these diary-entry like works, in the ways that they saw fit.



Figure 37: ***born, raised and living***, 2025, Mixed Media on wall (Mural), Multiple Dimensions

Evidently, the focus of this body of work led me to depicting the youth in many pieces, and in many ways it allowed me the chance to relay the conversations, issues and thoughts that the youth, especially Black femme youth may presently be dealing with. I believe that what led me to creating a mural is the inspiration that is found amidst the energy of young people. The space that I exhibited in is at a central point that a lot of young people spend time in, and seeing them communicate, connect, have fun, see and hold space for each other reminded me of the work I have been discussing throughout the years that I have worked on this thesis.

This mural is a testament to bearing witness to that.

*Note: The following section features the poems that I have written across the span of my MA journey (i.e., between 2022 - 2025), and each one accounts for my own personal experiences and point of views, especially when relating to the external matters that I was experiencing beyond just the stressors and aspects of my academic journey. The words are deeply personal and emotionally charged.

Poetry

-

Untitled (2022)

blessed be january
a mother reaching for a hand
she feels and feeds
through praying knees
in hopes that i understand

that when i forget
ignore and neglect
she still remains the present figure
at home, in thought, in every goal
and in clothes i wish were bigger

greeting me still, at the turn of time
a symbol of what's beyond the line
drawn in between
both living, and dying
between eleven attempts
at sinking, or flying

the sober, staying, patient, parent

not here by will, or solid certainty,
but by some normalised trajectory
moulded in calendars, currencies
and heads of home
a mother this time
carries a bleeding stone

the red, now ink
dripping on her feet
meets page and hand
and draws a promise to me

"bless this month
a twenty-third time
remember to give, not take
look into eyes, your mother's hand
holding the magic you will make".

Ghosts (2024)

Step restless in pursuit of sleep
They cling
Onto all that reminds them
Of life
Or love
Haunting those, who want only
To live in peace
Selfish by design
They do not leave until
They get
What they came looking for
An untied shoelace, an ounce
Of attention
A reason to stay
Shells of who they were
Desperate to be held
But gone nonetheless

Black Sand in Hand: Obligation (2024)

My hands once marked the walls
Where the absence of sound
Suggested the absence of being
Where our waves
Stained sands black
Which is
To stain them permanent
And seeming
A though whenever tone
Met quiet
It couldn't reach ears blue
And violet
Where symphonies without agony
Skipped over tales of state tragedy
Where ink injected
A growing bloodline
With an overflowing gift
A lineage bearing the timeless grain
That my shaking hands
Now sift

Bee (2024)

The irony
Will never age well
They come in peace
Yet are known
To hurt people too.
Omens
Of good fortune
They spread life wherever they go
But we take them for granted,
Flinch
When they get too close
Always
Expecting the worst

Untitled (2024)

But then suddenly absence is air
permission , to the lungs
Pulse, pushed back into arms
No longer in vain but in accordance
With how things shouldve always been
Words carved into skin
With meaning
Gifts offered earnestly
Without seeming
So transactional.
Child,
Love does not exist through proof alone
It isn't proud it isn't owned
It is given, and when it is
You say 'thank you'
You recognise, value
Humble yourself, to be taught too
So quickly we forget
How potent words be
How, at some point
We'll all be so sorry.

Prayers (2024)

To give of yourself
Despite not having much to offer
Is what i believe faith,
And love,
And trust
Is built on.
The idea that my hands
May lay empty
But my heart beats full
And so from there i will
Give you everything
That makes me anything
From the only source i can
And i will pray
That it'll be enough

Look to the sky (2024)

The weather that is constantly changing,
Rapidly, slow
Taints the clarity we think we know
We forget clouds are furniture
And blue, an accessory
And still we ask how anyone
Remains the kind of person they are
Despite the mess or magic
That adorns their life
If we just looked to the sky
We'd find that just like this sphere
We hold the potential
To taste rain
To glow sunny
To be vain
To be funny
We may finally notice
That despite
The weather
We remain
The same.

Awake - part ii (2024)

My parents
Would struggle to put me to sleep
When i was a kid, a baby
Awake with wonder about the world
That they came from
I kept my eyes, wide open
Lately i've been noticing
I can't sleep at all
And though its nothing new
I tried to come up with a reason
Told myself a couple bedtime stories
In hopes
That they'd lay me to rest
But apparently
When you're born
With a spirit that knows nothing
About rest
About slumber
A spirit
That will keep you up
Until your reach for the stars
And taste them

You lay awake
Again.

Thursdays (2024)

The beauty of the artist
Rests in their ability to breathe out
And then into
The eyes, the ears
The hearts
Of people
Who witness their work
They feel like thursdays
Always with enough time
Behind them
Enough time
To count for something
Edging on the cusp
Of sweet, sweet rest
But not yet giving in.
Thursdays, with the sun
Lingering between their palms
Between some prayers, or some gin
Gifting us hope, and harmony
Bearing their souls, great company
Lovers and writers
Honest inscribers
I hope to be
Like that.

Bless the heart beaten & beating again (2025)

The kid is running
Out of a door
Into a street
Into a field
Into arms
And falling
Falling harder than his feet
When they kissed the ground
This ground
That feels way too familiar
The sound of his shoes
Hitting the floor
Sounds a lot
Like his heart
Boom
Boom,boom
Did you hear it
In your room
The beat it makes
Almost mimics music
And it’s her favourite song

Chapter Three: Academic Incense

The Aftertaste of Ink, Smoke & Ash

"We are aware of the terrible role played by our education… in creating amongst us a false understanding of ourselves." (Biko, 2004: 57)

Some of the discourse that featured a *written* history of Black people has either been (re)produced, or censored by and/ or later disseminated through primarily White perspectives – especially within the context of South Africa and the frameworks of the country's historical media and press. I argue this point because some of the media that was considered i.e., by way of its social reach, verification, and/ or pace of dissemination, was arguably the type of media that perpetuated a Westernized gaze towards the existence of Whiteness in comparison to non-Whiteness or more truthfully – the 'peculiarity', spectrality or otherness of Blackness, in addition to the gendered politics within Black communities.

The impact of printed media, in addition to the more contemporary introductions of digital media, has therefore, held an infectious history within the borderlines of South Africa, especially because the country has endured, yet sustained a reputation of utilizing (White) subjective perspectives i.e., towards iterations, representations and theorizations of Blackness, as primary ways of spreading information throughout broader society via printed media and/ or illustrative art-production, as opposed to mediums of known, researched or verified 'fact'.

The practice of deriving what is *seen* as a practice that is substantially more valid, true and/ or valuable, as opposed to deriving what is known, taught or embodied, is a practice that I argue is survived by the continual production of printed media, and this is proven by the evidence that much of what has been messaged and/ or made into law, custom, belief, or fact (i.e., especially within a relatively White-run social bracket), had to have been printed or written (i.e., on paper or any valid surface) first – to be made visible and thus, real.

This stance bleeds into my research and recognition of the impact of Publication-making, Printmaking and Illustration as heavily potent media through which one is able to communicate variations of discourse and/ or information within the context of South Africa, as they both align with methods that had been used to establish and sustain truth, and therefore power, within the hands of a group of people, and upon the perceptions of their counterparts. As such, this essay seeks to explore the somewhat vast history of specific types of printed media in South Africa (i.e., prints, posters, flyers, newspapers, magazines, t-shirts, product

packaging & additional texts) and how they were not only used as one of the greatest political collaborators towards a regime like Apartheid, but how they also contributed to the dismantling of its effects (i.e., its aftertaste), amongst Black people. Equally, I *sight* the impacts of these forms of media and what they have since transformed into over the passage of time between the late 1980s and the present-day 2020s, by recognizing the inclusion of digital, audio-visual and/ or performative media that has both aided, advanced and/ or tainted representations of Black people, especially Black femmes.

Before progressing into any discussion pertaining to the impact of printed media in South Africa, I find it imperative to state that there are three categories through which I have come to read print/s, ink-based and/ or written media produced within the boundaries of South Africa – and these include *Academic Incense*, *White Smoke* and *Black Ash* (BLAQ NOIZE). Each category assists me in (re)framing the perspectives I hold towards printed information, because within those readings there is always context, and for example, when I read a printed artwork or a poster through the lens of perceiving it as 'Academic Incense', then it allows me to *sight* the work as something that in many ways has been used to impact, infiltrate, or intoxicate the senses of anyone who has perceived the work, in addition to 'cleansing, making clear, purifying and/ or brightening' their understanding of the work – much like incense in many spiritual or religious contexts would do the same.

The issue in this way of viewing printed texts/ artefacts is recognised when we acknowledge that this 'incense' is still innately academic in its nature and therefore, when that truth is applied to the structure of South African academic criteria for example, the concern of whether that incense somehow aligns with and values a White/ western methodology of learning, that is both heavily historicized through coloniality, and further survived by English being a primary language of education – should be noted.

What this category then provokes in some instances, is the question of whether a printed text viewed under the gaze and/ or intoxication of Academic Incense, is the correct way of reading it, or if there are – for example, other means through which to read it. These 'other ways' happen to be through the lenses of framing or citing elements of and within discourse that is considered 'Black Ash', as it implies that the printed work is historical, and created for or by Black people, and is therefore mostly devoid of the potency of White influence or validation. Additionally, viewing media or text through the lens of 'White Smoke', elucidates reading printed media with the knowledge that it has/ had once been created for the understanding of

that time period and while held an integral effect or role in its creation, it can only be accounted for within this contemporary era, which is what I consider to be the *aftertaste* of Apartheid.

As such, while reading and analysing the histories found within the avenues of South African printed media – I pose a question to the readers of this text, and ask "under which lens, if any, have you perceived printed media that has been produced and circulated throughout South Africa, and why do you think you would have seen it through that specific lens – equally, how does this *place*, inform, oppose or position your identity?"

Origins - Academic Incense

The histories associated with print-media in Southern Africa which I am particularly interested in, directly correlate with those of the Black producers of that art and/ or media – and this is to say that while I presently recognise the impact of the early histories of Printmaking and/ or other methods of ink-based image/ text (mass) production, I am not in this discussion, concerned with the histories that have had little-to-no affiliation with Black communities and artists, or those which have granted them restrictive access to the medium. As such, the first site within the history of Southern African print-media that I seek to acknowledge is that of publication, newspaper and magazine production.

This facet of history is rich with various modes of documentation which were used to represent, or in the same ways, perpetuate certain messages about Black people in Southern Africa, and at the height of internal and civil conflicts which were taking place within this region of the continent – the use of printed media was widely popularized because of its efficient and rapid pace of dissemination. More locally (i.e., in South Africa), printed media took the form of magazines, newspapers, flyers and posters – and these forms of media thereby became vastly popularised in conjunction with knowledge, truth, conflict and validation.

In reading about magazines and newspapers that had platformed and exemplified portrayals and/ or representations of Black bodies, identities, cultures and experiences during the Apartheid era, such as Drum, Bona, Tribute, Grace, The Rand Daily Mail and The Sowetan for example, I recognised that representations of Blackness had in many ways, become a multifaceted activity in the press, and was essentially dependent on the contexts and/ or aims of the media outlet that was producing and disseminating that information. Thus, when one pays attention to the fact that there were many moments between the 1970s to 1980s where

some media outlets within the South African press had faced sanctions or censorship because they had settled on reporting the realities of what was actually happening during Apartheid, it is also important to note that many of these outlets continued to make their objectives clear in going ahead with mass-publishing information anyway.

Despite adopting an ardently anti-Apartheid positionality, they represented, documented and disseminated varying facets of Black livelihood, survival, reality etc., which was inevitably cited in relation to a White, and therefore governmentally, economically and socio-politically supported form of survival. Noting the existence of anti-Apartheid print-based publications that did not shy away from documenting and therefore making visible the presence and lives of Black bodies, even if this was done through depicting vivid, gruesome, idealised, romanticised and/ or vulnerable representations of them, is a move I make intentionally within this discussion, because I cite these sources as examples of how the potency of printed and/ or publicised text, can be applied to the framework of reading and producing academic literature and/ or writing, which ultimately informs the core and the survival of broader educational and societal systems. I find that it is important to establish the impact of academia within the racial, cultural, gendered and even spiritual or religious make-up of a society, because this is what undoubtedly sets the stage for the trajectories of the people living within that society.

As such, *sighting* the importance, vitality and potency of academia through discussing the role played by the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which stipulated that Black/ Brown communities were to receive starkly discriminatory and derogatory levels of education, in comparison to their White counterparts – is imperative to making my point on the impact of education and/ or academia upon the fabric and/ or the outcome of a society. The Act was implemented and essentially cemented through laws that sought to ensure that schools hosting White students alone, would receive adequate funding, educators, governmental support and maintenance – whilst schools that were situated in racially segregated communities of Black and Brown people, would receive significantly less aid or assistance.

In ‘non-White’ schools, teachers were underpaid and far less qualified to offer substantial levels of education for their students i.e., with 15% of the staff in Black schools being qualified to teach and students only being permitted to be in school until the age of 13 - 15 (Alhadeff, 2018: 8). The Apartheid regime established and essentially sought to sustain a difference between the academic development of Black, Brown and White scholars because of the fact that one builds and solidifies the foundation of any idea or regime, through educating many

others about it. If one group within society is prohibited from gaining access to information, it places them at some level of disadvantage to their counterparts, and what this does is keep their positionality at a point of limitation. By stunting the potential or even the opportunity for Black scholars to learn, succeed and attain 'more' in a world that was essentially ruled by Whiteness, this Act secured their position on the playing field of South African society, and encouraged them to receive and consistently have 'less'.

Reading the texts, publications and/ or imagery that sought to push against these levels of discrimination, serves as an important and key moment within encountering South African history because it equipped a large portion of Black society with enough resources (i.e., discourse) to keep themselves educated 'enough' to be active participants within the playing field that did not want them to learn its rules, nor to move ahead. This is fundamentally where I pull my understanding and framing of Academic Incense from, because the printed media outlets that I had mentioned above, such as the magazine and newspapers that were not necessarily part of a scholarly curriculum but were owned by the White people, were and perhaps still are examples of the additional, if not the alternative modes of disseminating information, and offering sites for learning about the state of the world around, and within a community.

These publications form part of Academic Incense because they were and have continued to hold enough potency and longevity to affect and infiltrate the psychological, academic and social fabric of South African communities throughout time, and simultaneously keep us 'intoxicated, immersed and participating in' the cultures that we are exposed to, both in and outside of schools.

If one reads the texts published by media outlets which were or are fundamentally against socio-political or governmental authoritative figures, then the truth within the text and the potency or validity of the discourse disseminated by them, will be platformed and thereby hold the potential to be influential to the public. This fact is what I argue the Apartheid government understood and in its integration of laws pertaining to academia specifically, it sought to ensure the gradual, long-term damaging of racialised, and therefore socialised development within communities around South Africa that excluded the White population.

This further substantiates my point that it is always the potency or validity of information disseminated throughout any version of society, which constitutes as the most integral part of

that information, and again, if that information is one embedded within the academic structures of that society, then the impacts are powerful enough to establish and maintain the trajectories of the communities within it. If the press is a system that disseminates discourse that is both real and true, especially through print, then it equally holds the potency and potential to communicate to mass crowds and establish ideas that might not be accessible in schools for whatever reason. As such, the importance of recognising and paying homage to the origins and/ or effectiveness of the (printed) press is made known by the fact that both with and without the presence of the media, society can easily become harmonized, divided, imbalanced, unpredictable and/ or chaotic.

Seeing education as a crucial ingredient in maintaining and even establishing the success of a governmental or authoritative structure, highlights the importance of Academic Incense as a theoretical framework. At its core, what it encapsulates is discourse that is used for the purpose of educating people about important ideologies, movements, events and people, and it is also a way through which to understand what this kind of discourse does, and/ or has been disseminated for. It exists and is thereby created for the purpose of educating oneself or larger groups of people within the framework of scholarly learning, teaching and testing, especially for the sake of social survival.

I maintain that it is imperative for people within any community to be educated in some or any capacity, especially within the structures that govern their society. In this contemporary timeline, however, our world is ruled by a largely Westernised set of ideologies, due to the wounding which has been both caused and in some ways sustained by White/ European powers globally, and it is through this wounding, that people are able to assimilate to, or understand the innermost structures of their present societies i.e., through the consumption, intoxication and/ or absorption of the information taught or perpetuated through schools and/ or sites of learning.

If the more contemporary understanding of informative discourse looks like the ignition, inhalation or adoption of Academic Incense, and is then considered a modern approach to ‘learning’, reading or writing, then theorising the importance of this lens is key. The point behind making sense of this theoretical framework is to allow someone the chance to be more conscious of how they are reading contemporary or modern discourse, especially since “to be modern, is to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air" (Berman, 1988: 15), which is a statement that I believe encapsulates how swiftly one can be caught up in ‘breathing

the air' of state-approved and/ or propagandist ideas that have been presented as credible, academic and therefore *truthful* accounts of the world.

Categorising academic discourse as 'incense' offers a somewhat metaphoric approach to understanding academic and non-traditional but equally informative modes of learning that are packaged through media like print, illustration, poetry and digital screens, and I have written about it in this poetic way because I believe that anything that falls under this category will remain – as much of the academic discourse consumed by scholars does, embedded within the psychological, physical and social structures of indigenous, diasporic and enduring cultural groups who reside all over the world.

What this signifies then, is that even where there is a level of education that will be expected and/ or demanded of these cultural groups, and that will 'have' to be obtained, in order for them to be seen, accepted and potentially coveted by this largely globalised society, the ways that they might be able to become educated can be through accessing external and equally useful sources of information that exists, at least in the framing of this paper, as Academic Incense then.

White Smoke

An additional lens through which one may consume or create discourse within South African art media, is through a lens of *White Smoke*, since it encompasses the middle ground between accessing (i.e., burning) discourse that can be categorised as Academic Incense, and then reading what is or was later created by Black artists and/ or scholars as a result of that moment of access. What is situated at the end of this lens, is a perspective that rests on remaining focussed on what is there but seemingly fleeting. It is of course, the kind of perspective that understands that not everything written or made will remain and/ or survive.

Much like what happens when we encounter smoke, the effects of engaging with specific types of media through this lens, includes the sighting of blurriness, movement and change in whatever we are looking at. This means that when reading text or artworks as smoke, we account for how fleeting, (in)effective and/ or disillusioning it might be. This White Smoke lens is therefore one I apply to the reading of media that is both printed and digitised, because in many ways, what is created through those mediums can draw from discourse that qualifies as Academic Incense or Black Ash, but it is ultimately a midpoint between either category or lens. The media placed within this pocket of production, analysis or critique, is visible with the

knowledge and expectation of being cleared away and/ or erased.

- The meaning behind the metaphoric, theoretical framing for reading media this way, comes from the idea that when people burn anything, there is smoke that rises from that site and this signals some level of evidence that human activity and the effects of it, is present. As such, reading media through the lens of White Smoke means one engages with something visible, active and yet fleeting, despite being momentarily evident.

The greater significance of reading media through this lens is rooted in how it calls readers to pay attention to the mortality of their own, or other creators' works, because it reminds one that the moment of producing, disseminating and perhaps witnessing an artwork is a fleeting one, much like how life goes. This is an idea that while seeming quite simple, is one cemented by how I observed the treatment of work or artistic media created during Apartheid, and by Black or Brown artists.

This work had a consistent and heightened level of mortality attached to it, because it likely had an underlying anti-Apartheid messaging residing within it, and therefore it could or would be destroyed or censored according to the then South African government's standards. What this outlined is the importance and perhaps the value of these works, because they were created with little-to-no surety of survival. Equally, I apply this idea to how the artwork/s being produced in this contemporary era (i.e., the 2020s), by Black femme artists in particular – because while our works are respectively different and dive into a variety of subject matter, the only aspects of our work and/ or praxes that I believe can establish or secure their survival, are our fundamental understandings, referencing and creations of BLAQ NOIZE, that has been derived from, or inspired by the Neo-Archive.

It is in our individualised combining of historical sources and/ or artefacts that we alchemise, expand on or neglect in our contemporary work, that fuel the longevity, and ultimate survival of our work for future timelines. If however, the work that we create is produced through processes that are devoid of these sources, then I argue that the work could be like White Smoke, in that it will be made visible, acknowledged, and provoke a collective reaction amongst people, but it will exist momentarily. Acknowledging this is useful because citing the value of work produced and/ or read as White Smoke makes space for artists, writers, producers or consumers of creative media to recognise that there is a unique value situated within the NOIZE or the work that is not always guaranteed permanence.

Black Ash

"The history of Black South African literature has largely been the history of the representation of the spectacle."
(Ndebele, 1986: 143)

Those of us who are subjected to a particular way of living because it was historically enforced and then entrenched within our belief or religious/ spiritual systems, have already been affected by the inhalation and adoption of all three categories through which I argue we may view printed and other forms of media as South Africans (i.e., through the lenses of Academic Incense, Black Ash, White Smoke). This is because the origins of print media itself and the ways that we have been depicted, represented and defined within those frames of reference, stem from a colonial praxis of mass-messaging.

More specifically if you are Black person presently residing in the contemporary version of South Africa (i.e., the 2020s), then there exists a possibility that the ways that your parents, grandparents or great-grandparents perceived printed media, if at all – was through a heavily colonized, anti/ pro-Black and/ or anti-White gaze, because there had been little-to-no room for much diversity in choosing their individual perspectives within the timelines that they were at some point, subjected to. Thus, tracing our own current perceptions of written, imaged and more static media for example, as Black (art) scholars, might be influenced by the fact that older generations of our communities were not granted much choice in whether they could view media from this primary lens.

In his writing of '*The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*' Njabulo S. Ndebele offers an interesting and important reading of Black literature within the history of South Africa and states that "if all Black South Africans could read this 'protest literature', they would naturally take sides much to their aesthetic delight," (Ndebele, 1986: 149). What I can agree with here, is that in the exclusionary essence of literature that came about during and after Apartheid within the context of post-colonial Africa, Black people were not always granted as much freedom to *choose* to spend their time reading and formulating opinions on what they witnessed via text, and the mass-messaging that did take place and perhaps had the attention of broader Black communities was disseminated through more expressive, emotive, provocative media such as illustrated, painted, photographed and/ or printed imagery, theatre, music and performance, and conversation.

With this being said, the ways in which early 1960s-70s literature captured and/ or spoke of Black people, narratives and experiences was through a distanced and somewhat detached gaze. Ndebele's notion that the premise of Black literature which often fell under the category of being 'protest literature', and lacked an ability to focus on reality without dramatising or in some instances, emphasising the spectacle that Black bodies had been placed within during Apartheid. He states multiple opinions, maintaining that in Black writers creating and perpetuating this same spectacle in our literature we establish "... a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge.", and this becomes "the literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness" (1986: 150).

Furthermore, Ndebele mentions that regardless of how this kind of literature is published or packaged, there is nothing more that "can be expected of it." (1986: 150). Therefore, in recognising how reading Black literature can create this kind of disconnect between what is intimate and true, is important because it platforms the danger of losing touch with what remains relative to the social communities represented in the texts produced, then disseminated by them and other people.

> "Consequently, we have a society of pasturing and sloganeering: one that frowns upon subtlety of thought and feeling, and never permits the sobering power of contemplation, of close analysis, and the mature acceptance of failure, weakness and limitations." (1986: 150)

Citing Ndebele's ideas grants me the opportunity to both theorise what Black Ash is i.e., in relation to Academic Incense, especially because within this metaphoric labelling that I use to discuss the ways academic and/ or printed media can be read, I argue that once incense is burned, what remains is evidently, ash. Thus, if we are to correlate Black Ash to Academic Incense, it exists as whatever remains after one makes use of 'incense' to communicate their idea, or to create an artwork for example. In using his text as the incense that I am 'inhaling' in this instance, I am able to analyse it and substantiate the ordinary honesty in Ndebele's arguments.

Hence, what drew me to referencing his text in this essay, was the fact that reading African (art) histories and artefacts, highlights that there has been a prolific spotlighting over the spectacularity of Blackness, as opposed to that of its subtlety or its ordinariness. His early arguments in the text stipulated that spectacularity is something intrinsically dependent on the

suppression of, and therefore a continuous negation from "... deep-rooted individual as well as social fears… dreams for love, hope, compassion, newness and justice", and additionally this eventually breeds "insensitivity, insincerity and delusion" (1986: 150).

As such, nearly every and anything that had been experienced by Black people i.e., who had been captured in the literature of the era, as characters, figures, numbers, victims, or citizens – before or without being represented as individuals with their own identity – had a tendency to be depicted, especially in text or printed media, as anything but ordinary. This was not always evident, as within many avenues or genres of Black literature, there was equally a tendency to "Portray the ambivalences and uncertainties of black writers and readers negotiating their way between 'tradition' and modernity', or between masculinist and racist imaginings of blackness (and especially black womanhood)" (Ferreira, 2011: 66).

Ndebele's stance however, is based on what he believed was missing in that literature, which was the ability to create, for Black people who were being written about and written for, a chance to be depicted within a framing that was quite ordinary, rather than extreme. Stating that "The ordinary is defined as the opposite of the spectacular" and is therefore the "sobering rationality." which has made up the real livelihoods of Black people around South Africa (1986: 150). His call however, to recalibrate the scenery of Black literature from spectacular to ordinary is not a call to reduce and/ or simplify the brutal truths of what was occurring.

Instead, he argues that whether Black writers are attentive to it or not, the exasperation of an event or experience that collectives of Black people had encountered in the texts we produce, caters to an inherently White perception, and at times, fails to reach our own familiar or intended audiences. By his standard, spectacularity is something that was taught to 'us' through the implementation and expansion of a Westernised gaze, and this is proven in how Black people can and did write about the 'awful, violent and potentially inhumane' things that were experienced by their communities, at the hands of White colonials, and/ or the Apartheid regime.

However, what this writing does is remove the truth that the people who were committing these acts were doing so with an indisputable or unshakeable surety, honesty and reality flowing through them – which is to say, writing about a villainous White character, who harms an underprivileged Black character, strips the event of its raw, and ordinary truth. It isn't an extremely shocking event to cite the reality of what the Apartheid police force or racist White

communities for example, were actually capable of doing or enacting upon their 'non-White' counterparts, if it came down to a single decision and as such, what Ndebele seems to encourage is a diversion from writing about the events endured by Black people, whether they are negative or not, specifically through a lens that makes these events seem like anything other than what they *truly* were.

Thus, placing a focus on what constitutes as an 'ordinary' event within our lives, is a crucial and imperative decision for Black scholars and creatives, because what is intrinsically attached to our respective, traditional histories which are diverse, pre-colonial and varying in nature, is the discussion and depiction of the normal, and the ordinary. Dramatising events is a practice that while cited within several African histories as something embedded in the artistic and praise-based practices of people within certain communities, it is not an innately necessary thing to do whenever we have the chance or platform to account for the events which have taken place in our day-to-day lives. This notion then, to create and participate in a culture of creating and reading literature and any type of media, through a lens wherein we are prepared to remove the spectacular adornments of Black life, and be comfortable with depicting the real, truthful and less glamorised perspectives of this, is a reasonable one.

Although I agree with Ndebele's notion, I also offer an argument that stands beside it in support of the art and literature being produced and disseminated within the contemporary era, especially since there is, and has been a call towards a radicalisation of Black celebration, joy, praise, adoration, love and/ or respect. I argue that the introduction of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), famously associated with Steve Biko, is what prompted this, and is what fueled what Ndebele refers to as 'protest literature'.

I do not condemn nor do I see anything wrong with creating an emphasis on the harshness of the realities that Black people were facing in one's work, because in many ways it was necessary to create that much of a dramatic pull or call to attention, as the Apartheid regime was unbearably difficult for those it targeted and harmed. As such, the inclusion of spectacularity and grandeur within Black art is what I can and do support in some instances, because it serves as a reminder that the 'playing field' which many communities of Black people have been placed upon i.e., for several generations, is one that has been unbalanced and set up unfairly, but in an age of creating avenues and spaces for our communities to live and succeed as themselves, it is vital that we document how 'spectacularly' beautiful and/ or

revelatory the possibility for us to create and sustain different trajectories for ourselves is.

Therefore, I argue that while young Black artists living and working in the contemporary 2020s era, may witness or potentially create media that has been (re)produced through visual, textual, and/ or performed lenses that once held histories of discrimination, censorship, spectacularity and/ or harm – we are evidently, a generation that has been called and drawn to more kinetic, fluid and/ or experimental media, and for that reason, it is understandable that much of our praxes pull away from those histories and *gift* us something new/ neo to create, whether or not it borders on spectacularity.

I maintain that the importance of reading Black art and/ or literature through a lens created and seen by Black people, is predicated on the argument that "… we cannot be conscious of ourselves and yet remain in bondage." (Biko, 2004: 55). Steve Biko's writing in *I Write What I Like*, is equally a sight of reference in why I argue that sighting or reading Black Ash/ BLAQ NOIZE matters, because he argues that at the core of removing one's mind from the framing of White influence, rests the ability for the psychological, economical and/ or social liberation or development of Black people. I include this stance because I consider creating or consuming discourse about ourselves as an act that is crucial to taking our ideas, experiences and perspectives further.

Equally, I find it important to state that a Black artist or scholar's recognition of how art or literature (i.e., Black Ash or BLAQ NOIZE) produced by people that they relate to, and their choice to pull references from a *Neo*-Archive in their work, and their understanding of Academic Incense – establishes a *Neo* pathway within their praxis. What their praxis then holds is the potential to become a site of immersion and sustenance for pro-Black artistry across various mediums. Therefore, in moving away from the reliance on the validation of a White world, Black artists within this contemporary timeline are able to generate work that reflects autonomy, authorship, inclusion, progression and accessibility, whilst drawing on discourse and art that has been produced previously as well.

Conclusion

"...the reality is that, as black female critics entering this domain, we risk having our ideas appropriated or go unacknowledged by those who enjoy more power, greater authority of voice, within the existing structure."
(hooks, 1995)

The arguments outlined throughout my writing pull from themes of intergenerational representation i.e., of Black femmes and our communities through drawn, printed and/ or digital media, my theorisation of the *Neo*-Archive within the contexts or confines of Southern African art-academia, artistic/ historical influences, contributions and works that have been active and/ or established to sustain the *passage* and *placement* of Black artists within the industries we are situated, both in and around Southern Africa, and finally, the ways that the 'immortality' of artistic culture within contemporary drawn, printed and digital media has been informed by and sustained through sighting Black femme people and our communities.

Thus, I discuss how these themes correlate with my artistic practice, the works I have produced over the course of the MA degree, and I maintain the notion that the survival and transfer of BLAQ NOIZE, through the validation of and access to the *Neo*-Archive as an academic, psychological and/ or metaphysical resource, is how I am granted an opportunity to create representations of autonomous recollections, while also including depictions of equally relative narratives which have been shared with me by additional Black femme-headed communities, sources, spaces etc.

The value of autoethnography as a medium through which knowledge is produced and/ or disseminated has been extensively debated within academic contexts because of the main argument that the personalisation of perspectives and/ or discourse in research, can be arguably read as unverifiable, unreliable and/ or unrelatable. However, I argue that within the frameworks of many modern-day decolonial pursuits or calls towards the redress, reclamation, 'benefits' or liberation of previously (or presently) marginalized communities, there are still moments where I question how *else* might there be adequate transitions of power, healing or opportunity, if people who have been denied – by governmental laws or censorship for example, the authorship, autonomy and access to platforms where they could see, insert or support themselves, are not able to write, represent, or imagine themselves in some of the contexts and themes that (Western) academia especially, seeks to continue teaching, perpetuating and attaching to anyone but them. The call then for auto-ethnographic approaches to writing, academic or not, especially by, in this case, Black femme artists, is one I maintain as vital and valid.

My creative work is based on historical, familial, psychological and spiritual subject matter, and while those are the themes that I draw from, I am equally aware that my position within the (artistic) spaces that I seek to see myself *placed* in, and that I simultaneously witness several Black femme figures submerge themselves within, is a position that has inevitably, already been carved (or left) out – which is to suggest that before my work or my message is platformed, my identity or appearance will make '*NOIZE*' before I do.

This identity is one tied to a multitude of historical contexts and because of this, the work that I have created may almost always be subjected, much like I would, to projections of what meaning it holds, what purpose it serves and how it will operate or 'behave' within a space full of people, whether they resemble my features or not. With this in mind, I have found it necessary although immensely difficult to reach a point where I am able to create and/ or curate my MA exhibition. This is primarily because, in my own pursuits of writing about the reclamation of representation that many Black femme figures have adopted within their respective careers and praxes, I felt that I was not at a similar level or point within my own praxis to operate on such a confident frequency.

There are inherent, personal reasons behind this, but there are also several social reasons that have fueled it. Without elaborating so much on these issues, I have worked through many challenges to get to this point, and am therefore thankful to discuss and introduce my exhibition 'NOIZE From The *Neo*-Archive.'

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