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South African art historical writing: investigating the genealogy of taxomony in the selected works of David Koloane

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SOUTH AFRICAN ART HISTORICAL WRITING: INVESTIGATING THE GENEALOGY OF TAXOMONY IN THE SELECTED WORKS OF DAVID KOLOANE

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts by Research in Art History
of
Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand

by

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Supervisor: Nontobeko Ntombela

Date: May 2021

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the roots of taxonomic terms such as ‘township art’ and ‘black modernisms’ found in South African art history produced during colonialism and apartheid. South African art history shows a penchant to differentiate the work of black artists from that made of white South African artists. Since white South African writers mostly wrote this history I explore the beginnings of the classifications ‘township art’ and ‘black modernisms’ through the selected work of the black artist, writer and curator, David Koloane. Through the exploration of Koloane’s work I demonstrate that the labels ‘township art’ and ‘black modernisms’ are allegorical; in other words, they can be interpreted to reveal hidden ethical and political meanings. The thesis explores how, at different junctures in the discourse of South African art history, these terms are used to render the work of black South African artists different (read as inferior) and thus, less valuable. Consequently, through the discussion of Koloane’s interest in abstract expressionism, this thesis offers new ways of interpreting the work of black artists in South Africa through drawing on Koloane’s oeuvre.

DECLARATION

I declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work. I have not previously, as a whole or in part, submitted it at any university for a degree.

Declared at the University of Witwatersrand on the 18th May 2021.

.....

Mpho Kumeke

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this degree to my always-supportive mother Mathabang Kumeke and my late father Mafonyoko Kumeke. Your belief in me will always be my source of inspiration and hope both in good and bad times.

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I would like to thank the City of Johannesburg and Department of Arts & Culture for the financial support I received to pursue and finish my degree. A million times thank you to my supervisor Nontobeko Ntombela for her continuous guidance and support through thick and thin. Last but not least, education is a social activity but hunger for education can also be characterised by extreme loneliness, hardship and misery. Thank you to all the people that contributed to the construction of this dissertation, your help and advices are not forgotten.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AICA	Association Internationale Des Critiques D'Art
ANC	African National Congress
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BCP	Black Community Programme
JAG	Johannesburg Art Gallery
MEDU	Medu Art Ensemble
NP	National Party
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
SASO	South African Student Organisation
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UCM	United Christian Movement
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UK	United Kingdom
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand

Introduction

This dissertation investigates the roots of classifications such as 'township art' and 'black modernisms' (cultural stereotypes or controversial forms of knowledge) found in South African art history produced during colonialism and apartheid. My contention is that apartheid's racial categories and cultural stereotypes have found their way into the current South African democratic dispensation established, inter alia, on the principles of equality and social cohesion. These contentions are also noticeable in articles such as the one produced by Fiona Rankin (1990) where she asserts that white people introduced the concept of art as a commodity to African countries. Rankin posits that 'township art' is presented as an edible, attractive style that stresses the colourful liveliness of community life in areas like Soweto. According to Rankin, the painting is often executed in watercolour with "impressionistic" brush strokes and it triggers a rather shallow "sense of self-pity in a decorative and sentimental style" (1990:27).

This interest into the terms and definitions used exclusively for the work of black artists stems from my Honours research project (2012-2014) in which I investigated the appropriation of barber signs from West Africa by the Wits Art Museum (WAM). In executing this research, I became interested in how the barber signs had found their way into the discourse of visual arts. Therefore, I set out to investigate the ways in which the barber signs are displayed and studied at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits). This made me consider South African art history more broadly.

South African art history relies heavily on drawing distinctions between the works of black and white South African artists. Esme Berman (1975) is a prime example of the above. In the book there are ten sections; nine sections are dedicated to artworks made by white South African artists with only one section dedicated to work made by black artists. To further demonstrate this differentiation, in 1988, the academic Gavin Younge (1988) published a book presented as an attempt to celebrate the contribution of black artists to the development of art in South Africa and it features the work of black artists

only. Younge's book became a necessary addition that put the spotlight on lesser-represented voices in South Africa's art historical writing. According to the artist and writer Gavin Jantjes (2011), books like *Art of the South African Townships* played a role in exposing South African art to the international art world. However, this book is unfortunately riddled with ambivalences and ambiguities. For example, Younge's artists are both from urban and rural areas, but after reading *Art of the South African Townships,* one is left unsure of the distinction between artists from urban ('townships') and rural areas.

The inclusion of two white artists' works further complicates the book in that it is not clear whether these artists resided in 'townships' or not as implied through the title of the book. For the academic and writer Lize van Robbroeck (2006:251) the incorporation of Suzanne Louw (1986) and Michele Raubenheimer (1985) in Younge's book is "incongruous" and "expedient".

In terms of South African culture, rural areas are underdeveloped settlements formerly known as 'homelands' or 'Bantustans' under the leadership of traditional leaders (Mandela 1995:401, Peffer 2009: xvii). They are essentially seen as the opposites of urban areas characterised by technological developments and lit cities. Younge's book defeated its own purpose on many levels. As a result, it promotes misunderstanding about art produced by black people in South Africa.[1]

During colonialism and apartheid, the discipline of anthropology was used in a way that was compatible with the segregationist strategies of cultural differentiation that influenced the formation of controversial racial classificatory terms like Bantu, non-European, native, non-white, etc. The psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (1967:17) is of the view that, "the lumping of all Negroes under the designation of 'Negro people' is to deprive them of any individual expression. What is thus attempted is to put them under the obligation of matching the idea one has of them". Fanon's expression could

[1] According to Becker (2017:99), 'Art of the South African Townships' "cemented the term 'township art' as a distinct category". Please see, 'South African Art History: The Possibility of Decolonising a Discourse'.

be used verbatim to describe the purpose and effects of the terms, 'township art' (de Jager 1973, Berman 1975, Younge 1988) and 'black modernisms' (de Jager 1973, 1992, Nettleton 2016) found in South African art literature. These terms were used 'Othering' devices, and they owe their existence to apartheid's classifications of racial segregation mentioned above.

Anthropologists (W.W.M. Eiselen, Pieter Coertze, W.D. Hammond-Tooke, Jo Thorpe, E.J de Jager) working for the Department of Native Affairs and in South African universities were one of the first to research indigenous cultures, and the artwork of black artists.[2] Consequently, the discourse of art history was characterised by its own racial classificatory terms and labelling (i.e. terms like Black art, township art, community art, craft, etc.) that differentiated black artists from white artists in South Africa. These labels emerged at different times, and they have since become part of the discourse of art history in South Africa. In contemporary times these terms are ubiquitously used in reference to the work of black artists. In essence I aim to show that the labels 'township art' and 'black modernisms' serve the same purpose. Simply put, 'black modernisms' is equal to 'township art'.

In the 1990s, with the arrival of democracy a shift occurred and the term contemporary artists took centre stage amid events like the Johannesburg biennales. The term contemporary artist signifies equality but black artists continue to be defined in terms of identity and class as connoted by the labels 'black modernisms' and 'township artists'. In other words, the work of anthropologists began with the work of the 'black modernists'.

For example, de Jager was one of the prolific anthropologists in South Africa whose writing on modern art by black artists is still widely used to date, and he wrote for both private and public institutions.[3] De Jager (1992:16) writes

[2] Please see chapter three of this dissertation, the anthropologist W.W.M. Eiselen was in the forefront in the construction of the detrimental Bantu Education policy.
[3] For example, please see van Robbreock (2005), Nettleton (2011). Edward de Jager was a professor of anthropology at the University of Fort Hare. The Broederbond that promoted Afrikaner nationalism once controlled the University of Fort Hare, and it played a role in the creation of apartheid in South Africa. The University of Fort Hare is currently known as the Historically Black University.

“in human relations, feelings and emotions the Black man is a person who can never be lethargic or uncommitted that: would be contradictory and foreign to his very essence and nature”. This approach to art reading is inadequate in that it only focuses on the cultural aspects of the artists and neglects the formal elements of the work which is what we get to know visual artists about. The fact that de Jager states up front in the book that his hermeneutical approach heavily depended on anthropological methodologies implies that de Jager knew from the beginning that his methods were inadequate in dealing with art. Yet he proceeded to write with authority.

In the South African art discourse similar ways of writing about black artists’ work still persist. This gives cause for concern and agency. The academic and writer Sharlene Khan (2018) discusses a selection of art criticism texts written by white writers about black artists between 2001 and 2015, and with one text from the 1990s. For Khan, the controversial value judgments expressed in these texts can be traced back to the European colonial modernity discourse. Khan (2018:2) posits, “South African writing suffers from a lack of sustained political interrogation of who is writing, the writer’s body and voice, what and whom they are writing about, how they are writing and for what purpose”. Khan’s observation could be translated as a call for research into certain controversial forms of knowledge such as ‘township art’ and ‘black modernisms’. Therefore, Khan’s essay affirms the relevance of this study.

However, it is useful to note that with the advent of democracy as heralded by the first democratic elections in 1994, there have been significant attempts to question hegemonic histories. Most of these attempts find expression in post-colonial theories. Homi Bhabha (1994) is of the view that post-colonial theories “intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven hegemonic development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities and peoples” (1994:171). As a result, in the context of South African art we have seen events, exhibitions, debates, conferences and essays used as vehicles to devise critical ways of analysing issues that relate to cultural differences in

order to subvert the acceptance of antagonistic and ambivalent moments in the history of modernity.[4]

It is also very important to note that some work has been done in relation to other similar controversial labels such as 'community art', 'rural' art, 'transitional art', 'protest art', 'African art' and 'traditional art' which by the way are all used to describe the work of black artists only in South Africa. For example, the writer and curator Khwezi Gule (2007) is of the view that there are some inconsistencies in the manner in which certain artworks are discussed. Gule uses the work of the artist Jackson Hlungwani to demonstrate his point and he contends that, "there is a tendency to write about works of rural artists in anthropological terms, downplaying the aesthetic and formal dimension" (2007:139). Gule's reflection is most relevant to my study as Gule uses the idea of the discipline of anthropology to understand how certain controversial labels emerged within the discourse of South African art.[5]

In order to understand how the different ways of writing about the works of black and white artists in South Africa came about, I analyse the work of Koloane who I think of as a crucial voice in the discourse of South African art. Koloane has written immensely on the subjects of art and art criticism, his work still remains a source of inspiration to many younger writers. This makes Koloane a very important figure in the investigation of genealogies of classifications in South African art historical writing. I set out to investigate why Koloane rejected the label of 'township art' by extension the misnomer 'black modernisms'.[6]

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[4] Inter alia, I am referring to the work of, in alphabetical order: Goniwe (2006,2009,2012), Gule (2007, 2010, 2014), Khan (2007, 2011,2018), Mdluli (2015) Ngcobo (2007) Ntombela (2013, 2016) and Thavamani (2014). Please also see the SAAAH conferences where exclusive terminologies and definitions used to interpret the work of black South African artists have been discussed. Please see for example, 'Art and Social Change' (1986), Re-Write the Art and Architectural History of Southern Africa' (1987).

[5] Gule is of the view that the work of Hlungwani is often translated in relation to his Shangaan background and religious convictions. For Gule, the two methods aesthetic/ formal and ethnic/spiritual balance each other out in reading the work of Hlungwani. Gule (2014) continues his discussion on an online article in which he candidly argues that there is no such thing as a 'Limpopo artist' in reference to Hlungwani who is one of the artists that are called as such.

[6] As succinctly put by Mdluli (2015:18), the writing of Koloane "on South African art history is important, because while it highlights the disparities and inequalities of access to training and resources, it also

In this paper the work of Koloane includes a selection of his writings, exhibitions he curated, and exhibitions in which he participated as an artist. These are all considered forms of writing. I start by looking at an essay titled 'Walking the Tightrope' (1997) by Koloane published in the catalogue that formed part of the second Johannesburg Biennale. The interesting thing about this event is that it formed part of the initiatives to reposition South Africa as a participant in world art affairs after the partly self-imposed cultural boycott of South Africa. In other words, Koloane's writing came at a time when South Africa was busy reimagining itself in many respects including the exploration of new ways of rewriting South African art history. Therefore, I decided to use this historical writing of Koloane to examine what Koloane was talking to in his writing/work.[7]

In 1996 Koloane participated in the Association Internationale des Critiques d'Art (AICA) conference in London where he first presented the essay 'Art Criticism for Whom?. In 1995 he participated in the Africa95 arts festival held in the United Kingdom as a curator and artist. Before his participation in the Africa95 arts festival in 1995 Koloane exhibited a selection of his artwork at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg in 1993 and 1994. It seems that in this period Koloane was particularly busy and it became imperative to me to find out what motivated Koloane during this time.

For clarification reasons, in my exploration of Koloane's oeuvre I opted for a teleological and informative approach as I unpack the purpose of Koloane's work. This work proceeds from the thesis that "there is no such thing as History-that is, a meaningful order to the broad sweep of human events" as Francis Fukuyama (1992:3) notes. In light of this, this research (framework of analysis) is located within the multiple contexts of colonialism/post-colonialism and apartheid/post-apartheid. I specifically explore Koloane's work that was

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illustrates the gaps that still need to be filled in giving a more expanded account of the history of art produced by black people in South Africa, in both scholarship and other institutional frameworks".

[7] 'Walking the Tightrope' is to a large degree an extension of the essay 'Art criticism for Whom? which was first presented as a conference paper in London in 1996 and later published as part of the book *Africa and Art Criticism* (1998) by the author Katy Deepwell.

produced during what is known as ‘the transitional period’ in South Africa and work produced in the early part of the current democratic dispensation. In other words, these historical time frames are easily influenced and overlaps are unavoidable.

The work of Koloane discussed in this dissertation was penned or constructed precisely three decades ago and a lot has changed since then in South Africa, and certainly the world over. This means that this study is in essence a research of historical writing (historiography) therefore I employ a Foucualdian discourse analysis method. In other words, I investigate language and ideology in relation to the role of power and knowledge in society. For instance, what does the language used in ‘Walking the Tightrope’ reveal about the society in which it was produced? This is one of the theoretical questions I hope to explore as I trace the genealogy of cultural stereotypes and taxonomic terms used in the discourse of South African art history to discuss and interpret the work of black artists.

In simple terms, historiography is the study of history and how it is written or the writing of history. Danielle Loraine Becker (2017) in her doctoral thesis in art history offers, “history of historical writing gained momentum as a product of a late twentieth century ideological shift towards an understanding of the nature of constructed knowledge” (2017:17). Becker argues that historiography “allows one not to see history as a recorded truth but as knowledge from a particular perspective: one that requires research that is cognizant of the way in which history has been written, its biases, assumptions and methodologies” (2017:18).

Peter Kosso (2009) suggests that “historiographies are about the present, and the primary concern is that they be used responsibly, not, for example, as tools of power or manipulation” (2009:10). Therefore, my use of historiography is in no way, an attempt to perpetuate hierarchical power relations in the discourse of art history or aggrandize the artist Koloane. I endeavor, rather, to understand the beginnings of controversial classifications that are embedded in art historical discourse of South Africa.

It is also useful to look into the history of 'township art' through the concept of objectification. Objectification is about what things are and what things do in the social world. [8] I demonstrate that black artists who live in 'townships' objectify the life of black people to benefit from the art market of South Africa, which used to be dominated by white people. They paint overly sentimental township scenes as per the overt or implicit recommendations of white art dealers. As noted by Christopher Tilley (2006:60), animals do not change the world to a significant degree and their distribution is dependent on certain environmental limitations. By contrast, humans are found everywhere and they actively create things or "objectify the environment of which they are a part" (ibid.). In other words, they express something abstract in a concrete form. According to Tilley, objectification is the tangible embodiment of an idea. The concept is conceived first and "becomes realized in the form of a material thing" (2006:60). In other words, the world of objects can help us understand how identities of individual persons and societies are constructed. Therefore, as Tilley notes material culture cannot be divorced from culture and human society.

Primarily this study sets out to reply to the question, what was Koloane responding to in his writing? As will be shown, Koloane was one of the rare voices that represented the interest of black people in the visual arts world. Using discourse analysis I investigate Koloane's work as a form of archeological site that consists of strata, ruptures and discontinuities. The work discussed in this dissertation can be seen as 'related fragments' because they were not produced as a single unit of work. For example, when one idea is introduced and is not further discussed, in whose interest is that change or who benefits from that transition?

More importantly, this approach reflects my heightened awareness of the biases that may be found in the analysed work. Also, this strategy is a

[8] According to Christopher Tilley, the idea of objectification can be tracked down to the early nineteenth century in the work of Friedrich Hegel called the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. The founder of modern communism Carl Marx appropriated the Hegelian notion of the dialectic.

reflection of my objectivity and subjectivity in an environment permeated with theories of post-colonialism and post-modernism (e.g. as characterised by skepticism). I investigate the limits imposed by inadequate classifications such as 'township art' and 'black modernisms' so as to reveal their relationship with power. Michel Foucault (2005) explores the normative forms of knowledge and surveys how random taxonomies are accepted without scrutiny. The endurance of taxonomic terms such as 'township art,' and 'black modernisms,' in South African art history may be construed as an unconscious acceptance of arbitrary forms of knowledge that Foucault examines. Taxonomy is a branch of science that is concerned with classification, especially of organisms. According to Foucault taxonomy is concerned with "identities and differences; it is the science of articulations and classifications, it is the knowledge of *beings*" (2005:108, original italics).

The reason I focus on the selected work of Koloane was prompted by the fact that all the work discussed in this thesis was produced during a very special period in South African history. It is no exaggeration to state that the period between 1993 and 1998 was an unprecedented era in terms of the socio-political history of South Africa on many levels. For instance, in 1993 in his opening address of the 'Culture and Development Conference', Nelson Mandela, the to-be first president of the democratic South Africa, pinned his hope on culture to help South Africa change for the better. Also, in 1993 Lorna Fergusson embarked on a fact-finding mission that resulted in the hosting of the first biennale in South Africa. It is for this reason that chapter one commences with the context in which 'Walking the Tightrope' was produced. In 1994 the country held its first democratic elections that rendered South Africa a miraculous country and a beacon of hope, reconciliation and peace for many people around the world.

Chapter one and two analyse the essay 'Walking the Tightrope'. These sections seek to contextualise the thesis by discussing the history of art development in South Africa in relation to Koloane's arguments. In essence, chapter one lays the foundation of this dissertation as I discuss the history of art using the observations made by Koloane in his essay. Chapter two

continues by paying special attention to the history of the label 'township art'. In 'Walking the Tightrope' Koloane explicitly marries the development of art with the broader socio-political history of the country. This allows him to argue that racial stereotypes and controversial classifications found in South African art literature owe their existence to the history of colonialism and apartheid. I pick up on this by investigating the history of townships and how 'township art' emerges/ emerged from these townships.

Chapter three focuses on the essay titled 'Art Criticism for Whom?' (1998). According to Koloane, art criticism was a privilege of white education in South Africa, therefore, art criticism was in essence non-existent in the broader sense of the South African population. Following up on this argument I briefly trace the history of Bantu Education as an attempt to measure the impact of this differentiated type of education on the development of art in South Africa. What effect did Bantu Education have on artists like Koloane who state that they learnt to become artists in unconventional ways? Furthermore, in line with one of the main strands of this dissertation, I demonstrate how elements of anthropology were used in the creation of Bantu Education Act.

Chapter four looks at the exhibition *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, with a particular focus on 'Moments in Art' curated by Koloane in 1995 at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. I explore the meaning of blackness as I discuss the roots of the label 'black modernisms'. I demonstrate that taxonomies like 'township art' and 'black modernisms' are 'Othering' devices, which owe their existence to the phenomena of industrialisation and urbanisation in South Africa. I show how the discursive violence of these classifications endures and entrenched in the ways in which we speak and write about black artists in South Africa today. I also demonstrate that what is disapprovingly known as township art in the country, is outside South Africa framed as modern art (or 'high art').

Chapter five investigates the series of exhibitions titled *Made in South Africa* that occurred between 1993 and 1994 at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg. I discuss Koloane's interest in abstract expressionism. I think

about the ways in which Koloane rejected and challenged the taxonomy of ‘township art’. As in chapter four, I think of exhibitions as ‘speaking subjects’ that use artworks to construct syntaxes that reflect the identity of people and institutions that organised them. As it were, chapter five is the heart of this dissertation as I attempt to offer novel ways of reading Koloane’s work. In other words, this essay is not a “representation of spectacle” to borrow a phrase from Ndebele (1986:144), because I present new challenges and I endeavour to offer new knowledge.

However, since this kind of work has never been done in relation to Koloane I view this study as preliminary. Consequently, the key concepts and concluding remarks are embedded within the last chapter of this dissertation. This strategy helps me undermine, challenge and question the hegemonic and conclusive narratives about the creations of black artists in South Africa. Furthermore, this strategy forms part of the radical methodology I opted for in this dissertation as I trace the genealogy of reductive classifications used to interpret the work of black artists in South Africa through the lens of Koloane.

Chapter One

1.1. 'Walking the Tightrope' (1997)

As outlined in the introduction this dissertation is concerned with how certain classifications (e.g. 'township art' and 'black modernisms') are used in South African art literature to discuss and interpret the work of black South African artists. In this chapter, I investigate the history of the South African art world in order to understand the factors that prompted the emergence of the different ways of writing about black and white artists in South Africa. My investigation into "the ethnicised socio-cultural value judgments", to borrow a phrase from Khan (2018:3), found in South African art historical writing, uses the work (i.e. a selection of writings and exhibitions) of the artist, writer and curator David Koloane as a source of information. The work of Koloane helps us understand the South African art world from a perspective of a previously disenfranchised person.

The economist Amartya Sen (2005) discusses old Indian wisdom in relation to contemporary Indian culture, politics and ambitions.[9] As in South Africa, colonialism in India rendered the indigenous population silent; indigenous forms of creativity and intellectual expressions were relegated to the periphery. Therefore, in this book, Sen recovers old wisdom that was suppressed in the wake of colonialism. He uses this information to understand the contemporary culture of India. Sen (2005:xv) points out that, "voice is a crucial component of the pursuit of social justice". In a society characterised by inequality and racial superiority, Koloane was a voice speaking against injustices in the visual arts. I use the writings of Koloane to reflect on the practice of art writing in South Africa with regard to the national concepts of social cohesion and nation building. I am of the view that the historical writings (work) of Koloane will help us understand the contemporary South African art world.

[9] Please see, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*, Amartya Sen (2005).

In other words, this study takes part in the debate about the enlargement of South African art history as told from a Eurocentric point of view. I contend that the work of Koloane is important in the process of diversifying the South African art history after many years of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa.

Koloane is known for his unwavering critique of double standards and cultural stereotypes found in South African art writing. In this chapter I analyse an essay called 'Walking the Tightrope' (1997) by Koloane. I explore what motivated Koloane as I seek to respond to the questions, how did the history of art development in South Africa have an impact on the writing of Koloane and what does Koloane mean by the title 'walking the tightrope'? I seek to uncover what was Koloane thinking and responding to in his work. In essence, this chapter will help us understand the factors that contributed to the development of art (and 'township art') in South Africa in relation to Koloane's observation. Therefore, this chapter serves to contextualise my research into the genealogy of classifications 'township art' and 'black modernisms'.

In 1997 Koloane contributed 'Walking the Tightrope' to the catalogue that accompanied the second Johannesburg Biennale called *Trade Routes: History and Geography*. In this essay Koloane examines the development of art in South Africa. He offers a brief critique of the apartheid era socio-political space in which South African artists operated using his own observations and personal experiences as a black artist producing art in apartheid South Africa. 'Walking the Tightrope' is a proposition for an enabling environment that will encourage the emergence of a historically informed South African avant-garde movement. For Koloane, any statements that celebrate the period that saw the release of political prisoners, as "user friendly" as connoted by the popular term "Post-Apartheid Era," is a fallacy and myth (1997:35). In other words, the era characterised by democratic rule in South Africa is not necessarily easy or simple to work with in that the racial divisions the

apartheid government constructed are still visible within the South African society.

It is useful to note at the outset that 'Walking the Tightrope' was written at a very fraught political moment in South Africa. Therefore, a revisit to that period is crucial. It will help us understand certain aspects of the period in which 'Walking the Tightrope' was written as I investigate the reasons behind 'Walking the Tightrope'.

Due to the fact that it is impossible to analyse and elaborate on the concepts articulated in 'Walking the Tightrope' in a single chapter I opted, as a starting point, to investigate the context in which 'Walking the Tightrope' was penned in order to understand the thinking and reasoning behind it. How did the context in which the essay was written contribute to the argument of 'Walking the Tightrope'? How did this context shape Koloane's thinking? This explication thus also draws on studies produced after the writing of 'Walking the Tightrope'.

Trade Routes, was preceded by *Africus: Johannesburg Biennale,* which occurred in 1995. I look at the first mega-exhibition in relation to the second biennale as I explore the situation in which 'Walking the Tightrope' was written. This is followed by an analysis of 'Walking the Tightrope' where I highlight the key concepts discussed in the essay.

1.2. The Johannesburg Biennales[10]

Africus was staged a year after the historic South African democratic elections held in 1994.[11] The first democratic elections ended the National Party's (NP)

[10] The first Johannesburg Biennale took place at a very fraught political and cultural juncture in South Africa. On the sport front, for instance, the South African rugby team was preparing to participate in the 1995 Rugby World Cup, which they eventually won. The South African soccer team was getting ready to take part in the 1996 Africa Cup of Nations that the national soccer team won. Both events were seen as unifying factors in line with the vision of social cohesion, harmony and peace in the new democratic South Africa. In the United Kingdom (UK) they were preparing for the Africa95 arts festival that took place over a period of four months. Towards this festival Koloane presented a South African exhibition titled 'Moments in Art: A Story from South Africa' this show formed part of the exhibition *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* held at the Whitechapel in London. Africa95 will be the subject of chapter three.

rule of racial segregation established in 1948. According to the researcher, writer and curator Sipho Mdanda (2011:17), "after 1948, an unprecedented volume of racially discriminatory and repressive laws came into force". Unrelenting racial divisions characterised South Africa. The government colluded with scientists to justify its restraining laws.[12] Subsequently, the indigenous people of the country were subjected to terrifying and dehumanising ordeals while the white population enjoyed the best South Africa had to offer. The first biennale came at a time in which South Africa was starting to politically and socially reform itself after many years of institutionalised racial discrimination. In 1995, South Africa was still very much a racially divided country. The repressive laws of apartheid permeated all spheres of life including the arts. To start with, black South Africans were denied access to art education. Art museums and artistic activities were hardly established and organised in areas of black people. In order to foster reform within the arts in South Africa, *Africus* was organised as a starting point for discussion and reformation, especially in the visual arts. Also, on the economic level, arts and culture events such as the biennale and the yearly 'Arts Alive Festival' were used to reposition and rebrand South Africa as a tourist friendly country in the wake of democracy. Johannesburg in particular was reimagined as a "World Class African City" and a "Gateway to Africa" (Majavu & Pissarra 2011:5).

A catalogue in the same name as *Africus* accompanied the first mega-exhibition that marked the end of cultural isolation of South Africa.[13] For the artist, critic and academic, Colin Richards (1998:76), the catalogue is an

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[11] *Africus* is a Roman word for the colonised territories of North Africa.
[12] Please see the catalogue *Apartheid: The South African Mirror*, Pep Subiros (2007:15), 'Writing White on Black' a doctoral thesis by Lize van Robbroeck (2006: 235).
[13] The lengthy, colourful catalogue features several essays written by curators and contributors. In the preface to the catalogue Christopher Till, the director of the Johannesburg Biennale, explains the objectives and purpose of the exhibition. The introduction to the catalogue by Ferguson follows the preface. In the introduction Fergusson elucidates the backdrop and context in which the first biennale was organised. The catalogue also features essays in alphabetical order by Bongi Dlhomo-Mautloa, Anitra Nettleton, Rasheed Araeen, Coco Fusco, Arthur C. Danto, Adriano Mixinge, Jean-Hubert Martin, Ery Camara, Rashid Diab, Amareswar Galla, Sander Gillam, Sandra Klopper, Thomas McEvilly, Charles Merewether and Apinan Poshyananda. The biennale showcased artworks of almost 300 artists representing 80 countries. Chicken- man Mkhize's artwork titled *BUT ISI TART?,* a road sign sculpture appeared in the biennale's publicity material including on the front cover of the catalogue. The question posed by Mkhize is relevant in the context of South Africa where the term 'South African art' is frequently used to refer to a variety and multi-dimensional objects.

expensive mess, nonetheless it is a "useful document as far as art criticism goes".[14] Therefore, the catalogue is a very important archive that reminds us of *Africus*. It has been used as a salient source of information in this study.

Christopher Till, the director of Johannesburg Biennales (1995:7) points out that *Africus* was presented as a "vehicle through which a start has been made to begin a process of reconstruction and development through artistic interchange and exploration".[15] For Till, the biennale was one of the vehicles through which the injustices of the past could be interrogated and rectified (ibid.) *Africus* sought to use visual art as an enabling implement for debate in South Africa in an era typified by notions of transformation, reconciliation and development (1995:7). It highlighted, among other things, issues of inclusivity and art education through exhibitions and interactions in the form of workshops and training.

However, the art historian and writer John Peffer (2009:123) points out that the name *Africus* angered many people as it was seen as irrelevant, and people thought that a more Afrocentric name would have been more suitable given the history of the fight against colonialism and apartheid. In confirmation of the divided views on *Africus*, according to the artist and writer Candice Breitz (1995), from the beginning, *Africus* engendered an excessive degree of dispute, largely due to the political climate of 1995.[16] Critical questions emerged regarding the biennale's leadership (1995:89). How funding was secured and how artists were selected became topical issues (ibid). Lorna Ferguson was the first to admit that *Africus* was "over-ambitious" (1995:90). Owing to the number of artists and spaces to be prepared, *Africus* was logistically straining, partly as things did not go as smoothly as envisaged. Certain exhibition spaces, for instance, were not yet ready by the time of the opening (1995:90). However, for Ferguson, *Africus* foregrounded the legacy of apartheid in many ways as opposed to presenting a perfect South African

[14] Richards' statement forms part of the book *Art Criticism and Africa* first published in the United Kingdom in 1998.
[15] *Africus* took place in various venues in and around Johannesburg including the Johannesburg Art gallery, Electric Workshop, Gertrude Posel Gallery, Museum Africa, Standard Bank Art Gallery and at the Sandton Art Gallery to name just a few. It happened from the 28 February to 30 April in 1995.
[16] Please see 'The First Johannesburg Biennale: Work in Progress,' Candice Breitz.

narrative to the international community (1995: 9). In the era of apartheid South Africa was in essence an institutionally and racially divided society. To borrow from Fanon (1967:41), apartheid was based on the notion of divided "compartments". The Manichaean world of apartheid was founded on the binary of 'us' and 'them'. Organised hardly a year after the historical general elections that brought apartheid to an end, initiatives such as *Africus* contributed to efforts of dealing with the controversial consequences of apartheid. Linda Givon, for instance, the founder of the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg, expressed fear and ambivalence in reaction to the hosting of the first biennale. She saw this exhibition as "the inevitable opening of our doors. We'll be standing naked in public" (in Ferguson 1995:10). However, the academic Anitra Nettleton of the University of the Witwatersrand thought, "there was no need to present to the world an unproblematic unity typified by good stories" (in Fergusson 1995:9).

Lastly, according to Peffer (2009) huge amounts of money went into the biennale with most of the money coming from the apartheid period cultural affairs department. Some artists complained about the fact that all the money left in the cultural affairs was spent on the Biennale, and there were only a few artists who benefitted from the event. Peffer (2009:124) states that, "many of the top names in South African art even today, most of them white, really started clicking in 1995".

The issue of imbalances due to the legacy of apartheid is at the centre of 'Walking the Tightrope'. In regard to local representation, according to Peffer the biennale seemed to have been dominated by white university trained artists and black rural visionary sculptors. For Peffer, this set up was an unfortunate perpetuation of double standards found in the South African art world in that art was framed and interpreted in terms of false race definitions "where white artists are intellectuals and black artists are intuitive or colourful and represent the community" (2009:123). Peffer's observations are germane to the discussion of cultural stereotypes found in the South African art world. Here we learn that in 1995 as South Africa was celebrating a new dawn,

certain controversial conventions of thinking accidentally slipped into the new socio-political environment.

By and large, *Africus* succeeded in re-introducing the world to South African art and by the same token South African artists were re-introduced to the international art world. For example, a request was made to international curators participating in *Africus* to consider involving South African artists in their own exhibitions abroad (Ferguson 1995: 10). The biennale took place after many years of isolation. According to Ferguson, during the cultural boycott era, South African artists were prohibited from showing their work in any contemporary international biennales.[17]

Even though others felt that it was too early for South Africa to host a biennale, *Africus* highlighted the importance of using visual arts as a unifying activity, especially within a society that is trying to come to terms with its controversial history. For instance, the theme 'volatile alliances' encouraged debate about identity and cultural difference, and the trope 'decolonising our mind' sought to put Africa as a focal point while subverting the effects of colonialism on indigenous art forms and art produced by the African diaspora. Two years down the line the second Johannesburg Biennale was mounted.

Trade Routes maintained the momentum of the first biennale with a special focus on globalisation. A catalogue also accompanied the second Johannesburg biennale.[18] A holistic glance at the catalogue gives one a good

[17] *Africus* was presented as one of the cultural initiatives to celebrate the end of the partly self-imposed cultural isolation. Father Trevor Huddleston was the first individual to publicly suggest the imposition of cultural ban on South Africa following the forceful removals of blacks in so-called white areas in the 1950s. The ANC followed suit through its president in exile Oliver Reginald Tambo. On the basis of philanthropy in 1969, the United Nations in New York officially proclaimed economic and cultural sanctions on South Africa in response to apartheid rule. Countries were banned from trading with South Africa, and prohibited from any cultural exchanges with the country but these sanctions were not legally binding.

[18] The glossy and hefty catalogue contains, among other things, essays written by curators, art critics, artists and experts in the field of humanities. The first few pages contain joint prefaces written by Nicky Padayacha, the Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, Victor Modise, Executive Officer of the Department of Arts, Culture Development, and Facilities and Christopher Till, the Executive Director of the Biennale. These are followed by another preface by Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa, the Director of AICA. Dhlomo-Mautloa's text precedes an introduction by the founder of contemporary African art magazine, academic and curator of *Trade Routes*, Okwui Enwezor. In the introduction, Enwezor states the subject, scope and objectives of the biennale. In alphabetical order essays contributors in the catalogue are, Francesco Bonami, Pedrag Finci, Jean Fischer, Paul Gilroy,

sense of the socio-political environment in which *Trade Routes* was organised, which makes the catalogue a very good source of information vis-à-vis *Trade Routes*.

As a point of departure, *Trade Routes,* under the directorship of the curator Okwui Enwezor (1997:12), rejected the use of the concept of national pavilions as a criterion for selecting artists.[19] Instead of following the traditional format of national pavilions, Enwezor decided to collaborate with six curators based in South Africa and abroad.[20] The invitation criterion concerned itself with the profundity of responses to the theme of globalisation. Artists were not selected on the basis of nationality, and in relation to the formal elements and aesthetics of their art (Enwezor 1997:7). Subsequently, the biennale showcased the work of 145 artists from 35 countries.[21]

According to Enwezor (1997:8), *Trade Routes* came at a time of many socio-political changes in the world including the transition of South Africa from apartheid to democracy. The history of South Africa renders the country a "place of trauma," and it is through contemporary culture that common interests could be forged regardless of the differences manifest in daily reality (ibid.).

However, *Trade Routes* had its fair share of challenges. It elicited disparate views in that the exhibition was praised abroad and it was predominately met with regret within the borders of South Africa. To begin, the second biennale closed prematurely, a month before its planned closing date (Budney 1998:88). The Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, the main sponsor

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Ashaf Jamal, Clive Kellner, David Koloane, Vasif Kortun, Juia Kristeva, Olu Oguibe, Ivor Powell, Hannah le Roux and Saskia Sassen.

[19] In the Venice Biennale (which dates back to 1895) participating countries are financially responsible for their pavilions. Also, the idea of national pavilions means that each state pre-determines how it wants to be represented in the Venice Biennale as the state is responsible for selecting a curator. For these reasons, the concept of national pavilions is seen as perpetuating the loaded binaries of rich/poor, Western/non-Western, civilized/uncivilized, privileged/underprivileged, etc.

[20] In alphabetical order the collaborating curators were Hou Hanru, Kellie Jones, Yu Yeon Kim, Gerardo Mosquera, Colin Richards and Octavia Zaya.

[21] The biennale mostly happened at the Electric Workshop, in Newtown, Johannesburg. It took place from the 2 October 1997 until the 12th December 1997. The exhibition closed a month before its planned closure due to financial matters.

of both biennales, cited financial reasons for the early closure of the second Johannesburg biennale. One of the participating international artists Jen Budney (1998) describes the event as one besieged with financial problems and a hostile local media. The city council, for instance, issued early dismissal letters to the biennale staff as a result of bankruptcy. One local press went as far as to pose the question “Is the Biennale a Fraud?” as a headline on its pole advertisements meant to catch the attention of motorists and passers-by (Budney 1998:89). On the opening night local artists and audience criticised the biennale for its perceived inaccessibility and dearth of engagement with the community (Budney 1998:89). The event was largely seen as targeting the elite class which was then dominated by the white South African population.

Commenting on the 1997 biennale in the May 1998 issue of the Market Theatre newsletter, Koloane re-affirms the above and describes the biennale as characterised by what he calls “frog-leaping consultation” (1998:1). For Koloane, little consultation was done to inform the local public about the biennale. As it were, the biennale was considered an imposition on local communities. This reminded Koloane of the methods used during apartheid to impose events on communities. However, the difference is that the biennale took place at a time when the state was reviewing its policy on visual arts. For Koloane, the biennale was a gathering of the elite postmodernist artists and curators and a perpetuation of inequality particularly in the visual arts.

In her discussion of the anxiety brought about by the biennale, one of the biennale organisers Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa (1998:1) states that, “When I saw a T-shirt that was generated after the closure of the second biennale on Sunday, 18 January 1998 with the words: ‘I survived the second Johannesburg Biennale 1997’, I smiled and on reflection I wondered if I had personally survived it”. Dhlomo-Mautloa largely ascribes the misunderstanding that emerged during the biennale to the fact that in 1997 contemporary art was a new phenomenon in South Africa, and for many years South Africans did not participate in contemporary cultural trends due to the cultural boycott.

According to Dhlomo-Mautloa, the Council took a unilateral decision to close the exhibition, and the organising team was informed of the decision later (1998:2). Enwezor ascribed the early closure of the biennale to xenophobic attitudes manifest in the South African media (Atkinson 1997:1). Critics cited inaccessibility as the reason why the exhibition failed and many felt aggrieved by the appointment of the Nigerian curator Enwezor as the director of the biennale (Budney 1998:89). There was a lack of educational programmes accompanying the exhibition, and people felt that *Trade Routes* focussed too much on global issues rather than on matters affecting South Africans (Budney 1998: 90). Majavu and Mario Pissarra state that, "unsurprisingly, *Trade Routes* failed to draw in local audiences, and alienated many of those who did attend" (2011:7). The exhibition was seen as esoteric and conceptually aloof (ibid.). Its perceived negligence of local issues rendered *Trade Routes* redundant (Budney 1998:90).

On the one hand, in 1997 South Africa was still a very much racially segregated country, apartheid social structure was yet in place. For example, many directors of museums maintained their positions from the apartheid era and some did not want to be associated with the event as they felt that the biennale had nothing to do with their institutions' activities (ibid.). On the other hand, ordinary people and many black artists failed to grasp the benefits and spin-offs of the event (Koloane 1998:1). Financial matters exacerbated the situation (Budney 1998:90). The Canadian artist, Budney, for instance, upon realising the challenges South Africa faced at the time, questions the generosity of bringing international artists into South Africa while certain local artists couldn't even finish their projects for the biennale on time due to financial constraints. South Africans started wondering about the cost of hosting such a prestigious exhibition and questioned its relevance in the country that had recently gained its independence. For instance, Majavu and Pissarra point out that "the two Johannesburg biennales, *Africus* (1995) and *Trade Routes* (1997), were two of the largest and most prestigious international art exhibitions the country has hosted, although they differed in many ways" (2011:17). Some thought that certain socio-economic matters

should be addressed first. The money used to host these large-scale exhibitions was desperately needed in other sectors of the country (Budney 1998:90).

As shown above, the South African media took a lot of interest in the biennales. For the South African art critic and radio talk show host Atkinson, one artwork in the form of billboards by the Canadian artist Ken Lum summarised "the ambivalences that fracture South African art and its perceptions of its global currency" (1998:1). The billboards were strategically placed on either side of the M2 highway. Travelling out of Johannesburg, in easily visible words one billboard read, "I WANT TO STAY" and on the other side of the highway into Johannesburg the other billboard read, "I WANT TO LEAVE". *Trade Routes* was designed to continue the debate on reconstruction and development while re-introducing the world to South African art and the South African public to international artists, as was initiated through the first biennale, *Africus*. It seems that in 1997 the debate got hotter, and some were uncertain about the future of South Africa amidst growing levels of unemployment and crime.

For example, according to Budney (1998:90) the hosts of the biennale kept on reminding the visitors about crime in Johannesburg. As a result, people were confined to the grounds of the biennale which mainly happened at the Electric Workshop. While the atmosphere was joyful, the climate was also tense (ibid). Some visitors avoided the isolation and claustrophobia by making daily trips to Soweto and Alexandra, and by visiting nearby restaurants, which "were for all purposes still segregated and white" (ibid.). The increasing level of crime was brought about by a number of factors.

At the time that *Trade Routes* was hosted, racial tensions were still largely as they were during apartheid. The sporting victories discussed above which were seen, as unifying factors seem to have achieved little to lessen social rifts between communities. This was precisely because economic reformation had hardly begun; in fact, at this time, South Africa's political discourse was dominated by efforts to sustain political freedom. White South Africans were

still leading in the economy of the country. The issue of disparate salaries both in the private and public sectors was beginning to gain momentum. With the closure of companies due to uncertainty and lack of trust in the new political administration, many South Africans lost their jobs and young graduates struggled to find work. The situation looked bleak for many who not long ago had a glimmer of hope. On the one hand, some white South Africans relocated to foreign countries like Australia and the United States of America in fear of crime. As a result, the country was not only deprived of indispensable skills but tax collection was affected too. On the other hand, previously oppressed groups felt that it was their turn to benefit from the wealth of South Africa and this sense of entitlement inspired many commissions of crime both in government and in the private sector, while others felt that the promise of quick money through criminal activities was their only way out of poverty.

Lastly, during the hosting of *Trade Routes* many South Africans were still seeking closure regarding the atrocities committed during apartheid. These are some of the major challenges the biennales were organised against, and it goes without saying that the biennales (28 February-30 April 1995; 2 October-12 December 1997) were incapable of addressing all the socio-political matters that South Africa was grappling with at the time.

The observations and comments discussed above are telling and worth noting as they give us an idea of the context in which 'Walking the Tightrope' was penned. The period in which 'Walking the Tightrope' was written could be best described as characterised by nationalism, collective healing, ambivalence, fear and hope in South Africa. For instance, *Trade Routes* took place a year after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established. The TRC continued until 1998 and it was founded to investigate human rights violations committed between 1960 and 1994, and to give amnesty to political fighters and apartheid security forces that committed political crimes (Younge 2015:57).[22]

[22] According to the chairman of the TRC Archbishop Desmond Tutu of the Anglican Church of South Africa, the TRC, inter alia, sought to "unearth the truth about our dark past, to lay the ghosts of that past

The TRC received extensive media coverage, and while many South Africans saw the TRC as a new chapter in the history of the country, some within the Afrikaner community condemned it at the outset.[23] This shows that during the hosting of the Johannesburg biennales, South Africa was imbued with contradictory feelings of fear, hope and denial. These played themselves out in many ways in the visual arts and in society at large. For example, the task of bringing different race groups to subscribe to the idea of the biennale was a major challenge that provoked questions such as, whose stories were the biennales telling and how were these stories solicited? The fact that South African art has always been associated with the elite and white people did not help the situation such that the subject of race relations was one of the topical issues.[24]

Judging by the mixed feelings in reaction to the 1995 and 1997 biennales it is fair to infer that 'Walking the Tightrope' was written in a period fraught with, hope, conflicts, contradictions and uncertainty in the world of art of South Africa. The world of South African art was trying to deal with the legacy of apartheid, and trying to tackle head-on the challenges of this legacy. However, in terms of the divided views in regard to the biennales it is not clear who were the loudest voices but what can be stated is that many saw the two biennales as perpetuating the very same issues that these exhibitions set out to address. For example, the issue of making art education accessible to everyone in South Africa was not adequately addressed.

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so that they don't return to haunt us (in Younge 2015:57; please also see the documentary 'Bones of Memory' on the website of the South African Broadcast Cooperation). The TRC afforded South Africans an opportunity to debate racial issues and apartheid experiences overtly. The TRC was used as a tool to find closure in relation to human rights violations, which included, inter alia, death in detention, torture and sabotage.

[23] According to the journalist and author Christi Westhuizen (2007:8) the testimonies given during the TRC hearings made "many Afrikaners to sink into denial, disparagingly referring to the TRC as the 'Lieg-en Biegkommisie' (Lie and Confess Commission)". Afrikaans newspaper editors like that of *Die Burger*, Dommisse publicly labelled the TRC 'Biegbank' (Confession Bench or Rack) and 'Wraak-en Vegeldingskommisie' (Revenge and Retribution Commission)" in their headlines (2007:8).

[24] The TRC that was strongly endorsed by the first president of democratic South Africa, Nelson Mandela generated immense debate within the country. According to the curator and writer Kellner (1998) the TRC comes up as a meaningful form of subject in the South African contemporary art practice.

The context provided above helps us piece together what Koloane sought to address in 'Walking the Tightrope,' which is one of the goals of this dissertation. Lastly, the spirit of hope and contradictions that existed in the South African art world during the staging of the biennales are also captured in 'Walking the Tightrope'. In the following section I investigate the subject and key ideas expressed in Koloane's essay in light of the above given description of the environment in which 'Walking the Tightrope' was written. I investigate what Koloane meant by the title 'walking the tightrope' as I trace the development of art in South Africa.

1.3.Walking the Tightrope: A Matter of Death or Life

For whom do black artists (people) walk a tightrope or put an act?[25] During apartheid many black South African artists were compelled to put an act and behave in a way intended to make people (i.e. white art buyers) support them. The tendency to put on an act rendered some black South African artists invisible and barely known, let alone respected and admired within the communities they lived. As a result, some black artists found solace in liquor perhaps because of feeling useless and without purpose. In turn these artists were forced to sustain the performance in order to satisfy their addiction to liquor in the process known as 'hand to mouth'. As a result, some, if not many black artists died poor without any artistic legacy. Thami Mnyele (2009:22), using his own observations as a black artist in South Africa during apartheid spends time explaining the danger of putting on an act. Mnyele elaborates,

> Whenever I looked around me for those among our artists who were famous and said to be successful, their situation shocked me and would tend to confuse me. Here the artists seemed most popular only in white suburban circles; they did not seem to have any material means, house or decent home, and they seemed to have found pleasure in heavy drinking.

What follows is an analysis of what Koloane meant by the phrase walking the tightrope. For the benefit of the reader 'Walking the Tightrope' is originally

[25] In general terms, to walk a tightrope is to consider carefully the decisions or risks that you take in order to deal successfully with a difficult situation. Walking a tightrope is to attempt to establish a healthy balance in a difficult situation: sometimes, it could be a matter of life or death. Also, a tightrope walker is someone who walks along a tightly stretched rope or wire fixed high above the ground to entertain an audience, typically in a circus.

divided into five sections. The first section is what may be called a short social history of South Africa.

1.3.1. "Refugees in the country of their birth"

'Walking the Tightrope' commences with a brief history of South Africa. Koloane paints a picture of a nation that was racially divided, and space was central to this division. More importantly, this division played itself out in all spheres of life including the arts. Koloane touches upon the Land Act of 1912, the Group Areas Act of 1955, the Bantu Education Act of 1957 and the Population Registration Act of 1960. According to Koloane (1997:32), these Acts deprived and suppressed black African communities, and rendered indigenous people "refugees in their country of birth". The introduction of the Land Acts of 1912 and 1936 permitted "white inhabitants" to own 87% of South African land and the remaining 13% was allotted to the indigenous groups of South Africa (ibid.).[26]

According to Koloane, the arrival of the Dutch and British in South Africa resulted in a number of battles over the authority to own land. As a result the myth of the superior race prevailed which prompted power usurpation and domination of those deemed inferior. Koloane (1997:32.) writes, "the tightrope communities had to walk also entailed a minefield of repressive, dehumanising legislation" which denied so-called inferior races land and space.

Thus, black people were rendered aliens in their ancestral land, and removed from fertile grounds to be dumped in faraway arid places. When the NP came into power in 1948, it adopted the notorious Land Act as part of its grand apartheid, and many more draconian laws were introduced including the Group Areas Act of 1955, which limited the movement of black people. It meant that every black person was deemed a criminal. In a period of twenty

[26] In fact the essay starts with a few lines of the poem 'Beyond the Barriers' (1989) which in essence questions the legitimacy of signs put up in apartheid South African parks that gave Europeans full citizenship in Africa while the indigenous people were disavowed this basic right of belonging.

years an estimated number of “3.5 million” people were “uprooted from their homes” as they were being moved from one place to another as “guinea pigs”(1997:32).

According to Koloane, an inferior type of education system was imposed on black people through the Bantu Education Act of 1957. Koloane finishes this section by discussing the Population Registration Act of 1960. Koloane is of the view that this Act was used for the purpose of classifying each and every person in the country on the basis of race and colour for the issuing of identity cards. For Koloane, in a country made up of different people it is impossible to categorise people racially. However, many ‘coloureds’ were changed into white people and white people into ‘coloureds’ with no more than a gesture of pen to paper made by a government bureaucrat.

For the purpose of shedding light on the above observations, the history of racism is in essence the history of the Enlightenment project of Western Europe, which arguably commenced in the 17th century.[27] Post-colonial theorists criticise the Enlightenment project for its ambivalences and contradictions. For example, notions of freedom and democracy were at the centre of this movement but the above values were only bestowed on the Caucasian (or European) race that was seen as a civilised race. This led to the exploitation and dehumanisation of ‘non-European’ cultures through colonialism, slavery and apartheid. ‘Non-Europeans’ were regarded as primitive and backward clamouring for the help of Europeans to rescue them from the folly of primitivism. Liberty and self-determination were denied to ‘non-European cultures’ while fully guaranteed for the people of European descent.

[27] The Enlightenment was a cultural, intellectual, philosophical and social movement whose aim was to enlighten the European public. Notions of individualism, freedom, scepticism, progress, order, understanding and science were at the centre of the Enlightenment project. The Enlightenment intellectuals identified two sorts of primitives. The Khoisan, for instance, were thought of as fossils that couldn’t transcend the nascent stage of human evolution as such the Khoisan’s only fate was extinction. Africans, Arabs and Indians were seen as primitives who could go beyond the phase of development only with the assistance of the superior and civilized European race. Liberty and self-determination were denied to ‘non-European cultures’ while fully guaranteed for the people of European descent.

The various kinds of European settlers that arrived in South Africa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and afterwards were products of the Enlightenment project. In essence, South Africa was viewed as a distant European state hence the construction of homelands (Bantustans) within South Africa where the indigenous people could obtain full citizenship and develop according to their peculiar cultural traits.

1.3.2.The landscape as a personal property

The second section could be called the beginning of Koloane's brief discussion of the development of art in South Africa. It follows a short explication of the establishment of South Africa as a country. The second section commences with a few lines from the speech 'I am an African' (1996) written by the former South African president, Thabo Mbeki. The borrowed lines serve to communicate a sense of being, identity and belonging. Thus, Koloane nullifies the tendency of claiming nature as a personal property.

Koloane proceeds stating that the segregationist laws of the apartheid state to a large degree dictated the kind of art produced in South Africa. One's location in the country predetermined the type of art that one had to produce. According to Koloane, Europeans, through easel painting, introduced modern art in South Africa. Early South African painters focussed mainly on painting landscape. But due to the laws of the country, black artists who documented the beauty of nature in their own personal spaces did so at the cost of immense personal danger. Natural elements such as the sky, mountains, and trees suddenly became properties of white people. Koloane (1997:32) writes, "a few artists lives have been threatened for allegedly stealing a landscape scenery".[28]

[28] For example, the artist John Koenakeefe Mohl in the now famous narrative was kindly advised by a supporter of his work to refrain from producing landscapes because white South African artists had perfected landscape painting. In response Mohl argued that, "but I am an African and when God made Africa, he also created beautiful landscapes for Africans to admire and paint".

For Koloane, the landscape in the context of South Africa has always featured prominently in different cultural expressions. For example, the Afrikaner associated the landscape with power and conquest, which resulted in the idea of the grand Bantustan proposed by H.F. Verwoerd. The politics of space saw communities divided into racial compartments. Subsequently, an artist whose base is the 'township' will be concerned with different issues from that of a landscape artist with a privileged background.

Furthermore, according to Koloane, until the late 1940s, white artists' art resembled art made in the West slightly adjusted to reflect the South African context. The artists Irma Stern and Maggie Laubser looked up to the "German Expressionists" who studied non-Western cultures' objects displayed in museums in Germany (Koloane 1997:32). However, for Koloane, the South African artists Laubser and Stern's interest in the "African visual form" emphasised Europe's fascination with the "exotic" and "primitive" (ibid.). Koloane is of the opinion that owing to the dictates of the art market, black South African artists barely experimented with white subjects except in rare social cases.

According to Koloane the South African artists Cecil Skotnes, Alexis Preller and Walter Battiss were one of the first white artists who drew influence from their immediate surroundings. Skotnes and Battiss, for instance, developed immense interest in the rock art of the Khoisan people. Preller explored the culture and artistic creations of the Ndebeles.

Koloane concludes the second section by stating that the emergence of the figurative art made by black artists prompted the humanistic agency of some white South African artists. As a result, an inter-racial artists group such as Amadlozi were formed and was made up of Sydney Kumalo, Skotnes, Cecily Sash and Eduardo Villa. According to Koloane (1997:33), the point of the matter is at the height of apartheid certain white people identified themselves with "the spirit and ethos of Africa" (1997:33). At the time Skotnes was responsible for the Polly Street Art Centre in Johannesburg, which eventually became "the cradle of urban Black expression" (ibid.).

For the sake of contextualising the above, firstly, in 1997 during *Trade Routes* the debate about subject matter and race in South African art was topical. The artist and critic Carol Becker recalls how a biennale's conference she was scheduled to appear in was dissolved because of heated arguments. Becker states that, "The tensions in the South African art world, politely contained all week, had finally exploded" (in Young 2015:55).[29]

Secondly, Peffer (2009:134) offers in relation to the artist Bill Ainslie that, "Judging from his aesthetic interests at the time, and from the company he kept, it is tempting to term Ainslie a white township artist". Ainslie befriended a number of black artists including Dumile Feni, Louis Maqhubela, Ezrom Legae, Ben Arnold, Lucky Sibiya, Eric Mbatha, and Koloane. However, none of these black artists experimented with white subject matter in their work. This could be ascribed to a number of factors including apartheid legislature, access to art education, and the fact that the relationship between black and white artists during apartheid was based on subtle and overt power relations. For example, black artists were forbidden to be in so-called white areas at a certain time while white artists were at liberty to explore South Africa, as they wanted at any given point in time. Also, the white dominated art market would have responded negatively to the gaze of a black man thus depriving black artists of their income through art making. In other words, black artists had to perform their blackness in order to be considered germane. They had to represent the life of black people for the white viewer. Somehow preserving the already established psychological and physical differences (and borders).

[29]According to Young (2015), 'Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in South African Contemporary Representation', by Enwezor provoked a heated debate around the issues of identity, appropriation and visual culture in South Africa. In 1999 an anthology of essays titled 'Grey Areas: Representation, Identity, and Politics in Contemporary South African Art' was published in response to Enwezor's essay. According to Peffer (2009:282), *Grey Areas* is a title of a collection of writing on race and representation in art after apartheid. The volume does not explain the official use of the term during apartheid; it discusses the work of black artists in a brief manner. It does not discuss the history of art before 1994. For some the main goal or concern of the essays is to defend Breitz and other white female artists against the accusation of art critics Enwezor, Olu Oguibe and Kendell Geers that "their aesthetic appropriation of the image of the black body was insensitive" (ibid.).

Lastly, the debate about who has authority to represent whom in visual arts became heated in the late 1990s. For instance, Enwezor (1996) discusses the dangers of white South African artists' tendency to historicise the desires of black people. Enwezor was commenting specifically on the work of Penny Siopis and Candice Breitz who reproduced images of colonial Africa in their work. For Enwezor, the appropriation of images that depict indigenous Africans in various states of suffering and powerlessness only gives currency to cultural stereotypes that were produced during colonialism and apartheid. White South African artists should rather explore their own histories, experiences and heritage as subject matter in their work.

The issue of representation is very important as it relates to one of the arguments of this dissertation. Black artists in South Africa were somehow steered towards a particular vocabulary of expression. As will be shown this had an impact on the perpetuation of sentimentalised township scenes by black artists as per market recommendations.

1.3.3. Art as a tool to express dissent and a vehicle to lobby

In the third section Koloane discusses how the visual arts during apartheid became an implement to resist apartheid, and how certain international visual artists supported the fight against apartheid through simple yet profound gestures.

Koloane states that the 1980s saw a rise of the arts being used as a tool to express dissent against the rule of apartheid in South Africa. In 1982 the Medu Art Ensemble (MEDU) a cultural group established by South African exiles living in Botswana organised a conference called *Culture and Resistance Symposium and Festival of the Arts*. In attendance were academics, political activists, and artists living in exile and in South Africa.[30] In the conference the artistic expressions presentations, which included the visual arts, theatre, poetry and music, narrated the story of apartheid in South

[30] The location (i.e. Botswana) of the symposium made it impossible for the South African government to prohibit it from taking place as it was beyond the borders of South Africa.

Africa as experienced by the oppressed masses of the country. To many white participants in the conference the different forms of suppression metered out against the oppressed masses in South Africa were for the first time revealed. One of the symposium resolutions was the identification of the arts as a potent tool in the fight against apartheid. Cultural workers as artists were called, and were made to realise the futility of the freedom of creating art in a society typified by racial superiority and prejudice. According to Koloane, the 'Resistance and Culture' conference played a significant role in planting the seeds of cultural resistance in South Africa. In 1985, South African people of different skin colour, creed and religion founded a mass democratic movement called the United Democratic Front (UDF). The UDF, which consisted of South Africans from all walks of life, including parishioners, professionals, labour, students and the youth put the arts in the centre of the culture of resistance. Printmaking became one of the effective ways used for communication, and was also used as a mode of resistance. Art centres were not just spaces to share ideas and to make art but they also became spaces of political education and cultural consciousness.

Koloane concludes the third section by stating that, the unjust laws of South Africa prompted the agency of the international community. In 1980, for example, the artists Enerst Pignon-Ernest and Antonio Saura established an organisation called Artists of the World Against Apartheid. This organisation was used as a vehicle to lobby international artists to sympathise with the oppressed masses of South Africa. The organisation put together a travelling exhibition; among the exhibitors were Donald Judd, Alberto Burri, Malangatana Ngwenya, Wilfred Lam and Skunder Boghossia. The collection of the exhibition was later kept in France to be donated as a foundation collection for the Museum of Apartheid in Johannesburg. Koloane (1997:33) writes,

> Ernest Pignon's idea was simple yet dynamic. It asked artists to give a work of art in support of the anti-apartheid struggle, and thereby offer to the people of South Africa the experience of sharing visual ideas, something Apartheid denied them.

For Koloane, the irony of the matter is that many white South African artists who directly benefitted from apartheid showed little empathy towards those who had been oppressed for decades.

In summary, the idea of 'cultural workers' was also prompted by the perception that certain artists were individualistic. Such sentiments were expressed particularly in relation to artists who produced the so-called township art. Some members of MEDU the organisers of the conference went on to become fierce critics of 'township art'. The artist Mnyele, for example, was one of the vocal critics of 'township art'. I further explore this issue in chapter five of this dissertation.

1.3.4.African roots and identity

In the fourth section Koloane briefly discusses how apartheid racial categories found their way into the visual arts in South Africa. As a result, classifications such as 'African art' were used to justify the expectations of the dealers and art market. For Koloane, racial segregation hindered South Africa from becoming one of the cultural hubs in the world.

Koloane proceeds stating that the seemingly unbreakable system of apartheid came to a screeching halt through negotiations, a process that was globally characterised as miraculous (Koloane 1997,Young 2015). For the purpose of completely breaking down the elements that kept apartheid together and to bring stability to the country many initiatives saw the light of day through commissions and other similar actions. For Koloane, immediate attention was of crucial importance in areas such as land restitution, education, housing and healthcare. In terms of art, Koloane (1997:34) writes,

> If there is anything the apartheid machinery had in abundance, it was the religious labeling and classifying of things according to racial categories: Bantu, non-white, non-European, native, plural, other, coloured, and finally African. It was not surprising that the work of black artists should have acquired a label or classification to distinguish it from white or European artists.

For Koloane, there was an urgent need for the investigation of the racial classifications used to differentiate the work of black artists from that of white artists in South Africa. According to Kolane, the changes that permeated the country in the years leading to 1997 had hardly affected the visual arts world in a significant manner. For example, the marketplace was still controlled by white people; the usable infrastructure remained in white areas. In the communities of black people artists were still viewed in a bad light in that they were still seen as "documenting day-to-day events for the benefit of an affluent white clientele"(1997:34). Most of the patrons had never set foot in 'townships' to experience the circumstances under which artists make art. For these art buyers, the appalling conditions of townships had "little or no effect" on the artwork produced by black artists in townships (ibid.). Koloane elaborates, "the crowded, overflowing conditions appear to them as something out of the Van Gogh 'Potato Eaters' series"(ibid.).[31]

The art market dictated to black artists and guided them in relation to what black artists should produce. This was done in fear that black artists "will lose their identity or roots" (Koloane 1997:34). Particularly, dealers in "African art" encouraged black artists to focus on township scenes, i.e. crowded township streets with an emphasis on mother and child, musical and sheeben sceneries. Koloane states that, "it is not difficult therefore to realise that artists who fall victim to this cycle become programmed to the dictates of dealers and their work is often reduced to a craft-like thematic formula"(ibid.).

Koloane argues that, the previous government lost the opportunity to unite South Africans. The city of Johannesburg, for instance, by virtue of its diverse cultures could have been a mega cultural hub alongside cities such as New York, London, Cologne, Berlin and Paris.

It is clear from the above observations that apartheid laws hindered the development of art in South Africa. The separation of people on the basis of

[31] According to Koloane there are exceptions though which include "political activists, religion ministers and so forth" (1997:34). Individuals like Joe Slovo and Helen Joseph who "are buried in a Soweto graveyard"(ibid.)

race contributed to the construction of divisions in the art world of South Africa. These divisions manifested themselves in many ways including how black artists are written about, how their work is received and valued. Lastly, these divisions also contributed to the emergence of 'township art'.

1.3.5. A recipe for a Dadaist poem

The last section of Koloane's essay begins with a poem titled 'To make a Dadaist poem' (1993). This poem demonstrates how chance is used in writing a Dadaist poem. Koloane uses the poem as a metaphor to describe the alleged emerging South African avant-garde movement. For Koloane this idea is as "incongruous as the recipe for a Dada poem" (1997:35).

Koloane commences by stating that in the South African art circles there is an intentional atmosphere of "amnesia" and "the immediate past" is considered irrelevant by means of denials (1997:34). According to Koloane, the essay 'Art Criticism for Whom?' was first presented at a conference in London organised by the British division of AICA. In the paper Koloane explains the intricacies of the situation in South Africa as a result of glaring differences in resources between black and white artists. For Koloane these inconsistencies hinder any form of debate between artists. According to Koloane his paper was received rather negatively and was seen as depressing by some in the audience including a South African colleague. Koloane was further distressed when a Nigerian academic/artist who had never been on a fact-finding mission to South Africa accused him of exaggerating the situation in the country. The artist implied that Koloane was maybe reluctant to make the essential "paradigm shift beyond apartheid syndrome" (1997:34). Koloane was of the view that the main point of the situation was that artists in South Africa not merely had to "walk a tightrope" between two disparate worlds, the one being the uninterested and under resourced, and the other being the power of funding and promotion- but also artists had to "run the full Apartheid gauntlet" (1997:35).

According to Koloane, the period in South Africa characterised by the release of political prisoners and the unbanning of political organisations was wrongly dubbed the Post-Apartheid era. It was characterised by obsessive attempts to “embrace a supposedly user friendly Post-Apartheid Era” (ibid.). For Koloane in a surprising twist of things it is the people who benefitted from apartheid that are signalling the new era instead of the suppressed communities. This forms part of the efforts to integrate with the international visual arts world; the immediate past seems to have been dismissed as immaterial as though asserting: “Let bygones be bygones” (ibid.). According to Koloane the enthusiasm as expressed in some publications that there is an emerging avant-garde movement in South Africa draws on the flawed dismissal of the past as irrelevant. For Koloane in the post modernism period, appropriation is one of the popular modes of expression. Therefore, what may seem innovative in South Africa in other parts of the world it might be old-fashioned. In essence everything produced currently is either a copy or a variation of something made a little time earlier. Koloane states that (ibid.), “appropriation within postmodernist framework represents an open-ended licence for artists to copy regardless of whatever image they deem necessary in their diverse explorations”. In terms of the local context appropriation has also protected or diverted attention from racial issues. Koloane was of the view that certain artists fail do draw inspiration from their immediate communities as though these artists want to remain nameless without exposing who they are and their goals as artists. For instance, it is easy for portraiture artists to draw or photograph black subjects and neglect their own existence as they appropriate wholesale the existence of others. For Koloane (1997:35), within the arts it is clear that “a creative ambience is one of the primary preconditions”.

Koloane continues stating that the beneficiaries of apartheid have a role to play in reversing the psychological onslaught orchestrated to imbue all spheres of communities during apartheid. The lack of interaction between black and white artists through an academic debate makes the idea of an emerging avant-garde movement seems absurd. No amount of intellectual justification can explain the fallacy of an arising South African innovative

movement. For Koloane, revolutionary solutions are necessary. Socio-economic factors such as proper housing, education, health system and job opportunities contribute to a healthy and eventually creative society. The amount of creativity that still permeates communities defies logic despite the apartheid government efforts to discourage creativity among communities. According to Koloane, many black artists still produce art, with a few exceptions, “under the most appalling conditions” (1997:35). The creative liveliness that seems to be arising from an ostensibly sterile and arid environment is a signal “towards a new horizon” (ibid). Koloane finishes by offering that the South African art story cannot afford to be told through self-righteous fragments and half-truths. It should be narrated in a clear and indisputable “chorus” (ibid.).

Having discussed the key concepts in Koloane’s essay. The rifts constructed by the apartheid system as captured in ‘Walking the Tightrope’ played themselves out in various ways. All spheres of life in South Africa were regulated on the basis of racial superiority and cultural differences, which resulted in everlasting consequences for both the subjugated and conqueror. It is apparent that one of the things Koloane was thinking about in his essay were the beginnings of controversial classifications used to discuss the work of black artists only in South African art historical writing.

What this means in regard to the argument of this dissertation is that the principles of separation as fostered by the apartheid government informed the kind of art produced in South Africa. This also tells that the tendency to differentiate art made by black artists from that of white artists in South Africa owes its existence to the ideology of unequal separation.

As Koloane noted South Africa would have been a cultural hub if the government of the NP had striven to unite South Africans. Perhaps, there would have been no need for studies about the controversial taxonomies used to interpret the work of black artists only in South Africa.

1.4. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to investigate the history of the development of art in South Africa as observed by Koloane in 1997. In order to respond to the main question of this long essay, I set out to explore how the history of the development of art has impacted the work of Koloane. I commenced this chapter with an extensive description of the context in which 'Walking the Tightrope' was written. I then embarked on an analysis of 'Walking the Tightrope' zooming in on key concepts discussed in the essay. In line with the main argument of this thesis I traced how certain racial classifications developed in relation to Koloane's observations. In essence, chapter one can be viewed as a contextualisation of the environment in which 'township art' developed.

In spite of the Johannesburg Biennales success in reintroducing South Africa to the international community after three decades of cultural isolation, for many South Africans, the Biennales missed the opportunity to address socio-political and artistic issues specifically related to South Africa and the African continent at large. In 'Walking the Tightrope' though, it seems that Koloane was acutely conscious of the need to speak to specific matters pertaining to South Africa. His focus on the history of South Africa and how visual arts developed in the country is evidence of the above. 'Walking the Tightrope' clamours for reformation and was aptly presented during an event that fostered change in the South African visual arts domain.

Chapter Two

2.1. A short history of the expressionistic form of art called 'township art'.

> Black artists are not expected to venture beyond certain thresholds in their work, the primary reason being the fear from dealers that they will lose their identity or roots. What is being advocated in this concern is that the artists should maintain the status quo by sentimentalizing township existence for the benefit of the market expectations (Koloane 1997:34).

In this chapter I endeavor to track the roots of 'township art' in relation to Koloane's critical arguments and observations as discussed in the essay 'Walking the Tightrope' (1997).[32] I demonstrate the interconnectedness of art making with certain socio-economic forces as I attempt to explain some of the factors that contributed to the development of 'township art'. More importantly, I touch upon the market demands, destitution and agency of black artists so as to give a well-nuanced account. For clarification purposes, the aesthetic of 'township art' includes, inter alia, sentimentalised compositions of corrugated shantytowns, scenes of people drinking in shebeens, crowded township streets with women doing laundry in communal taps and children playing, etc. The canvas is characterised by expressionistic marks, fuzzy edges of objects and contrasting bright colours. Figures are depicted in cubistic distortions with elongated body parts, and in most cases facial expressions are not emphasised.

As mentioned in chapter one, Koloane is known for his position against the controversial forms of knowledge and cultural stereotypes found in South African art historical. In the previous chapter, inter alia, I set out to investigate the development history of art in South Africa and what Koloane meant by the title 'walking the tightrope'? 'Walking the Tightrope' gives a brief assessment

[32] Please see chapter one of this thesis for the discussion of the context in which 'Walking the Tightrope' (1997) was penned. 'Walking the Tightrope' is featured in the catalogue that accompanied the second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997.

of the apartheid era socio-political space in which South African artists operated. Koloane uses his own observation and personal experiences to make certain arguments about the conditions in which black artists produced their art. He advocates for an enabling environment that will encourage the appearance of a historically informed South African avant-garde movement. For Koloane, any assertions that celebrate the period that saw the release of political prisoners, as "user friendly" as connoted by the popular term "Post-Apartheid Era," is a fallacy and myth (1997:35). According to Koloane, the era characterised by democratic rule in South Africa is not necessarily easy or simple to work with in that the racial divisions the apartheid government constructed are still visible within the South African society.

In chapter one, I explore the history of the South African visual arts world so as to understand some of the factors that prompted the emergence of the disparate ways of writing about black and white artists in South Africa as expressed in 'Walking the Tightrope'. In essence, chapter one serves to contextualise my study of the history of the problematic classifications 'township art' and 'black modernisms'. In chapter two, I continue with the discussion of the development of art in South Africa with a specific focus on the emergence of controversial racial categories as expressed in 'Walking the Tightrope'.

This chapter demonstrates how the term 'township art' was used to establish differences between the works of black artists and white artists in South Africa. Such a categorisation rendered artwork made by black artists less valuable (or completely valueless). This writing convention was used to rule out any possibility of equality between black and white South African artists. My contention is that an analysis of South African art literature written in the 1930s until the latter part of the apartheid era reveals the desire of certain white art writers to sustain a cultural relationship with Europe while openly and proudly self-identifying as South Africans or Africans (or 'Afrikaners'). Furthermore, in accordance with the principles of self-determination, I argue that artists were not passive victims; they managed to survive while at the

same time documenting for future generations particular patterns of thinking in the history of South Africa.

In his brief review of literature produced by black writers in South Africa the writer Njabulo S. Ndebele (1984), discusses the emergence of some new writings in South Africa during apartheid. Commenting on 'protest' literature that emerged during apartheid, Ndebele (1986:149) poses the question, "why the misnomer protest?". It is like Ndebele was also thinking about the equally worrying misnomer 'township' when he formulated the above question, and I carry this through in this chapter. Ndebele continues, "the misnomer devalues the literature as art since 'protest' carries the implications of political and specifically expository declaration of dissent. The misnomer is obviously taken from the concept of politics of protest" (ibid.). As will be shown below the classification 'township art' also renders black South African artists work less valuable. Similarly, the term 'township art' clearly owes its existence to the idea of space politics. It connotes class. I argue that black South African artists do not self-identify their art as 'township art'.

The writer Matsemela Manaka (1988:15) briefly touches upon the idea of space in South Africa as connoted in the term 'township art'. He contends that,

> Because the artists lived in the townships and their art was a portrayal of the joys and agonies of the township life, they were labelled 'township artists'. This is a reflection of the racist arrogance of the white South African experience. The art which is expressive of the experiences of white people in town, city or suburbs is not called 'town art' or 'city art' or 'suburban art'.

Given the fact that Koloane was born and brought up in Alexandra Township, this chapter investigates the factors that contributed to the development of so-called 'township art' in South Africa so as to shed light on how Koloane evaded and challenged the label 'township art'. Since the 1970s until the 1990s black South African artists were differently labelled makers of 'township art'. Perhaps this is the reason Koloane touches upon the emergence of racial categories in South Africa, which eventually influenced the development of controversial classifications in the South African art world. This is very

important in relation to the main question of this thesis; it helps us understand what Koloane may be replying to in his writing/ work.

This chapter commences with the history of art in South Africa as per Koloane's observations so as to give the reader an idea of the context in which 'township art' developed. I then define what we mean by the term art. This is followed by a brief history of the development of townships in South Africa. The former discussion borrows from recent definitions of art. The latter explication draws on the observations of Koloane as captured in 'Walking the Tightrope'. I unpack Koloane's observations while discussing the emergence of townships in South Africa. Lastly, I briefly look at the history of the Polly Street Art Centre to explore the impact of this centre on the emergence of so-called township art.

2.2. Easel Painting in South Africa

According to Koloane (1997:32), the different European people who arrived between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries in South Africa introduced easel painting to the country. Koloane continues stating that many white South African artists who operated in the early twentieth century received their art education in Western Europe and their subject matter did not differ from their European counterparts and influencers.[33]

However, it should be made clear that the purpose of this section is to contextualise Koloane's writing and not to argue about the significance of European trends emulation. I seek to demonstrate that art in South Africa was greatly seen as a European heritage, and it was seen as a reflection of class and elitism. It is for these reasons that black artists were expected to work differently from white artists as black people were seen as inferior and not part of the elite.

[33] Irma Stern (1894-1966), for example, studied in Germany under the famous German expressionist Max Pechstein (1881-1855). Alexis Preller studied in the School of Arts in London in 1934 and in 1937 he continued his studies in Paris at Le Grande Chaumiere.

In elaboration, the white population of South Africa maintained its relationship with Europe through a number of ways including by means of collections, art education and exhibitions. For instance, one of the first public art collections in South Africa was shipped from London in 1910 a few months after the formation of the Union of South Africa (Carman 2006:1). To date the collection constitutes the foundation collection of one of the oldest public galleries in South Africa, the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG)[34]. Even the South African fine arts and art history curriculums in universities were modeled in relation to Western European art. According to Becker (2017:107), Heather Martienssen, for instance, the first professor of fine arts at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) obtained her doctoral degree from London (Europe) in 1947. So did Marie Stein-Lessing, the lecturer and art historian who obtained her PhD degree from the University of Berlin.

Martienssen and Stein-Lessing with imported knowledge from Europe occupied strategic positions in the Wits University Arts Department. Wits was founded in 1896 as a mining school, it obtained the status of a university and its current name in 1922. This makes Wits one of the oldest English-medium universities in South Africa if not on the African continent. However, African art history was only introduced in 1978 with the arrival of Anitra Nettleton (Becker 2017:155). At first, focus was on art of central Africa. No artistic creations made in the southern Africa area were studied until later due to a cited lack of academic research on art objects produced in the southern region of Africa at the time (ibid.). This was a countrywide practice (please see Becker 2017).

Art education for black people could only be accessed through missionary schools and art centres like the famous Polly Street Art Centre. The establishment of Polly Street Art Centre saw many black people taking up art as a hobby and later as a career. Art produced in such centres found its way to privately owned white commercial galleries, and it caught the attention of art critics and art writers.

[34] Please see Carman, J. 2006.Uplifting the Colonial Philistine: Florence Phillips and the making of the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Wits University press: Johannesburg.

White art critics saw modern art by black artists as mere mimicry and an imitation of Western culture. The Eurocentric character of art and art history of South Africa was maintained through a number of ways including literature and exhibitions. For example, in art publications like *Kuns in Suid-Afrika* (1935) and *Skone Kunste in Suid-Afrika* (1951), modern art created by black artists was not featured at all. F.L. Alexander (1962) devotes a separate section titled 'The African and the Bushman' to black artists. The South African art historian Esme Berman (1975) has a chapter set aside for the so-called township art. Arguably, the first attempt to absorb modern art by black artists into the canon of national South African art was made by Berman. But in analysis her work arguably reflects a particular way of thinking in apartheid South Africa. Berman was a part of the community of white art writers that unconsciously perpetuated the notions of racial differences in South Africa as per the constitution of the apartheid government.

In response to the double standards manifested in the ways in which black and white artists were written about mostly during apartheid, Manaka (1988) is of the opinion that black artists were simply trying to record their surroundings and immediate environment. Indeed, artists have always been interested in documenting life in its different manifestations.[35] As I argue, in line with Foucault's exposition of discourse analysis, any form of writing (discourse) is rooted within the society it was produced in or it is a record of its time and culture. For me, the genre of 'township art' tells us more about the

[35] For example, the Impressionist artists who worked outdoors in order to capture an accurate impression of light and atmosphere. *Springs* (1873) an oil painting by the French artist Claude Monet (1840-1926) is a typical impressionist work that depicts colours of a beautiful spring. During the late 1870s and 1880s impressionists were primarily preoccupied with expressing their own individual impressions without respect for established artistic rules (Lissoos 2004:25). The Impressionist painters renounced both the exact scholarly style and the emotional concerns of Romanticism, and their interest in objective representation, in particular of the landscape, was influenced by early photography. Impressionism was encountered first with suspicion and derision, but soon became profoundly influential. Its leading promoters included Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Cezanne, Degas, and Sisley. Or the genre of expressionism through which the artists seeks to express emotional experience rather than impressions of the external world. Expressionists typically repudiate orthodox ideas of beauty or harmony and use distortion, exaggeration, and other non-naturalistic devices in order to emphasize and express the inner world of emotions. For example, the paintings of El Greco and Grunewald epitomise expressionism, but the term is also used in relation to a late-19th-and 20th-century European and specifically German movement tracing its origins to Vincent van Gogh, Edvard Munch, and James Ensor, which insisted on the primacy of the artists feelings and mood, often incorporating violence and the grotesque.

intended viewer than it says about the subject of 'township art'. Black artists put up an act to please the white art market as advised by white art dealers. This was in line with the idea of separate development promoted by the apartheid government. Black Africans were re-directed to their Africaness so as to help them develop according to their culture and particular characteristics. As will be shown in chapter three Bantu Education was also created and conceptualised on the basis of re-orientating black Africans towards the so-called Bantu culture which was imagined as totally different from the culture of Europeans. As I argue in this dissertation there was a need to seek out differences, Manaka's observation reveals the biases of the day in regard to art writing in South Africa. The discourse of art writing was used to perpetuate racial rifts, borders and differences institutionalised by the system of apartheid.

In terms of exhibitions, until the latter part of the 1940s in national and international South African art exhibitions black artists' work was sometimes not included or special subcategories like the "Native Exhibition" were constructed under which the work of black artists was discussed. In 1948 the inclusion of Sekoto's painting in the South African Association of Arts exhibition presented white art writers with difficulty in terms of framing Sekoto's work.[36]

As indicated above black artists were indeed not taken seriously. The JAG acquired its first painting called *Yellow Houses*: *A Street in Sophiatown* (1940) by a black artist in 1940, three decades after the JAG opened to the public. This was a widespread tendency, for instance, in Cape Town the South African National Gallery founded in 1871 reviewed its acquisition policy only in the 1960s with the purchase of its first work by a black artist in 1964.[37]

[36] What the academic Lize van Robbroeck calls a "hermeneutical and taxonomic problem" (2005:148).
[37] The acquisition of black artists' work did not always mean that these works would be immediately shown. For example, the South African art critic and writer Ivor Powell (2008:40) argues that the Gerard Sekoto painting, "to the best of my knowledge", was "never exhibited in the gallery's permanent collection" until later in the history of JAG.

The inclusion of black artists' work in public collections was prompted by many factors, including the interest in the exotic, the socio-political changes in the world at the time, and a realisation of the limits of the word ‘art’, among other factors. Art dealers were not only dealing in art but they also became advisors to black artists to ensure that black artists adhered to Eurocentric standards pertaining to ‘African art’ and what this should look like (Deliss 1995:263). This resulted in an imagined township existence that amused the white dominated art market which the apartheid government misinformed of the real situation in South African townships. According to the art historian John Peffer, Keith Beavon once wrote that white South Africans thought of townships as towns separate from their own towns (Peffer 2009:192). The requirement to depict sentimentalised township scenes restricted creativity and, the freedom of expression and association. For black artists this was some kind of a dilemma. Choosing not to heed the advice of dealers meant many things, including the prospect of having no income. As will be shown below some artists took note of the dealers’ counseling while others rejected them. In conversation with Powell during the exhibition ‘Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa’ in 1995, Koloane (Powell 1995: 261) points out that,

> If you didn’t do this kind of thing [township art] it was harder. In 1977 and 1978 I started experimenting with collage, and I took some of these pieces to Gallery 21. The first thing the owner said was that I didn’t do the work...because this is so “un-African.” He said for that reason he didn’t feel comfortable buying it.

It seems that looking at stylised colourful pictures of township scenes was more pleasing to the art market of South Africa. The idea of the exotic that gained currency during the European enlightenment seems to have given impetus to the demands of the art market of South Africa during colonialism and apartheid. Ironically, on the one hand, as shown above, white South African artists drew inspiration from their European counterparts and their art was seen as ‘original’. On the other hand, white art dealers criticised black artists like Koloane who experimented, for instance, with collage or abstract art. His art was seen as ‘un-African’ implying that Koloane was just a misguided imitator who produced ‘unoriginal’ European art. I argue here such attitudes reveal the desire to maintain a cultural relationship with Europe while overtly and proudly self-identifying as South Africans or Africans (‘Afrikaners’).

This is a prime example of people who want two good things at the same time.[38]

It is also useful to note that institutions like the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) and Funda Centre, established by black people to cater for the artistic needs of the black population in South Africa, were sites of art production mainly for the consumption of the white art market. These institutions somehow perpetuated the forms of classifications, and the separation of black and white artists in South Africa.[39]

Shifting our attention back to Koloane, one could only imagine the feeling of rejection Koloane experienced. Predetermined ideas about African art made it more difficult for artists like Koloane who were trying to break away from the limited iconography of 'township art'. In the 1970s all black artists in South Africa were unfairly classified as makers of township art.[40] In fact, the South African artist Kay Hassan (2008) contends that, as recently as in 1994 black South African artists were still expected to produce 'township art'. Hassan elaborates that "the so-called township art was so hot-they wanted us to do things that we were used to do" (in Gule 2008: 81).[41] The South African art market was so fascinated by the ubiquitous township stereotypical scenes depicted in colourful paintings. Hence, certain black artists became victims of manipulation who opted for the kind of art that lost its uniqueness, a hallmark of European modern art. However, I contend that artists were not passive victims; they managed to survive while simultaneously recording for posterity certain patterns of thinking in the history of South Africa.

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[38] Afrikaner collective awareness can be tracked back to the 1870s. Van der Westhuizen is of the view that Afrikaner nationalism is an ideology designed to reform Afrikaans-and Dutch speaking whites as 'the Afrikaner *volk'* (2007:12). At the forefront of Afrikaner nationalism were self-aware ministers of the Dutch Reform Church, academics, journalists, lawyers and ordinary people. The common goal was self-determination as in the capturing of power. Van der Westhuizen argues that language became crucial in the process of promulgating the ideology of Afrikaner nationalism and "Afrikaans was standardized and became a powerful ethnic and cultural mobiliser" (2007:12).

[39] Please see chapter five of this dissertation.

[40] According to Same Mdluli (2015:25) in her doctoral thesis "the 1980s are significant years in the history of South African art because for the first time black 'rural' artists became visible when they were suddenly included in major exhibitions alongside both white and black urban artists." In other words, the idea of 'rural' artists first appeared in the discourse of South African art during this time.

[41] In the catalogue *Kay Hassan Urbanation* 2008

2.3. A re-visitation of the term 'art'

As I attempt to breakdown the term 'township art' it is useful to give a very brief account of the historical shifts that occurred in regard to the meaning of the term art. During the Enlightenment of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the German philosopher Georg F. W. Hegel (1790) publicly claimed that Africans possessed no civilisation.[42] Hegel based his argument on the perceived lack of African writing that led him to conclude that Africans have no history or art. For Hegel, barbaric and uncivilised Africans were incapable of producing objects worthy of the name 'art'. 'Art' for Hegel was a connotation of the highest civilisation manifest in European culture. In his exposition of human history Hegel advocates for a linear progression from barbarism to civilisation. Hegel seems to have disregarded the disruptions and discontinuities that human history experienced. Foucault (1972:8) in his popular 'archeological' approach to epistemology is of the view that, "discontinuity was a stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history. It has now become one of the basic elements of historical analysis". In terms of the period of the Enlightenment thinking Africa was seen as still culturally trapped in the stage of barbarism as such the African continent was the opposite of the European continent that has attained its civilisation. The emphasis of differences and diversity instead of similarities are worth noting. Hegel was one of the intellectuals who subscribed to the idea of the Enlightenment. Hegel's canonical texts are still influential in contemporary academic circles. Immanuel Kant another German philosopher and Hegel are considered to have played an important role in the construction of modernist ideas of race.[43]The point is the Enlightenment was a very significant movement in the history of the West. For many scholars and theoreticians the Enlightenment conceptions of race formed the basis of the most durable and resolute ethnic stereotypes of modern times. Until the emergence of the Enlightenment a clear cultural boundary between Europe and non-Europeans was not yet delineated.

[42] Please see *Philosophy of History*.
[43] For example, please see Van Robbroeck 2005:70

However, since then turning points have emerged and significant changes have occurred in the ways in which, for example, the African continent is imagined and hypothesised. African material culture is received and interpreted differently since the time of the Enlightenment.

It is important to note that the introduction of art history/art criticism in various colonies served the purpose of analysing through the medium of language a very limited range of art forms (i.e. drawing, painting, prints and sculpture). The vocabulary used in European art history proved inadequate to interpret artistic objects produced by non-European cultures in various colonies. Subsequently, as succinctly put by Gablik (1969: 12), “the new problems for art concern the constant redefinition of its boundaries…”Gablik was commenting on the emergence of Pop Art which in the 1960s was received with some degree of antagonism and a proportion of the public thought of it as some “sort of a joke” (1969:10). This seemingly impersonal approach to art making through the use of daily urban objects or urban imagery prompted a rethinking of the meaning of art. More so Pop Art refuses to detach itself from everyday experiences, it is innately connected to the environment in which it is produced. Gablik (1969:15) proceeds, “art, then, must have a manifest connection with the environment; it must act directly on experience, instead of being something that stands for it”. Similarly, long before Pop Art emerged, African artistic objects such as stools, staffs, masks, headrests, performances and so on were intricately created in connection with daily experience. Similar to Pop Art, African artistic objects were received with mixed feelings and unfair criticism leveled against them for their perceived lack of individual creativity, a hallmark of European modern art. But also a revision of the definition of the term art ensued that saw objects formerly known as artifacts being classified as art objects. This history is too vast to exhaust within the limited pages of this dissertation. However, it is important to note that the expansion of the definition of ‘art’ to accommodate ‘non-Western’ material culture is intricate and fraught with ambiguities. For instance, Kelly (2007:15) states that “the drive for the ‘acceptance’ of non-western objects and their perceived ‘ascent’ of a scale of value and interest- from ‘curiosity’, to ethnographic ‘document’, to ‘art work’ was and is still a complex

problematic".[44] Kelly was commenting specifically in relation to the Louvre, the leading museum and art gallery in France, which according to her only addressed the issue of non-western objects representation in 2000 after many years since the French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) and others called for the reassessment of non-western material culture in France.

The writer and curator Gule (2010) complicates the situation in relation to the meaning of the term art.[45] Gule touches upon the inevitable expansion of the definition of the term art as new digital technologies emerge. Gule uses a work titled *Step Inside* (2004) by the artist Nathaniel Stern to illustrate his point. For Gule (2010:124), this work questions "the very notion of what an art object is," in that *Step Inside* depends on interactive software that allows the viewer to step inside a specifically built room where image and sound integrate to form a real time shadowy projection of the viewer on the screen. The viewer essentially becomes the artwork. For this reason, it becomes difficult to point out what precisely the art object is.

However, the art historian and writer Carman (2004:115) is of the view that some attempts to expand the boundaries of the term art have "resulted in revisions, rather than rewritings, in which the Western parameters of 'What art is' are broadened to include objects which are utilitarian or which were formerly classified as craft, artists whose skills were acquired in (or aligned with) Western-type training centres..."In consideration of these developments, in terms of the meaning of the term 'art' in this dissertation any form of human creativity or expression is considered as art; this includes any object that is framed and presented in an artistic manner in a gallery or a site specific intervention. This understanding also holds that the configuration or visual shape of an artistic creation need not be manifested in physical form; it can also assume a metaphysical configuration, which could be fully grasped through the senses of the mind.[46]

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[44] Please see *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects* (2007).
[45] Please see 'Contending Legacies: South African Modern and Contemporary Art Collections' (2010).
[46] Please see the art installation *Seedbed* (1972).

The explication given above reveals the limits of the term ‘art’. More importantly the term ‘township art’ owes its existence to the notion that indigenous Africans possess no civilisation as Hegel notes. Hence the tendency to deny black artists any equality with their white counterparts in South Africa. This is very important to note in relation to the argument about the valorisation of black artists work in South Africa.

2.4. A brief look into the development of Townships in South Africa

The story of South African art is fundamentally interlaced with the broader socio-political narrative of the country. As will be shown below, the term ‘township art’ connotes spatial segregation and it is loaded with meaning both on the metaphysics and scientific levels. For instance, the term ‘township art’ implies a space, geography and time. Since there is a type of painting called township art in South Africa, it seems relevant to ask who the consumers of township art are. Do the makers of this kind of art self-define their art as township art? What did Koloane mean by dealers, African roots, identity and sentimentalising the status quo, as discussed in ‘Walking the Tightrope’?

Townships are products of the laws of separate development, which were officially inaugurated in South Africa more than three hundred years ago (1840s). On the one hand, I contend that the term township in South Africa is synonymous with second-rate standards, poverty, crime, drunkenness and violence, simply put, with all things negative and degenerative. Biko (2004:74) once said it is a miracle to survive life in the township. On the other hand, townships are associated with collectivism, self-reliance, self-determination and the spirit of Ubuntu. Taking into account both perspectives discourages any homogenisation of experiences; people experience South African townships in several different ways. That is why any attempt to classify artistic expressions made in townships using limited classifications will be invariably and fundamentally flawed.

The word township signifies a geographical space where the so-called township art is produced within a larger society by a certain group of people or

individuals. Given the innocuousness of the term township in common language, the above is very important to note especially in the context of South Africa where the descriptor 'township' has assumed a somewhat local definition and meaning.[47]

Townships in South Africa started appearing in 1867 and 1886 following the discovery of diamonds and gold.[48] However, with the passing of time in South Africa the term 'township' has assumed a local definition. Owing to the principles of colonialism and apartheid, officially identified areas to be inhabited by the black population of South Africa came to be known as 'locations' (Peffer 2009:192). Van der Westhuizen, in her captivating discussion of the rise and fall of the NP locates "South Africa's first example of structured segregation" to the 1840s in Natal, the former British colony (2007:14). According to Van der Westhuizen, the secretary of native affairs in Natal, Theophilus Shepstone as early as the 1840s promoted the notion of racially segregated areas called 'locations'. Later, the word 'location' would be used interchangeably with the term 'township'. In other words, in terms of South African culture the terms 'location' and 'township' are synonyms to date (Sanders 2013). This enduring concept of townships was imagined in the colonial period, and the segregationist government institutionalised it during apartheid. In the democratic South Africa the notion of townships is perpetuated through the project known as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which saw the construction of low cost houses in townships around South Africa and the development of new areas as locations or townships.

As I trace the history of townships, I argue that tax laws, and land dispossessions as a result of the Native Land Act of 1913 inspired the migration of indeginous Africans, mostly males, to 'urban areas'. In her

[47] In common language a township is a division of a county with some corporate powers, for example, a district six-mile square.

[48] For example, following the discovery of the gold reef in the farm of Langlaagte (to the west of Johannesburg) by the Australian George Harrison, townships such as Ferreirastown and Marshalltown were developed within a walking distance to the newly built town of Johannesburg. White gold diggers from all over the country including the Western Cape, Northern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal mostly populated these townships.

succinct exposition of the origins of Bantu Education in South Africa, Kros for the purpose of contextualisation also touches upon the phenomenon of migration to urban areas by black South Africans. As Kros (2010:61) notes, during the 1930s and 1940s "the African urban population" grew "by about a half". This increase of African labourers in urban areas like Johannesburg somewhat explains why the majority of artists who made 'township art' were male artists (gendered genre of art). The migration of people resulted in a number of things, including the construction of racially divided areas (e.g. locations) in South Africa.

'Locations' were initially situated within walking distance from 'towns' and 'cities'. Blacks, 'Coloureds' and people of Indian descent lived in the same locations until the introduction of the Group Areas Act of 1950. Through this Act racially segregated residential areas were institutionalised and established. In fact, following the discovery of gold in Langlaagte in 1886 some townships were located in what today is known as the Central Business District of Johannesburg or a few kilometres from the CBD. Alexandra Township,[49] for instance, the birthplace of Koloane was founded in 1912 as a space for non-Europeans.[50]In Alexandra people could buy and own property (Bonnie & Nieftagodien 2008:20). In the 1950s, Alexandra received scores of forcefully removed people from the inner city locations (slums) of Johannesburg. Owing to the proximity of Alexandra to the City of Johannesburg, the apartheid regime also attempted to demolish Alexandra but its efforts failed, as Alexandra was privately owned (ibid.).

For Koloane, life in Alexandra was typified by politics, crime, music and soccer. According to Koloane, Alexandra was a melting pot of cultures that boasted several performing artists but as a young man living in Alexandra in the 1950s he never encountered any visual artists. His first real exposure to professional art making was through a friend, Louis Maqhubela who was

[49] For more on Alexandra Township please see: *Alexandra: A History*
[50] The area of Alexandra was initially designed to accommodate 338 plots to be sold to white South Africans only. But when this did not materialise the area was further divided into smaller plots for sale to black Africans and 'Coloureds'. Alexandra was established just a few months before the introduction of the notorious Land Act of 1913 (Bonnie & Nieftagodien 2008:20).

studying art at Polly Street Art Centre between 1956 and 1958. But this only happened after Koloane's family had relocated to Soweto. Given the laws of apartheid, Koloane assumed that black people were not allowed to become artists, and the idea that black people were denied access to certain galleries exacerbated the matter. For inspiration, over the years Koloane kept on referring back to Alexandra Township.

However, due to the locations of townships and what these spaces represent in the mind and memory of many, especially, the formerly oppressed masses, townships are critically known as 'reservoirs of labour' (Khan & Asfour 2018:16). In terms of popular youth cultures townships provide a setting for the development of different expressions. There is a general assumption that many young people who live in 'rural' areas and 'homelands' in South Africa wish to visit Johannesburg, Cape Town or Durban where they would eventually reside in nearby townships. The idea is to experience township and city life, that is why cities like Johannesburg have been heaped with praises and given various names including, 'Maboneng' (a place of lights, similar to Fanon's Paris-city-of-light). In the olden days the floods of lights that characterise Johannesburg at night dazzled a lot of newcomers to the city who mostly came from underdeveloped 'rural' areas. Perhaps the attitude of South Africans, specifically, of young people toward townships could be best described in the words of Fanon (1988:52),

> After several months of living in France, a country boy returns to his family. Noticing a farm implement, he asks his father, an old don't pull-that-kind-of-thing-on-me peasant, "Tell me what does one call that apparatus?" His father replies by dropping the tool on the boy's feet, and the amnesia vanishes.

Fanon tells of an Antillean young man who has just returned from Paris. He demonstrates how language can be used to adopt a new culture and identity. Fanon bemoans the black Antilleans obsession with the French language at the expense of Creole. For Fanon, it seems that black Antilleans envied their former colonisers and it seems that the only way for black Antilleans to reach a full human life was through the adoption of the French language and culture. Townships for many South Africans are seen as bridges between the white man's world (i.e. urban areas; cities) and 'homelands' (villages). It is a space

where most black people first come into contact with the culture of the white man. However, in recent times there has been a growing awareness about the effects of migration to urban areas on a number of levels including the realms of culture and economy.

The government of apartheid considered townships as temporary holding areas for blacks while they were in urban areas, the heaven of white people. The houses that black people lived in were the property of the state and black people were not allowed to buy them until 1994. For Koloane, for instance, calling a township a place of home is fundamentally misleading and untrue in that economic circumstances compelled and still force people to migrate to townships in search of work in nearby cities or towns (in Khan & Asfour 2018:16). This makes townships mere conduits of labour and black people mere instruments in an economy that hardly benefits them. The realisation that black South Africans are not benefiting in the economy as desired resulted in the formation of left-wing socialist movements.[51]

Lastly, commenting in 2018 on the phenomenon of township art Koloane (2018) is of the view that 'township art' is "a collective expression of people trapped in an environment not of their own choice" (in Khan & Asfour 2018: 3).[52] In agreement with Koloane, I argue that the production of 'township art' was a way of documenting the reality of the oppressed masses in apartheid South Africa, and secondly it was a practical way of making a living for many black artists in a society strongly characterised by capitalism and greed.

In conclusion, the notions of segregation and the need for cheap labour prompted the construction of 'townships'. Everyone living in 'townships' except for children was expected to earn a living through some form of employment. As Rankin (1990) notes among certain black people living in the

[51] Political organisations such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and extreme separatists left wing movements like the Black First or Land First with a catch phrase "Land or Death". The primary aim of such political parties is to liberate indeginous Africans economically. For them, economic liberation will fully restore the dignity of black South Africans and structures like townships and ghettoes will be things of the past.

[52] Please see the Black Mark Collective website for the full interview.

slums of Johannesburg, townships and in rural areas the production of art was mainly influenced by the prospect of earning a living. This prompted the emergence of a variety of aesthetics, which were unfortunately homogenised through the term 'township art'. In the following section I focus on the development history of the type of 'township art' that employs the strategy of sentimentalised township scenes.

2.5. Where did 'Township Art' originate?

According to Manaka (2007:15), the Lesotho born artist Ephraim Ngatane was one of the first black artists to experiment with township scenes using watercolur. The corrugated shantytowns, crowded township streets with women doing laundry in communal taps and children playing and so on, became the subjects of Ngatane and many other artists who lived in the slums of South Africa then. At the time, watercolour was the most used medium at Polly Street Art Centre where Ngatane was studying art (2007:15). According to Manaka, at Polly Street Art Centre watercolour was made more available to students and thus watercolour became the favourite media of this era (ibid.). Perhaps this was because of the fact that watercolours were somewhat affordable and they dry quickly in comparison with oil painting. Peffer (2009:198) corroborates this deduction as he argues that watercolour was popularly associated with amateurs and Sunday painters. Furthermore, for Rankin (1990:29) the use of easy and inexpensive techniques such as the watercolour and linocuts was a reflection of the socio-economic conditions of black artists and the scant resources of art centres that many black artists attended like the Cape Arts Project in Cape Town. Also, Rankin is of the view that the artist and teacher at the Polly Street Art Centre, Skotnes played a significant role in the institutions' decision to promote the use of watercolour. [53]

As I proceed with my discussion of the development of 'township art', the researcher, writer and art historian Miles (2004:36) is of the view that the

[53] Please see chapter three of this thesis.

success of artists like Ngatane, Sydney Kumalo and Dumile Feni encouraged a disposition “towards materialism”. Artists were encouraged by the possibility of selling their artworks as per the market demands. This inclination also meant that certain artworks were copied and repeated for “the sake of quick sales” (ibid.). As a result, to borrow from Manaka artists became factories of art.

To put things into perspective, the story of Polly Street Art Centre is arguably also a narrative of similar art centres that sought to give black people of South Africa access to art education. Also, it seems that the story of the centre is also a story of the development of art by black people in South Africa, particularly the development of so-called ‘township art’.

According to Miles, the Johannesburg City Council whose goal was to offer cultural facilities for the non-whites of Johannesburg established the Polly Street Adult Education Centre in 1949 in a building used by different organisations for a variety of social and educational purposes (Miles 2004:15). The building was then renovated and furnished as a space for non-whites activities. As the doors of art education were closed to people classified as non-Europeans, the Polly Street Art Centre became a space of inter-racial partnership. For example, the multiracial artists group *Amadlozi* as Koloane noted in ‘Walking the Tightrope’ was founded in an environment like the Polly Street Art Centre, where people of different races could interact. Peffer (2009:36) calls these spaces and interactions the “grey areas” of apartheid. Kumalo, Louis Maqhubela, Legae, Ben Arnold, Durant Sihlali and Ngatane all studied at Polly Street Art Centre and were some of the artists who benefitted from these rare interactions between black and white people in South Africa at a time of heightened apartheid. The NP had won the general elections in 1948, which were opened to white people only. Its victory was accompanied with an introduction of repressive and totalitarian legislation against the black, Indian and the ‘coloured’ population of South Africa. Regardless of the humble beginnings of the Polly Street Art Centre, its contribution to the development of art in South Africa is of historical importance. However, it seems that the

Polly Street Art Centre was also caught up in the discourse of apartheid, which was heavily based on the notion of separate development.[54]

According to Miles (2004:42), Sihlali who registered at Polly Street Art Centre in 1953 as a 16 year old teenager was the first to document his surroundings by depicting "true-to-life renderings" of them. Peffer (2009:192) states that in 1953 Sihlali was 18 when he and his friends read about the success of artists from Polly Street Art Centre in *Zonk!* Magazine. In 1953, upon his arrival at Polly Street Art Centre Skotnes tutored him.[55] In chapter three as I analyse 'Art Criticism for Whom?', I touch upon the issues of art education and pedagogy.

A juxtaposition of Ngatane's work with that of Sihlali reveals that these artists used different approaches to depict similar subjects. One of Ngatane's works, which I argue is a typical township scene as demanded by the art market, is entitled *Township Scenes* (1969).



Figure 1: Ephraim Ngatane *Township Scene* (1969) watercolour and gouache on paper, 56x75.6cm. Johannesburg Art Gallery Collection. *1910-2010 Hundred Years of Collecting: The Johannesburg Art Gallery*, p.134.

The objects in the painting are not clearly delineated. They are highly stylised in bright contrasting colours such as blue, orange, yellow, white and black. The scene is crowded with humans with no clear facial expressions, and there

[54] In chapter three I demonstrate how the Polly Street Art Centre unconsciously perpetuated the idea of development in relation to 'the peculiar characteristics of a people'.
[55] Miles attributes some inconsistencies to the lack of meeting minutes.

are no clear boundaries between the houses, which implies, inter alia, a lack of privacy and peace of mind. The colours give rise to a feeling of ambivalence. It may be concluded that Ngatane, while executing the painting *Township Scenes* relied heavily on his imagination, and the work is characterised by expressionistic brush strokes. However, Ngatane also produced portraits and paintings featuring human figures with strong personal characteristics such as the *Young Brother* (1959), *The Approach* (1964) and *Portrait of Dumile* (1964). These paintings are not characterised by the limited iconography of 'township art' — instead, they reveal the true character of Ngatane's subjects. For example, *The Approach* is executed in impasto cubist gestures. The painting is centred on two figures that occupy the right hand side of the painting. One of the figures a young lady dressed in a white shirt and long black skirt with her shirt tucked in neatly, revealing a white waist belt, looks startled or scared towards a man dressed in a black long coat and black hat. The man is holding a burning cigarette in his left hand and looks as if he is trying to strike a conversation with the scared looking lady. The lady's clearly delineated facial features communicate liveliness as opposed to sentimenatilised township scenes paintings where human beings are treated as objects with no feelings or emotions. Ngatane produced abstract art too.[56]

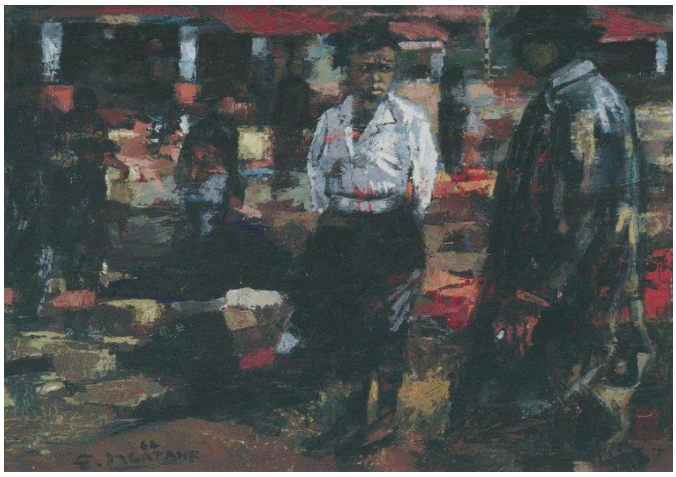

Figure 2: Ephraim Ngatane *The Approach* (1964) oil on board, 58x72.5 cm. Private Collection. *Polly Street: The Story Art of an Art Centre*, p.82

[56] Please see *Soweto Reflections* (1970).



Figure 3: Ephraim Ngatane *Portrait of Dumile Mslaba* (1964) oil on canvas, 115x93cm MTN Art Collection. Johannesburg *Polly Street: The Art of an Art Centre*, p.83

From very early on in his career Koloane understood the implications of producing what was known as township art. For the purpose of contextualisation, below I also look at the artistic trajectory of Koloane in relation to the emergence of 'township art', and also some of the artists who produced so-called township art were Koloane's peers.

One of Sihlali's early township scenes painting is a watercolour called *Burning Old Clothes* (1964), which depicts a family of four disposing of their personal belongings with clearly delineated houses in the background.



Figure 4: Durant Sihlali *Burning Old Clothes* (1964) watercolour on paper, measurements not stated. Estate Durant Sihlali. *Polly Street: The Story of an Art Centre* p. 129

As in real life, the whole activity is taking place at night in what seems to be a bushy unkempt no man's land. The central (female) figure is leaning over, busy pulling out clothes from a suitcase placed next to the burning fire. Behind her there is a male figure standing on a dirt road looking in the opposite direction, away from what is happening next to him. Right in front of the fire there is a child with both hands on her face, she seems overwhelmed by the smoke from the fire. Diagonally behind her there is an older child who is busy stoking the fire with a stick that has a piece of fabric hanging from it. The artwork is captured in earth colours with some patches of dark shadows. The colours of the clothes of the female and male figures seem to be merging with the surrounding. The little girl is dressed in a light pink dress and the fire tender is in a bright yellow knee length dress. In short *Burning Old Clothes* is a careful observation of life in 'townships', however the artist paid little attention to the physiognomy of his subjects. By and large, *Burning Old Clothes* is some form of factual reportage.

According to Miles, Sihlali's participation in the Thupelo workshops during the 1980s saw his work oscillating between the figurative and non-figurative. For example, Sihlali also painted landscapes and made abstract work sometimes with strong political themes and remarks. The acrylic on paper titled *Reminders of Past Apartheid* (1987), which features randomly arranged words (or signs) such as Africa, *Amandla*, Azania and Mandela is a typical example of this tendency.

However, Miles (2004:42) does not explicitly attribute the existence of the genre of 'township art' to Ngatane. According to Miles, Ngatane adopted the free-flowing technique promoted by Skotnes in his outdoor township scenes. Rankin is of the view that Ngatane was most likely the first artist of the Polly Street Art Centre to have a solo show organised at the Litchi Gallery in 1962. This exhibition was followed by many other successful shows at the Adler Fielding Gallery.

According to Peffer (2009:), Lesley Spiro is of the view that the first occurrence of 'township art' as associated with black artists happened in 1962

at the Adler Fielding Gallery on the occasion of an exhibition titled 'Township Life'. This show featured the work of Sekoto, Maqhubela and Lucas Sithole. The Adler Fielding Galleries earlier known as the Adler Lawrence Galleries were one of the few white owned private galleries that showcased the work of black artists. The Adler Fielding Galleries played a significant role in the development of art in South Africa. Ngatane, Gladys Mgundlandlu, Sihlali, Ben Arnold and many other black artists have had exhibitions in the Adler Fielding Galleries.

In order to contextualise the above given information, according to Koloane 'township art' "developed a sub-market for itself within the mainstream South African market in the late 1960s" (in Tadjo 2002:22). Koloane's exposure to art began in earnest after his encounter with Maqhubela in the 1950s. Maqhubela was influential on Koloane in various ways. For instance, Maqhubela told Koloane of the Polly Street Art Centre which Koloane had not heard of until then.[57] Maqhubela shown Koloane what proper art materials to use as Koloane was still a novice who had never encountered visual artists in Alexandra. The former took the latter to galleries and introduced him to different individuals including the artist and art home studio owner, Bill Ainslie in 1973. Koloane studied art at Ainslie's art studio until 1977, starting first as a part-time student, and in 1975 following the relocation of the engineering company that Koloane worked for, Koloane decided to pursue his art studies full-time at Ainslie's home studio. It was also during the year 1975 that Koloane had his first exhibition alongside the already established sculptor Michael Zondi who was based in Natal at the time (now called KwaZulu-Natal). Koloane was not part of the exhibition 'Township Life' that happened in 1962 at the Adler Fielding Gallery.

[57] According to the art historian and curator Sipho Mdanda (2018:57) "Dr David Koloane is a world-renowned artist and writer who attended classes at Polly Street Art Centre in the early 1960s." According to the editor of Arttrob Sean O'Toole (2003), in the 1960s Koloane was a young trainee with the Polly Street group of artists, the first place where black artists could gather under one roof. According to O' Toole (2019)"When Koloane was 16, artist Louis Maqhubela moved into a house across the street in Alexandra, a township in northern Johannesburg. The two toured galleries together, these early encounters contributing to Koloane's generous yet also critical eye."

In the late 1960s when 'township art' was making inroads in terms of the audience and art market Koloane was experimenting with art materials that he had been recently introduced to and he was busy informing himself, by means of reading and gallery visits, of different art styles. Being aware of the shortfalls and advantages of 'township art' Koloane from very early on in his career sought to develop his own unique artistic language. Manaka helps us understand Koloane's awareness in relation to 'township art'. Manaka (2007:14) states that,

> under the influence of Louis Maqhubela, David Koloane, who worked differently from other 'township artists', believes that artists should always strive towards developing their artistic articulation and vocabulary beyond that of ordinary people and yet should be understood by all the other people.

In the late 1970s Koloane started experimenting with collage and abstract art. Maqhubela played an important role in this regard too. In 1966 following his trip to Europe where he encountered artists like Douglas Portway in Britain, Maqhubela came back in South Africa with a passion for abstract art. According to Koloane, Maqhubela was influenced by Portway who was into oriental philosophy and abstract art. On his return Maqhubela' s art was received positively in South Africa and this resulted in him relocating to Europe as he felt that due to apartheid opportunities were limited in the country. In 1979 Koloane made a work on board titled *Made in South Africa*. According to Peffer (2009:176) *Made in South Africa* is a compelling example of "socially conscious abstract art" and it originates "from Koloane's early engagement with the work of Louis Maqhubela and Bill Ainslie…" In chapter five of this dissertation I look into the series of exhibitions titled *Made in South Africa* (1993-1994) held at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg. I use this series of exhibitions to further demonstrate Koloane's efforts to define himself as a unique artist conscious of his situation and position in apartheid South Africa.

As will be shown in chapter five, the creation of Thupelo workshops sought to offer black artists a certain level of independence in terms of what artists choose to explore. In addition, as noted above artists such as Ngatane produced different kinds of work but the art market was more drawn to the sentimentalised township scenes of Ngatane. Some black artists even quit

their jobs to produce the quick selling ‘township art’ (Rankin 1990). However, most of these artists have since artistically fallen by the wayside (Powell 1995). This speaks to the notion of putting an act as per the art market which resulted in many black artists dying as paupers.

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I tracked the roots of ‘township art’ according to Koloane’s observations as discussed in ‘Walking the Tightrope’. I began by discussing the history of art in South Africa. I defined the term ‘art’ and traced the development history of townships in South Africa. In essence I show that the term ‘township art’ was used to establish differences between the works of black artists and white artists in South Africa. This differentiation rendered the work of many black artists less valuable (or completely valueless). As bell hooks (1995: 7) states that difference implies lack and deprivation. In the following chapter I demonstrate how differentiation was perpetuated through education in South Africa.

Chapter Three

3.1. 'Art Criticism for Whom?'

3.1.1. Introduction

In this chapter I analyse the essay 'Art Criticism for Whom?' (1998) by the artist, writer and curator David Koloane. I pick up on Koloane's observations regarding the effects of Bantu Education on black people as discussed in 'Art Criticism for Whom?'. In this essay Koloane argues that art criticism was in essence non-existent in terms of the greater population of South Africa due to the provision of different types of education to South Africans during apartheid, and due to the unfair distribution of resources and infrastructure within South African communities. At the heart of 'Art Criticism for Whom?' is the issue of the reformation of the education system in South Africa. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, there is arguably a need for an academic research into the variety of factors that gave rise to the canonical 'township art' genre. Picking up on Koloane's arguments I demonstrate that Bantu Education was one of the factors that contributed to the development of the 'township art' genre in South Africa.[58] In the previous chapter, using an essay titled 'Walking the Tightrope' (1997) by Koloane, I investigated the history of the South African art world in order to understand the factors that prompted the emergence of the different ways of writing about black and white artists in South Africa. I demonstrate that 'township art' genre was a product of many cultural exchanges between black and white citizens of South Africa. The term 'township art' is misleading and it renders the work of black South African artists less valuable (or valueless).

[58] In 1997 David Koloane contributed a paper entitled 'Walking the Tightrope' to the catalogue that came out with the second Johannesburg Biennale known as *Trade Routes: History and Geography*. In this essay Koloane discusses the development of art in South Africa and he argues that the development of art in South Africa cannot be separated from the larger socio-political narrative of the country. 'Walking the Tightrope' discussed at length in the previous chapters is an extension of 'Art Criticism for Whom?' which was first presented as a conference paper at the AICA in London in 1996.

It seems that when writing 'Art Criticism for Whom?,' Koloane was responding to Barthes's definition of criticism. The latter states that, "to criticise, however, is to put into Crisis, something which is not possible without evaluating the conditions of the crisis (its limits), without considering its historical moment..." (1977:208). In her master's research report in the form of an analysis of the art magazine *Art South Africa* Clarissa Snapper (2005:7) defines art criticism as any writing that "takes a position in favour of or against something". Expressing similar views a decade earlier Evelyn Nicodemus (1998) defines the sphere of art criticism in this manner: "Within this field, art critics have functioned beside artists, dealers, curators, collectors, etc. as one category of agents among others in an ongoing war between '-isms or what Bourdieu calls 'position takings'" (1998:27).

The origins of art criticism in South Africa are not clear. According to Koloane, the genre of art criticism was non-existent in the broader context of the South African population. However, the first writings on modern art by black artists in South Africa emerged in the 1930s in the form of newspaper articles.[59] If the definitions provided above are anything to go by, then the first articles on modern art by black artists that emerged in the 1930s could certainly be called art criticism writing, in that there was a lot of 'position taking' mainly against black artists. Surprise was expressed at the achievement of black artists, and most of these articles articulated doubts veiled in paternalistic and patronising views. Art criticism in South Africa continued in this vein well into the 1990s, and arguably into the democratic South Africa.

The French philosopher and writer Denis Diderot is known as the pioneer figure of the current practice of world art criticism. However, the term art criticism is associated with the English painter and writer Jonathan Richardson the Elder (1715, 1719), who first used the term in his writings. Richardson's analyses were mostly on historical and old paintings though. In simple terms art criticism is the analysis, evaluation and interpretation of artworks often on the basis of a theory. Art criticism moderates the

[59] For example please see van Robbroeck (2005).

relationship between art and the public by keeping the public informed of the developments occurring in the art world. Therefore, the ideas and language used in art criticism change as new ways of making art emerge and evolve.

The first writings on current and new art emerged from the 1740s during the public exhibitions known as the salons held at the Louvre Royal Palace in France. These exhibitions were organised by the Royal Academy under the auspices of the king who was the main sponsor of the salons. The salons were accompanied by written commentaries and other pamphlets regulated by the king. Local newspapers also carried reviews of the salons written by art critics, however most of the writings were characterised by praise and admiration for the artists and the Royal Academy. Little frank criticism was offered due to the king's support of the salons. Critics treaded carefully in avoidance of the king's condemnation and subsequent censorship. As a result critics tended to side with the state and church when it came to matters of aesthetics or they simply reflected the views of art buyers. However, all of this changed in 1747 with the emergence of *Reflections on Some Causes of the Present State of Painting in France* an essay written by the politically liberal French writer La Font de Saint-Etienne. The observations expressed in the aforementioned essay were based on the salon that took place in 1746. However, the Royal Academy sponsors did not take kindly to De Saint-Etienne's critical remarks on certain artists that trained at the academy as a result the salon of 1749 was cancelled in fear of further criticism. The salons were reinstated in the 1750s with the king's intervention to suppress all unregulated writings about the salons. When Diderot started writing from 1759 he wrote for a banned Parisian publication that sent its products twice a month to a secret international readership. Hence, Diderot could write without being worried about the king's censorship and he wrote lengthy essays as compared to his contemporaries. Diderot is credited for introducing new ways of writing about art which were based on his personal ideas and close reading of art objects, he spent a great deal of time analysing compositions and the ideas behind artworks.

The above brief history is worth noting in that art criticism has since become a domain of opinions, and how those views are expressed and promulgated. For example, when the art critic Clement Greenberg visited South Africa in 1975, Natalie Knight described Greenberg as having an "acute mind" and "a biting tongue" in a sphere "where all standards are a matter of opinion" (in Bester 2007:58)[60]. Koloane in 1998 was one of a few black South Africans who had an opportunity to express himself in matters of art. The art historian and critic Bester (2007) defines art criticism as one of the many voices on art, for Koloane the apartheid system of South Africa denied the oppressed masses of South Africa this voice.

In the main my investigation seeks to uncover what Koloane was responding to in his work. Therefore, this chapter grapples with the question, why the title 'Art Criticism for Whom?'. However, it is important to note at the outset that 'Art Criticism for Whom? was penned precisely twenty-two years ago and a lot has changed since then in South Africa and globally. This means that this chapter is in essence an examination of a form of historical writing. Through such a lens I employ a Foucualdian discourse analysis method as mentioned in the introduction. I investigate language and ideology in relation to the role of power and knowledge in society. Historiography enables me to understand that 'Art Criticism for Whom? is a piece written from a particular perspective, and so certain biases and assumptions are to be expected.

It is useful to employ Barthes' theory of texts as I attempt to uncover why the title 'Art Criticism for Whom?, Barthes writes,

> There are those who want a text (an art, a painting) without a shadow, without the dominant ideology; but this is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity, a sterile text (see the myth of a Woman without a shadow) (Barthes 1975:32).

Barthes defines a text with a shadow as a fertile text and is capable of influencing debate. Barthes argues that the text requires its shadow: "this

[60] According to Bester (2007:58), in anticipation of Clement Greenberg's visit to South Africa in July 1975, Natalie Knight wrote an article about Greenberg in which she liberally quotes Sophy Burnham from the classic work *The Art Crowd* (1973). Please see chapter five where I discuss the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg formerly owned by Knight.

shadow is a bit of ideology, a bit of representation, a bit of subject..." (1977:208). 'Art Criticism for Whom?' is not only an evaluation of art criticism in South Africa but Koloane also focuses on the factors that enable the development of art criticism and he discusses the limits imposed on black South African artists as a result of unjust legislature. As will be shown below 'Art Criticism for Whom? is a text with a shadow and it has influenced many younger writers including Khan (2018) and Mdluli (2019). The explication below commences by painting a picture for the reader regarding the contents of 'Art Criticism for Whom?.

3.2. 'Art Criticism for Whom?':An Analysis

'Art Criticism for Whom?' is a personal viewpoint on the subject of art criticism in South Africa. Koloane begins by arguing that art criticism in the broader context of the South African community was literally non-existent. This viewpoint nearly prompted him not to bother to participate in the conference on art criticism and Africa in 1996 held in London.

Briefly, the AICA conference was based on the idea of 'Art Criticism and Africa' with a specific focus on South Africa, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. For the purpose of widening the discussion, the conference was ordered into four sub themes: specifically, "the art criticism about Africa which takes place outside Africa; the role of the art critic as advocate; institutional issues in the administration of culture and art criticism for whom?" (Deepwell 1998:10). It goes without saying that Koloane went for the latter sub theme.[61]

According to Koloane, on the one hand, art discourse is and has invariably been an entitlement of the privileged white South African population who

[61] In 1998 the artist, critic, lecturer in art history and theory, and president of AICA Katy Deepwell collected and edited the colloquium essays into a book titled *Art Criticism and Africa*. *Art Criticism and Africa* contains essays by contributors like Olabisi Silva, John Picton, Evelyn Nicodemus, Ola Oloidi, Murray McCartney, Barbara Murray, Tony Mhonda, David Koloane, Colin Richards, Chika Okeke, Fatma Ismail Afifi and Olu Oguibe. These contributors represented Egypt, Europe and North America in the AICA symposium in 1996. 'Art Criticism for Whom?' forms part of this collection of essays. The book commences with an acknowledgment section by Sajid Rizvi followed by a short tribute to Jock Whittet by Heather Waddell, and by an introduction to the book by Katy Deepwell.

received a sort of education based on western standards. On the other hand, the black population of South Africa was disavowed the fundamental right to choose the sort of education they desired. An inferior quality of education was imposed on them through the Bantu Education Act of 1956.

In order to understand Koloane's contentions, Bantu Education was introduced in 1953 (Mphahlele 2013: 168). For Mphahlele, Bantu Education "disrupted" African traditions yet it was introduced as a mechanism to help Africans restore their "tribal cultures" (2013:169). Mphahlele's observations are beneficial in many ways. Mphahlele who holds a professorship in education spent some time investigating the effects of Bantu Education on teachers and pupils in government schools for black people during apartheid.

According to Kros (2010), the seeds of Bantu Education Act were planted almost three decades before the Act was introduced in 1953. It owes its existence to the Eiselen Commission appointed by the NP in 1948 immediately after it ascended to power. The history of Bantu education is too vast to exhaust within the pages of this thesis but what should be pointed out is that Bantu Education was in essence a clumsy political plan constructed by politicians who happened to be scholars too. It was created on the foundation of separate development that promoted the growth of cultures according to their so-called particular characteristics. It is noteworthy to mention that Koloane was born in 1938 ten years before the introduction of apartheid by the NP. He was fifteen when the Bantu Education Act was officially introduced in 1953 and was already in high school.

At primary level Koloane attended art classes, which to them were some form of 'free time'. According to Koloane and many other black African intellectuals, missionary education was not the best of education but it encouraged black Africans to develop self-esteem. Art education was made available to black students at some mission schools. The mission schools encouraged students to think beyond tribal notions and fostered students to embrace a broad worldview. For example, artists like Gerard Sekoto and Ernest Mancoba studied at mission schools and are known as one of the first black artists to

use modern methods of making art. The introduction of the Bantu Education Act brought all this to an end as the government took over these institutions with new rules. This helps us understand the history of art education development for black people in South Africa, which I argue had an effect on the emergence of 'township art' in the country.

Having said the above, Koloane continues stating that the placing of museums in distant areas from black communities exacerbated the situation; as a result black people were strategically rendered ignorant and turned into mere hewers of wood and drawers of water. The government of apartheid projected to the world a South African public image that was essentially based on false pretences with the majority of the country receiving little or no education (1998:69).

Koloane argues most white South African artists have received tertiary level education (ibid.).[62] The formal art education that white students received prepared them for a variety of careers in the arts sector. Schools in black communities did not offer art as a subject, which meant that the only sources of visual inspiration for black students were commercial billboards (ibid.). According to Koloane until recently, black students wishing to apply for art education at universities were by law required to obtain permission from the government. Many black artists possess no tertiary level education and their environment is void of any creativity facilities and libraries. Black artists merely think of their skill as a way of making a living (they devalue their work), aesthetics complexities are seen as less important. Artists end up kowtowing to whatever demands of the art market. The buyer in essence dominates the relationship between the buyer and seller. In this instance Koloane quotes Susie Gablik, "with the marketplace a central shrine and symbol of our culture, only the buyer/ seller relationship has reality" (in Koloane 1998:70).

For Koloane, the South African art market is wholly white dominated. The viewers, critics, art historians, conservators and archivists are white people.

[62] Please see chapter one of this dissertation.

What Koloane calls the middleman between the public and gallery, the media in the form of periodic newspapers provide an alternative reviewing of art. Many a time the media is seen as the “only barometer” which determines trends in the creative space of South Africa (Koloane 1998:70). By virtue of the fact that power and wealth are commonly associated with art, this renders visual arts in South Africa a reserve for those who consider themselves the elite in the South African society.

According to Koloane, colonialism played a significant role in shaping certain ways of thinking and of doing things. Once more Koloane relies on Gablik to drive his point,

> For a long time now the cultural coding of modern western civilisation has centred on notions of dominance and mastery. The dominance of human over nature, of masculine over feminine, of the wealthy over the poor, of western over non-western cultures. Colonial influence is evident in that aesthetic education standards are still based on the British model, implying that whatever major initiatives come from the mother country (in Koloane 1998:70).

Koloane is of the view that the influence of the British did not decline following the achievement of independence by many African countries. Instead it became a widespread rule and criterion that governs the making of art in most African states.

By virtue of the institutionalised racial prejudice that imbued all spheres of life in South Africa, certain newspaper reviews implied discriminatory tendencies for work by black artists. For Koloane, it is ironic that in the first place civilisation was used to “detribalise” black people through education and Christianity but today black artists are discouraged from drawing on western influences (1998:70).

According to Koloane, certain sympathisers with the liberation struggle against apartheid expected black artists to express strong feelings of anger and militancy in their work. For example, the critic Joyce Ozynski wrote a questionable review about the artists Thomas Motswai in which she

expresses surprise at the many smiling faces depicted in the work of Motswai. For Ozynski it was unimaginable to see black people smiling amidst the daily terrors of apartheid. However, Koloane took exception to the patronising and ridiculing review of Ozynski, who seemed to be judging blacks without having set foot in their neighbourhoods.

Koloane proceeds stating that in comparison, white artists' work is unquestionably endorsed with a use of sophisticated terminology. For instance, in an article published by *The Star* on the South African artist Kendell Geers, it is stated that, "Geers subverts the South African conventional understanding of creativity" (in Koloane 1998:70). Koloane fails to understand how certain artists unsettle accepted norms of creativity in a country that denied a particular section the right to be creative. For Koloane, apartheid ruined things for everyone, therefore white South African artists are not in a position to enjoy accolades and pioneer statuses while black people were denied access to art education. For example, when the apartheid government enacted the Separate Amenities Act that denied blacks the right to share libraries and museums with their white counterparts, the art world of South Africa never protested against such Acts. This rendered the world of South African art uneven with white artists receiving preferential treatment.

Continuing with his demonstration of double standards found in newspaper reviews, Koloane cites an article published in *The Mail & Guardian* on 21 September 1995. According to Koloane, the reviewer expresses surprise at the work of a young black artist called Langa. Langa's abilities to put together found objects into interesting conceptual artwork, and his ability to develop a personal artistic idiom were seen as something to behold. Langa's work presented the writer with problems of classifying and interpreting it.[63]

In reading the review of Geers' work in relation to that of Langa's work, for Koloane it is apparent that different hermeneutical strategies were employed. The review of Geers' work is imbued with positivity and the review of Langa's

[63] Langa studied art at Technikon Natal (now known as DUT).

artwork expresses implied concerns. Langa is seen as venturing into an unknown terrain to him. The reviewer somehow denied Langa the freedom to explore yet this freedom was offered to Geers without questions. Koloane draws on the work of the psychologist Chabane Manganye to illustrate his argument, “the white dominant culture having assigned freedom and security for members of their own kind, whilst ensuring the maximum absence of this condition for blacks” (in Koloane 1998: 71). For Koloane, the affirming and positive reviews of white artists were inspiring, and they boosted the levels of confidence of white artists.

Koloane is of the opinion that considering the imbalances in the South African world of art the question of ‘Art Criticism for Whom?’ sounds “rhetoric” implying that it does not serve the entire population of the country (1998:71). For example, English is always the medium of communication used in art criticism even though it is most often a second or third language to most black South Africans. (1998:71).

The above shows that art in South Africa has always been associated with race, elitism and class. The political apparatus introduced by the government like Bantu Education did not help the situation. The different ways of writing about artists as noted above also affected the valorisation of artworks in the country. Even when black artists had acquired significant art education their work was still received with heightened caution and apparent distrust. In other words, the tendency to treat the work of black artists differently as compared to the work of white artists continued well into the new South Africa. More importantly we learn that black artists had to perform their blackness in order to be relevant in the realm of South African art which resulted in the canonical ‘township art’.

Koloane proceeds arguing that the academic terminology employed in art criticism renders it inaccessible to ordinary people. Inequality also contributes to the decline of interaction between black and white artists. Most black artists lack confidence and are intimidated by their white counterparts. Black artists are discouraged from engaging with the European art history and are advised

to stick to their African tradition (1998:71). Sack (1988) who conducted field research in preparation for the *Neglected Tradition* show attests to the idea of language as a barrier in the world of South African art. For Sack in many cases the misunderstanding brought about by communication problems between black artists and researchers or art dealers results in the misinterpretation of black artists work who some of them could hardly utter an English word. It is apparent that this is one of the factors that lead to the differentiation of the work of black artists in South Africa.

Given the problems identified, Koloane urges for collaboration in the region of southern Africa to find ways of implementing an accessible kind of art criticism. There is a need to implement art criticism in South Africa without excluding communities. Institutions that are regarded as containers of foreign cultures should be changed and made accessible for the benefit of the local population with strategic educational programmes in place. The model of workshop programme that already exists in the Southern Africa region can be expanded to include oral and written interpretations in any language. Through beneficial collaborations tertiary institutions, galleries and museums can be made accessible to artists and people that make craftwork. Outreach programmes, for instance, could help artists access the resources of universities on an informal basis of learning. For Koloane, these measures can help ordinary people understand what is happening. For the art historian and academic Colin Richards (1998) such strategies run the risk of being anti-academic and anti-intellectual.[64] This is one of the examples which show that people from different racial backgrounds have different views of what should be done to reform the South African art world as I demonstrated in chapter one using the JHB biennales as case study. These disparate perspectives characterise the nature of South African art world.

[64] According to Same Mdluli (2019) in relation to the writing of 'Art Criticism for Whom? by Koloane, "A well-versed art history scholar and art critic would be privy to the fact that Koloane was responding in 1998 to a text written by the late Colin Richards in which Richards declared there was no art criticism in South Africa — a declaration made without consideration of his own privileged position or acknowledgement of the real conditions that produced the situation raised by his critique."

Lastly, Koloane posits that the Central Business District of Johannesburg boasts the JAG that is situated in Joubert Park. According to Koloane, for many people who use Joubert Park, the JAG is irrelevant and confusing. Koloane ascribes the confusion to the policies of apartheid. A lot of Joubert Park users think of the JAG as a government building, and they don't know what is happening inside. The sculptures in the grounds of the JAG are used as backdrops for photographs and people have little understanding of the significance of these sculptures. For Koloane, this shows that little is done to educate those who regularly use Joubert Park. This hinders change and does not help in changing perceptions about art and art criticism in South Africa. Similarly, many young people are deterred from engaging in the practice of writing due to its intimidating academic language.

As mentioned earlier 'Art Criticism for Whom?' was written two decades ago and a lot has changed since then. But it seems certain issues take time to change. For example, Lize van Robbroeck (2013) commenting on the art book *Visual Century* writes, "while there is a substantial increase in the number of black students qualifying as fine artists, the same is not true of art history, for reasons that can be best speculated on" (2013:37). For van Robbroeck this is one of the reasons that explain why *Visual Century* features writings mostly by white writers.

As noted above 'Art Criticism for Whom?' is a text capable of influencing debate. For example, in 2019 the Standard Bank Art Gallery in Johannesburg hosted an exhibition titled A *Black Aesthetic: A View of South African Artists (1970-1990)*. This exhibition prompted a significant degree of response and media coverage, and it also had a strong educational element. Same Mdluli, the Standard Bank Art Gallery curator, noted a number of important considerations in a public response in the local *Mail & Guardian*.

Mdluli is of the view that art critiquing similar to curating is a complicated skill that requires a certain degree of the visual arts understanding. According to Mdluli, Koloane's 'Art Criticism for Whom?', written two decades ago, argued that the visual arts in South Africa are often seen as elitist and associated with

power and affluence. For Mdluli, the ideas expressed in Koloane's essay are still germane in the South African art criticism space characterised by inconsistences and differences. According to Mdluli the South African visual arts world is contradictory and has largely retained a predominantly male dominated and elitist space even though it has expanded and 'democratised' the consumption of art by including Black women.

Furthermore, due to the fact that nowadays anyone can become an artist or art critic, and anything can be framed as art, Koloane's essay is even more important as a theoretical lens to analyse why certain views on visual arts are repulsively misplaced. These form part of a larger symptom of a lack of art education; methods of teaching in institutions and patriarchal systems determine and control who speaks with authority on matters of art. Patriarchy plays a crucial role in how we think about race, class and gender relations in all spheres of life. Koloane's observations inform Mdluli's reflection on the way in which the show *A Black Aesthetic: A View of South African Artists* (1970-1990) was received and written about.

In particular, Mdluli was responding to some patriarchal reviews that failed to understand the objectives of the exhibition. For Mdluli these reviews reveal hidden misogynistic agendas, and their writers treat black professional women in the visual arts as art objects with nothing substantial to offer. This does not help change perceptions of art as elitist but it is also part of the false politically ambitious thinkers with no charisma, desperately looking for validation in the seemingly free for all art space.

Mdluli's response was directed specifically at what she judged as unfair criticism levelled against *A Black Aesthetic*. The exhibition, inter alia, inspired debate about race and art in South Africa. In the following chapter I explore issues relating to the exhibition. In essence, Mdluli uses 'Art Criticism for Whom?' as a theoretical lens through which she could rebut what she perceived as unjust criticism prompted by misogynistic attitudes.

Further demonstration that the work of Koloane has influenced many younger writers is the work of the writer and academic Khan (2018). Khan looks at twenty-three exhibition reviews written by white writers about black artists between 2001 and 2015 with one review from 1990-where necessary written responses to these reviews are discussed. Khan reveals the ethnicity based socio-cultural value judgments used in these writings and the bodies that produce them and how these writings inform the visual arts scene of South Africa.

According to Khan since apartheid Koloane and others have questioned the authoritative white voices in art history and art criticism writings that seem to be perpetuating the limited Eurocentric foundation and description of what is art and how art is written about. Khan argues that there is a need for a sustained political investigation to uncover who is writing, the body of the writer and voice must be revealed. What is the subject of the writing and about whom is the writing about, how and for what purpose is the writing. She specifically focuses on art criticism writings that contain implied assessment and critique of contemporary works as found on public platforms.

Khan demonstrates how anti-black colonial racism works in art criticism to maintain White bodies, and their art stories and interpretations as germane, truthful and universal in the visual arts. She shows the *white* writer as an embodiment of an idea. She demonstrates that “Whiteness remains invisible and *unscathed* in its specifically cultural value judgments and continues to appear as universal, *normal* and natural” (2018:3). Khan posits that White colonial values found in arts education owe their existence to colonial modernity norms and thinking “with all their racial and ethnic prejudice” (ibid.). For Khan, there are a few publications in South Africa that have writings about the visual arts. The limited publishing field of South Africa is not helping the situation in that newspaper art writing and exhibition reviews have a wide audience as compared to academic journals and by default they become salient sources of principal information about artists. As such these shape cultural knowledge of artists and writers.

The point of the matter in the above brief description of Mdluli and Khan's work is that younger scholars have taken up Koloane's criticism and writing. With that said Koloane's essay inspires my research into the factors that prompted the emergence of the labels 'township art' and 'black modernisms' in South Africa.

In conclusion, 'Art Criticism for Whom?' sheds light on the significance of art criticism in South Africa where certain sections of the population were denied the basic human right of access to quality education. Owing to the great disparities in regard to the distribution of infrastructure and resources during apartheid, Koloane was of the view that in essence art criticism in terms of the broader population of South Africa was non-existent. A bottom up approach should be used to raise awareness about art criticism otherwise the visual arts and art criticism will invariably be associated with the elite. At the heart of 'Art Criticism for Whom?' is the issue of the education system reformation.

What this means in relation to the argument of this dissertation could be best described through the story of Polly Street Art Centre. In chapter two of this dissertation I demonstrate that 'township art' emerged from this centre in the 1960s. Below I briefly touch upon the recruitment strategies used at Polly Street Art Centre to attract students. More importantly, I explore pedagogies and teaching methods employed at the Centre.

The Polly Street Art Centre somehow closed the gap that missionary schools had left due to the introduction of Bantu Education policy. The daughter of Skotnes, Pippa Skotnes (2018) writes,

> then he got Thrups to donate chicken soup that was served during classes. Students began to flock to the centre and soon he was teaching up to 75 per week. It became a refuge and the only art school for blacks in the country.

If the above statement is anything to go by then the centre was indeed a refuge. Black people that visited the centre were driven by many reasons. Some saw it as a place to learn while to others it was a place where one could get a free meal. This explains why a number of black artists ended up being

factories of art. Upon realising the potential of making a living out of producing art certain artists at Polly Street Art Centre never looked back and they eventually became role models. Rankin (1990) thinks about the intricacies of the interaction between South African black artists and their white patrons. Rankin postulates that white people brought the idea of fine art to the African continent. Even though artistic objects have been produced for many years for practical or symbolic purposes necessary to African social system but the idea of art void of any function, especially easel painting is novel to the African continent. For Rankin this explains why modern art made by black artists is sold entirely to the white market, among black Africans there was no tradition of buying art objects for the sake of looking at them.

Koloane thought of Polly Street Art Centre as a space that offered a bit of dance, a bit of music, a bit of art and a bit of boxing. Therefore, the training offered at Polly Street Art Centre was by no means serious as people attended during their free time. Artists who studied at Polly Street Art Centre were determined, they developed on their own and were happy to have a meeting space were they could share ideas. Ivor Powell, the art critic, academic and writer in conversation with Koloane in 1995 during the africa95 arts festival in the UK argues that the Polly Street Art Centre was established under the auspices of the NP through its Department of Native Affairs (or the Non-European Affairs Department). This happened while the NP was busy trying to institutionalise the policy of Bantu Education and Cecil Skotnes was appointed as an instructor.[65] Powell contends that the establishment of the Centre was the NP's strategy to encourage white artists to work in one way

[65] "A chapter in a recently published monograph on Skotnes, *Teaching and Learning, Skotnes at Polly Street* by Elizabeth Rankin, throws light upon the topic. It is interesting to note that when Skotnes first tried to introduce sculpture among the students who gathered at the centre, it was not well received. The reason seems to have been that they related sculpture and especially carving to craft, which was almost the only form of art offered in the black classes of Bantu Education. Painting on the contrary was conceived as being part of modern urban culture. Seen from a wider Africa perspective, it is likewise thought-provoking that when Skotnes wanted to avoid letting western ideas and aesthetics interfere with a presumed original African sensitivity, and therefore tried to encourage the students to draw on an African heritage represented by craft and traditional visual production, he met with little response. His approach in fact not totally different from the patronizing views of the heads of the workshops in Central and West Africa where an alleged African innocence was cultivated and manipulated. But here the context was different and Skotnes was quick to learn. He soon found out that with the disappearance of South Africa's material culture and the industrialization and urbanisation the black population, the urban black artists with whom he worked had virtually no knowledge of the traditional culture of the continent. For them art was connected with the present not with the past"

and black artists in another. In response to Powell (1995: 262), Koloane was of the view that,

> For blacks, in a primitive untutored way. If a black artist was referred to as primitive, that meant he was going in the right direction. Blacks weren't encouraged to pursue an academic training, or to become art teachers, for example.

Individuals such as the artist Durant Sihlali who attended at Polly Street Art Centre, is known for expressing similar views and how he was invariably at loggerheads with his instructor Skotnes. Skotnes' academic track record makes it difficult to comprehend the above. Furthermore, Skotnes strongly fostered a particular way of approaching art, especially watercolour.

The artist Ephraim Ngatane a peer of Sihlali and both attendees at Polly Street Art Centre followed the instructions Skotnes in his handling of watercolour. Skotnes promoted the free flow technique of watercolour characterized by fuzzy edges of figures and objects as opposed to clearly delineated objects and figures. Skotnes strongly encouraged the use imagination to his students.

However, a point that should perhaps be made is that artists at Polly Street Art Centre were at liberty to choose any subject matter. Skotnes could only influence and impose his ideas on his students to a certain limited degree. One of the instructors at Polly Street Art Centre gives credence to the above as captured in Miles' book. Miles (2004: 29) notes,

> Alpheus Kubheka recalls that the programme at Polly Street consisted of drawing in charcoal and painting in watercolours as well as oils. Apart from working in the studio from still life and life models, they also painted out of doors. Kubheka was responsible for organizing these excursions.

I am of the view that the choice of certain subject matter of artists such as Ngatane fascinated the white dealers and art market that was wholly dominated by white people at the time. The work of Ngatane that depicted sentimentalised township scenes became the embodiment of life in the

townships to people who had never set foot in such areas. The economic success of this kind of work resulted in repetition and copying as artists realised that they could make a living by painting stylised township scenes.

3.3. Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed ‘Art Criticism for Whom? by Koloane. I started by offering a brief history of art criticism which precedes the analysis of ‘Art Criticism for Whom?. I have discussed the impact of Bantu Education on art development in South Africa. I have demonstrated the relationship between modern art and education in relation to the so-called township art. Since the issue of education reformation is at the centre of ‘Art Criticism for Whom?’ It is safe to infer that art education was one of the issues Koloane was responding to in ‘Art Criticism for Whom?’. In regard to the argument of this dissertation the type of education that black people received during colonialism and apartheid was one of the factors that brought about the emergence of ‘township art’ that emerged from the Polly Street Art Centre. During the course of this research I came to realise that the current education system was somehow modelled on Bantu Education.

It is important to note that Bantu Education was criticised for not being an integral part of a plan for socio-economic growth. It was confusing because of its various agencies with no clear organised unity, and it was not planned. It relied on experimentation based on scientific research. In other words, when the Bantu Education Act was inaugurated in 1953 it did not come as a fully packaged concept accompanied by well thought school curricula.

Like the current Outcome Based Education (OBE) system it was hastily introduced to address political concerns rather than issues pertaining to classrooms and genuine reformation of the education system. Most of the recommendations of the Eiselen Commission point us back to the influences of Afrikaner nationalism that strongly promoted separate development. This finding leads us to the historical source of differentiation as captured in classifications such as ‘township art’ or ‘black modernisms’. In chapter four I

investigate the roots of ‘black modernisms’. I explore how what is generally known as ‘township art’ in South Africa is received and interpreted abroad.

Chapter Four

4.1. An Analysis of *Moments in Art: A Story from South Africa* (1995)

This dissertation is concerned with the controversial forms of knowledge found in South African art literature produced during colonialism/post-colonialism and apartheid/post-apartheid eras. I seek to demonstrate that certain cultural stereotypes have found their way into the new South Africa. In this chapter I investigate the meaning of blackness as I discuss the roots of the label 'black modernisms'. I show that taxonomies such as 'township art' and 'black modernisms' are 'Othering' devices, which owe their existence to the phenomena of industrialisation and urbanisation in South Africa. I demonstrate the endurance of these terms within the art historical discourse of South Africa. I also show that what is disapprovingly known as township art in the country is, outside of South Africa framed as modern art (or 'high art').

The tendency to emphasize the ethnicity of black artists by white writers can be traced back to certain art writings produced during colonialism and apartheid. E de Jager (1992), for instance, in the conclusion uses the capitalised terms Black/Blacks 24 times on one page. The capitalised adjective 'Black' is used as a noun that references all indigenous Africans. The excessive use of this term distracts the attention of the reader as the reader is compelled to focus on issues pertaining to culture and identity, and less on the aesthetics of the artwork. In 2019 Same Mdluli curated the exhibition 'A Black Aesthetic: A View of South African Artists (1970-90)', which was mostly made up of the works that constitute de Jager's book. The exhibition was complemented by a strong element of educational programming. Through the show Mdluli proposes a different theorisation of modern art by black artists in South Africa. Looking at 'A Black Aesthetic' from a point of view of knowledge production, the exhibition unconsciously perpetuated the anthropological framing of modern art produced by black artists in that the narrative of the show was mostly based on de Jager's initial ideas instead of offering, perhaps, how contemporary black artists have been

influenced by the collection, both in critical and uncritical ways. Thus the show maintained the mythologised history of modern art made by black artists in South Africa. For the writer Mongezeleli Joja (2019:1) the exhibition "inadvertently ratifies De Jager's ethnographic focus. As a result, the show not only ends up serving to echo De Jager's androcentrism (placing the male at the centre), it also rescues some of his shoddy dispositions."[66]

Having said the above, my investigation of the genealogy of classifications 'township art' and 'black modernisms' uses the work of the artist and curator David Koloane as a source of knowledge into how these labels emerged. Through the exploration of Koloane's work I demonstrate that the labels 'township art' and 'black modernisms' are allegorical, they can be translated to reveal hidden moral and political meanings, and I show that in the discourse of South African art history these terms are used at different times to serve the purpose of rendering the work of black South African artists different (inferior) and less valuable.

In chapters one and two of this thesis I discuss the essay 'Walking the Tightrope' (1997) by Koloane through which we learn how art developed in South Africa. In chapter three of this dissertation I explore the essay 'Art Criticism for Whom? also by Koloane. 'Art Criticism for Whom? was first presented as a conference paper in London in 1996. Koloane's appearance in the conference was brought about by his participation in the Africa95 arts festival held in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1995. In this festival Koloane participated both as an artist and curator. For the sake of diversifying my investigation into the work of Koloane in this chapter I discuss the exhibition 'Moments in Art: A Story from South Africa' (1995) which Koloane curated as part of the show *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* held at the Whitechapel Gallery in London during the Africa95 arts festival. In other words, in this thesis the practices of writing, art making and curatorship are all regarded as some sorts of text or forms of writing. For example, in terms of

[66] I am aware of the tension this discussion generated with Mdluli arguing that Joja perpetuated patriarchy that he ostensibly rejects. For example, please see Thuli Magedze (2019), James Macdonald (2020).

visual arts Koloane interrogates the socio-political and human conditions as created by the regime of apartheid in South Africa. This is beneficial as I explore what Koloane was responding to in his work and that includes his writings, artwork and shows he curated/co-curated. I am interested to find out how Koloane's interrogation of the South African socio-political conditions played itself out in his other forms of work like curating and writing.

In response to the invitation to contribute to the exhibition *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, Koloane had the following to state, "it is a historical development for an African curator to be entrusted with such a responsibility in the South African context". In conceptualising the exhibition Koloane settled on the idea of black consciousness as the main theme of the show. In light of this, this chapter seeks to explore why did Koloane choose the lens of the philosophy of black consciousness to tell a South African story on an international stage? Why did Koloane choose the idea of black consciousness yet his show featured both black and white South African artists? I argue that this approach nullifies the negative natural meaning ascribed to the sign 'black'.

In order to put things in context I begin by defining the term 'modernism' and I look into the meaning of the sign 'black' as used to define people. This is followed by a brief history of the philosophy of black consciousness in South Africa so as to uncover the source of inspiration to Koloane as I explore the reasons behind his choice of theoretical base in relation to 'Moments in Art'.

I then look into how the Whitechapel Gallery became the host of *Seven Stories* during the Africa95 arts festival. According to Clementine Deliss, (1995:27) the originator of *Seven Stories* together with the art historian John Picton, *Seven Stories* was a result of a complex curatorial process over three years, to which the Whitechapel Gallery gave continuous support. Lastly, I discuss *Seven Stories* with a specific focus on 'Moments in Art'. In this regard I commence by briefly offering the context in which this show was organised. My discussion focuses on the work of Paul Stopforth, Ezrom Legae and

Koloane, as it is impossible within the scope of this chapter to pay attention to the works of all featured artists. It is hoped that the selected work will help us understand the essence of 'Moments in Art' and assist us to ascertain what Koloane was responding to in his work.

A catalogue of the same name complemented *Seven Stories*. [67] As the academic and author Colin Richards writes (1996:85), catalogues and journals are "informative" and they give "opportunities for the publication of local and international critical writing on South African art". Catalogues are very important in the discourse of historiography. I have, therefore, used the *Seven Stories* catalogue as a source of information.

4.2. A concise history of modernism and blackness as a signifier of absence

It should be stated upfront that this dissertation subscribes to the notion of multiple modernities including pre-colonial African modernity as embodied by the ruins of Mapungubwe in Limpopo, South Africa (Oliphant et al 2004: 15). For the sake of scholarly clarity, black people in South Africa responded in various ways to the idea of modernism as introduced through colonialism. Black people started using western ways of making art approximately a century ago (Rankin 1990, Gule 2010). For example, artists like Simon Mnguni and Gerard Bhengu whose work resemble studies made by early white ethnographers of black people, were mostly executed in watercolour. Among the first artists to depict unsentimental human situations in areas occupied by black people were John Koenakeefe Mohl (Mohlankana), Gerard Sekoto and George Pemba. These artists are chronicled as the first black

[67] The glossy colourful catalogue is divided into four sections. These are introduction, seven stories, recollections and notes. The introductions section contains acknowledgements, which are followed by Catherine Lampert's foreword. These precede Deliss' essay titled *7+7=1: Seven Stories, Seven Stages, One Exhibition*. *7+7=1* is followed by 'Inside. Outside' an essay by Evelyn Nicodemus. The following section contains seven stories from Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Ethiopia, South Africa, Kenya and Uganda. The recollections section has a collection of interviews, reminiscences, articles and manifestoes from the above-mentioned countries. The last section put together by Elsbeth Court contains a further reading list, contributor's biographies, references and credits. The work of the Senegalese artist El Hadji Sy — a without title oil on canvas — was selected for the official poster, T-shirt and catalogue cover.

artists to use European methods of making art (i.e. canvas painting) as a result of the phenomena of industrialisation and urbanisation that followed the discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa. In the discourse of art history the above mentioned artists are controversially defined as 'black modernists'[68]. When they first appeared in the 1930s their work was received with ambivalence, white art writers saw the work of these artists as an emulation of European art.

The creation of art centres like the Polly Street Art Centre in 1949 in Johannesburg prompted the emergence of new aesthetics by black artists. However, from the 1970s until the 1990s black South African artists were all pejoratively called township artists.[69]Below I explore the roots of the tendency to differentiate the work of black artists from that of white artists in South Africa through reductive taxonomies such as 'black modernisms'.

According to the academic and writer Henry Louis Gates, Jnr (1983:38), "the trope of blackness in Western discourse has signified absence at least since Plato". Major philosophical, scientific and literary text on racism first emerged in the 16th century. For example, in terms of literature and theatre, the playwright William Shakespeare in the play *The Tempest* (c. 1610 or c. 1611), imagined Caliban, one of the characters, as a black slave, a simple man who is not fully human. On the cultural and moral levels such perceptions justified the enterprises of colonialism and slavery that ensued. In the late 16th century a European intellectual movement called the Enlightenment emerged through which racism and colonialism were defended and vindicated.[70] With the end of colonialism in South Africa certain cultural perceptions were maintained

[68] Some of these artists received their art education in missionary schools that were subsequently closed down in the wake of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (please see chapter three). According to Peffer (2009:6) "Mancoba and Sekoto had received a relatively privileged education compared with most black South Africans of their day."

[69] It should be made clear that terms such as 'resistance art' (1970s), 'rural art' (1980s), 'transitional art' (1980s) appeared at different times but they were almost all exclusively used to define the work of black artists in South Africa.

[70] The Enlightenment is a European intellectual movement of the late 17th and 18th centuries emphasizing reason and individualism rather than tradition. It was heavily influenced by 17th-century philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Newton, and its prominent exponents include Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Adam Smith.

through apartheid aka intra-colonialism.[71] In other words, "the received idea of blackness as a negative essence," a symbol of "badness" can be traced back to a particular geography and temporal space (Gates, Jnr 1983: 38). The interpretation of blackness as a symbol of absence prompted a variety of reactions especially among those stigmatised through the colour of their skin. The black consciousness movement in South Africa, inter alia, sought to quell the stigma associated with blackness. In the subsection below I discuss the history of black consciousness in South Africa.

In common language modernity as derived from the word modern relates to the quality of being modern, a most recent way of thinking as opposed to using traditional methods of thinking and expression.[72] In this thesis the terms modernity and modernism are sometimes used interchangeably, unless stated as in modernism in reference to the theory or aesthetic of the twentieth century. More specifically, the term modernity connotes the condition of society and modernism(s) refer to twentieth century aesthetic(s).

The popular notion of modernity holds that modernism began in the 17th century. In this sense modernism is seen as a geographical, historical and temporal phenomenon mostly ascribed to the Italian astronomer and physicist Galilei Galileo and Rene Descartes the French philosopher and scientist who coined the term, 'I think, therefore I am'.[73] This continuous, unperturbed and homogenous account of modernity has prompted a variety of responses and

[71] The end of colonialism in South Africa was marked by the event of South African unification in 1910. The union of South Africa is the predecessor to the present-day republic of South Africa. It was established on 31st May 1910 with the unification of the Cape Colony, the Natal Colony. It included the areas that were previously a part of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State

[72] A movement toward modifying traditional beliefs in accordance with modern ideas, esp. in the Roman Catholic Church in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. According to the art historian John Peffer (2009:4), "Modernism may be characterized at its most basic as a self-conscious break with the past, as an ongoing search for novel forms of expression, and by experimentation with nontraditional media. Modernist art has also been dependent, since the nineteenth century, upon a close circuit of critics and dealers intent on promoting the idea of novelty by foregrounding the artist as an ideal (and marketable) "individual" in the contemporary world. Modernism developed in the context of the global cultural upheaval that resulted from a century of industrialisation and colonialism."

[73] In his translation of *Discourse on Method and Meditations* by Descartes Laurence J. Lafleur (1960:vii) is of the view that, "By an almost universal agreement among philosophers and historians, Rene Descartes is considered the originator of modern philosophy, or at least the first important philosopher of our times. If we add to this the common belief that philosophy points the way for developments in all other fields, it will be evident that to Descartes is ascribed an importance comparable to that of the beginning of intellectual culture in Greece or of the origin and spread of Christianity in the Mediterranean regions, and surpassing all other events in history".

revisions of dates regarding when precisely modernity started. Many post-colonial historians locate the origins of modernity in the phenomenon of the Renaissance. The expeditions of discovery brought Europeans to contact with the unknown or the 'Other' cultures, and this informed the Europeans' self-awareness of identity.[74] In terms of art, Modernism as in the philosophy of modern art emerged in the nineteenth century in tandem with modern art as a result of industrialisation.[75]

The Europeans' desire to self-define resulted in the creation of the myth of race as the West embarked on the project of classification characterised by the taming of the natural world. Around the same time another modernity arose in the form of the New Negro in the United States of America as a result of slavery, which followed after the discovery of sea routes as noted above. These two fundamentally similar modernities developed side by side with the Renaissance and Enlightenment modernity taking centre stage, and becoming a standard narrative perpetuated through various modernist discourses. The accepted notion of modernity in the West was transferred as a whole to South Africa. The art historian John Peffer (2009:6), is of the opinion that in the visual arts "in South Africa, the terms defining the general character of modernism were roughly the same as those in Europe, though the tendency was to respond to modernist principles by means of local conditions..." This was the case for both black and white South African artists.

For Paul Gilroy (2000:44), the story of a "tidy, holistic conception of modernity" is not credible. In his mapping of modernism Gilroy does not only question the received historical narrative of modernity but he also seeks to argue for the "inversion of the relationship between margin and centre as it appeared within the master discourses of the master race"(ibid.). According to Gilroy (2000:47) in the standard story of modernity black people,

> appear as signs of irrational disorder or as a means to celebrate the power of human nature uncorrupted by the decadence of the civilizing process. In

[74] For example please see the writings of Daniele Becker (2017), Van Robbroeck (2006).
[75] For example, the realism of Gustave Courbet is recorded as the first instance of modern art.

> either guise, blacks enjoy a subordinate position in the dualistic system that reproduces the dominance of bonded whiteness, masculinity, and rationality.

It is partly because of the above that African cultural revivalists view colonialism that arose in the wake of sea routes discoveries as a violent disruption of African cultural traditions that imposed with different levels of success Western thought and community organisation on African people.[76] Modernism is considered as co-existing with the spirit of post-modernism. As much as Foucault saw modernism as an attitude perpetuated through various discourse narratives, post-modernism is essentially a zeitgeist or an attitude characterised by the enjoyment of skepticism, playfulness, paradox and most of all enmity towards generalisation. However, for Gilroy (2000:44) much of the perceived newness of post-modernism as promoted in the dominant writings of white European and American writers "evaporates when it is viewed in the unforgiving historical light of the brutal encounters between Europeans and those they conquered, slaughtered, and enslaved". It is partly for this reason that Gilroy sees his book as an intellectual contribution towards the project of reconstruction pertaining to the periodisation of modernism and post-modernism. For Gilroy (2000:44) the periodisation of these phenomena is very important in relation to the history of black people in the West and for recording the changing relations of domination and subjection "between Europeans and the rest of the world". Furthermore, as much as modernity is seen as a departure from traditional ways of doing things modernity also strongly owes its existence to tradition. As Gule (2010:121) succinctly puts it,

> A number of scholars have argued that modernity has always tried to make a clean break with tradition. That, however, seems like a limited reading. It is true that modernity is a critique of certain aspects of tradition but, judging from artistic expression, modern artists, at least after French Impressionism, were obsessed with traditional or 'primitive' societies.

[76] Please see Jay A. Ciaffa (2008) in the essay 'Tradition and Modernity in Post-Colonial African Philosophy'.

Given the above contentions, this thesis suggests a multifaceted form of modernity, including pre-colonial modernisms. This is in line with V.Y. Mudimbe's assertion of a "multifaceted 'idea' of Africa" (1994:xi). According to the academic Ntongela Masilela (2003:3), "the historical issue of the so-called 'Black Atlantic' is fundamentally about the construction of African modernities". Early black South African intellectuals traced African modernity back to the historical matter of the black Atlantic event of slavery. There are occidental modernisms too. According to the artist, academic and writer Chika Okeke-Agulu (2006:3), the so-called "mainstream" European modernism "began in the nineteenth century reaching its zenith in the early twentieth century in Paris and New York" (ibid.). In essence, European modernism is signified by modern art that emerged in the twentieth century in Paris and other parts of the world. For Okeke-Agulu modernist art was more than a search for new artistic styles (aesthetics),

> modernism was the expressive form of the political, ideological and socio-economic processes associated with modernity; local historical conditions and intellectual traditions therefore determined the specific form of its constituents. Modernism in Africa thus refers not to a set of formal conventions but to sets of critical practices championed by artists confronting or responding to Africa's modernity during the colonial and immediate post-independence eras. In the hands of these artists, modernism insinuates the visual expression of the real experiences, illusory visions, and critical imaginations of Africa's modernity (ibid.).

African modernists who first appropriated western ways of making art have been wrongly labeled un-African in favour of African nativism. Okeke-Agulu sees not modernist art from Africa as some form of Euro-American art copy. For Okeke-Agulu, modernist art from Africa stems from "a conscious examination and questioning of, rather than an easy answer to, issues arising from the implications of the continent's triple heritage" (i.e. indigenous African, European and Islamic influences). With his theory of African modernisms Okeke-Agulu debunked mythic assertions made by William Fagg and Margaret Plass who maintained that modern African art was in essence "an

extension of European art by a kind of involuntary cultural colonialism" (in Okeke-Agulu 2006:3). Such assertions perpetuated the notion of mimicry, and foreshadowed attempts to read modern art from Africa on its own terms. For Okeke-Agulu, the notion that Paris and New York are sites of modernism while alternative modernisms that develop outside these locations are seen as inferior modernisms points to the misunderstanding of the theory of modernism. Okeke-Agulu (ibid.) defines modernism as

> a constellation of formal and conceptual strategies adopted by artists everywhere who, exploiting ideas and expressive forms from within and outside of their cultural contexts, fashioned new ways of seeing and expressing the modern through art.

In the following section I look into the history of black consciousness, I demonstrate that the idea of black consciousness is a modernist construction that incorporates ideas of Pan Africanism, Negritude, and the Black Atlantic notions of race and culture. This complicates the reading of artworks that draw on the idea of black consciousness as will be shown below. This explication helps us understand the meaning of blackness beyond the standard meaning associated with the term black.

4.3. A brief history of the roots of the concept of black consciousness in South Africa[77]

The concept of black consciousness took shape in the backdrop of the Sharpeville carnage. The writer Xolela Mangcu (2004) discusses the contribution of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) to the attainment

[77] In 1865 in defense of his race, Reverend Tiyo Soga writing as Defensor a pseudonym submitted an article to the *Gazette* responding to Chalmers' article entitled 'The Kafir Race'. Chalmers argued that in order for the Xhosa people to avoid extinction they should let their colonizers lead them and blacks must contribute to the construction of the British colony. Soga countered Chalmers contention arguing that Xhosas will not go extinct; in actual fact the entire black population will rise as stated in the Bible "Ethiopia shall soon stretch her hands out to God". Soga believed that the black population would adjust to their new reality of life provided that they embrace Christianity and education without losing their heritage and identity. The interaction between Soga and Chalmers is significant in the history of writing in South Africa and in relation to the development of Black Consciousness in the country. As Williams states that, "as far as can be ascertained, the letters are the first of their kind by a black man in South Africa, and contribute to making 1865 the great year for the emergence of Black Consciousness" (in Ross 2018: 14).

of liberation in South Africa. According to Mangcu the BCM began in earnest in 1967 as a result of the University of Grahamstown's refusal to accommodate black students who had attended a meeting of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). As a sign of solidarity Biko invited white students to join them and find accommodation in the nearby 'township'. However, the white students showed reluctance, which resulted in black students boycotting the meeting altogether. Biko then decided to join a meeting of the University Christian Movement (UCM), which was also happening in Grahamstown. In 1968 in one of the UCM meetings Biko broached the concept of establishing a blacks-only student organisation. The South African Students Organisation (SASO) was eventually formed with Biko and Barney Pityana as president and secretary general, respectively. SASO would use the philosophy of black consciousness as its founding ideology.

Biko, the proponent of African humanism and self-determination is famous for noting that, "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (2004:74). The BCM sought to re-instil the eroded sense of pride in the mind of black people. It concerned itself with countering the mentally embedded proclivity of inferiority and to subvert the state of powerlessness that colonialism had imposed on Africans through the declaration of African humanity and to instil pride in Africans. Therefore, the BCM was a resistance expression of self-love and self-acceptance in the midst of humiliation and subjugation. For the advocates of black consciousness philosophy the primary object was to address the psychological aspect of the oppressed as expressed in Biko's statement.

For Biko, black people were complicit in their dehumanising and brutal oppression by internalising the racial theories and stereotypes the government of apartheid promulgated about them. He encouraged his people to disabuse themselves of the notions of self-hate and low self-esteem. Secondly, the BCM sought to combat white racism in all its forms in South Africa; it argued for the equality of mankind against the regime of apartheid. It promoted the notions of self-reliance and self-determination amongst the oppressed masses of South Africa.

Biko locates the emergence of self-determination amongst black South Africans in the instance of the Freedom Charter ratification on the 25th and 26th June 1955 as a guiding document of the ANC and its allies. Subsequently, a group of disgruntled members left the ANC to form a new political party called the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). At the heart of this fall-out, inter alia is the preamble to the Freedom Charter document which states that "South Africa belongs to everyone who lives in it"[78]. Also, the Pan Africanists were against the idea of collaborating with white liberals who joined the ANC either as ordinary citizen of South Africa or as members of the Communist Party of South Africa. For Biko (2004:73), this breakaway marked the beginning of black self-awareness in the South African political domain, "Black Consciousness was slowly manifesting itself". Biko observed.

According to common knowledge the BCM in South Africa borrowed from and was preceded by similar theories in the black diaspora.[79]In the 1800s, African-American intellectuals like Alexander Crummel, Martin Delaney and Edward Blyden spearheaded the 'back to West Africa movement' that promoted the notions of self-love and of reclaiming African heritage. In the 1900s when intellectuals like W.E.B du Bois organised the Pan Africanism symposium they were primarily concerned, inter alia, about the psychological repercussions of slavery and oppression on black people. In Jamaica Marcus Garvey emerged with a militant expression of black consciousness. He promoted the idea of 'back to Africa' and criticised individuals who sought to alter their appearance by using skin-lighteners and hair straighteners. In the 1930s the native of the island of Martinique, Aime Cesaire invented the word 'negritude' in light of the stigma that was associated with being black at the time. The academic and African humanist Es'kia Mphahlele (1984: 11) writes,

> some African poets, have sweet things to say about night. Night as a symbol of blackness. Night "teeming with rainbows", as Aime Cesaire would say. Night of ourselves. Black souls communing with night and listening to its

[78] Please see the current South African Constitution.
[79] For example, please see the work of James Walvin (2007), Ronald Segal (1995) on the history of the black diaspora.

> mysteries, night defining black souls and their pride. Night was no longer to represent the ugly, the mysterious, the sinister, the darkness of spirit.

By and large, negritude is a declaration of the value of African culture. Cesaire sought to foreground the endeavours of people like himself who were trying to shake off the shame linked with being black. Leopold Senghor who subscribed to the theory of negritude advocated for the acceptance and cultivation of blackness. In the 1960s during the initial years of the philosophy of black consciousness in South Africa, in the United States of America (USA) the ideology was in full motion. Political activists like Malcolm X and Kwame Toure (aka Carmichael Stokely) and radical black nationalist movements such as the Black Panther and Black Power found expression in the philosophy of Black Consciousness.

As noted above in the South African context, black consciousness developed in the backdrop of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre that claimed the lives of many black people.[80] Following the massacre, the government banned all political parties and the first state of emergency was introduced. Some political activists were detained and others fled South Africa into exile. The banning of political parties temporarily brought to the end the mass political organising, there was to a certain degree a lull of mass political activity in South Africa. According to Mangcu (2004:115) in the early 1960s political activity in South Africa took the form of "underground political activities". The BCM emerged from such an environment.[81]

In his brief mapping of the history of black consciousness in South Africa Mangcu writes (2004:115),

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[80] In response to a political campaign led by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), on the 21 March 1960 people in different 'townships' went on strike to protest against the carrying of passbooks as ordered by the apartheid regime. Passbooks were issued in relation to pass laws and the Population Registration Act of 1950. However, the protest in Sharpeville Township in the Vaal (south of Johannesburg) caught the attention of the world as hundreds of people were killed trying to flee from heavily armed police. Eventually, sixty-nine protesters died and more than two hundred were injured; many were shot in the back.

[81] Other contributing factors to the development of black consciousness in South Africa include the increasing bad living conditions of black people in the country at the time. Also, in the 1960s and 1970s in nearby countries like Angola and Mozambique, European domination was under attack. The former and latter countries gained their independence from the rule of the Portuguese in 1975.

> However, the movement received its most powerful articulation in the student and radical black nationalist movements in the 1960s, particularly through the voices of African-American leaders such as Malcolm X and Kwame Toure (formerly Stokely Carmicheal), and the Black Panther party.

For Mangcu, the black consciousness philosophy in the context of South Africa offered a system of ideas that formed the foundation of the liberation struggle since 1968-1977. Biko (2004:43) argues that, “the fact that American terminology has often been used to express our thoughts is merely because all new ideas seem to get extensive publicity in the United States”. For Biko, the concept of black consciousness has its roots in the African continent and was formed through many different intellectual activities including intellectual activity within the African diaspora. In the United States (USA) the highly developed communication network enables news and ideas to spread rather quickly as compared to underdeveloped regions or states in Africa. According to Biko that is why in the USA the philosophy of black consciousness became popular and resonated with many young people.

Black consciousness defines people of Indian descent, indigenous Africans and ‘Coloureds’ as the Black population of South Africa. This was a way of undermining and of dissolving the cultural differences constructed by the apartheid regime in order to discourage unity amongst these groups. Biko saw the unity of these oppressed groups as their strength in the fight against apartheid. Shannen L. Hill (2015: xiv) states that, “people divided once as Bantu, Coloured, and Indian were BC’s audience”. For Hill (2015: xv), the philosophy of black consciousness transcends the issue of race or ethnicity; black consciousness cannot be pinned down. It is “thought and expression, identification and agency”. In the following section I look at how Koloane used the idea of black consciousness to transcend ethnicity.

Koloane’s contact with the idea of black consciousness can be traced back to the 1970s. In 1977 as a manager of The Gallery in Jeppestown, Johannesburg Koloane applied for funding to the Black Community

Programme (BCP) initiated by Biko. In fact, as a result of media coverage about the opening of The Gallery on the 27th July 1977, the administration of BCP approached the management of The Gallery to inform them of the newly established BCP and its work. In a nutshell, the BCP sought to make funding available to self-sustaining community projects managed by black people. The Gallery was identified as one of the initiatives that could benefit from funding issued by BCP. However, following the death of Biko on 12 August 1977 in police detention the BCP funding did not come true as the government started clamping down on everything associated with Biko and the BCP. The Gallery closed down shortly as it could no longer sustain itself.

Thembinkosi Goniwe the academic and writer curated a series of exhibitions about Koloane in 2019 in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Speaking to Graham Wood (2019), Goniwe is of the view that Koloane's duty as an artist included rejecting the reduced status of 'township artists' and the restricted identities championed by colonialism and apartheid. Goniwe contends that "Koloane's artistic and philosophical output involved building on Steve Biko's idea that 'what South Africa needs is a human face' to create a visual language that opens up the possibilities of new identities" (in Wood 2019:2). As will be shown below the death of Biko and the philosophy of black consciousness have since become sources of inspiration to many visual artists in South Africa.

4.4. The Whitechapel Gallery

Koloane was in London when Deliss and Picton started organising a three-month series of interdisciplinary seminars and discussion around contemporary African art and criticism at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London in 1991. By virtue of his history with the University of London, Koloane became one of the attendants of the seminars, which according to Deliss were the initial steps towards formulating *Seven Stories*[82]. According to the director of the Whitechapel Gallery at the time

[82] The seminars were attended by "African and African-descent artists either resident in the UK (e.g. Sonia Boyce, Olu Oguibe, Sokari Douglas Camp, Pitika Ntuli) or passing through(David Koloane, Ato

Lampert, in 1992 the Whitechapel Gallery warmly welcomed the idea of enhancing the story of African art as was being planned by the Royal Academy. In 1993 a forum was established, and very soon decisions were made on the approach of the exhibition and who may be contracted as co-curators of *Seven Stories*. For Lampert (1995:10), "the Whitechapel's initiative took account of the longer history of the representation of African art in the west and its many proponents". In essence, in the wake of 'western modernism' re-evaluation that commenced in the latter part of the twentieth century the Whitechapel Gallery through *Seven Stories* reinforced its goal of becoming a leading gallery of contemporary art exhibitions in the UK.

The Whitechapel Gallery opened its doors in 1901 as one of the first publicly funded galleries for temporary exhibitions in London. It is famous for showing the work of artists like Pablo Picasso and Mark Rothko, amongst others, and has a long history of organising educational programmes and outreach projects. It is useful to look at the origins of Whitechapel Gallery in terms of the history of the collection and reception of artistic objects or material culture objects made outside of the West.

Like many museums and galleries, the Whitechapel Gallery was established as a site of the production of scientific knowledge and most importantly was founded, to borrow from Wolfgang Ernst (1996:111), "as an arbiter of aesthetic taste". For Ernest, museums are frames whose principles are reflected in the exhibitions they organise, and museums to a certain degree are tied to various political forces. In his theory of exhibitions, Bruce W. Ferguson (2005:180) succinctly elaborates on the above thinking,

> A simpler and more comprehensive way of saying this is that the ways in which art is talked about, understood and debated are largely determined through the medium of exhibitions-through the exhibition as a complex representation of institutional, social, and, paradoxically, often personal values, simultaneously. And the exhibition's representivity then is an

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Delaquis), as well as historians, independent critics and administrators from institutions such as Arts Council and the institute of Contemporary Art" (Deliss 1995:).

> exemplary identification of the direct political tendencies (democratic, nationalistic, feminist, regionalistic postcolonial or whatever) on offer.

For Ferguson, the fundamental role of any exhibition is to influence. Employing these ideas I demonstrate how the Whitechapel Gallery raised awareness in regard to the ways in which African art is received and written about in the West. The academic and writer Edward Matenga (2011:48) is of the view that,

> The west may be defined historically, culturally and geographically as comprising Western Europe, North America, New Zealand and Australia. Western peoples share a common heritage that may be traced back to the Greco-Roman civilization in Europe. Western culture was subsequently shaped by the Renaissance and Enlightenment movements as much as by the rise of mercantile capitalism. A new consumer culture emerged that spurred European nations to seize territory overseas, spawning settler colonies such as North America, Australia and New Zealand, which themselves became part of the West.

Matenga's delineation is expansive and takes into account a number of elements that constitute an updated definition of the cultural and geographical term the 'West'. Owing to the broadness and inclusivity of Matenga's interpretation of the term 'the West' in this dissertation, the above statement is deemed appropriate and it is appropriated. Matenga spent many years investigating the historical architectural site known as the Great Zimbabwe.

The Whitechapel Gallery, which was established as a space for temporary exhibitions, used the multi-faceted arts festival of 1995 to participate in the debate about contemporary African art. The collaborative effort of *Seven Stories* brought to the fore issues pertaining to what constitutes what is known as contemporary African art. The Whitechapel Gallery has a long history of collaborative exhibitions that questioned notions of the nature of art, and challenged the conventional ways of displaying art objects in museums.[83]

[83] For example, in 1956 the Whitechapel Gallery hosted an exhibition called *This is Tomorrow*. According to Anna C. Cline (2012) in the essay *The Evolving Role of the Exhibition and its Impact on Art*

4.5. *Seven Stories* revisited with a special focus on 'Moments in Art'

Koloane's interest in curating can be traced to the 1970s when he was in charge of the proxy black owned, The Gallery, in Jeppestown, from 1977-1979. In 1982, he was appointed to curate artworks of artists based in Johannesburg which became part of the 'Culture and Resistance Conference' held in Botswana. Koloane offered much needed expertise to the Whitechapel Gallery as the institution was trying to deal with issues pertaining to cultural identity and inclusivity in exhibitions.

Seven Stories was a presentation of the diverse contemporary African art with over one hundred and thirty artworks on show made by sixty-five artists based in Africa. This exhibition formed part of the four-month national arts, Africa95 organised in the United Kingdom (UK) from September until December. Africa95 was an unprecedented display of African arts in Britain that consisted of literature, poetry, music, film and visual arts. These artistic presentations took place in various venues across the country. The arts festival was enhanced with workshops and conferences designed to encourage cooperation and exchange between African artists in the diaspora and in Africa. Africa95 sought to incite debate about African art and to bring awareness about contemporary African art in an environment characterised by interest in traditional African art. In fact, Africa95 was organised to coincide with the huge *Africa: The Art of a Continent* exhibition that was held at the

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and Culture, *This is Tomorrow* challenged ideas of the nature of art and how art is created. The title of this exhibition appropriately summarizes the liberal and futuristic vision of the Whitechapel Gallery. "Devoted to the collaborative process, it strived to make the point that all types of artists could harmoniously work together to create art. The exhibition enlisted thirty- seven painters, sculptors, architects, musicians, and engineers including Richard Hamilton, Nigel Hendurson, Victor Pasmore, Keneth and Mary Martin, Erno Goldfinger, Alison and Peter Smithson, and James Sterling. Twelve groups of artists worked together on a project, and each came up with something uniquely different, some concerned with pop culture, and others with a different aesthetic strand of abstract Constructivism. The variety of what was shown fit with the Independent Group's rejection of idealist aesthetics and with it penetrating interest in a diversity of cultural artifacts. It is an exhibition remembered for its focus objects of popular culture placed in a new context, somewhat similar to the ideas found in *Machine Art*. Though, in this case, the challenge to convention was in the form of established artists of different disciplines coming together, to create merging interests and ideas with the intent of producing new and challenging art" (Cline 2012: 3). In 1986 the Whitechapel Gallery organized "*From two Worlds*, which was selected by an artist collective led by Gavin Jantjes and curated by Nicholas Serota" (Jantjes 2011:33). This exhibition highlighted issues relating to "diversity and difference", it is one of the exhibitions that according to Jantjes (Jantjes 2011:33) showed "the gaps in the knowledge of European experts about international art production, as well as the stagnation of Western modernist thinking".

Royal Academy of Arts in London, and which omitted contemporary African art in its analysis of the continent. The latter exhibition sought to acknowledge the cultural contribution of the Caribbean and Africa to the enrichment of the arts in the UK; it was a celebration of the diverse African arts and their contribution to world art. By virtue of its vastness *Africa: Art of a Continent* became the main attraction of Africa95. This exhibition comprised of over 800 works covering a period of 1.5 million years of African history, and this rendered *Africa: The Art of a Continent* the most ambitious and monumental African art exhibition in the history of the UK to date. Therefore, among other reasons, the Whitechapel Gallery came in to close the gap of contemporary African art, hence the focus on current African art in *Seven Stories*. The insistence on personal stories was another strategy used to present a different view of contemporary African art in comparison with previous exhibitions that focused on contemporary and 'traditional African art' held in the West.

Africa95 consisted of various contemporary African art exhibitions that included *Big City* shown at the Serpentine Gallery, *Winds of Change* at 198 Gallery, *Seeing is Believing* at the Economist Plaza and *Seven Stories* at Whitechapel Gallery. According to Olabisi Silva, the last mentioned show was the most ambitious of them all after *Africa: The Art of a Content*. *Seven Stories* was made up of 'The Quest: from Zaria to Nsukka, a story from Nigeria' by Chika Okeke, 'Objects of Performance: a story from Senegal' by El Hadji Sy, 'The Khartoum and Addis Connections: two stories from Sudan and Ethiopia' by Salah M. Hassan, 'Moments in Art: a story from South Africa' by Koloane, and 'Concrete Narratives and Visual Prose: two stories from Kenya and Uganda' by Wanjiku Nyachae. However due to the limitations of the length of this thesis, I focus on 'Moments in Art' in line with the aims of this chapter. According to Deliss (1995:24) 'Moments in Art' was perhaps the most topical exhibition, and Silva is of the view that "sanity, depth, coherence and visual pleasure" imbued 'Moments in Art' (1996:17). Generally, the 1960s and 1970s were used as starting dates of exploration in terms of the scope of *Seven Stories*.

According to Koloane the brief was to put together a group of artworks by South African artists to be presented as part of seven African narratives show, which will form part of the Africa95 arts festival. The selection of participants took place through a system of seminars and meetings that Koloane attended. Discussions began in 1991 and in 1992 the Whitechapel Gallery became the first institution in the UK to pledge support for the Africa95 arts festival. The idea of the exhibition *Seven Stories* took shape in 1993 at a visual roundtable discussion. Participating in this forum were Kojo Fosu from Ghana, Salah Hassan from Sudan, the painter and curator El Hadji from Senegal, Etale Sukuro from Kenya, Koloane from South Africa and Ulli Beier the German art teacher in Nigeria. Through this forum various ways of communication were devised. The interaction and exchange of ideas between participants continued until the opening of *Seven Stories* in 1995.

The organisers of *Seven Stories* take pride in the fact that they afforded African artists and curators an opportunity to self-define and self-represent in one of the capitals of world (high) art. The final presentations were personal and professional accounts of the achievements of contemporary artists as individuals and as artists participating in movements in Africa. This is what distinguishes *Seven Stories* from other contemporary African art exhibitions organised in the West, especially those that came before *Seven Stories*. For example, 'Moments in Art' was "partly the reconstruction of influences that informed" Koloane's own ideas of art, "and a chapter in the new reconstruction of the modern history of art in South Africa" (Deliss 1995: 24). Koloane begins his narrative in the 1950s by touching upon the influence of Polly Street Art Centre on him; he does so by discussing two oil paintings by Ephraim Ngatane. In turn these paintings reminded the viewer of the influence of pioneer artists such as Gerard Sekoto and George Pemba on South African black artists. However, Koloane's main focus is on the death of Biko who died in police custody during apartheid.[84] Deliss (1995:24) is of the view that,

[84] According to the art historian John Peffer (2009:56) in the book *Art and the End of Apartheid*, "On August 18, 1977, Steve Biko, the Black Consciousness leader who had inspired the "Class of '76", was arrested in the Eastern Cape. He was taken to Port Elizabeth, brutally beaten in police custody, and left naked and handcuffed in a cell. During interrogation Biko received a severe blow to the head, causing brain damage and eventual loss of consciousness. He was then driven twelve hours to Pretoria Central Prison, still naked and chained, in the back of a police vehicle. He died on the floor of a cell in Pretoria.

> the philosophies and ideologies of Uhuru, Negritude, Nkrumah's 'African Personality', and the Black Consciousness movements have provided models of resistance and collectivity that artists have espoused in attempts to modify the various economic, class, race and art-historical divisions in modern society, and develop an appropriate aesthetic.

South African artists, including Koloane, used the philosophy of Black Consciousness to self-define and to develop a sense of self-awareness as artists producing art in a restrictive environment. In a society characterised by racial divisions and unfair distribution of resources and infra-structure (i.e. libraries, museums, etc.), artists, intellectuals, politicians and ordinary citizens found expression in the philosophy of black consciousness. 'Moments in Art' displayed the work of thirteen artists who were all male artists except for the artist Sybille Nagel. These artists were Ngatane, Bill Ainslie, Sam Nhlengethwa, Paul Stopforth, Dumile Feni, Ezrom Legae, Robert Hodgins, Norman Catherine, David Koloane, Dumisani Mabaso, Kevin Atkinson, Sybille Nagel and Kagiso Pat Mautloa. The absence of women artists in 'Moments in Art' is questionable, however according to the organisers of *Seven Stories* the presentations were a result of the freedom given to co-curators. Otherwise the show would have been a false reflection of the achievements of contemporary African artists had the organisers imposed their ideas on the co-curators. As can be seen Koloane's artists are both black and white proving the fact that the idea of black consciousness was used as a theoretical lens through which a South African story could be told.

According to Koloane (1995:145),

> The Biko event, more than any other occurrence, touched every human chord when explicit details of that incident were revealed at the inquest. It provoked international outrage. A creative upsurge developed around the event as different artists in the visual, literary and preforming spheres produced a

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His death was first pronounced the result of a hunger strike, and later as the result of injuries sustained when he "attacked" his interrogators. Autopsy reports showed that Biko died from traumatic brain injury."

variety of work. It became evident, then, that a Biko dedication should become the central aspect of this exhibition.

Paul Stopforth and Ezrom Legae are some of the widely known South African artists who produced riveting works in response to the death of Biko. A week after Biko's tragic death Stopforth launched his exhibition of life-size casts as a commentary on deaths in detention. But the public could not help but associate Stopforth's exhibition with Biko's death. *Torture* and *Deaths in Detention: Figures* (1978) consists of six figures depicted in different traumatic actions.



Figure 5: Paul Stopforth *Torture* and *Deaths in Detention: Figures* (1978) Life-size plaster cast. Image accessed online on 16 December 2020.

In essence, Stopforth was responding to narratives fabricated by the police following the deaths of people in their care. Activists were detained, tortured and could remain in prison for indefinite amounts of time without being trialed. Some died and narratives were hatched to hide the real causes of deaths. One of the common stories was the soap story — the police claimed that prisoners slipped on soaps and died. At the Market Theatre, Stopforth's sculptures reminded those who were once detained of their traumatic experiences. Somehow Stopforth sought to put a stop to the state sanctioned abuse.

In terms of the six figures, according to Hill (2015:118), one figure was placed in a chair in the middle of the room with a black cotton bag over its head. Another figure was laid on the floor with its face down. Behind the seated figure there was another upright figure with both its hands on the wall as if being examined or checked. This particular figure reminds one of the *House of Bondage* (1958-66) series of photographs by Ernest Cole.

In what seems to be a very painful fall, Stopforth placed a tumbling figure on the stairs with its mouth open and arms stretched out, and another could be seen falling from the Market Theatre Complex roof. The last figure depicts a restrained detainee in a chair. All these life-size figures are without clothes.

Stopforth's intervention was the first in the country to openly speak about torture and killing of activists in police custody. His work became what is now known as 'resistance art'. Stopforth's intervention was indeed uncompromising and it worked well in the Market Theatre. However, Stopforth's figures were more than what seemed to be a stage play; they were a serious comment on the stripping of dignity and identity through torture and fabricated stories.





Figure 6: Paul Stopforth *Torture and Deaths in Detention: Figures* (1978) Life-size plaster- cast. Image accessed online on 16 December 2020.

Figure 7: Paul Stopforth *Torture and Deaths in Detention: Figures* (1978) Life-size plaster- cast. Image accessed online on 16 December 2020.

Among others, in the 1980s Stopforth produced a two dimensional series of close up depictions of Biko's body parts such as legs, arms and hands. Anne

Sassoon in the book *Paul Stopforth: Taxi-015*, inter alia, explains how the series of drawings was conceptualised and developed. According to Sassoon (2010:40), Stopforth's acquaintance with Biko made him develop the series but with *Figures* (also known as *Torture* and *Deaths in Detention*), Stopforth wanted to get close to the victims of death in detention. Through a lawyer representing the Biko family, Stopforth received photographs taken by pathologists at Biko's autopsy. He painstakingly made copies of them without adding or subtracting from the original photographs, using graphite liquid wax on paper. All the torture marks and bruises on the body of Biko, Stopforth reproduced as they were. For Sassoon, the drawings in themselves were a shocking evidence of police brutality and they may as well have been used in the enquiry into the death of Biko. This series of drawings formed part of the exhibition 'Moments in Art'.



Figure 8: Paul Stopforth *Biko Series (Hand)* (1980) mixed media on paper, 76.2 x 55.9cm. *Paul Stopforth: -Taxi 015.*

Figure 9: Paul Stopforth *Biko Series (Leg)* (1980**)** mixed media on paper, 76.2 x 55.9cm. *Paul Stopforth: -Taxi* 015.

Figure 10: Paul Stopforth *Biko Series (Arm)* (1980) mixed media on paper, 76.2 x 55.9cm. *Paul Stopforth: -Taxi 015.*

Figure 11: Paul Stopforth *Biko Series (Legs)* (1980) mixed media on paper, 76.2 x 55.9cm. *Paul Stopforth: -Taxi 015.*

Legae studied art at Polly Street Art Centre and he started off as a sculptor. According to Hill (2015), after 1964 Legae began taking drawing seriously as it became clear to him that good drawing skills would help him become a good sculptor, but also for his new job as a teacher at Jubilee Art Centre he needed to know how to draw. From very early on in his drawings Legae had always been interested in organic and abstracted forms. His forms usually appear to be floating freely in space without being kept together by a visible background. At times Legae would incorporate geometric coloured figures that provide some form of seemingly incomplete context. The *Chicken Series* (1979), which formed part of 'Moments in Art', is no different. This series of conté and wash paper drawings show fragmented floating chicken parts, broken bones and fragmented human parts in various positions. According to Hill, Stopforth and Legae were both followers of BC and they reflected the BC's value of humanism in their work. In terms of the *Chicken* series Legae had this to say:

> I used the chicken as a symbol of the black people of this country, because the chicken is a domestic bird. Now, one can maim a chicken by pulling out his feathers; one can crucify him and even kill him; but beware- There will always be another egg and always another chicken. If you remember in all these drawings with the symbolism of the domestic fowl, the spirit of Biko hovered and emerged even in the shadows, sometimes behind bars and sometimes free. And then watch out because that chicken suddenly became a vulture and the aggressor (in Hill 2015:135).

For Legae, the death of Biko meant a number of things including ambivalence. After almost a decade since he had stopped making art Biko's death somehow urged Legae to do art again. The death of Biko resurrected the artist in Legae. The creativity displayed in Legae's work is testimony to the miraculous way in which the death of Biko touched Legae. For Legae, the abundance of chickens can be equated with the population of black people in

South Africa. No matter how many domestic fowls humans eat but chickens will always lay eggs. For Legae, the chickens are a symbol of resistance. The art historian Peffer is of the view that, African spirituality is helpful in the process of interpreting Legae's work. The notion of animal slaughtering, for example is relevant, chickens could be used in rituals and slaughtered as sacrificial lambs.



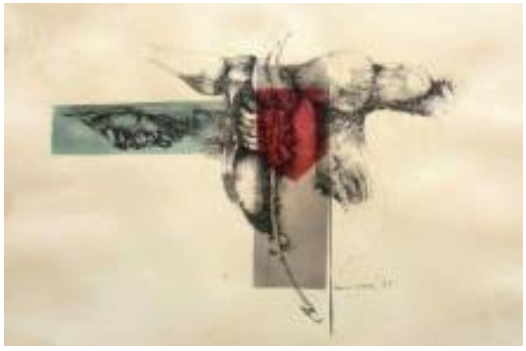

Figure 12: Ezrom Legae Chicken Series (1979) conté and pencil on paper 30x47cm.accessed online on 17 December 2020.

Figure 13: Ezrom Legae Chicken Series (1979) conté and pencil on paper, 45x65cm. accesed online on 17 December 2020.

The ambivalence by which Legae was overwhelmed forced him to accept the death of Biko, and to think of Biko as a martyr even though he knew that the void left by the charismatic leader of BC would be left wide open for a long time. For Legae, at times the action of preserving life through martyrdom overshadows the pain experienced in the process of martyrdom. Biko's death evoked all sorts of contradictions to Legae. It is an issue that stayed with him for a very long time. Legae was a schoolmate of Louis Maqhubela who told Koloane about the Polly Street Art Centre and inspired him to develop an interest in abstract art.

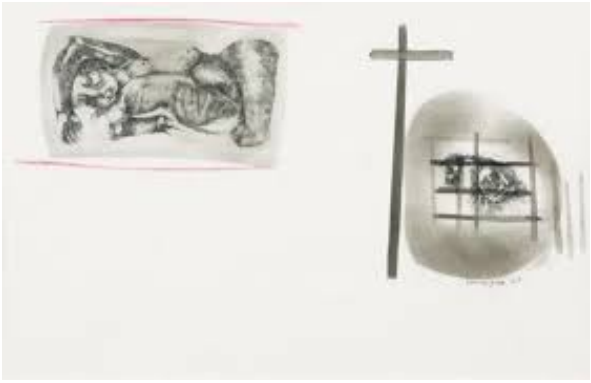

Figure 14: Ezrom Legae *Biko Behind Bars* (1979) graphite and watercolour on paper 29x46cm. Accessed online on 17 December 2020.

Also on show there were abstract art pieces by South African artists. Namely, artworks such as *Pachipamwe No. 3* (1989) acrylic on canvas by Bill Ainslie, Dumisani Mabaso's acrylic and cloth on canvas *Untitled* (1988), *White African Landscape* (1982) oil on canvas of Kevin Atkinson, *Deep Touch* (1992) mixed media on plywood by Sybille Nagel, Kagiso Pat Mautloa's mixed media artwork titled *Tablet* (1993) and *Fertility* (1990) acrylic on canvas by Koloane.[85]

Fertility is a depiction of a shack settlement in vigorous expressionistic marks which renders the work a semi-abstract expressionism work. In the forefront the acrylic painting on canvas is populated with scavenging and wild looking dogs. The sky is captured in a dark brown colour, which seems to be diluted by a smoke that is coming out of three electricity-generating towers. The smoke's mobility is suggested by touches of white, pink and red colours which proceed to the end of the frame to the right. Underneath, the flat roof shacks are covered in smoke emanating from a number of braziers placed adjacent the tin houses. There is no clear delineation of streets and fences. While the houses seem lit there are no human beings in sight. The dogs are feasting in what seems to be an unregulated dumping site with dustbins knocked over and all sorts of material lying around. One of the dogs is standing on an abandoned automobile as if keeping watch. The car seems to be sinking in the rubbish lying all around it. By and large, the scene invokes feelings of fear; it is characterised by dystopia, disorder and chaos.

[85] Please also see the series of works depicting Steve Biko by David Koloane titled *The Journey* (1998).

The term fertility means the quality of being fertile, productiveness, and the ability to conceive offspring. However, Koloane's work seems to be suggesting destruction and impending danger. I pick up on the idea of imminent peril in chapter five as I discuss the history of abstract art in the context of South Africa.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to discuss the exhibition 'Moments in Art' curated by Koloane as part of the exhibition *Seven Stories* which was held at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1995. I discuss the roots of the label 'black modernisms' as I investigate what Koloane was responding to through this exhibition. I show that classifications such as 'township art' and 'black modernisms' are 'Othering' devices that are ubiquitously used to differentiate the work of black artists in South Africa. Using the philosophy of black consciousness, Koloane managed to subvert the negative meaning associated with the term black through his inclusion of both black and white artists in the show 'Moments in Art'. The academic and writer bell hooks (1995:2) is of the view that, "aesthetics...is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming, it is not organic". Thinking about the exhibition *A Black Aesthetic*, bell hooks' definition would have been useful in the process of supplementing the work of de Jager.

Chapter Five

5. Revisited: *Made in South Africa* (1993 and 1994)

5.1. Introduction

In this thesis I set out to investigate the genealogy of the loaded classifications 'township art' and 'black modernisms' as found in South African art literature. Since Koloane is known for his rejection of the label 'township art' I use his work (texts, exhibitions and artwork) to trace the roots of the labels 'township art' and 'black modernisms'. I demonstrate that black South African artists do not self-identify as 'township artists' or they don't call their art 'township art'. For instance, the artist Lefifi Tladi (2016) argues that, art schools found in black communities during apartheid "focused too much on the social conditions of townships, leaving students unable to see beyond these areas" (in Pather 2016:1). According to Tladi, this led to the exclusion of art made in townships.[86] Tladi continues, "that's why we have never had a South African art; we always had township art... we couldn't perceive ourselves beyond the township in the context of South Africa. That's what the limitations were" (in Pather 2016:1). The artists Kay Hassan (2008) contends that, as recently as 1994 black South African artists were expected to create 'township art'. Hassan adds that "the so-called township art was so hot — they wanted us to do things that we were used to do" (in Gule 2008: 81). The artist aka cultural worker Thami Mnyele (2009:24) is of the opinion that 'township art' is "art of negation" characterised by "sentimental caricatures of a primitive community of people who were satisfied with their 'way of life'". In conversation with the art critic Ivor Powell in 1995 during the Africa95 arts festival in London, Koloane states that,

> If you didn't do this kind of thing [township art] it was harder. In 1977 and 1978 I started experimenting with collage, and I took some of these pieces to

[86] Please see chapter two of this dissertation for what is a township in the political and cultural senses of South Africa.

> Gallery 21. The first thing the owner said was that I didn't do the work...because this is so "un-African." He said for that reason he didn't feel comfortable buying it (Koloane in conversation with Ivor Powell 1995:261).

Koloane's experimentation with abstract art and collage can be traced back to the 1970s. Koloane's exposure to the professional art world came as a result of his encounter with the artist Louis Maqhubela in the 1950s. Maqhubela also exposed Koloane to abstract art in the late 1960s upon his return from a trip to Europe. The above statement quoted in the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* that took place at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1995, gives us an idea of the expectations and impositions of the art market on artists, especially on black artists in South Africa.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how, through the use of semi-abstract expressionism Koloane defied the recommendations of the art market when the genre of 'township art', in today's parlance, was trending. Thus, Koloane debunked the notion of 'township art' because Abstract Expressionism during apartheid was only associated with white artists in South Africa. In 2019 the academic, writer and curator Thembinkosi Goniwe co-curated with Koloane the retrospective, *A Resilient Visionary: Poetic Expressions of David Koloane* which was held at the Iziko National Museum in Cape Town. The important exhibition also travelled to Johannesburg.[87] Goniwe (2019:1) is of the view that, "Koloane's gestural painting style is unmistakably influenced by Jackson Pollock, who is also a big jazz fan. But some critics reproached him for referring to Abstract Expressionism, saying he simply copied this style". According to Goniwe, in response, Koloane argued that it was not a matter of emulating a style "but of using modernism as a vocabulary" (Goniwe 2019:1). Goniwe asserts that each of Koloane's work is "also a symbol of freedom and independence" (ibid.).

[87] Koloane could only attend the opening in Cape Town as a few days after the opening on the 30th June, Koloane passed on at the age of 81.

In essence Koloane refused to submit to any label. For the academic and writer Ruth Simbao (2019:1), the work of Koloane is some “form of resistance; a refusal to create the work that the art world expected him to create”.

Through his combination of abstraction and figurative themes, I demonstrate that Koloane grew beyond the limits and standards set for black people (artists) in South Africa. Therefore, he cannot be seen as a mere product of apartheid. This is also evident in his curriculum vitae as Koloane proceeded to become an artist, writer and curator, among other things.

In line with my mapping of the roots of the taxonomies like ‘township art’ and ‘black modernisms’ I investigate Koloane’s interest in Abstract Expressionism, which I argue is the antithesis of ‘township art’ characterised by sentimentalised township scenes of people in the streets and shebeens, as well as figurative depictions of daily life in townships with poverty disguised in happy colours. I trace the history of Koloane’s interest in Abstract Expressionism, which can be traced back to the 1940s and 1950s in New York. From very early on in his career Koloane sought to work differently from his contemporaries by developing his personal artistic vocabulary and voice. The series of exhibitions called *Made in South Africa* (1993 and 1994) is a quintessential example of his efforts to artistically challenge the idea that black South African artists were all makers of ‘township art’.

For the purpose of giving the reader an idea of the context in which *Made in South Africa* was organised at the Goodman Gallery in 1993 and 1994, it is useful to outline a picture of the years leading up to this series of exhibitions and after. As will be shown below, the context in which *Made in South Africa* was held had an influence on how Koloane conceptualised his exhibition.

In 1990, in fear of African communism that threatened the existence of Afrikaner nationalism, the president of South Africa F.W. de Klerk lifted the political parties ban, which was introduced after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. He granted political prisoners their freedom and many political expatriates returned home. The country held its first democratic elections in

1994. In 1993 in his opening address of the 'Culture and Development Conference', Nelson Mandela, the to-be first president of the democratic South Africa, pinned his hope on culture to help South Africa change for the better. In 1994, after 100 days in the presidency office, Mandela declared the state's commitment to finding out what really happened during apartheid as he spoke about the 'truth' in his 100 days in office speech. In 1996 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to investigate the atrocities of apartheid. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) serves as a meaningful subject matter in contemporary South African art, the William Kentridge production called *Ubu Roi* is a good example of how South African artists engage with the concept of the TRC.

In 1992 one of the oldest public art institutions in South Africa, the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), appointed the first black person (Bongi Dhlomo) on the Art Gallery Committee (AGC) which is in charge of making decisions about JAG's acquisitions, exhibitions and policies. The JAG was under the leadership of Christopher Till also the director of the Johannesburg Biennales, who was a crucial influencer in matters related to the Johannesburg Biennales of 1995 and 1997. Till felt very strongly that the biennales would contribute towards national healing. It was also Till who initiated the exhibition The *Neglected Tradition* curated by Steven Sack at the JAG in 1988. According to Nettleton (1995:65), *The Neglected Tradition* was one of the first that openly attempted "to redefine South African art history". However, it is worth noting that in 1990 the *Weekly Mail* carried a section of the paper 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom' by Albie Sachs. This paper was originally presented in an ANC seminar in 1989. In essence, Sachs called for the re-evaluation of the notion that 'culture is a weapon for struggle' that the ANC adopted during the fight against apartheid. 'Preparing Ourselves' generated a heated debate in South Africa in relation to the politics of artistic representation. According to Richards (1998:75) the "art critical engagement" which developed as a result of Sach's article boded well for the "future". In a nutshell, the period in which the work of Koloane was produced seems to have been fraught with socio-political activity.

Koloane, in his four decades in the world of art, sought to define himself and to develop his own artistic idiom in an environment that was not conducive to being a black artist. As indicated in the quotes above preconceived ideas of what African art ought to look like impeded black artists' development in South Africa. In fact, the education system designed for black people was made to ensure that black people become mineworkers instead of being scientists or artists.[88]

Koloane started drawing in primary school but in the township of Alexandra where he grew up there were hardly any visual artists. In the 1950s his family relocated to Soweto where in high school Koloane befriended Maqhubela.[89] Maqhubela informed Koloane of the Polly Street Art Centre. In the early 1970s Maqhubela who was into the genre of abstract art introduced Koloane to the artist and art home studio owner Bill Ainslie who was also into abstract art. Maqhubela and Ainslie were both influenced by the abstract artist Douglas Portway who was a follower of Buddhism. Bill and Koloane became friends and collaborators on many cultural initiatives including the founding of the Thupelo Workshops, which later gave rise to the art studio known as the Bag Factory in Newtown, Johannesburg.

Having said the above this chapter commences with a brief history of the Thupelo workshops, which were initiated to help black South African artists develop a new visual language and new identities in the midst of stereotypical classifications such as 'township art'. This is followed by a short history of the Goodman Gallery so as to give the reader an idea of the space in which *Made in South Africa* was shown. I then discuss the series of exhibitions starting with *Made in South Africa* 1993 followed by a discussion of *Made in South Africa* 1994. However, in order not to locate Koloane in a mythological space it is beneficial to look at Koloane's work in relation to his peers and younger artists that he may have influenced.

[88] Please see chapter three of this thesis.
[89] According to Elza Miles (2004:97) in *Polly Street: The Story of an Art Centre*, "Ephraim Ngatane told Maqhubela about Polly Street Art Centre and encouraged him to enroll. In 1957, while he was still at the Nakene High School in Orlando, he joined the art classes."

5.2. Thupelo Workshops and Abstract Art

As noted above, Koloane started making collage and abstract art in the 1970s; for example, in 1978 he produced a collage on board titled *Shantytown*, which is in the collection of the University of Fort Hare. In 1979 he produced his first *Made in South Africa* piece of abstract and collage. Abstract art which Koloane's mentor Maqhubela had been experimenting with since his return from Europe in 1966, was not associated with black artists. In 1983 when Koloane left South Africa to attend the Triangle Arts Workshop in New York, the home of Abstract Expressionism, Maqhubela his mentor had already exposed Koloane to abstract art. Maqhubela's interest in abstract art can be traced back to his encounter with the South African expatriate artist Portway who was into Zhen Buddhism and abstract art. The point of the matter is the adoption of abstract art and Abstract Expressionism by South African black artists was a revolutionary gesture just like the emergence of Abstract Expressionism in the 1940s in the United States of America. David Anfam (1990) discusses the history of Abstract Expressionism in relation to its political implications, cultural circumstances and factors. He offers new readings of the works he cited in his book. Anfam (1990:7) is of the view that, "Abstract Expressionism is a landmark art in particular. Like the Cubist epoch it represents a revolutionary event which revises our view of things before and after." For Anfam, the criticism that followed after the emergence of Abstract Expressionism partly owes its existence to the nature of Abstract Expressionism painting because "it remains a shade too serious, strange and extreme, like Cubism itself" (1990:7). For these reasons, Abstract Expressionism will possibly never be as popular as the work of Salvador Dali or David Hockney; or capture the imagination of people who welcomed Impressionism. Anfam (1990:20) is of the opinion that Abstract Expressionism aesthetic consists of but not limited to

> daemonic figures and fractured forms, the somber ritualistic atmosphere, unsparing surfaces, exacerbated drawing and a more brutal aesthetic norm than the spiritual and sometimes utopian abstraction of predecessors like Mondrian, Malevich or even Kandinsky.

According to Anfam, Abstract Expressionism is a reflection of a “traumatic zeitgeist” (1990:20). For Anfam (ibid.), Abstract Expressionism is one of the radical modernist ways of looking for “new languages”. It is important to note the above in that upon his return to South Africa Maqhubela produced semi-abstract works with lush floating colours.

In line with the artist Mark Rothko’s definition of Abstract Expressionism, Anfam decides on the idea that Abstract Expressionism painting is an ‘experience’ rather than a ‘picture of an experience’. In other words, Abstract Expressionism is more than a reflection of personal feelings and emotions of artists, there is more to it as suggested through the layers of paint and multiple active marks made on the canvas.

However, one of the criticisms leveled against Abstract Expressionism was its perceived lack of open political statements. According to Anfam, critics like Serge Guilbaut criticised Abstract Expressionism for this supposed dearth of overt political assertions which allowed dealers, galleries and writers to exploit Abstract Expressionism and interpret it as an attempt towards freedom and individuality during the Cold War struggle against Communism. This is one of the political entanglements that Abstract Expressionism found itself in. Closer to home, the very same criticism and more were made against abstract art in South Africa. Especially abstract art made by black artists.

For example, according to the art historian John Peffer (2009), a localised Abstract Expressionism of South Africa appeared in the 1980s and it is traceable to the United States of America. Peffer is of the view that in the 1980s the issue of aesthetic representation was topical in the country. It was the time of the Culture and Resistance conference wherein artists were defined as ‘cultural workers’ who should use artistic expressions to fight against apartheid. The Medu Art Ensemble, the organisers of the conference would later be fierce critics of abstract art in all its forms in South Africa. South African abstract artists were criticised for promoting individuality and they were seen as not contributing to the fight against apartheid. In fact, it was

partly because of this kind of criticism that prompted Sachs to pen the essay discussed above.

For Peffer, the first Thupelo Workshop that took place at Hunter's Rest in Rustenburg in August 1995 was key to the development of Abstract Expressionism in South Africa. A cohort of fifteen artists and invited guests came together in a workshop situation for two weeks. They experimented with colour, large-scale paintings, mixed media and sculptural forms constructed from found and discarded materials. Only lunch breaks and critique sessions led by Bill Ainslie and a visiting American artist called Peter Bradley punctuated the art making process.[90] In the second year the workshops were given the name Thupelo Workshop and they continued annually until 1991, with a different group every year.[91]

However, the Thupelo workshop was also criticised, inter alia, for promoting an American way of life and art expression at the expense of African aesthetic and roots especially during the state of emergency in South Africa. Subsequently, as Shashi Cook (2009:151) notes that,

> Koloane's abstract expressionist work had been rejected to an extent by black and white society. Many whites simplistically associated black artists with a figurative style and with a subject matter of, as Koloane worded it- AK47s, township and shebeen scenes, happy people, and musicians.

Academics like Gavin Younge and Colin Richards saw abstract art as 'apolitical' and they thought the Thupelo workshops were a promotion of cultural imperialism imposed by the United States of America. This was prompted mainly by the involvement of USSALEP in the Thupelo project, which was thought to have dealings with the United States government. Collins went as far as saying that art produced during the Thupelo workshops

[90] According to Peffer the gathering was then called FUBA-USSALEP workshop, the Federated Union of Black Arts (FUBA), the United States-South Africa Leadership Exchange Program (USSALEP) and local businesses funded it. The purpose of the workshop was to offer temporary relief to black artists working in isolation and limited workspace and with limited art materials. According to the art historian and curator Sipho Mdanda (2018:57) "upon Ainslie's death in 1989, Koloane started the Thupelo Art Project."

[91] Thupelo is a South Sotho word that means to "teach by example".

was lousy, a statement which he later regretted as excessive and undue (Peffer 2009:161). A statement made by Barbara Ludman in *Tribute* magazine in 1987 is worth noting at length as it gives us an idea of the subject of criticism with regard to South African Abstract Expressionism. Ludman states that,

> Thupelo has been accused of "cultural imperialism"-because of the tendency of participants to create abstract works instead of the politically relevant etchings, township scenes and pastel character studies which are recognizably South African. This puzzles some of the participants, including Johannesburg Art Foundation director Bill Ainslie, who points out that Ndebele designs are also abstract; that abstraction is "at home in Africa".[92]

During this debate individuals like Ainslie were isolated and criticised for promoting an un-African mode of expression.[93] Participants such as Koloane were overlooked as if they did not have a say in the workshops, and on how things were done during the Thupelo workshops. According to Cook (2009), the Thupelo workshops were created in order to help black South African artists to develop a new language in response to the widespread township art painting at the time. Cook (2009:67) elaborates,

> according to Koloane (2008) the Thupelo Project was founded due to the worry that black artists' work was being stereotyped by the art market generally, and that it was just identified as township art irrespective of what the individual artists were trying to do.

In the book *David Koloane: Taxi-006*, Veronique Tadjo writes (2002:22),

> new forms of artistic expression, such as abstraction, were not real options for black South African artists, who were encouraged to stay within the confines of 'township art'. It was assumed that the genre did not require formal instruction and therefore had little chance of evolving towards a more

[92] Please see the book *Art and the End of Apartheid* (2009) by John Peffer.
[93] Douglas Portway also influenced Ainslie, like Maqhubela, at some point in his life Ainslie relocated to Ibiza where Portway lived in order to be nearer to Portway his mentor.

> complex discourse. It was grounded in figuration and centred on the immediate social environment of the black community – a form of social realism.[94]

In other words, the Thupelo workshops came as a result of a growing awareness regarding the hidden meanings in the seemingly innocuous term 'township art'. However, the purpose of this section was not to discuss the responses elicited by Abstract Expressionism in the 1980s in South Africa.

5.3. Koloane at the Goodman Gallery

Given the history of apartheid and its various manifestations in the cultural sector of South Africa, one wonders how the Goodman Gallery represented Koloane, as a black artist. As demonstrated in chapter four, exhibitions in their inception are designed to influence and they reflect the mission and principles of the institution that host them. In most cases institutions have socio-political agendas that are implicitly or overtly communicated through exhibitions. As Bruce W. Fergusson (2005:176) notes that, exhibitions can then be understood as "the main agency of communication" that use artworks as their "element of speech". It is useful to employ the notion of exhibitions, as 'speaking subjects' as I investigate how Koloane got involved with the Goodman Gallery which has been owned by Liza Elsers since 2008. Fergusson (2005:188) concludes that, "by understanding the exhibition as an institutional utterance, we will begin to know who speaks to whom, why, where and under what conditions". Who was the Goodman Gallery talking to and why? Or what was Koloane trying to alert us to through his exhibition of carefully selected works? These are some of the questions I hope to ponder over.

It is also useful to look at Koloane's involvement with the Goodman Gallery vis-à-vis stable mates like Sam Nhlengethwa and William Kentridge. The

[94] Please see chapter three of this thesis for the discussion of art education in South Africa particularly in relation to the development of so-called township art.

careers of these artists at the Goodman Gallery took off around the same time.

Linda Givon opened the Goodman Gallery on the 25 November 1966. According to the art historian and writer Rory Bester (2007:59), the policy of the gallery was to “show the latest trends in the art of England and Italy, and also of South Africa, at prices serious collectors and followers can afford.” The artist and writer Gavin Jantjes (2011) is of the view that since the 1970s, the Goodman Gallery performed a significant duty in the promotion of contemporary South African art in the international community.

Throughout its history the Goodman Gallery has maintained its independence that is why during apartheid it was leading in terms of the number of black artists it boasted. In the current era of democracy the Goodman Gallery made its presence felt in the contemporary memory by hosting overtly polemical shows such as the controversial exhibition of the artist Bret Murray that featured a painting titled *The Spear*. *The Spear* a depiction of president Jacob Zuma with his private parts exposed caused public stir. This instance resulted in ANC supporters marching on the art gallery, and maintaining sustained pushback through the media and other platforms. However, the clamour arguably helped raise the Goodman Gallery’s profile. Speaking against a populist government has invariably caused divisions but the Goodman Gallery managed to position itself as a progressive gallery that speaks through its exhibitions.

When the Goodman Gallery took on Koloane as one of its artists, it had long been on its path to distinguish itself as a leading gallery in contemporary South African art affairs. Judging by the principles of the Goodman Gallery over the years, it is clear that Koloane’s art was thought provoking and aesthetically pleasing. Perhaps, this is why Koloane was approached and included as one of the Goodman Gallery artists. According to Goniwe, during her first visit to the Bag Factory Givon was intrigued by Koloane’s drawings. Koloane was then invited to exhibit at the Goodman Gallery. This is how

Koloane got involved with the Goodman Gallery. For Goniwe (2019:1) “this marked the beginning of an international career.”

Made in South Africa of 1993 was the first show of Koloane at the Goodman Gallery and it focused on the violence that was befalling the country at the time. According to Cook (2009:155), the Goodman Gallery launched the careers of artists like William Kentridge, Willie Bester, Kendell Geers and Peny Siopis.

In the following section I look at the *Made in South Africa* exhibition that took place in 1993. I discuss the nature and theme of this exhibition. I demonstrate how Koloane embraced, rejected and challenged the genre of township art. It should be noted that Koloane’s embrace of the so-called township painting should not be confused with his unwavering reaction to the controversial label of ‘township art’ which was imposed by art critics and writers as shown extensively in chapter two of this thesis.

5.4.1. *Made in South Africa* 1993

The first Johannesburg Biennale that took place from 28th February to 30th April 1995 was, according to the director of biennales Christopher Till, born during a most critical period in the recent history of South Africa. However, the idea of the first biennale was conceived in 1993 a period known as the transformation era. At the same time South Africa was being sold to the world as a miraculous country, peaceful and as a safe tourists destination. In essence, South Africa was seen as a new ‘brand’ or ‘commodity’ fit for the consumption of the international community. As a result the term heritage featured prominently in different government discourses all for the purpose of promoting the rich heritage of South Africa to the world. These efforts were accompanied by the identification of potential heritage sites, historical narratives and events to be used in the discourse of nationalism and proudly South African campaigns. In the spirit of offering South Africa as a friendly destination to the international community Koloane produced a series of artworks titled *Made in South Africa*. According to Koloane his work seeks to

address socio-economic matters, it is a reflection of the socio-political landscape of South Africa both past and present. Over the years Koloane's work has attracted a variety of investigation and interpretation. Koloane's longtime friend and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature Nadine Gordimer (2002:5) writes of Koloane,

> Koloane's interpretation of urban life has struggled and triumphed in finding different visions and modes, techniques, materials to express the huge oppressions, upheavals, and hard-won freedoms that have been epitomised in our city sprawls.

As shown above, from very early on, Koloane sought to find new ways of looking and of seeing thus developing his own voice. In line with Chika Okeke-Agulu's (2006:3) theory of modernism I think of Koloane as a modernist who employed conceptual strategies to create news ways of "expressing the modern through art".

The first *Made in South Africa* exhibition ran from 7th to 20th February 1993, with a preview on 6th February 1993.[95] The show consisted of graphite drawings as a narrative frieze held together by a motif of stray dogs. The exhibition commented on the violence that was taking place in South Africa before the general elections. Overall, Koloane's movement between figurative and abstract expressionist renderings of stray dogs characterises this body of work. The layered expressive marks render the dogs and landscapes barely visible which forces the viewer to relook over again with ambivalence. Gordimer expresses this sentiment succinctly, "when we receive his paintings and drawings we are not merely looking, we are drawn into his discoveries about the process and spaces of living. And its endless mystery" (ibid.). In essence, through his use of dogs Koloane investigates the different roles of dogs within communities. The gloom and mystery in the work of Koloane

[95] *Revue Noir* the defunct visual art periodical and *David Koloane:Taxi-006* are some of the publications that give us an idea of the sheer size of 'Made in South Africa' (1993 and 1994).

could be best described through the artworks *Fighting Dogs* (1993), *Mgodoyi II* (1993) and *Menace* (1993).[96]

Fighting Dogs shows two aggressive brawling dogs. The dogs in this work are drawn in aggressive expressive marks, which renders the subjects faintly visible. Both dogs are placed on the left of the picture. The head of one dog seems to be emerging from the bottom while the other seems to be appearing from the top of the picture. Koloane refrained from using the theory of perspective to create depth and he equally ignored the principles of composition, therefore the work looks flat and imbalanced.

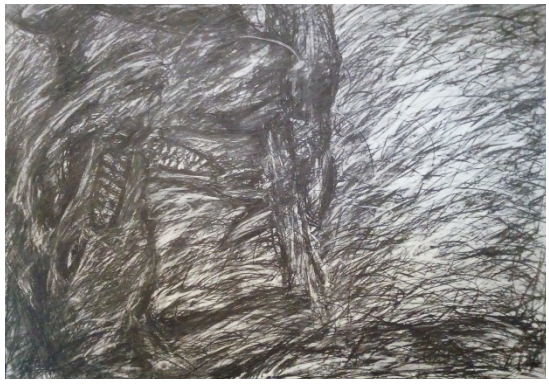

Figure 15: David Koloane *Fighting Dogs* (1993) graphite on paper, 63x 91cm. *David Koloane: Taxi006,* p.25

Mgodoyi I depicts two aggressive dogs on their hind legs. With their mouths open, it appears that the dogs are about to attack each other. The densely scratched dark surface of the image is contrasted by the moonlight. The jagged moon appears to be in the middle of the fighting dogs. On both sides of the moon there are heavy dark patches, which seem to offer equilibrium to the work. There is no sense of depth which makes the work look flat. As in *Fighting Dogs*, the dogs' teeth, eyes and wild looks help us recognise the dogs in Koloane's work.

[96] Mgodoyi is a contemptuous Zulu word for a man who behaves like a mongrel.



Figure 16: David Koloane *Mgodoyi II seies 1* (1993) lithograph, 55.7x75.6cm. Johannesburg Art Gallery Collection. *1910-2010 One Hundred Years of Collecting: The Johannesburg Art Gallery*. p. 152

And *Menace* is a depiction of a single dog standing in the middle of the road at night. The dog's body is not clearly delineated including the features. The cover of the night and dark hair of the canine make it difficult to make out the dog in the picture. The bright eyes of the dog render it strange and scary yet they help the viewer see the dog.

The common thread in these works underlies the abnormality of the dogs. The dogs all look anomalous; they are not well fed yet they look energetic, lively, and aggressive. They are always ready to put up a fight or to defend their territory. Koloane captured the aggressiveness of his dogs through his equally widespread aggressive marks.

Having demonstrated the above, at the time of reimagining and of repositioning South Africa as a participant in global matters following a prolonged cultural and economic isolation, Koloane decided to tell a story of violence and dystopia as captured in the quality of his work on *Made in South Africa*. Thus, touching upon the dark side of the beautifully packaged story of the new South Africa. Instead of using overt symbols of violence such as the 'AK47,' Koloane cleverly decided to use dogs as a universal metaphor for violence. For Koloane, stray dogs were a perfect metaphor for the oppressed and neglected masses of South Africa, who the government left to fend for themselves. Gordimer (2005:4) states that, "these ghetto dogs of Koloane's 'series' are of no recognisable breed; they are outcast, as the people of the townships are, in the township where the dogs scavenge-but the difference is

that the dogs are free." For Gordimer, what is implied is that the oppressed masses will rise and claim their freedom one day.

Dogs in spaces known as townships were in the past arguably associated with white supremacy and terror. For example, in almost all the riots that took place during apartheid dogs were always present which the police would unleash on protesters as a result these protesters would run helter-skelter being chased by the dogs. For example, the 1976 student uprising is said to have begun with a police dog that was killed by the protesting students after it was unleashed on them. Also, as a matter of observation during apartheid dogs received special treatment from their white owners as compared to black people who worked for them. For instance, a lone white man would drive into the 'township' in a pick up truck with only his dog in the front seat while a single black man or a group of black men are sitting in the back. Perhaps, because of the nice journey and ample space in most cases you would see the dog sticking its head out of the open window, with its mouth open and tongue outside wet with frothing saliva.[97]

To a certain degree dogs in South African contemporary art have since the 1976 student uprising inspired artists in various ways including the artists Willie Bester and Jo Ractliffe.[98] The mixed media sculptural piece titled *For those left behind* (2003) by Bester is the most revealing of the terror and violence associated with police dogs. The work is an assemblage of mostly found steel and gas cylinders depicting a policeman with his dog. Its complicated yet rough and unpolished surface reminds the viewer of apartheid police toughness and brutality. *For those left behind* was preceded by *Dogs of War* (2001), both artworks were comments on the case of three Mozambican migrant workers whom the police voluntarily unleashed dogs upon.

[97] Please see Gabeba Baderoon (2016) on how the symbol of a dog had been racialised in South Africa in 'Animal Likeness: Dogs and the Boundary of the Human in South Africa.'
[98] Please note that artists such as David Goldblatt have incorporated the symbol of a dog in his photographs before the 1976 uprising, for example, please see: *Cup Final, Orlando Stadium, Soweto* (1972).



Figure 17: Willie Bester *For those Left Behind* (2003) recycled metal. Exhibition view accessed online on 17 December 2020. The Cape Town Triennals Rupert Museum.com

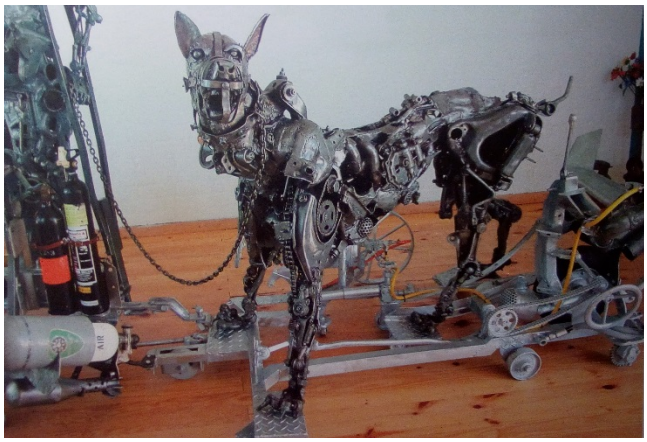

Figure 18: Willie Bester *For those Left Behind* (2003) detail, recycled metal. *Johannesburg Art Gallery Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*, p. 72 & 73

In her series of screen printed photographic lithography titled *Nadir* (1988) Ractliffe fuses aggressive dogs (symbols of violence and feral police authority) with images of squatter camps, garbage dumps, among others, to convey the widespread fear and violence brought about by the apartheid state apparatuses. For instance, *Nadir 15* depicts two dogs placed in the centre of the frame in what seems to be a deserted and desolated environment. One of the dogs has its wide mouth open, slightly in the direction of the viewer, while the other faces the opposite direction with a vigilant and fierce look on its face. The thick cloud in the background adds to the apocalyptic quality and gloom of this picture as such the work invokes fear and uncertainty.



Figure 19: Jo Ractcliffe *Nadir 15* (1988) photolithograph, screen print on paper, 54x 85cm. Johannesburg Art Gallery Collection. *1910-2010 One Hundred Years of Collecting: The Johannesburg Art Gallery*. p. 153

It is useful to look at the work of the artists discussed above in relation to the work of another contemporary artist's work Elizabeth Gunter. *Keep* (2007), for instance, is a series of drawings of dogs, which depict dogs in various floating position in a clear white background. The playfulness of the dogs makes them relatable and adorable while it also renders them vulnerable. For the academic and writer Deborah Posel (2007:26) the work of Gunter could be metaphorically read "as a reflection on the vulnerability of living beings more generally". Gunter concludes that "these artworks are emblematic of an aspiration to a freedom to be, in a world that promises but doesn't guarantee it- and an acceptance of the ineluctable vulnerability that goes with that".



Figure 20: Elizabeth Gunter *Keep* (2007) charcoal on Fabian paper, 334 x 183 x 7 cm. *Spier Contemporary 2007*, p. 102

The point in the above comparison lies in the fact that at first glance the dogs of Gunter look approachable and innocent attributes that cannot be bestowed on the dogs of the artists Koloane, Bester and Ractcliffe. In the following section I look at 'Made in South Africa' (1994).

5.4.2. 'Made in South Africa' (1994)

Made in South Africa (1993) commented on 'violence'. 'Made in South Africa' (1994) sought to highlight the 'legacy of violence'. In comparison with 'Made in South Africa' (1993), which was made up of black and white artworks only, 'Made in South Africa' (1994) comprised of coloured pictures of roughly drawn houses, braziers, burnt-out cars, dogs searching for food in tipped over garbage bins and other violent scenes. As with his black and white work, expressive energetic layering of marks characterise this series. The work making up 'Made in South Africa' (1994) almost all depicts chaotic and apocalyptic township scenes. Shown in the year of the first democratic general elections, 'Made in South Africa' (1994) also formed part of the

discourse of rebranding South Africa. According to Goniwe (2019:1) *"Made in South Africa* was created in 1993/94, when the apartheid era came to an end. But not much of the optimism of this new beginning can be felt in this work." For Cook (2009:150), in her exposition of shifting policies pertaining to institutions of public collections of art in South Africa between 1990 and 1994,

> the title Made in South Africa is a sardonic label that one would normally associate with a product 'proudly' manufactured in South Africa. The use of it in Koloane's series title is ironic as the scenes depicted are of hardship and poverty.

As noted above the show focused on the 'legacy of violence'. This is an interesting wordplay in that the works are not characterised by bloodshed as in human death; instead, Koloane placed a lot of emphasis on the environment and landscape. Also, Koloane gave serious thought to the idea of the label. His use of words helps us associate the works with a variety of contexts in a single geography. For example, sub- labels such as sun, moonshine, morning and grime at times accompany the main title *Made in South Africa*.

For example, the oil pastel on paper sub-titled *Moonshine* (1993) is fraught of interesting symbols. The work is executed in expressive energetic marks; it depicts an unfenced graveyard site situated adjacent to a human settlement. The full white moon emerging from the horizon pierces the clearly delineated purple sky above the informal settlement. Into the middle of the artwork there are human figures going about their business. The foreground is populated with graves symbolised by crosses. In this sense violence is suggested through the burial site, however, the moon in this work could symbolise a new beginning and regeneration.



Figure 21: David Koloane *Made in South Africa (Moonshine)* (1993) oil pastel on paper, 27.6x40.7cm. *David Koloane: Taxi006* p.20

The oil pastel on paper sub-titled *Sun* (1993) is a depiction of a squatter camp during a hot sunny day. The work is also expressive and the objects are abstractly rendered. The settlement underneath the big orange sun seems to be under siege with heat. A few steps from the shacks there is an old windowless automobile and next to it there is what looks like a dumping bin. The space is certainly unkempt as suggested through the layered expressive marks in the foreground. Perhaps, the striking bright colours in the work of Koloane represent the optimism that permeated the country at the time. However, the bright contrasting colours at times do not necessarily create any harmony to the viewer's eyes instead they invoke feelings of ambivalence, disorder and chaos.



Figure 22: David Koloane *Made in South Africa (Sun)* (1993) oil pastel on paper, 27.6x40.7cm. *David Koloane: Taxi006* p.20

The acrylic on canvas sub-titled *Scavengers* (1993) shows a group of dogs searching for food in what looks like a dumping site a few metres from the unfenced tin homes. The work of Koloane is suggestive of an artist that was always in search of new modes as Gordimer notes. *Scavengers* is also executed in expressive layered marks this time around though the marks look subtle and thin as if Koloane had used a very thin brush or felt tip-pen.



Figure 23: David Koloane *Scavengers* (1993) acrylic on canvas, 146x153cm. *David Koloane: Taxi006* p.28

Braziers (holed up metal drums in which firewood or coal is burnt) in Koloane's work represent poverty, light and dark, warmth and cold. Growing up in Alexandra township aka Dark City braziers were common cooking, heating and lighting devices. For example, in one of the works Koloane depicts four crudely drawn braziers with very hot looking flames of fire. The high levels of these flames seem to be about to raise to the ground the nearby shack settlements. This work could be read in terms of Gerard Sekoto's work titled *The Song of the Pick* (1946-47). The work shows a white foreman with his hands in the pockets and a smoking pipe in his mouth in front of a group of black male workers digging a trench with picks. The foreman thinks is in control of his cohort of workers but in reality he could be easily overwhelmed and destroyed by them.



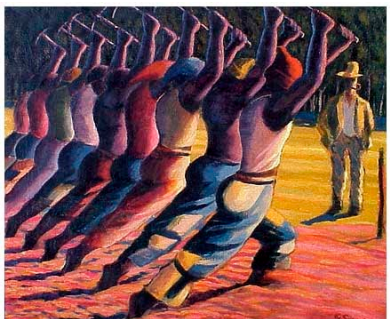

Figure 24: David Koloane *Made in South Africa (Braziers) (*1994) oil pastel on paper, 42 x 29 cm. Standard Bank Art Collection (Wits Art Museum) *Snippets of my Early Memories: David Koloane's Made in South Africa as Landscape, Still Life and Portrait*. p. 47

Figure 25: Gerard Sekoto *The Song of the Pick* (1946-47**)** oil on canvas, 49 x 59.9 cm. *Art and the End of Apartheid*. p. 203

In South Africa shack fires resulting from braziers is an annual phenomenon that results in destruction and death. For Kentridge, the brazier represents inequality in post-apartheid South Africa where poor people are forced to navigate a tricky and difficult space to earn a living. Above all the brazier is a symbol of resilience.

For the artist and curator Clive van den Berg (1995), the landscapes of Koloane represent the conflicted histories of South Africa in relation to land and life. It is for this reason that van den Berg included the work of Koloane in his travelling exhibition *Panoramas of Passage: Changing Landscapes of South Africa* in 1995. Koloane in the essay 'Walking the Tightrope' (1997) expresses a similar view where he posits that the landscape in apartheid South Africa was a personal possession of white people.[99]

Having said the above, the 'Made in South Africa' (1993 and 1994) series is characterised by conscious naivety on the part of the artist, which could be read as a conceptual strategy employed to express the modern. The arts journalist and editor of Arthrob, Sean O' Toole (2003) writes,

> An early proponent of township realism, Koloane's post-liberation (1990) works have tended towards what critic Ivor Powell defines as a 'primal stylistic chaos'. Willingly naïve, and yet gloriously unconscious of this

[99] Please see chapter one of this dissertation.

> paradox, Koloane's work share something of abstract intentionality of Jean Michel Basquiat. His work is also characterized by a recurring subject matter (particularly township scenes, dogs, cityscape, jazz music) and tends to offer a curious blend of epiphanies and mesmerized celebrations of our collectivity as human beings (in Cook 2009:150).

Koloane employed naivety in his art to alert us to our childish ways and shared naivety. For example, in the period under discussion in this section almost every South African especially the previously oppressed was optimistic about the future of the ANC and the country. The ANC eventually came into power in 1994. This is what I mean by shared naivety. This holds water given the fact that a majority of South Africans voted for the ANC and it won with a very big margin. However, this optimism took place amidst growing levels of poverty, crime, unemployment and rising levels of diseases such as AIDS and tuberculosis (TB). To date the ruling party still struggles to transform from being a liberation (underground) movement into a governing political party as manifested in the use of state machinery for the benefit of the organisation and its members.

Koloane pointed us to the basic need to address socio-economic issues first such as decent housing and infrastructure and better education. For example, a few days before the opening of 'Made in South Africa' (1994) Koloane in conversation with the journalist Mfundo Ndebele, was convinced that art could contribute to the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

In relation to one of the main arguments of this thesis, it is worth noting that Koloane's township scenes or makeshift settlements are imbued with gloom he did not gloss over the hardships of living in townships. Koloane was then not necessarily against the subject matter of what controversially became to be known as township art particularly in the painting of sentimental township scenes. He spoke against the label of township art, which ignored many factors that brought about the development of so-called township art. Including the fact that 'township art' was a product of interaction between

black and white artists of South Africa during apartheid. Furthermore, for Koloane apartheid was a politics of space therefore claiming art was some form of claiming space.

The use of naivety was indeed a strategy on the part of Koloane in that he also displays an acute sense composition and skill in his other works such as the *Jam Session I* and *Jam Session II* as compared to the series of *Made in South Africa*. But this also speaks to the fact that Koloane refuses to be boxed, for him abstract art is just one of the ways of articulating the modern.





Figure 26: David Koloane *Jam Session I* (1996) graphite on paper, 70 x 100 cm. *David Koloane: Taxi006* p.39

Figure 27: David Koloane *Jam Session II* (1996) graphite on paper, 70 x 100 cm. *David Koloane: Taxi006* p.39

Lastly, as mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, Koloane's work helps us understand the contemporary South African art world. It offers us tools to read the work of contemporary artists. It is interesting to note how contemporary artists such as Bright Ngobeni have claimed a space in the visual space of South Africa. In 2011 Ngobeni was in a three-month residency at the Bag Factory Studios in Johannesburg where mentors like Pat Mautloua, Nhlengethwa and Koloane encouraged him to take his art seriously. Through his richly hued work Ngobeni comments on, inter alia, socio-economic issues and corruption in post-apartheid South Africa. It can then be said that Ngobeni's work is a 'symbol of independence' and an expression of freedom as noted above vis-à-vis the work of Koloane.

5.4.3. "A Very Successful Solo Exhibition"?

Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Fergusson and Sandy Nairne (2005:1) are of the

view that,

> Exhibitions and anthologies are primary vehicles for the production and dissemination of knowledge today. Both are collections of discrete entities compiled for purposes of validation and distribution...exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed.

What follows is a discussion of how 'Made in South Africa' (1993 and 1994) were received at the Goodman Gallery in relation to the ideas that exhibitions are 'speaking subjects' and sites of exchange (i.e. monetary exchange, cultural exchange, knowledge exchange, etc.).

> In 1993 David Koloane had a very successful solo exhibition at the Goodman Gallery entitled 'Made in South Africa' which was based on the violence in the country.

The above statement was sourced from the Goodman Gallery's archival material in the David Koloane File at the Johannesburg Art Gallery Reference Library. It is very beneficial in the exposition of the series of exhibitions titled *Made in South Africa* (1993 and 1994). To begin with, it tells us of the reception of Koloane's work at the time, and it tells us a lot about the nature of commercial galleries in general. The phrase "very successful" as used by Linda Givon in the above statement suggests, inter alia, that the works on the show were almost all sold. According to Goniwe (2019:1), "pop star David Bowie was also enthusiastic about Koloane's expressive paintings and acquired works from the series *Made in South Africa* for his collection."

According to Cook (2009:154), Sue Williamson, the editor and founder of *Artthrob* is of the view that the Goodman Gallery "dominated the commercial gallery scene of Johannesburg in the nineties. Givon was the controversial and uncompromising head of the gallery for forty years, in that time building an impressive art market for South African art".

How would the work of Koloane have been received had it been shown at the

Everard Read Gallery which is also a commercial gallery or at a public gallery of art like the Johannesburg Art Gallery? Does the number of sales have an impact on how artists are received and incorporated into the canon?

For starters, the Goodman Gallery since its inception mostly focused on artistic objects made in Europe. In fact, the opening of the gallery in 1966 was described as some kind of artistic muscle flexing because of the number of international artists on show. In other words, Givon was motivated by the idea of an artist as a genius. Perhaps it occurred later to her that what is today called 'African art' was the work of geniuses too.

The point of the matter is there are many factors that contribute to perceptions of what art is, how artists are received, written about and valued including assertiveness and agency. The academic and author Nontobeko Ntombela (2019) alludes to assertiveness in relation to Nhlengethwa. She writes,

> And, as such, this position [of recognizing black subjective agencies] considers Nhlengethwa's role as someone who has always seen himself beyond the representational surface of being 'discovered,' rather employing strategies of self-writing that are intertextual and autobiographical. In other words, a knowing of one's right to speak and the right to take part in the production of one's own art history (in Macdonald 2020: 12).

In 1993 Nhlengethwa had a solo show titled *South Africa, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* and in 1994 he became the Standard Bank Young Artist Award winner. Through these feats Nhlengethwa established himself as one of the leading voices in the South African art world. In 1995 Koloane featured his work in the exhibition *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*. Nhlengethwa who speaks highly of the Thupelo workshops is today a highly valued South African artist whose work appears in leading art publications.[100] Kentridge had his first solo shows at the Goodman Gallery in 1992 and 1994 respectively. He was once a student at the Johannesburg Art Foundation established by Ainslie. Currently, Kentridge is the most highly rated South African artist. As

[100] Please see for example *The 2Oth Century Art Book*

noted above many factors contributed to Kentridges' rise and prominence in the world of art. The point of the matter Koloane, Nhlengethwa and Kentridge are valued differently due to the dictates of the art market and because of how South African art history has been written.

5.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I set out to demonstrate how Koloane undermined the label 'township art' through his oscillation between or blend of abstract expressionism and figurative renderings. I demonstrated that Koloane, and many other black South African artists, were not necessarily against what came to be known as township art but they were rather against the reductive labels that made the work of black South African artists less valuable in comparison with the work of their white counterparts. The Thupelo workshops provided artists like Koloane with a space where artists could forget about the dictates and pressures of the art market. Subsequently, Koloane developed a unique artistic idiom and voice. Thulile Gamedze (2019:1) alludes to the point that artists should be protected and allowed to grow "rather than just inclusion into the canon."

Lastly, Goniwe is of the view that, Koloane's first show at the Goodman Gallery "marked the beginning of an international career" for Koloane. Was Koloane somehow 'discovered' by Givon? How does Givon's visit to the Bag Factory Studios affect the pricing and valuing of Koloane's work?

In closing, in this thesis I set out to investigate the genealogy of the loaded classifications 'township art' and 'black modernisms' as found in South African art literature. Through my exploration of Koloane's incisive work, I demonstrate that black South African artists do not self-identify as township artists nor do they label their work 'township art'. The so-called township art was in fact a product of exchanges between black and white people of South Africa.

Market demands in South Africa encouraged certain black South African

artists to ‘put on an act’ as a way to make a living. This resulted in the production and repetition of sentimentalised township scenes mostly depicting a highly stylised community life in bright colours. Most of the artists that produced this kind of work have unfortunately died poor with no palpable artistic legacy. Artists like Koloane had to walk a very tightrope as they were navigating the uneven art landscape of South Africa. Consequently, Koloane and others were criticised for striving to develop a unique artistic vocabulary. However, artists such as Koloane managed to leave behind a perceptible artistic heritage. Attributable to this feat is Koloane’s level of education hence in ‘Walking the Tightrope’ and ‘Art Criticism for Whom?’ the issue of education reformation in South Africa is recurring. Through exploration and education Koloane established himself as a unique artist seeking to reflect the socio-political space of South Africa.

I show that the classifications ‘black modernisms’ and ‘township art’ are ubiquitously used to serve similar purposes of differentiating the work of black artists from that of white South African artists. In ‘post-apartheid’ South Africa even black curators/writers seem bound to use certain reductive framing conventions when dealing with the work of so-called black modernists. As a result, they unconsciously perpetuate the anthropological framing of modern art produced by black artists, thereby, contributing to the undervaluing of black artists’ work. In other words, the discursive violence of the taxonomies ‘township art’ and ‘black modernisms’ still persists, and it is ingrained in the ways we speak and write about the work of black artists in South Africa.

This investigation into the genealogy of pejorative labels used only to define the work of black artists in South Africa has led me to many questions, which could be the bases for more research. Greenberg et al write,

> exhibitions and anthologies are, by definition, selective and exclusive due to the biases of the organizers and the actual or perceived constraints of space, finance and availability of the works. The totality which many art exhibitions and anthologies seem to claim to embody is a fiction and even a fantasy.

This being the case, this dissertation is just the tip of the iceberg regarding factors that give rise to different ways of writing about artists in South Africa. As noted above, does the notion of 'discovering' artists have a bearing on how artists are valorised and ultimately how they are written about? This is an interesting point of entry through which South African (art) history could be mapped in 'post-apartheid' South Africa.

ENDS

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