

734453 MA Research final.docx

by Sasha-Lee Setzin

Submission date: 13-Dec-2023 07:51PM (UTC+0200)

Submission ID: 2258046188

File name: 734453_MA_Research_final.docx (4.41M)

Word count: 30024

Character count: 163237

HOW CAN SCREEN DANCE BE USED AS A TOOL TO REFRAME THE BLACK FEMALE BODY IN SOUTH AFRICA?



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How can Screen Dance be used as a tool to reframe the Black female body in South Africa?

Abstract

Screen dance can be used to explore and celebrate the diversity and complexity of the Black female body, highlighting the unique experiences and perspectives of Black women in South Africa. Through experimentation with movement, camera angles, and the manipulation of light and sound, screen dance can be used to create a new visual language that reframes the Black female body in a more nuanced and empowering way. This medium can be used as a tool to reframe the Black female body in South Africa by breaking stereotypes, giving agency to Black female dancers and choreographers, and exploring the diversity and complexity of the Black female experience. Screen dance allows for greater creative control and representation of the Black female body, offering a platform for self-expression, experimentation, and the exploration of new perspectives. The research seeks to examine the ability to manipulate and reimagine the image of the Black female body, through digital media which can be a powerful tool in challenging dominant cultural narratives and re-centering the experiences and perspectives of Black women. Additionally, it explores how screen dance can bring attention to the embodied experiences of Black women, and the ways in which their bodies have been subject to historical, cultural, and societal oppression. By making the body visible, screen dance can create a space for resistance, healing, and empowerment for Black women.

Keywords: *The gaze, Black female body, screen dance, experimentation*

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Introduction

My journey in doing my master's research has become a deepening realization of how institutionalized the objectification of Black female has become. The ideas put forth in the writing stems from my experience of being a Black woman and how our bodies have been represented on screen (film and television and social media). The trajectory I have been working on comes from the perspective of reframing the representation of the Black female body using dance and camera. This required me to interrogate ways in which the Black female body can be viewed by society.

For Taylor Friar (2021), the gaze of the Black female body has been a distinct site of transgression and deference in visual culture. It has been ripped from autonomy, purged from intellectual spaces, and exposed as a 'bizarre' raw spectacle (Friar, 2021). To Patricia-Hill Collins (2006) and several other scholars such as Akeia Bernard (2014), Anne McClicktok (1995) and Tate (2005), the Black female body has been greatly undermined since the genesis of slavery, as it normalized and institutionalized the rape and prostitution whilst intertwining it with the idea of a willing submissive object ready for consumption (Jackson, 2006). Over time, enslaved Black female figures, destitute of any agency, have been socially rejected and 'thingafied', which crafted cultural stereotypes such as the infamous Jezebel (Jackson, 2006). In Friar's (2021) description, according to the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, describes Black women as lascivious by nature.

The descriptive words associated with this stereotype are singular in their focus: seductive, alluring, worldly, beguiling, tempting and lewd. I expand ways in which the Black female body can be seen using camera and dance. This dissertation aims to reframe and reconstruct the Black female body by challenging stereotypes such as the Mammie, Jezebel, and Sapphire that perpetuate violence in South African visual culture. The purpose is to not only facilitate agency but the overarching concerns of social injustice and equality.

While I can provide some general information, it's crucial to approach the topic with sensitivity and acknowledge that individual experiences and perspectives can differ greatly. To Stephane Serge Ibinga (2007), in the context of South Africa, Black women have historically faced various stereotypes that are deeply rooted in the country's history of colonization, apartheid, and ongoing

socioeconomic disparities. These stereotypes can include perceptions of Black women as hypersexualized, aggressive, loud, or lacking intelligence. These stereotypes not only perpetuate harmful biases but also contribute to the marginalization and unequal treatment of Black women.

Within the South African context, the notion of the male gaze and sexual symbolism of the Black female body refers to the way in which the bodies of Black women are objectified, hypersexualized, and consumed by Black and white men alike. The term 'male gaze' can be defined as women being looked at and displayed with an appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact (Mulvey, 1989). She states that the male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure styled accordingly in their traditional exhibitionist roles.

In South Africa's apartheid and colonial periods, the Black female body was viewed as a commodity for labor, pleasure, and reproduction. During apartheid, the male gaze was and still is prevalent in institutions of authority such as the police force and parliament (Ibinga, 2007). The hypersexualized stereotype of the Black woman was used to justify the exploitation of Black women under apartheid, with the notion of the "Jezebel stereotype" that portrayed Black women as sexually promiscuous and immoral (Bernard, 2014).

This led to a culture of sexual exploitation and abuse of Black female bodies in how Black women are represented on screen. There is an overriding narrative of Gender-based violence (GBV) culture that is predominant in South Africa. The Black female body has become a site of oppression and violence. According to Clark Hine (1989) although Black female body has more autonomy now, the historical trauma of how Black bodies have been brutalized can present Black women with challenges in how they regard and engage with their bodies. The Black female body is also used in advertising to appeal to the male gaze and encourage product consumption. Many billboards and posters feature Black women in sexually suggestive poses, further perpetuating these stereotypes.

The hypersexualisation of Black women's bodies can also be seen in South African popular culture, including music videos, where Black women are often portrayed in sexually suggestive positions, scantily clad, and twerking (from the likes of artists such as Chomi, Thembi Seete to Babes Wodumo). The sexual violence and harassment that Black women face are often seen as justifiable due to these stereotypes. The lack of intervention from law enforcement and society

has perpetuated this abuse. This suggests that ³² the male gaze and sexual symbolism of the Black female body in South Africa are deeply rooted in history and continue to perpetuate harmful stereotypes. This has resulted in the exploitation ⁴⁷ and abuse of Black women, eroding their dignity and humanity. It is essential to continue to raise awareness and counter these harmful stereotypes and practices to ensure the dignity and safety of Black women in South Africa.

The writing in Chapter 1: Politics of ²⁰ representation of the Black female body ³ opens by offering an overview of body politics to contextualize the Black female body as it relates to the colonial paradigm and illuminates the Black female form and its journey. I argue that the Jezebel, Mammie ²³ stereotypes are direct products of the male gaze, manifested through an interconnected stream of political, economic, and cultural factors related to gender, and women's role in Africa. I then go on to illustrate how can one use and experiment with screen dance to recognize and negotiate the male gaze in the section *reimagining dance and screen*.

The conventions of screen dance have to do with how it is constructed and formed. The elements and mechanisms are, mise-en-scene, ¹ cinematography, choreography narrative, and sound. The experimental nature of the genre of screen dance can break down stereotypes and challenge societal norms surrounding the Black female body. Screen dance can be used to challenge the traditional gaze imposed on the Black female body by using non-linear narratives, abstract imagery, and the manipulation of the frame to disrupt the traditional gaze and create a new perspective. The moving image in screen dance has ways of portraying complex information and transporting us through space and time. The language of cinema allows one to participate from multiple points of view.

The process of reframing the Black female body in this research and constructing an alternative gaze first has to do with the colonized female body. I will begin to unravel ¹⁶ the construction of the Black female body and its gaze ⁶ as an extension of the sexualisation of Black bodies during the colonial era.

⁷⁵ ²¹
¹ Mise en scene refers to everything in front of the camera including actors, props, lighting, set design, the natural and artificial details that characterize the spaces filmed. The term is borrowed from a French theatrical expression, meaning roughly "put into the scene". In other words, mise-en-scène describes the stuff in the frame and the way it is shown and arranged. From <https://collegefilmandmediastudies.com/mise-en-scene-2/>. Accessed 6 May 2021

I also explore a feminine mode of production to provide new ways of representing and seeing the female body based on socially engaged choreography of the resistive body using screen dance. I found myself engaging with feminist writings that uncovered smaller narratives and discourses on the female body that lie dormant in dance and camera. I interviewed South African screen dance expert, Jeannette Ginslov's, who uses an informed model that deals with the multifaceted experiences of women and our pursuit of agency and resistance. Ginslov's work provided the research with an in-depth understanding of the genre of screen dance and her process/experimentations using a close reference to the case study that is explored in *'Sandstone'*(1988). The challenge is to create a feminine language by uncovering new approaches to choreographing and filming the female body, specifically the Black female body.

Chapter 2 identifies the presence of historic stereotypes and meta-narratives that are inscribed to the Black female body through contemporary images and media. This includes conjunctive conversations and a multitude of voices from post-colonial writers and women in film, whose writings support the notion of developing new semiotics of the female body. The theories by South African Black feminist scholar, Pumla Gqola, a gender activist, feminist, renowned scholar and author. Her works examine spaces that Black women choose to occupy subject positions in which they determine the structures and the meanings of their lives. Gqola argues that postcolonial feminism/womanism is not only concerned with subverting patriarchal and colonial focus of logic, but the focus is also on opening the terrain of Black women representation and theorization to a new signification.

This also includes Laura Mulvey's critique of the notion of the male gaze, which emphasizes creating realistic portrayals of women on screen. Inspired by the manifesto of Laura Mulvey on 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' (1975). The writing is directed to experimental filmmaking and offers alternate artistic discourses to challenge dominant narratives in cinema.

The final part of Chapter 2 follows Ketu Katrak and Ama Ata-Aidoo's writings which critically observe the female body as a site of oppression and resistance. Ketu Katrak's inquiry investigates the works of postcolonial writers and critically observes how the female body is experienced as a site of oppression and resistance. Katrak's performance construct investigates the politics of the female body with specific reference to a variety of texts from Third world societies, on how the body is a site of oppression and that one can resist this oppression using oral forms and language

(Katrak, 2006). ⁴¹ The politics of Black women and how the body ⁵¹ is a site of oppression and resistance can be found in the literature of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy or the Reflections of a Black -Eyed Squint* (1977) . The writing deals with exploitation of Africans, their subjectivity, their struggle after gaining independence and the exile of an African woman.

The investigation further provides alternative ways of positioning looking at the Black female body in non-dominant ways of meaning-making. This attests to the final formation in Chapter 2: Theories on developing new semiotics of the female body of the research, which includes Helen Cixous idea of making the female presence felt, where she ¹⁸ has been absent using performance in which the woman's body will become a source of a radically new text. I also use South African performance artist , Nelisiwe Xaba's, *Inscribing new meanings on the female body through theatre*'(2006). I was intrigued by the notion of embodiment to deconstruct bodily experience in my practice-based research using experimental methods. This idea of 'embodiment' brought about questions notably around how theatricality and the dancing body can challenge cultural construction. In what ways can I attempt to rebirth the female body to serve its purpose other than that of the viewer? How does one break those boundaries, and critically engage and provoke thought?

Chapter 3 of research looks at ways to reframe the Black female body by looking at devices used by exploring the case studies *Hatched (2008) & Uncles and Angels (2013)*. The politics of South African female bodies are viewed in a problematic scope as highly sexualized, however, there are new platforms such as screen dance being developed to represent the Black female body in various ways . This section examines dance pedagogies and aesthetics of Black female choreographers, Mamela Nyamza and Nelisiwe Xaba. Their case studies offer ways to reconstruct the male gaze by using the body to ⁴⁰ challenge stereotypes of the Black female body and cultural notions of gender. The theory in the research actively demonstrates ways in which one can use the body and the camera to articulate an alternative gaze and ways of representation and how one can break conventions using screen dance.

These theories actively engage with the methods of experimentation I explore in the practical component of this research. Chapter 4 consists of an analysis of the screen dance documentary *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022), which looks at the cinematographic and dance techniques that are

employed in reframing the Black female body. *SHE IS WOMEN* is a screen dance informed by real events of GBV that have occurred in South Africa from 2019 till today, which is the main source of data for this investigation. Using existing GBV narratives, it offers an alternative representation of women with a specific context in South Africa.

Chapter 5 is a framing document of the practical piece which is a critical reflection of the practical work, *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022). The ideas in the framing document relate to the conventions that have been discussed in the body of the research. The framing document illustrates the application of the theoretical framework provided throughout the research and how I used these conventions in my own exploration. In this screen dance, I thought of possible ways of representing the female body avoiding predictable ways of looking at the female body. I built a different gaze through the lens of the camera dance and editing. The creative component is a screen dance informed by real events of gender-based violence that have occurred in South Africa from 2019 till today, which will be the main source of data for this investigation gathered from social platforms. The practical component is based on the theme of violence against women. Using existing narratives, it offers an alternative representation of women with a specific context to femicide in South Africa. The screen dance is shot at a specific isolated building in Johannesburg.

'SHE IS WOMEN' (2022) refers to the countless victims of violence personified as one voice. It is a screen dance that looks at the body as an entity to express forms of oppression. This piece is influenced by the works that speak to the pandemic climate of the Black female experience and the struggle of the Black female individual in South Africa. It proposes to critique the crippling system of South Africa's failure to deal with this issue. These stories are always forgotten, and mostly, it is because there are so many of these narratives that it has become a norm to kill or violate a woman. It serves as a reminder to the audience about the forms of violence inflicted on the everyday Black woman and that it can happen to any one of us, at anytime, anywhere. Women are not safe in South Africa.

It is inspired by the *16 Days of Activism* GBV movement that is occurring in South Africa. The aim is to create awareness about social issues in South African society through the medium of screen dance. The research is based on the social-engaged choreography of the resistive body. The screen dance looks at creating movement and reimagining the Black female body.

The practical component attempts to reposition Black female subjectivity, restoring visibility of the Black female body, and giving voice to the body. This is achieved by uniting corporeality and dance while rejecting the mainstream cinematic practice of obliterating the body as it maintains the diegetic or non-diegetic Black female voice. How I position my body, by redefining its position against traditional patriarchal representation that has dictated the image of what and who a Black woman is or is supposed to be. The idea is to create awareness about this particular social issue of Gender-based violence in South Africa, through the medium of screen dance.

I am not promoting an overall representation of ideas and interpretation of the Black female body that represents all Black women's sentiments on the issue. I do acknowledge individuals who recognize themselves as a Black woman in a multitude of ways. The objective is not to solve the problem but to establish meaning to excavate the voices of Black women.

Methodology

This paper will use a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative and practice-based, including case studies, historical and document analysis.

The research uses both theoretical and practical academic applications of research comprising of journals, chapters, interviews and video references of screen dance history and the representation of the women on screen. The theoretical ideas in the research provide a framework for the practical component and have a significant impact on the work. I subsequently seek to examine the aesthetics of the Black female body and how I can experiment in fragmenting my body employing cinematic and movement.

Chapter 1: Politics of representation of the Black female body

Colonialism and the 'exotic':

Although there have been significant shifts in the way Black women have been viewed in visual culture in South Africa, there still exists representations of Black women that are reminiscent or nostalgic of European representations of the Black woman. The first chapter in my investigation discusses the prevalence of colonialist framework in modern society and the culture of commodification around Black bodies. The chapter specifically addresses the history and contemporary use of the Black female body.

Since the beginning of colonialization, the Black race was seen as an inferior race by colonizers. McClintock (1995) states that documentation of maps and reflections of the British conquest, is riddled with language that suggests the sexual nature of the land and its discovery. The 'New World' which referred to African lands, was described as 'virgin land' by colonizers, wrongly suggesting an empty and uninhabited territory (McClintock, 1995). This patriarchal framework of colonialism depicts the New World through rhetoric ascribed to women which suggested the land's docile nature, awaiting the conquest of men. This romanticisation was used to validate the conquest of the land itself, precluding the sexualisation of the women made victims by these imperialist mindsets. The feminization and sexualisation of the European colonial narrative encouraged the sexual exploitation of Black women (Holmes, 2016:1). McClintock's ideas are imperative as it foregrounds the genesis of sexualisation and abuse of the Black female body in a historical setting.

Within the Western context, the Black female form has been associated with destructive stereotypes which carry many connotations of being sexually deviant, subhuman, primitive, and uncontrollably erotic by nature, all under the perverse white male gaze e.g., Jezebel and Mammie stereotypes (Tate, 2015). *'they were displayed nude for sale at slave auctions and exhibited publicly or privately in the drawing rooms for the wealthy and aristocratic in Europe, as was the case for the Hottentot Venuses'* (Tate, 2015,4). Tate (2015) suggests that the lens through which Black women are viewed is rooted in the history of enslavement, colonial conquest, and ethnographic exhibition.

According to Dr Keisha Gordan and Deborah McMillan (2022), the ideology of the Black female body has been shaped by white hegemony and supremacy, the representation of the Black female is flawed (Gordon, Miller, 2022:247). Stereotypes usually evolve a period of overtime as a result of repetitious erroneous portrayals of a specific group of people (Davis & Harris: 1998). Although research is limited, there is still an inaccurate portrayal in the print media and screen and these representations have a ruinous perception of Black female bodies. Research suggests that print media and media have historically been dominated by the stereotypes of the Black female: Jezebel, Sapphire and Mammie/Mammy. The 'Jezebel' representation derived from early days of slavery and was used as a way for white men to justify their victimization of Black women owned as slaves (Gordon, Miller, 2022:249).

The Jezebel is depicted as having insatiable appetite, lacking modesty and posing half naked. This image has evolved from postcards, sheet music, ashtrays and print media and the image still persists today. Turner (2011) found that Black women are more likely to appear provocative and oversexualized in media and music videos compared to white women. The 'Mammie', originated from the South during slavery and it described Black women who were nurturers and caretakers of white families (Gordon, Miller, 2022:249). 'Mammie' is a term that defined the Black women as a domestic worker, obese, asexual and is described as someone who puts others needs first before her own. According to Kersti Myles (2017), the Mammie's greatest virtue is her willingness to love and submit to the white folk. This non-threatening image of the Mammie is portrayed by affection by whites because it epitomized the sexist-racist ideal of Black womanhood, complete submission to the whites. The 'Sapphire' stereotype became more prevalent on radio during the 1940s and 1950s, it described Black women who were hostile and angry especially towards Black men (West, 1995) notoriously what is known as the 'angry Black woman.'

Patricia-Hill Collins chapter in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000:69) critiques the negative stereotypical images on Black women, and how they continue to oppress and perpetuate dominant subjects definition of the object i.e. Black women. Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie argues that colonialism has brought out the basic sexist tendencies in pre-capitalist Africa by rearranging society in ways that effectively erased any existing sources of female empowerment.

(Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993: 109) The result of this is that when colonial power is finally overthrown, even though the indigenous people feel the urge to embrace their old, suppressed culture, colonial manipulation still exists in their minds. The images pervasive nature aid in sustaining intersecting oppression because they reflect the dominant group's interest in maintaining the Black women subordination (Collins, 2000:69). These images are used to make Black women's oppression look normal and natural.

Throughout history, the male gaze has invoked sexual politics which reaffirms the power of patriarchy by deploying women as props in service of heterosexual narratives that are prevalent in African society. Consequently, in Ogundipe-Leslie's *'African Women, Culture and Another Development'* (1993) she argues that African woman have six mountains burdening their back, this references the six oppressions that Black women carry: colonial oppression, tradition, her own backwardness, her color and herself. Frantz Fanon's *'The Wretched Earth'* (2004) suggests that both Black and White men not only oppress Black women with law and tradition, but make women feel like a burden upon men as well. Ogundipe-Leslie's text shows that the sixth mountain 'herself' is the combined weight of the other mountains. Ogundipe-Leslie argues that colonialism has brought out the basic sexist tendencies in pre-capitalist Africa by rearranging society in ways that effectively erased any existing sources of female empowerment. (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993: 109).

In the context of reframing the Black female body in screen dance, Ogundipe-Leslie's philosophy of the six mountains could be seen as a lens through which to explore and represent the multifaceted experiences of Black women. Screen dance is a form of artistic expression that combines dance and film, allowing for the exploration of movement, storytelling, and visual aesthetics. By drawing on the six-mountain philosophy, screen dance practitioners and artists can create narratives and imagery that challenge stereotypes, celebrate Black womanhood, and provide alternative representations.

For example, in screen dance works, the Black female body can be portrayed in diverse ways, showcasing its strength, beauty, and complexity. It can challenge dominant narratives that

objectify or marginalize Black women, instead highlighting their agency, creativity, and spiritual connections. By incorporating elements of the six-mountain philosophy into screen dance, artists can explore themes of embodiment, labor, motherhood, political activism, creativity, and spirituality, creating nuanced and empowering representations of Black women's experiences.

It's important to note that the connection between Ogundipe-Leslie's philosophy of the six mountains and screen dance, as it is interpretive and subject to individual artistic choices and intentions. However, the six-mountain philosophy offers a broader framework for understanding and reframing the Black female body, providing a rich source of inspiration and a potential lens through which to explore themes of identity, empowerment, and cultural narratives in the context of screen dance. Although colonialism has somewhat dissipated into the history books, Black people feel the urge to embrace their old and suppressed culture, but colonial manipulation still exists in their minds. The image of Black women in modern today, aids in sustaining oppression because it reflects dominant groups interest in maintaining Black women subordination (Collins, 2000:69). These images are used to make Black women's oppression look normal and natural.

The gaze of the Black female body can be traced to the colonial archive. The iconography of Black women was eroticized and romanticized by the horrors of colonialism and slavery, labeling the Black women as willing and hypersexual (Nelson, 2010). The visual examples of Sarah Baartman (fig.1) and the Sable-Saffron Venus (1765) (fig.2) epitomize hypersexualisation of the Black female body. It is no surprise that the theme of hypersexualisation seen in the story of Baartman and the Sable-Saffron (1765) continues to permeate through popular culture today. The concept of exhibitionism and being displayed for voyeurs speaks back to how Black women were auctioned naked, and their bodies used as entertainment for White audiences to gaze upon.

The same concept references Black women today. This exhibitionism has somewhat turned into a fashion in current South African media and visual culture. The representation of Black women in media and magazines was examined within a critical paradigm, specifically feminist studies (Lombard, 2018). The studies revealed that Black women were revealed in non-working roles rather than the decorative or working role. The study showed Black women posing in subordinate ways and as mentally drifting from the scene, which is in opposition to the ideas of empowerment of the South African agenda (Lombard, 2018). To reframe the Black female body, one must look at ways of deconstructing the Black female body. This means finding ways to

highlight Black women's subjectivities, other than fulfilling pleasures of others or male desires, rather to empower the woman, herself and the viewer.

A distinctive figure who experienced colonial sexualisation was a woman known as Saar(tjie) Baartman, a diminutive colonial Dutch form of her name Sarah Baartman. The name also means little, the (jie) makes her 'less' as Baartman was seen as property. Ms. Baartman was narrated in colonial historiography and classified as having "steatopygia" which is 'protuberant' buttocks (Parkinson, 2016). She was not only the epitome of colonial exploitation but an international sensation of commodification. Sara Baartman's representation had a significant impact on the current representation and construction of African women in the 21st century and has shaped how Black women are portrayed. After Baartman's death in 1815, her body was further violated through the mutilation and display of her genitalia. Her genitals and brain were preserved and exhibited in museums in France for nearly 200 years (Parkinson, 2016).

This post-mortem objectification and voyeuristic display of her body reinforced the dehumanization and commodification she had endured during her life. Originally, Baartman's body was ridiculed under the colonial gaze, however, South Africans recognize Baartman's contribution to the ideal Black female body-with a strong legacy of curvaceous posteriors lauded on TV and celebrated on social media more than other races. Black women are now turning their bodies into a business, and these women are comfortable with being objectified (Ashley, 2021). While it has positive implications as these women are making a profit (social media), these portrayals accentuate stereotypes such as the 'Jezebel' as discussed early in the research.

The hypersexualisation can be seen in the construction of Sable-Venus (1765). In Western art, Botticelli's Venus is represented by white females read as the ideal of beauty (Nelson, 2010). Therefore, attaching words such as 'Hottentot, Sable, and Saffron' as prefixes to 'Venus' is an ironic gesture that substitutes a grotesque, racially Othered body for the expected white female body (Nelson, 2010). In depicting primitivism, hyper sexuality, sexual availability, and enslavement, These paintings (re)produced Blackness as inhuman and located the white female body as beautiful, and civilized (Tate, 2022: 107).

The Sable-Saffron Venus is a painting that predates Baartman. The painting enforced perceptions of Black women in Europe and the Caribbean. The perception held was that Black women were 'naturally sexually open and they should serve as concubines or breeders' (Tate, 2022). The

significance of these painting highlights ¹⁷ various aspects of this Sable-Saffron Venus persist today in the controlling images of the welfare queen, strong Black woman, and other stereotypes. These images have influenced ² the way in which Black women are viewed and represented which regards ² the Black female body as an object of denigration, primitive and exotic 'other.'

For Tate (2022) ¹² such work reminds us that history still haunts the present even if we see ourselves engaged in Stuart Hall's (1996) resignification of Blackness through recognizing and deconstructing artifacts from the past of racism in contemporary times (Tate, 2022: 105-106). What one sees in the 'sable Venus' is a ¹² lack of contrived womanly innocence or nature as a veil that marks ¹² nudes like Botticelli's Venus (fig. 3) as artistic, non-pornographic, and thus not a moral threat to the white body politic, as Black female bodies occupied their natural space of hyper sexualized, ¹² enslaved, masculinized labor that could be discarded and used at will (Tate, 2022: 107). This shows that even prior the inception of filmmaking and the moving image, the Black women's image was constructed for the intent to satisfy the 'male gaze'

The voyeurism associated with Baartman's body and the female body on display reflect a broader issue of the objectification of women throughout history. ³ The Black female body has been treated as objects of desire and spectacle, reduced to their physical appearance for the pleasure and consumption of others. This voyeurism is rooted in the power dynamics of gender, where women are subjected ⁶⁷ to the male gaze and their bodies are used as objects for entertainment, control, and exploitation.

The nuances of violence associated with the display of female bodies on screen and in other media forms are complex. Women are often depicted in hypersexualized or degrading ways, perpetuating harmful stereotypes, and reinforcing the idea that their worth lies solely in their physical attributes. This objectification can lead to various forms of violence, including emotional, psychological, and physical abuse.

This colonial image and narrative is still inherent ⁶⁸ in South Africa. It continues to threaten the sexuality of Black women and positions Black female bodies into servitude. Within a political and social context, this exhibitionism of the body jeopardizes the position of the Black female. There are an astonishing number of cases of Gender based and issues of inequality based ⁶⁹ on the fact that you are a Black woman, and this has been normalized. The influence and control these images continue to ¹⁴ have on Black women on how Black women are treated and perceived affects

our everyday lives. Studies show that these images contribute to the violence perpetrated against Black women. The perpetuated image of the Jezebel as overtly sexual and promiscuous contributes to sexual exploitation of Black women, and it also contributes to lower conviction of Black on Black rape compared to other ethnicity groups or same race rape cases (Olive, 2012 & Johnson, 2006).

The dark history of rape, objectification, and violence has turned 'the erotic' into a psychosocial condition of Black identity that makes issues of sexuality complicated (Hine, 1989: 912-920). 'Rape: A South African Nightmare' (2015) by Pumla Gqola brings an artistic approach to female presentation as it highlights pivotal aspects of the Black female body and the external infliction of the gaze or oppression on it in contemporary society. Gqola unpacks the complex relationship South Africa has with rape by paying attention to the patterns and trends of rape, asking what society can learn from famous cases and why South Africa is losing the battle against rape (Davis, 2015). This ties in to the consequence of the societal view of the Black female body. This piece of literature, 'Rape: A South African Nightmare' (2003), the reader sees results of the power of the gaze. The solution, as I have articulated throughout this paper, is to reframe and resist the contemporary gaze through the manner in which one represents and depicts the Black female body in all spheres of performance. In my case, I have chosen to express activism through screen dance.

Additionally, the commodification and dehumanization of women's bodies can contribute to a culture that normalizes violence against women. When women are continually portrayed as objects to be consumed, it reinforces a harmful narrative that their bodies exist for the pleasure and control of others. This can create an environment where violence against women is trivialized or even justified. It is important to recognize and challenge these harmful representations and the violence that accompanies them. Promoting a more equitable and respectful portrayal of women in media and society is crucial for combating the objectification and violence inflicted upon Black female bodies. This involves promoting diverse and nuanced representations of women, celebrating their achievements and agency, and fostering a culture that respects women's autonomy and dignity.

Example 1: Sarah Baartman & Sable-Saffron Venus

Fig 1: *Sable-Saffron Venus* (1765)



Fig 2: *Sarah Baartman* (1800)



Fig 3: *The Birth of Venus*: Botticelli (1484-1486)



The gaze ³⁹ of the Black female body in theatre and media:

The stereotypical representations of Black women have a long history, dating back since the beginning of colonialism when Black people were often depicted in stereotypical and offensive ways, as discussed. These stereotypes were ¹¹ used to justify the enslavement and oppression of Black people, and perpetuated harmful stereotypes that continue to have an impact today.

Colonial representations of Black women can still exist in theatre, although ¹³ it is important to note that the representation of Black women in theatre, like in other forms of media, has evolved

over-time, and is not limited to solely colonial portrayals. However, some productions may still depict Black women in ways that are stereotypical, offensive, or perpetuate harmful colonial narratives. It is important to acknowledge and critique these representations and support productions that offer more nuanced and authentic portrayals of Black women.

⁵⁷ In Yvette Hutchison's *Aesthetics of South African Women's Embodied Activism: Staging Complicit* (2018) Black women were written in silence through male narratives, through voices that are not their own. Black women were not given positions of power and were never afforded opportunities to frame the conditions of their representations. Black women were used, and their creativity was tapped but was given limited space to exercise their voices. This has also been prevalent since the inception of filmmaking (Hutchison, 2018); women were represented in absentia and through memory, which perpetuates gender stereotypes and leads to gender discrimination. Therefore, women and girls are underrepresented due to patriarchal norms/traditions.

¹¹ It is evident that the representation of the Black female is situated in a patriarchal framework and signifies the male gaze. The male gaze is resonant of this degradation due to the way Black women choose to predominantly frame themselves. This is ⁸⁰perceived as individualized 'choices' made by Black women to present themselves as 'hypersexualized'. ¹⁶The Black female body has historically been exploited for profit and continuously treated in hyper-sexualized, hyper-gendered settings in popular media culture. Women are misrepresented with faulty biases and assumptions and visual media equates women to their bodies and exploits them; the content is usually comprised of women being subjects of entertainment. As much as Black women are now taking ownership of their bodies, their bodies have now turned into profit. This propagates the idea of being commodified and the body being displayed, always on view meaning that it is not your own. The current representation of Black female bodies on screen is still being viewed in a negative light and it represented as a Jezebel which is done to please the buyers (mostly men) of these products.

⁵ The Black women is being equated to silence and portrayed as either not interesting enough to be represented or already overly represented. ⁵It is then worth considering whose gaze forms this familiarity. Although the dominant culture does not offer a favorable context, the narratives of the subjects in question remain forceful. To challenge dominant modes of how Black women's

bodies are/portrayed, new visual grammars need to be used and created; sometimes an encounter with an image can become the starting point for unlearning inherent dominative modes.

"Negresses go unseen because we consider there is nothing to see and that we have basically nothing to do with them." (Mbembe, 2019: 173).

I went back to the idea of the archive looking at images, videos on the representation of Black women bodies. Consequently, the scrutiny of colonial archives was largely based on ethnographic materials created by European science, which is the camera. This revealed that guns and whips were not the only technologies that caused the suffering of colonized people and enabled the prevalence of structured colonial rule (Said, 1979). It evokes an analogy with a tradition in aesthetics in photography and film, the one between the long gun and camera (Farzan, 2022).

²⁹ *"To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed."* (Sontag, 2004: 10). The camera is likened to a gun and is a weapon that is responsible for creating the language and discourse around the Black female body. This quotation connotes that the camera/gun is a detrimental weapon, a killing machine. It is used to oppress the subject and reminds subjects of their 'position' in society. Colonial archival materials are a painful process for the subject, it brings about suffering, it reveals the gaze of the Black female body as repressed, denied and ultimately interrogating. These ideas give me the chance to make Black bodies visible without objectifying to dominant ideologies. Azoulay proposes the notion of a civil political space where the camera can be used to continually renew the gaze and unsettle the pre-existing structures of visibility and exposure (Azoulay, 2008).

The contemporary lens of the Black female body on screen

Colonialism has had a profound lasting impact on the perception of Black female bodies. The historical injustices have shaped stereotypes and biases that continue to affect how Black women are represented today in the media. Acknowledging the roots of the historical context as the

problem is essential in providing evidence of how the Black female body is perceived. Whilst the historical context is imperative, it is crucial to address contemporary issues too.

The stereotypes and biases still persist today in the media landscape this includes oversexualized portrayals, one dimensional characters and limited positions for Black women in leading roles (Bernard, 2016). There is also a lack of diversity in media ownership and production in South African media. This can result in decision makers of the industry not being able to make nuanced decisions about authentic portrayals of the Black female body. The impact that these images have to all audiences who may internalize these messages can have negative consequences on how Black women are treated within a community.

Here are some of the contemporary examples that highlight issues related to Black female bodies on screen. The issue of colorism is still prevalent in media, dark-skinned women are often under represented and less favorable than light skinned Black women. For example, in *Nina Simone (2018)* biopic, actress Zoe Saldana had to darken her complexion for the role to match Nina Simone's complexion (New York Times, 2016). Reality shows such as *Real Housewives of Johannesburg (2022)* depict Black women as overly aggressive and dramatic. Black women are continuously hypersexualized in media such as Instagram and music videos, and face criticism for explicit content which some argue reinforces stereotypes of Black women being overly sexual. South African artist Moonchild Sanelly, is often celebrated for challenging traditional norms and advocating for self-expression and empowerment. Whilst Moonchild is known for her unapologetic approach, critics mention that the artists brand perpetuates the negative stereotypes of Black women (Khulu, 2022). Her stage performances feature explicit content, provocative behavior and sexual themes. She adopts behaviors and certain personas that maybe seen as stereotypical such as twerking and suggestive dance moves. Her music and lyrics use explicit lyrics and vulgar language which contribute to the one dimensional image of Black women being aggressive, insatiable and loud.

In addition to the contemporary lens on screen, there is a narrative of the 'pickaninny' (Evans, 2021: 6-7) and it is usually defined as the portrayal of young Black women that come from challenging families and disadvantaged backgrounds. 'Pickaninnies' are usually portrayed as

undesirable, and resistant to pain. They are also portrayed as adultified and having to take on responsibilities from a young age. This can be seen in *Beast of the Southern Wild* (2012) featuring Qhuvézhané Wallis, who plays 'Hushpuppy', a six year old girl with a terminally ill father who struggles to build their home for years. Another prevalent example is the film *Precious* (2009) played by Gabourey Sidibe, a 16 year old who is sexually and physically abused by her mother and father respectively (Evans, 2021, 7).

In Kgafela oa Magogodi's (2003: 198) *Sexuality, Power, and the Black Body*, acknowledges and encourages the need for Black women to have access to the camera in order to take back control of the camera and cinema apparatus. This will give Black women an opportunity to share their experiences of womanhood as female subjectivity in Africa has been defined by men rather than by women. Magogodi's work challenges the prevailing stereotypes and objectification of the Black female body. Historically, Black women have been subjected to harmful and degrading stereotypes that have reduced them to hypersexualized objects. By addressing the intersections of sexuality, power, and race, Magogodi's chapter provides a critical analysis that challenges these stereotypes and encourages a more nuanced understanding of Black women's experiences. In addition, the chapter highlights the agency and empowerment of Black women in shaping their own narratives of sexuality. By reclaiming their sexuality and asserting their own desires, Black women can challenge the power dynamics that have historically marginalized and silenced them.

This reframing of the Black female body as a site of agency and empowerment allows for a more comprehensive understanding of Black women's experiences and challenges dominant narratives. Magogodi (2003: 199) argues that Black filmmakers have contributed to the challenge of re-imaging the Black woman but have failed to transcend the patriarchal trap in which woman are placed in sexual roles as opposed to engaging in politics. The Black woman has fallen victim to a tendency to de-womanize Black womanhood.

For instance, in Sembene's *Xala* (1974) shows men in positions of power suffering from impotence and picking up sexual diseases. The sexual impotence of the El Hadij's (main character) is symbolic of a sterile postcolonial social order which is a responsibility of the new ruling elite in Senegal (Kgafela, 2003: 190). African nationalism is constructed around masculinity. El Hadij's body is figured as a political spectacle and the body of his third wife,

Ngoni is an erotic spectacle. After El Hadji's failure to deflower Ngoni, one of the in laws is heard saying "A girl like that could arouse a dead man" (Xala,1974) which shows the viewer Ngoni's sexuality as opposed to her other qualities she may possess as a married woman. This links to Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze where woman is portrayed as objects of pleasure and rendered powerless in male directed films (Kgatela, 2003:196). The camera thus becomes a political suspect.

There is a representational gap which exists outside fetishized visualizations of the Black woman, as history and imagery has been dictated by the male view. Black women's stories, experiences and pain has been overshadowed, silenced and treated as normal to society and by men. This has led me to challenge dominant discourse of how Black women are usually represented, by choosing an alternative discourse to undo and reveal the narrative from my point of view, a Black woman's point of view. I wanted to construct a revised gaze and distort the idea of the male gaze, by using the imagery, cinematic, dance devices and my form (body) to construct a new visual language. The conventions of screen dance allow one to manipulate elements of the cinematic imagery and dance to create and represent multiple points of view of the Black female body.

Renewing the gaze in my research meant taking control of the image, taking control of my body, the camera apparatus. Traditionally, the narrative and the gaze is constituted by a primarily male and patriarchal one and how the system of looks is deployed in the film constructs the look of the spectator predicated on a male radius of perception. In my practical *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022), I explored ways of deconstructing preconceived notions of the Black female body by establishing a language of intimacy and mobility. I employed the antithesis of the male gaze, the female gaze.

The idea is that the female gaze draws on representations of women by women for women and it is how a woman sees herself, it seeks to empathize rather than objectify (Telfer, 2016). This meant using the camera to create a narrative through the female director/creator's perspective in a subjective way to show the inner emotive being of being feminine, unashamed, emotional, and intimate. The female gaze does not mean that subjects cannot be sexual or show their bodies, it simply means the audience will see it differently through a woman's eyes, they will feel what a woman feels using cinematic devices and dance. I shot from a feminine perspective in relation to Black women's experiences of abuse in South Africa, focusing on the victim's experience. The

feminist mode provides new ways of representing and seeing the female body based on socially engaged choreography of the resistive body using screen dance.

¹⁷ Stereotypes about Black women dissociate their identities from their actual lived experiences as dominating society treats them. According to Tate (2015), Black women are rejecting this manipulation of any kind and attempting ¹⁷ to develop alter/native bodies that coexist with dominant views of ideal women's bodies, artists such as Zanele Muholi, Mary Sibande, Berni Searle, Nelisiwe Xaba, Mamela, Nyamza and Mona Hatum. ⁶ I suggest this continued violence and exploitation are rooted in a colonial imperialist framework maintained through historical reproductive control and hypersexualisation. To Walters (2021), ³ the multifaceted discourse on Black women's experiences of reckoning with sexual trauma converges with the discourse on Black women's pursuits of agency and resistance. This section provides a critical framework in finding ways of decolonizing the body by creating a new discourse ²⁰ in which Black women can explore subjectivities in various ways.

² My approach to the Black woman's gaze at herself and provides a different perspective from the male gaze discourse on the Black female body that is typically centered on scopophilia ³³ (Jackson, 2010:69). I am choreographing and filming from a feminine perspective in relation to Black women's experiences of abuse in South Africa, focusing on the victim's experience. The intention is to manipulate the gaze by using camera technology and dance challenging the objectified female body emancipating it from patriarchal structures.

Re-Imagining Dance and Screen

I formulated a discourse to inscribe the Black female body which led me to choose the genre of screen dance. Its hybrid nature and how fluid one can be in creating a narrative using the camera, dance, and editing in which the finished dance takes in place of a film, rather than a live performance, movement is devised with the camera. This section provides a critical framework of screen dance and its history as well as the relationship between the camera and dance by screen dance experts.

Here, I provide a succinct discussion on the origins of screen dance and the relationship between camera and dance. The cinematic imagery and dance are much easier to understand and process than written text. The camera can become a character in the narrative, from the composition of

the elements (lighting, framing, mise-en-scene, and choreography). Screen dance is three-dimensional; as it can alter the viewers' perception of the dance which can create a lively fluid experience (McPherson, 2006).

Screen dance origins and history

First, the genesis of screen dance can be traced to the first dance recorded by the Lumiere brothers by Thomas A Edison filming Ruth Dennis doing a skirt dance outdoors titled '*Annabelle Serpentine dance*' (1894 -95). Dodd's '*Dance for screen*' (2004) covers an extensive history of the inception of filmmaking and the projection of film and television images within a line of performance. Dance and movement were then expressed through media in the early nineteenth century by pioneers such as Eadweard Muybridge and filmmaker Georges Melies who created several films for stage productions (Dodd's, 2004:1). The explorations of dance movement, photography and the cinema set the tone of the century for experimentation (Smith, 2018). Two divergent paths were then posited, one mainstream and the other experimental. Mainstream cinema was Hollywood epics in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s such as Busby Berkeley's "*Gold diggers*" (1936). The other form of filmmaking was experimental, and this can be seen through avant-garde works such as Maya Deren's '*Study in choreography for camera*' (1945).

Secondly, Rosenberg and Brannigan's literature provide a critical framework of screen dance and its history as well as the relationship between the camera and dance. In understanding the definition of 'screen dance', Brannigan utilizes the term 'dance film' to emphasize the aesthetic and the technological continuity amongst screen media, to recognize the centrality of the camera from the framing to the editing (Brannigan, 2013:133). Rosenberg's '*Screen dance: Inscribing the Ephemeral Image*' (2012) unpacks the screen dance definition in detail, as it discusses the relationship between dance and technology. For Brannigan, choreography, cinema and moving bodies share an intense relationship with space and time. Screen dance interrogates the nature and quality of movement and produces a variety of movements through the body, mise-en-scene, editing, design, camera, and postproduction effects (Brannigan, 2013:10).

Rosenberg uses screen dance as an umbrella term under which dance and non-dance choreography created for any size or type of screen can fit (Rosenberg, 2012). Screen dance is

site-specific, the camera can be viewed as a site, and the site is how a work is contextualized. Furthermore, screen dance is the concept of recorporealization which is used to describe the reconstruction of the body in screen techniques at times, the construction of an impossible body (Rosenberg, 2000:4). Lastly, in screen dance methodology, the body is the raw material for reconceptualization of corporeality, in which mechanical reproduction recorporealizes the body and one which is filmed. The edited body becomes the authentic body as it outlives its subject (Roseberg, 2000:4). The narrative is informed by the choreography or rhythm of the music, and by the framing of the camera and composition of editing.

In analyzing the genre of screen dance, there are mechanisms or conventions that define the genre mainly mise-en-scene, cinematography, choreography, narrative, and sound. I have discovered that choreography and film share an intense interest in moving bodies. There is a relationship between space and time, and I can manipulate these elements using editing. The variety of movements in dancing for the camera is produced through a cinematic process. The use of concepts from cinema studies plays a critical role in developing a new dance vocabulary using camera technology. For example, the movement of a body part of an object can be informed by outside forces such as natural elements and technological manipulation. The technical elements can transform the phenomenal body. In the film, camera movement, lighting, editing, camera distance and are equally potent performers. The cinematic language allows fluidity in terms of time and space, the camera can zoom in / out, focus tightly in a small area, or an extreme close-up of graphic detail in bringing an intimate level of understanding of the text on screen (e.g., gesture through the lens can be poetic and grand compared to live performance).

Some academics and scholars refer to screen dance as a short video/film made whereby the choreographer can function as director and can also be a collaborative practice of both director and choreographer. Screen dance artists include original choreographies, edited choreography achieved by technology together with the artistic choices of mise-en- scene. According to Bench (2019: 220), screen dance must contain diegetic movement which must be identifiable to the viewer as dance movement. The work must contain histories, aesthetics, and practices of dance. The work must demonstrate choreographic sensibility such as the motion movement of the cinematographic choices (Bench, 2019: 224).

The next step was finding an alternative way in which I can represent the Black female body. Black women ² that are misrepresented in a visual world take control of these images? How can Black female bodies acquire agency to construct self and identity? With these questions, I looked at the medium of screen dance and conducted a series of investigations through scholarship and feminist discourse about the Black woman's gaze.

³⁴ The camera is an instrument of the gaze, and the spectators look is controlled by its guide. Screen dance allows me to use the camera to renew the traditional gaze. Screen dance permits the Black female body to have agency through cinematic devices and fusion of dance forms, as one can decide on representation and how to place the body.

The male gaze is systematic, the camera is an instrument of the man, and to disrupt this system, woman must take this tool and dismantle its power with her own (Mulvey,1999) . The camera is weaponized and can become a tool of power. The camera as a medium is controlled by the male hand. The camera instigates a kind of bodily violence to the Black female body challenges, screen dance challenges this notion. In screen dance, the cinematographer and choreographer has more autonomy in terms of point of view: the female perspective, framing fragmenting body parts and isolating the female body. This also includes camera movements such as body pans, tilts, angles, slow/fast motion .Lighting can also have an effect such as experimenting with hues and tones lighting compared to female fantasy lighting. Lastly, the way in which narrative is written or constructed can position /frame the Black female body within the narrative than outside the narrative. Screen dance can become a useful paradigm in which Black female bodies can be represented in interesting and unique ways.

Conventions and mechanisms of screen dance artists in South Africa:

I interviewed South African screen dance expert, Jeannette Ginslov's who's work ¹⁶ provided the research with an in-depth understanding of the genre of screen dance and her process/experimentations using a close reference to the case study that is explored in '*Sandstone*' (1988). The theories are the foundation of the research; the notions reiterated in the paper explore the act of rewriting using our subjectivities and narratives inscribed to and in our bodies.

'Sandstone' (1988): Jeannette Ginslov

Jeannette Ginslov's artistic journey has always been closely intertwined with social justice and the exploration of the human experience. Her passion for dance, combined with her deep-rooted commitment to addressing issues of race, gender, and identity, has led her to carve out a unique space in the world of screen dance. Through her innovative projects, Ginslov has sought to challenge stereotypes and celebrate the beauty, strength, and diversity of the Black female body.

Sandstone (1988) is a piece which was banned as the choreographer performed topless to a speech of the former nationalist party prime minister PW Botha. The work represents a sense of agency as she explores representations of politics, postmodernist feminist dance practices and choreographic strategies on the female body in an extreme environment (Medea, 2011).

Sandstone (1988) was a piece she did after coming back from Europe. Ginslov saw that change had not progressed very well in South Africa and this piece was a reaction to it. She came back working with Tossie Van Tonder on Afro fusion. There were a few practitioners who were trying to explore their roots and heritage, how they lived, what they were experiencing. She was influenced by European and South African Black Afro fusion. Even though she practiced African dance in Europe, where she trained, the influence of Tossie Van Tonder and other practitioners rubbed off her. The piece was inspired by an art exhibition by Marly Van Milton, and it was all about the human figure in art. These figures looked like painted, naked, wearing these little beshu (traditional San/Khoi attire) (see Appendix 1 p.72).

The conventions and methods she used have influenced the practical component of this research. Ginslov draws on ¹¹ the idea of the individual body as the primary site of power, rewriting the female body, drawing attention to the dancer's power as an 'articulate thinking being' (Ginslov, 1998: 13). Ginslov's feminist strategy prescribes that the process of deconstructing the sign of the female, which requires the woman to take a subjective role and be the producer of symbolic expressions (Ginslov, 1998: 48). *Sandstone* (1988) shows how cinematic storytelling and narrative can impact the way we see society and can be effective in communicating issues whether political, economic, or social.

To comprehensively analyze Ginslov's work, the case study will be broken down into five components of performance of screen dance.

Convention 1: Mise-en-scene

As mentioned in Ginslov's interview, in *Sandstone*, Ginslov's mise-en-scene is based on site. She uses an abstract location; it is a very bland, desert type of environment. Ginslov's point of view refers not to the physical location but also the metaphorical representation of place. The site provides context. Ginslov's placement of the female body in an extreme/strange environment signifies the oppression of apartheid (see Appendix 1 p.72). She paints her body like the color background as the physical environment dances and dances topless to the voice-over of PW Botha (former Apartheid prime minister)

Convention 2: Cinematography

The piece begins with a wide shot of the desert with Ginslov walking into the frame followed by a medium close-up of her body. The camera then slowly zooms out from an extreme close-up of her ear to a medium-long shot of her curled body. There is a variety of shots especially wide long shots of the environment to signify the dancer's isolation in the environment. Ginslov employs a variety of close-ups of her exaggerated facial expressions as she unravels her body. The camera moves with her movement, she also interacts with the environment. As soon as the voice-over of the prime minister, she then stops the choreography to remain still.

Convention 3: Choreography

In Ginslov's screen dance, the body is the seed of inspiration. Movement phrases can be tossed around, the end can become the beginning and the beginning and become the end. The body can get fragmented, and layers of choreographic movements can be created, which can be different from the movement material that was originally based on. She performs movement by juxtaposing contemporary and African (see Appendix 1 p.71). She also has moments of abstraction and exaggerates her phrasing.

Ginslov uses the space of the environment and interacts with the surroundings such as using the sand as a metaphor for the land, South Africa. Ginslov explores moments of isolation in parts of the dance; the movement signifies restraint to show confinement. Then she switches the movement to be repetitive, direct, confrontational, and rapid. Towards the end of the choreography, Ginslov's thumb signifies the right to vote ⁸¹ in South Africa, Ginslov is commenting on the apartheid system and restrictions of freedom in South Africa.

Convention 4: Narrative

The narrative is hugely influenced by location, location is also influenced by narrative- they are interlocked i.e., *Sandstone* (1988) explores the female body in an extreme environment. The location and objects in the environment such as the lighting can influence the narrative. Whereas on a stage, the environment is more controlled and technical elements are planned. This aesthetic element can add to the narrative and can be the inspiration of the narrative, there becomes a dialogue between the environment dance and the filmmaker. Ginslov's screen dance also shows how one can react to the environment, as movement is based on reacting to the elements of the environment (see Appendix 1 p.72).

Convention 5: Sound

Ginslov uses sound to progress the narrative. At the beginning of the piece, she begins to curl up in a fetal position accompanied by an introduction speech and sounds of birds. She then begins to move subtly to sad African voices humming inter lapping as if she is being rebirthed. This movement phrase is accentuated by a drum section and a full-on African contemporary ritualistic choreographic performance, filmed in a wide shot. She ends the piece with a dramatic orchestral gong sound and points her thumb up and turns it down as she choreographs back into the fetal position. The voice-over of the prime minister (a forefather of apartheid) is used to intensify this political message.

Interview: Appendix 1

In my conversation with Dr. Ginslov, she provides insights into her collaboration with the director in creating *Sandstone* (1988). She emphasizes her desire to challenge the male gaze and shift the focus to her own perspective and emotions as a performer. Her goal was to change the director's point of view to capture her body and movements in a way that transcended objectification and highlighted the emotion and virility of her performance.

Ginslov discusses the concept of the body as an archive of memory and experience. She explains how her choreographic language and use of symbols aimed to encapsulate and convey emotions and experiences stored within the body. This notion of the body as an archive is tied to feminism

and the idea that the body holds memories and narratives beyond what is stored in the mind. Ginslov addresses the challenging issue of using screen dance to highlight gender-based violence against women. She emphasizes ³ the need for a cultural shift in society and suggests that artists and filmmakers can contribute by challenging the objectification and commodification of the female body in media. She also stresses the importance of having female voices and perspectives in the creative process to reshape the representation of women.

The interview provides a platform to engage with Ginslov's thoughts on the transformative power of screen dance, her experiences in the industry, and her creative process. It explores how she uses this medium to communicate stories, emotions, and messages that resonate with audiences on a profound level.

This chapter discussed the use of the moving image and how screen dance allows for the exploration and experimentation of different perspectives, which challenges the traditional gaze imposed ¹³ on the Black female body. The hybrid nature of the genre allows the Black female body to have agency through cinematic devices and fusion of dance forms, as one can decide on representation and how to place the body. Screen dance asserts agency of the Black female body as it challenges notions of classical dance, music video or film which is dominantly dictated by the male gaze. These mediums are more controlled by the male hand and instigate a kind of bodily violence to the Black female body. Through experimentation with movement, camera angles, and the manipulation of light and sound, screen dance can be used to create a new visual language that reframes the Black female body in a more nuanced and empowering way.

Ginslov exercises the female gaze and argues that it is in fact the body that is relaying the story and not just a form of dance that is portrayed through the male gaze, which is ballet (see Appendix 1). Ballet which shows us perfection, line form and in tradition; it perpetuates a type of male gaze. According To Ebersole (2018) ballet works and ³⁷ companies are choreographed and mostly run by male choreographers. When a male crafts ballet according to balletic tradition, the female ballerina is subjected to and dominated by the male gaze, even though she may appear to have agency (Ebersole, 2018). Ginslov was interested in breaking the norms and paradigms that were around at the time and tried to reawaken people by looking some other form like strange being that will shake the audience into some way of seeing a woman's body. In the interview

Ginslov (see Appendix 1) mentions that she directed her cinematographer to focus on her emotion, anger, and virility as she wanted to change his point of view.

Ginslov considered the opposite ⁷² of the male gaze which is the female gaze. I use the female gaze as an approach to recreating and reframing the representation ² of the Black female body. The female gaze draws on representations of women by women for women and it is how a woman sees herself. It seeks to empathize rather than objectify. Like Ginslov, I am interested in breaking the norms and paradigms that exist around the female to reawaken people by looking some other form like strange being that will shake them into some seeing way of seeing a woman's body (Ginslov, 2022). This means using the camera to create a narrative through the female director/creator's perspective in a subjective way to show the inner emotive being of being feminine, unashamed, emotional, and intimate. The female gaze does not mean that subjects cannot be sexual or show their bodies, it simply means the audience will see it differently through a woman's eyes, they will feel what a woman feels using cinematic devices and dance.

Chapter 2: Theories on developing new semiotics of the female body.

The following section includes conjunctive conversations, a multitude of voices from post-colonial writers and women in film, whose writings support the notion of developing new semiotics of the female body. The theories by Pumla Gqola and Laura Mulvey critique the notion of the male gaze and emphasize creating realistic portrayals of women on screen. It also follows Ketu Katrak and Ama Ata-Aidoo's writings which critically observe ³⁵ the female body as a site of oppression and resistance. Considering these theories actively engage with the methods of experimentation I explored in the practical. It is this type of performance construct that investigates the politics ⁴⁸ of the female body with specific reference ⁵² to a variety of texts from Third world societies, on how the body is a site of oppression and that we can resist this oppression using oral forms and language (Katrak, 2006).

The investigation further provides alternative ways of positioning looking at the Black female body in non-dominant ways of meaning-making. This attests to the final formation of the research which includes Helen Cixous and Nelisiwe Xaba's, inscribing new meanings on the female body through theatre. Cixous and Xaba's idea ¹ of embodiment brought about questions notably around how theatricality and dancing body can challenge cultural constructions and offer

further possibilities of representation, and in what ways can I attempt to rebirth the female body to serve its purpose other than that of the viewer? How do I break those lines, and critically engage and provoke thought?

Black woman as subject: Laura Mulvey & Pumla Gqola

³ The Black female body has been a site of oppression, and the traditional camera has accentuated what I call a 'violent gaze'² toward the representation of Black bodies and Black women. This section examines multitude female conversations around creating an alternative way in representing the Black female body. What I discovered, was the overriding emphasis on how Black women can use subjectivity, their bodies, and experience to create a narrative to inform a different gaze. A gaze that speaks to the truth of the Black women's experience can provide a powerful tool of resistance. Laura Mulvey and Pumla Gqola's theory proposes a new discourse in which Black women can choose to 'occupy subject' positions in which they determine the structures and the meanings of their lives. The following chapter advocates creating realistic portrayals of women through camera and dance to represent the female body in a subjective view, with an identity giving her power and place.

The subject in semiotics controls the field of signs and represents a point of view (Ginslov, 1998: 47). This means that the self is empowered, and the subject becomes a narrative at an intersection of cultural codes and practices. This notion of 'subjectivity' challenges the dominant representations that are encoded in patriarchal discourse by replacing the 'objectified'. Both academic theories from Mulvey and Gqola discuss feminist perspectives on women, and how women are portrayed through the male gaze.

For Laura Mulvey (1989), women are the bearer of meaning and not the maker of meaning, women are not placed in a role where they can take control instead, and they are put to be observed from an objective point of view. Mulvey's writing is directed at experimental filmmaking and offers alternate artistic discourses to challenge dominant narratives in cinema. Inspired by the manifesto of Laura Mulvey on '*Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*' 1975. Laura Mulvey's writing proposes ways of experimenting with the camera and breaking away

² The violent gaze in my view is an extension of the male gaze and highlights how certain representations of women can be oppressive and harmful.

from voyeuristic ways of representation. Mulvey uses Freudian's concept of phallocentrism and insists that film, plots, images, and characters are solely built on patriarchies both within and beyond sexual contexts (Mulvey, 1989:3).

³⁶ Mulvey's perspective of the male gaze helps one think of ways of representing the female on-screen, avoiding predictable patriarchal structural ways of women and constructing an alternate gaze. How can I use my body and the camera to change the mainstream perception of the Black women? How do I position my body and the camera? What context does the location provide? How does the camera move with the body? How can editing and manipulation of elements in the technology change ⁴⁷ the representation of the Black female body? How do I create a narrative that speaks back to the prevalent trends of exploitation, sexualisation, and complete erasure of Blackness?

In Pumla Gqola's '*Ufanele uqavile: Black women, Feminisms and Post coloniality in Africa*', she argues that postcolonial feminism/womanism is not only ²⁶ concerned with subverting patriarchal and colonial focus of logic, but the focus is also on opening the terrain of Black women representation and theorization to a new signification. An example she uses is from Nokuthula Mazibuko's '*Lady was a Mshoza*' (2000), which is a South African documentary that focuses on the lives of a group of Black women who live the mapantsula way of life, *Abomshoza* who is also known as the female panstula. *Abomshoza* is a transgressive woman, dangerous and questioned prescriptions on female behavior in South African townships (Gqola, 2001:19). Gqola argues that African feminism is about Black women sharing their struggles of oppression and burdens that they face as being located on African land geographically. She metaphorically refers to this as "six mountains" on a Black woman's back, which is a reference to Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's '*African Women, Culture and Another Development*' (1993). *Abomshoza* is a transgressive woman, dangerous and questioned prescriptions on female behavior in South African townships (Gqola, 2001:19). When applied to the context of film and screen dance, Gqola's example illustrates that through the lens of the camera and the shared authentic experience of these women; Black women can redefine their position and prioritize their own needs and push the boundaries of what it is to be defined as a Black woman. The camera is a successful tool of empowerment through visual representation which helps Black women to redefine their societal position. Black women like *Abomshoza* control and shape their own

narrative. This control over existing representation allows them agency to challenge existing stereotypes and assumptions.

In addition, Gqola's theory of pleasure politics suggests that Black women can renegotiate their sexuality on their terms. The trajectory which formed my research and how Black women can use to redefine themselves is using their sexuality as a tool of resistance using digital activism (screen dance) to analyze dominant feminist themes. The argument deals with how transgressive behavior and ideologies can challenge the meanings attached to being a Black woman (Gqola 2001: 20). I explored creative ways to fragment time-space body and choreography by modes of experimentation through screen dance. Dance and camera can offer a tool to interrogate the dominant discourses of gender and race.

Both Mulvey and Gqola's ideas critically illustrate how we may come to understand how cinema adapted similar attitudes in their practices in examining this history of visualizing and erasing Black female bodies within the politics of visual pleasure.

[Rewriting HER image: Ketu Katrak & Ama Ata Aidoo](#)

The philosophy around oral storytelling suggests alternative thinking on performance constructs on how oral storytelling is a significant tool of resistance. Drawing on the text of Ketu Katrak and Ama Ata-Aidoo, the ideas speak back to the task of representing Black women in postcolonial ways requires society to create and refashion forms of representation. This notion opens avenues for one to experiment through screen dance.

Ketu Katrak's inquiry investigates the works of postcolonial writers and critically observes how the female body is experienced as a site of oppression and resistance. Katrak uses Third World literary texts and cultural production as the basis for theorizing.

She discusses the politics of the female body with specific reference to a variety of texts from Third world societies (India, Africa, and the Caribbean). How the forms of language including indigenous, oral, written, and expressive performance can provide alternative ways of thinking about the position of Third World women and non-dominant ways of meaning-making (Katrak, 2006: 5).

Oral, written, and performative forms to refashion forms of representation.

In oral testimony, the body speaks, and women find a voice in narrating their lives. Oral forms are used by activists to explore issues women are facing. According to Katrak, oral forms are important in postcolonial societies; a dialogic and multi-vocal exchange among literary, non-literary, and activist, written, oral, visual, and performative (Katrak, 2006: 6). A dialogic interaction and inclusion of multiple viewpoints are enabling especially for colonized people i.e., Black women, as they can challenge versions of colonial history and combat the denigration of native cultures and civilizations.

Along with voice, women's knowledge gathering, and experience are conveyed via the female body, in movement, dance, and other non-verbal, visual, and aural forms (Katrak, 2006: 7). Women's oral testimony in stories operate outside the norms of writing, it provides alternative ways of thinking about women's position in Third World societies and non-dominant ways of meaning-making (Katrak, 2006: 7). In addition, the dialogic interplay between genres and languages enables female protagonists to resist bodily exile.

Katrak's first step to externalize the pain of bodily exile and marginality is by using oral, written, and performance as acts of resistance. This shows that speaking orally, writing, and performing the stories as well as cultural and activist work are significant acts of resistance. They serve as models for other women in the larger project for social change. In *Feminist Genealogies* writers like Botswanan Bessie Head and Ama Ata Aidoo illustrate creative uses of oral traditions in modern-day written stories. Several of Bessie Head's stories are based on village gossip and small talk, especially important avenues for women. She artistically creates ordinary, unusual events of village life with considerable imagination using local folklore, historical records, and myth (Katrak, 2006: 8).

Oral narratives involve story telling using music, rhythm or vocalization. These elements can be integrated into the music and sound design of screen dance. The rhythmic quality of oral traditions can influence choreography and movement choices creating a dynamic, visual and auditory experience. Oral forms can also be useful as a tool to raise awareness about the experiences of Black women as it can contribute to a more nuanced respectful portrayal of Black female bodies and experiences. When Black women participate in a screen dance based on their

own narratives, they have agency on how their bodies are represented or perceived, reclaiming control over their own image.

Ama Ata-Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977)

An example of oral traditions can be found in the literature of Ama Ata Aidoo. *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977) or *the Reflections of a Black -Eyed Squint* (1977). It is a novel about a Ghanaian student, Sissie, who is awarded a scholarship to travel to Europe while colonialists have been depicted as antagonists in the novel.

The conventions in screen dance and oral forms share a common thread because they are both ways in which human beings have used movement, rhythm and visual elements to express and connect with time, culture and experience. Although they manifest differently due to the medium and context, the fundamental principles of storytelling and expression remain central for both forms.

Convention 1: Narrative

Aidoo takes the English language that was used to subjugate her nation and uses it to highlight the stereotypes of Africans, especially African women. Aidoo subverts and deconstructs the colonial discourse by challenging the stereotypes about the colonized others, especially Ghanaians. Aidoo constructs literature and narrative by writing poetry and prose, experimenting with language, and asserting the autonomy of the female character.

Convention 2: Themes

The writing deals with the exploitation of Africans, their subjectivity, their struggle after gaining independence, and the exile of an African woman. The novel discusses themes including the Black diaspora, colonialism, racism, exile, colonialization of the mind, and colonial education. The book attacks the notion of exile; the conflict is between the protagonists and Africans who have left their homes in search of a better life in Europe.

Convention 2: Language

Ama Ata Aidoo's agency is evident in the narrative's experimental structure which infuses prose, poetry, letter writing, and oral voicing which allows the readers to see Sissie's thoughts and impressions about the world around her without fully entering her consciousness. The

experimental style of the passages reflects the protagonist's personality and thoughts broken free from Western conventions such as the form of the novel (Tagaddin, 2018:17).

Through Sissie's journey, the writer reverses the western stereotypical discourse and racial prejudices. The protagonist is the observer who is in the privileged position of the western traveler. The book renders an oppositional voyage of a young African female turning to Europe to encounter the savage whites and others. The protagonist is the embodiment of an African woman who fights against colonialist ideologies based on the preconceived notion of African women, she is proud, confident, and well-educated (Tagaddin, 2018: 25)

In the novel, Sissie evaluates and criticizes the German landscape and sees the past of western historical abuse and its brutal colonial rape:

“looking at the river/how many/virgins had I was sovereign Lord and master /unvirgined. on their nuptial nights” (Ata Aidoo, 1977: 19)

In this passage, as she describes the German countryside and its glorious castles, Sissie realizes that it is not only virgin lands that were raped in the name of expansion and domination. Germany's river represents the primitive history of patriarchy, feudal exploitation, distressing rape, pain, and anguish. Europe in Sissie's eyes is the center and epitome of violence, savagery, ignorance, and lust (Tagaddin, 2018: 20).

Using oral forms in screen dance

Ama Ata Aidoo and Katrak's theories speak back to using alternative forms in representing the Black female body as they reiterate strong female protagonists who fight against oppressive social constructional notions of gender and their consequences for women. Ama Ata Aidoo's literature blames colonialism for importing “a fully developed sexist system, which has been adapted, maintained and exacerbated as it has been integrated into different aspects of African culture” (Marangoly, Scott, 1993: 299).

These theories opened possibilities and avenues to explore oral forms using the medium of screen dance as an emerging genre. Given that screen dance is a hybrid genre, I experimented with not only the camera and dance but also oral forms/language. I was able to deconstruct and

play with language in the practical component using prose and poetry, looking at personal memory and the archive to create a narrative.

Body as text: Helen Cixous & Nelisiwe Xaba

The main aspect of the research involves ways of inscribing new meaning to Black women's bodies. This section discusses ways the Black female body can rescript itself by looking at performance texts which reiterate ideas of contesting the traditional representation of the female body. The idea is to make the Black female presence felt using performance in which the body will become a source of a radically new text. Helen Cixous's article '*The Laugh of the Medusa*' (*Aller a la Mer*) condemns Western theatre as a patriarchal institution and calls for women to write themselves. Cixous provides a critical framework where the female body can be transcribed into a new form of language which can inform how performance is interpreted and understood.

Firstly, Cixous writes that it is time to inscribe feminine texts and liberate the new woman from the old woman, by coming to know her and getting to love her. This process will take place when "her life story is decided inside her body beginning with her blood" (Cixous, 1976: 878). She views the woman's performing body as a birthing event. A body decoding and naming itself in one long slow push giving birth to her own theatrical experience. She calls for the universal woman subject to bring to their senses and meaning towards their history and speaks to woman's inevitable struggle against conventional men. The entire process of writing has been confounded with the history of reason which supports privileged alibis, it has been one of the phallogocentric traditions (Cixous, 1976: 879-880). Male writing has been governed by a libidinal, cultural, political, and masculine economy, where the female/woman has been perpetually repressed and oppressed by patriarchal systems.

'They Look at Me and That Is All They Think' (2006) : Nelisiwe Xaba

The case study is a notable dance piece performed and choreographed by Nelisiwe Xaba. It explores themes of identity, societal expectations, gender and race. The work refers to the narrative of Sara Baartman and how she became a symbol of oppression of African women by colonization and its zoo-like ways of viewing Africans. Xaba uses costume, lighting, and choreography to critique the colonial act of representation. The work exposes the politics

surrounding the act of looking at a particular racial and gendered body in both historical and contemporary context (Castelyn, 2018: 4). Xaba uses theatrical devices to underline the negative stereotypical connotation of Black African women as a sexual and exotic other.

The piece combines dance, spoken word and visual elements to create multi-dimensional and thought provoking experience. The piece was created during post-apartheid South Africa, a time of significant social and political change in the country. Overall *'They Look at Me and That Is All They Think'* (2006) is a significant work that uses dance and performance to engage in social and political issues within the unique context of post-apartheid South Africa. It is recognized for its powerful commentary on identity and the societal expectations placed upon women of color.

To comprehensively analyze Xaba's work, the case study will be broken down into six components of performance: *Narrative. The gaze. Choreography. Sound. Lighting and Theme.*

Convention 1: Narrative

Xaba sees the story of Baartman as an allegory of her artistic quest which took her out of Soweto into the contemporary Eurocentric art world. It is still prevalent today that Western audiences view Black female and male dancers differently; Xaba exposes these clichés of our exotic voyeurism in a unique way (Kaaitheatre, 2008).

After Baartman was taken from South Africa and exhibited in Europe in the nineteenth century. She died in 1815 and her remains were put on display in Paris until 1982 (Castelyn, 2018: 4). Xaba uses this notion to draw on a parallel of her journey as a Black South African woman performing in Europe. The work exposes the politics surrounding the act of looking at a particular racial and gendered body, in both historical and contemporary contexts (Castelyn, 2018: 4).

Furthermore, the title 'Hottentot Venus', is a construction of a masculinist, colonial discourse on female sexuality that has a predominant impact on how Africans and Diasporic women are represented in the twenty-first century (Castelyn, 2018: 5). Gottschild (2003, 150) states that the etymological root of the word 'Hottentot' means to stammer or stutter. The title is an insult that lucidly reveals European racism and exposes early European ignorance of the Khoekhoen and Khoi/San languages. 'Venus' is an oxymoron and racist ridicule, Baartman was displayed not as a person, nor as art but as a quasi-human artifact (Gotschild, 2003: 150).

Convention 2: The gaze

In addition, Xaba's performance appropriates Laura Mulvey's male gaze and Cixous's theory of women rewriting themselves by investigating viewing relationships and how the female body in dance can resist objectification. *They Look at Me and That Is All They Think* (2006) is conscious of the power operations at play in the act of looking between spectator and dancer, and how this looking has a particular effect on the materialization of identities (Castelyn, 2018: 4). She is responsive to the audience's gaze by disrupting the act of looking by way of revealing and hiding her body from the audience.

Throughout the performance, Xaba is in control and plays with the audience, and decides when she will reveal or hide her body from the audience. Xaba uses hyper-exaggerated breasts and buttocks to emphasize how the Black female body is there to entertain guests 'civilized Europeans' with the naked image of Otherness. European culture is not there to look at the performance, but rather to look at certain parts.

Convention 3: Choreography

Xaba's body is not presented as a whole; it is cut up and fragmented with the skirt covering and revealing certain parts which reference the mutilated remains of Sarah Baartman and how her body was displayed. She uses this theatrical device to remind the audience of the horrific fate of Baartman as a collection of museum objects and underlines the negative stereotyping of the Black African female (Castelyn, 2018: 6).

Convention 4: Sound

She also uses music as a motif, for example, she uses The Pussycat Doll's song 'Don't cha' the lyrics contain the following: 'Don't cha wish your girlfriend was hot like me. Don't cha wish your girlfriend was a freak like me?' Don't cha, don't cha. Doesn't cha wish your girlfriend was raw like me? (Smith & Callaway, 2004). The writers of the song are famous male African American rapper and producers Trevor George Smith also known as Busta Rhymes and Thomas DeCarlo Callaway also known as Ceelo Green. The music comments on how the stereotype of African female sexuality as 'exotic' and overtly sexual is still in operation in contemporary society as epitomized through contemporary popular music and culture. As the music changes to French accordion music, she plays with the shadow touching her breasts (Castelyn, 2018).

Convention 5: Lighting

Xaba uses effective lighting to create shadows and alter her figure (breasts and buttocks) to larger or smaller. The figure deflates and inflates, and the buttocks become larger emphasizing the theatrical mechanisms that created the fantasy of the African woman as exotic, to begin with. Xaba uses her skirt as a circus tent, where animals are put on display and perform tricks for the audience's pleasure. This is analogous to Baartman's narrative treated as a circus animal performing for the audience's pleasure and doing tricks and is equivalent to Xaba's experience as an African female on stage (Castelyn, 2018).

Convention 6: Theme

Xaba uses costume, lighting, and choreography as a theatre apparatus to mediate representation to critique the colonial act of representation. She uses theatrical devices to underline the negative stereotypical connotation of Black African women as sexual and exotic others. She does not present her body which reminds the audience of the horrific fate of Sarah Baartman as a museum of collection (Castelyn, 2018: 5). Baartman's image shows how European superiority was dependent on the classification of many Africans. Xaba's theatricality and dancing body can challenge cultural constructions and offer further possibilities for representation.

Summary

Hélène Cixous's essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975) and Nelisiwe Xaba's performance piece *They Look at Me and That Is All They Think* (2006) both hold significance in relation to the representation and empowerment of the Black female body in screen dance. While these works were not specifically focused on screen dance, their ideas and themes can inform discussions and creative practices surrounding the Black female body in this context.

The Laugh of the Medusa (1975) by Hélène Cixous is a foundational feminist text that calls for women to reclaim their voices and bodies through writing. Cixous argues that women have historically been marginalized and silenced in patriarchal societies, and she urges women to embrace their unique experiences and expressions as a means of self-liberation. Cixous encourages women to write and speak from their bodies, challenging established norms and reclaiming their agency and subjectivity.

¹ Nelisiwe Xaba's performance piece *They Look at Me and That Is All They Think* (2006) explores the gaze imposed upon the Black female body and the stereotypes and assumptions associated with it. Xaba uses her body and ⁷⁸ movement as a form of resistance and critique, challenging and subverting societal expectations and representations. By confronting and questioning the viewer's gaze, Xaba's work disrupts the objectification and commodification ²⁰ of the Black female body, offering alternative narratives and perspectives.

In the context of screen dance in reframing the Black female body, both Cixous's essay and Xaba's performance piece can inspire artists to engage with similar themes and concepts. Screen dance provides a visual medium through which the Black female body can be represented, reimagined, and empowered. Artists can draw on the ideas put forth by Cixous and Xaba to explore and challenge the gaze, to subvert stereotypes, and to reclaim agency and subjectivity through movement and visual storytelling.

By incorporating elements of Cixous's call for women's voices to be heard and Xaba's interrogation of the viewer's gaze, screen dance artists can create works that offer counter-narratives and challenge dominant representations of the Black female body. They can explore themes of self-expression, identity, embodiment, and empowerment, using movement, choreography, and cinematography to convey their messages and perspectives.

In summary, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975) by Hélène Cixous and ¹ *They Look at Me and That Is All They Think* (2006) by Nelisiwe Xaba ¹³ contribute to discussions on the representation of the Black female body in screen dance by providing insights into agency, subjectivity, resistance, and the reclamation of narratives and expressions. These works can inspire artists to create screen dance pieces that challenge stereotypes, confront the gaze, and empower the Black female body through movement and visual storytelling.

Chapter 3: Reconstructing the gaze of the Black female body.

This section looks at ways to reframe the Black female body by looking at devices used by exploring the case studies Mamela Nyamza's *Hatched* (2008) and Nelisiwe Xaba's *Uncles and Angels* (2013). The case study actively demonstrates ways in which one can use the body and

the camera to articulate an alternative gaze and ways of representation and how one can break conventions of movement using theatrical devices.

This section examines dance pedagogies and aesthetics of Black female choreographers, Mamela Nyamza and Nelisiwe Xaba. The significance of using performance-based case studies in relation to research is because these artists have found ways to reconstruct the gaze using the body -to ⁴⁰ challenge stereotypes of the Black female body and cultural notions of gender. For practicum purposes, it meant eluding from classical ways of dance, movement and cinematic techniques, and ways of editing.

The conventions used in the case studies directed me to explore the theme of violence in a more nuanced way that is not representational or direct. It also led me to explore improvisation and repetition in an isolated space and I found myself creating a movement language that spoke back to being a woman.

Hatched (2008) :Mamela Nyamza

⁸²
Hatched (2008) by Mamela Nyamza is a solo performance that confronts issues of gender-based violence and the objectification of women's bodies. Nyamza uses her body and movement to express the pain, resilience, and reclaiming of agency in the face of violence. By embodying personal experiences and collective narratives, she challenges societal norms and expectations, highlighting the strength and resilience of Black women (Hutchison, 2018:358).

Convention 1: Narrative

⁶⁴
Hatched (2008) is one of Nyamza's first choreographies which deal with the social and political issues of a woman who was born during apartheid into a patriarchal structure. The piece is an autobiographical representation of the bond between mother and son and represents the mundane tasks associated with womanhood; it portrays the relationship of the artist as a lesbian African mother and her son, in a performative space (Hutchison, 2018:358) .

Convention 2: Choreography

⁷
Mamela Nyamza's *Hatched* (2008) is a solo performed, framed as ballet simultaneously blending African and contemporary dance (jazz, mime, and release technique about her Black

female body) allowing dance to look political and social. Her abstract style of dance has allowed her to share her story and the story of many South African women.

Mamela Nyamza's physical theatre choreography deals with political and social issues in a patriarchal culture. According to Hutchison (2018: 361), Nyamza physically demonstrates her embodied identity that she has been developing over the years to specific aesthetics and social practices, just as the Black woman's body has been encoded by colonial patriarchal practices. For Hlaethwa (2018), Nyamza's laundry routine, ballet, and movement create an autobiographical piece that speaks to the yokes she carries as a gay Black woman, a mother, and an African performer in European spaces.

Convention 3: Sound

The artist mixes village sounds, African music together with Tchaikovsky's classical music. With this juxtaposition, Nyamza's son who is on stage doing sinister charcoal drawings raps over the background music. Nyamza uses sound to show the binary between European and African and her inner emotional state of being a mother and performer.

Convention 4: Gaze

The piece is set around a washing line which is a domesticated gendered setting. In Hutchison's (2018: 359) analysis, Nyamza enters on stage on her tippy toes also known as 'en pointe', in a tulle skirt reminiscent of a ballet tutu, with a naked torso covered in wooden pegs. She hangs red items of clothing on the line and uses them to represent the different roles women are assigned to.

Convention 5: Theme

Nyamza wears an assortment of ballerina dresses under a tattered apron and sits in a deep squat with her back toward the audience. Nyamza hatches as a performer as she critiques her body as a site of social-political, geographical inscriptions, production or constitution, and dance as her medium (Hutchison, 2018: 362). Nyamza provides a model for other women to shape their subjectivity, and performances themselves.

With this, she illustrates the Foucauldian practices of the self, whereby she acknowledges that she has been actively involved in constituting her subjectivities rather than acted upon by them.

The artist highlights how she battles oppression on the grounds of race, sexual orientation, and gender. Nyamza employs specific aesthetics that overtly engage with abjection or beauty as artistic strategies to interrogate multiple ways in which an individual or society may be complicit in the subjugation in contemporary South Africa (Hutchison, 2018: 356).

Uncles and Angels (2013): Nelisiwe Xaba

Nelisiwe Xaba's digital performance collaboration with Mocke J Van Veuren, is centered on the traditional Reed dance ceremony which is a celebration meant to promote respect for young women and preserve the custom of girls remaining virgins until married (UJ Arts and Culture, 2022).

Convention 1: Narrative

Xaba's work questions the subversion of culture with her reed dance, celebrating the preservation of a young girl's virginity. It is a live video and dance performance with a projecting screen.

Xaba plays multiple characters (The aunt, mother, granny, and adolescent girl). Xaba uses the aunt to imply how aunts perpetuate patriarchal traditions -the uncle is implied as the role of the spectator. The performativity of adolescence and sexuality is for the uncles /powerful men, in a way the spectators are the uncles.

The stereoscopic film uses a minimal constrained aesthetic within the box-like spatial frame to metaphorically elaborate on ideas of feminine purity/virginity under patriarchy (Van Veuren, 2014: 38). The statement suggests that the stereoscopic film employs a specific aesthetic approach characterized by minimalism and constraint. Van Veuren uses this approach to metaphorically explore the concept of feminine purity within the confines of a box-like frame. This approach allows for a symbolic or artistic examination of societal norms and expectations related to femininity and purity.

Convention 2: Choreography

Xaba's reason for choosing the Domba dance was because of multiplication and the possibility of how she could multiply herself on stage (Xaba, 2013). Elements of the Reed dance and virginity testing are played acted by Xaba, as dreams/anxieties of a little girl, role-play of imagined adulthood. Choreography references the Venda Domba snake dance and drum majorette routines

echoed using delayed video signals (Van Veuren, 2014: 39). The performance is dream-like but alludes to the nightmarish questions of chastity, virginity testing, purity, and tradition.

Convention 3: Cinematic devices

Van Veuren mentions that he employed interactive, live projected video elements to play on different levels, with singular/multiple bodies, repetition, mimicry, and power relations between Xaba's three-dimensional figures and flattened projected bodies. In addition to editing, the technology creates a backdrop of multiplication and temporal dissonance against which choreography unfolds as sometimes playful, interactive, and unpredictable. Van Veuren also used Isadora technology to duplicate Xaba's body digitally. Van Veuren uses programmed video manipulation and a novel optical projection method to create on the stage of live video images (Van Veuren, 2014: 40).

Convention 4: Gaze

For Van Veuren, it is about using technology and the camera critically "the camera has a certain masculinity and voyeurism to imply the kind of watching of an uncle" (Van Veuren, 2018). The look deals with how feminine sexuality is shaped, manipulated, and groomed by patriarchal culture in the interest of powerful men - it was done at a time when the media had revealed how powerful men manipulate and exploit young girls. The piece has no masculinities in it, the male figure is absent - the idea that the male figure is the spectator and a lot of performativity in the show is for the uncle.

Convention 5: Theme

The work questions chastity, virginity testing, purity, and tradition. It is a stereoscopic film that employs a minimal box-like frame to figuratively elaborate on conceptions of femininity and purity under patriarchy. It also probes the sometimes-curious relationship between innocent and outwardly young women and the older affluent men who dominate them (UJ Art Centre, 2018).

Summary

In my analysis of the case studies, both artists employ embodied politics in using the Black female body as a site of agency to critique certain notions of patriarchy that are dormant in society. This embodied performativity has helped shape how I performed my practical. It looks

at breaking traditional conventions of 'looking' and seeing the dancing body, using my body to create an alternative vision ² of the Black female dancing body.

The genre of screen dance ⁷³ has also opened avenues for one to experiment and formulate a discourse that speaks to the subjectivity of Black women. It is about representing the unseen, the unheard, and the invisibility that continues to resurface ⁴³ when it comes to issues of Black women and Black girls. It unveils that we as artists need to create a discourse beyond decolonization, one that sees beyond racialization or gendered bodies.

Mamela Nyamza's performance piece *Hatched* (2008) and Nelisiwe Xaba's dance work *Uncles and Angels* (2013), hold significance in relation to reframing ⁴³ the Black female body in screen dance and exploring the theme of violence against Black women. While these works are not specifically screen dance pieces, their themes and approaches inform discussions and artistic practices in this context.

Nelisiwe Xaba's *Uncles and Angels* (2013) explore themes ⁷⁹ of gender-based violence, stereotypes, and the limitations imposed on Black women's bodies. Through dance and multimedia elements, Xaba critiques societal structures that perpetuate violence and oppression against Black women. She confronts the viewer's gaze and challenges dominant narratives, aiming to shift perspectives and create spaces for dialogue and transformation.

In the context of reframing the Black female body in screen dance, these works can inspire artists to explore similar themes and approaches. Screen dance allows for the fusion of movement, cinematography, and storytelling, providing a powerful medium to convey narratives of violence and resilience. By incorporating ⁷⁷ elements from *Hatched* (2008) and *Uncles and Angels* (2013) artists can address the theme of violence against Black women and engage in a process of reclaiming agency, challenging stereotypes, and presenting alternative narratives.

In screen dance, the Black female body can be visually represented and celebrated in ways that counter the violence and objectification often imposed upon it. Through choreography, ²⁰ camera angles, and editing techniques, artists can convey the strength, resilience, and beauty of the Black female body. They can create narratives that confront the viewer's gaze, challenge harmful stereotypes, and offer healing and empowerment.

By drawing inspiration from the themes and approaches in *Hatched* (2008) and *Uncles and Angels* (2013), artists in screen dance can contribute to reframing the Black female body by shedding light on the experiences of violence faced by Black women and reclaiming agency, resilience, and empowerment. Through their creative expression, they can provoke conversations, raise awareness, and inspire change surrounding the violence and liberation of Black women's bodies.

I believe that Black women who provide narratives of contemporary forms of the gaze, give a more inclusive and well-rounded approach to dealing with the issue of gender and race representation. This pushes Black women from the periphery of visual culture discourse to the forefront and in the position of agency. The problem is that as a society, Black women included, are not viewing these images critically.

Black women such as Nelisiwe Xaba and Mamela Nyamza are concerned about the misrepresentation of this group to challenge the existing meta-narratives of Black female inferiority. This investigation uses a practicum of counter-storytelling as a means of recreating narratives that authentically express the experience of the Black woman. It is an opportunity to create an open-ended narrative that is socially uplifting using camera and dance.

Chapter 4: Making the invisible visible, a case for *'SHE IS WOMEN'* (2022)

'SHE IS WOMEN' (2022) is a screen dance informed by real events of gender-based violence that have occurred in South Africa from 2019 till today, which will be the main source of data for this investigation. Using existing narratives, it will offer an alternative representation of women with a specific context to GBV in South Africa. This piece is influenced by the works that speak to the pandemic climate of the Black female experience and the struggle of the Black female individual in South Africa.

The practical *'SHE IS WOMEN'* (2022) exhibits a way in which the body can be placed, written, and formed. I compiled a framing document that explores lens, marginality, and authorship. I

explored creating an alternative gaze to film from a feminine perspective concerning Black women's experiences of abuse in South Africa, focusing on the victim's experience. The intention is to manipulate the gaze by using camera technology and dance challenging the objectified female body and emancipating it from patriarchal structures.

Firstly, to interrogate these claims, I collaborated with an amateur cinematographer because I wanted to elude from linearity by avoiding predictable ways of representation, I found ways to represent the Black female body in a different way focusing on ideas of subjectivity and experimentation by juxtaposing different mediums.

As a choreographer, I developed a set of movement praxis that was influenced by Black choreographers such as Dwana Smallwood from the Alvin Ailey theatre which is a hybrid of African jazz and improvisational methods. I was also successful in interviewing as part of the research, well-renowned screen dance artist Jeannette Ginslov

I wanted to gain more insight into screen dance and develop a more nuanced feminine language. My investigation also includes a variety of perspectives from film and theatre on the female body. The theories support my claim on reframing the representation of Black female bodies in screen dance. The research accentuates a feminist perspective on subjectivity (based on experience /audio narrative) and experimentation with form.

Lastly, I used these theories and case studies to create my screen dance film. This chapter consists of an analysis of the screen dance documentary *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022), which looks at the cinematographic and dance devices that are employed in reframing the Black female body. My method is in a form of an Avant-garde experimental route, which considers breaking of narrative, editing, sound, fragmenting the female body, and exploring peculiar spaces/locations.

The practical reflects the Black feminist goal of repositioning for Black female subjectivity, restoring visibility of the Black female body, and giving body to the voice. This is achieved by uniting corporeality and dance while rejecting the mainstream cinematic practice of obliterating the body as it maintains the diegetic or non-diegetic Black female voice. How I position my body, by redefining its position against traditional patriarchal representation that has dictated the image of what and who a Black woman is or is supposed to be.

Chapter 5: Framing document

‘‘A Black woman’s body is never hers alone.’’

Fannie Lou Hamer

Overview

How could our bodies become whole and fragmented, simultaneously concrete and vanishing all at once?

It is never easy to speak about our oppression as Black women. One of the most proactive engagements in feminist and women's activism in African contexts involves Gender-based violence. Understanding gender-based violence is full of pain. It is also important for viewers and readers to be aware that given the reality that gender-based violence takes many forms, survivors are still reluctant to speak openly about their experiences. The material is volatile, and information and discussions may open wounds for people or raise questions that are difficult to answer. Research and activism show that GBV exists in every community, in millions of households, institutions, and even within public spaces. Despite the inevitable difficulties of 'counting assaults' it is widely accepted that GBV in African contexts is very high. Due to this, and because of the different shapes particular incidences of GBV can take, understanding the context becomes very important to develop strategies to combat GBV (Review Essay GBV, 2022).

In my experience, Black women have been misrepresented and subjected to various forms of discrimination in my community. This has been propagated by a culture of misogyny that is predominant in South Africa and the world (Nowrogi, 2022). Walking in the streets of Johannesburg has always been a challenge. As a young Black woman, I am faced with simple decisions about what to wear and what is considered ‘appropriate’ because I am afraid of what might happen to me and what men in the streets say. South Africa is a society where there is a culture of violence where male superiority is treated as the norm. Societies free of GBV do not

exist, and South Africa is no exception. Accurate statistics are difficult to obtain for many reasons including the fact that most GBV cases are not reported. Population-based survey shows very high levels of intimate partner violence and non-sexual violence, being the most common form against women in South Africa:

- Men are often the perpetrators, and women and children are mostly the victims.
- 56% of women are murdered by an intimate partner.
- Between 25% and 40% of women experience sexual/physical violence in their lifetime.
- Under 50% of women report ever experiencing emotional or economic abuse at the hands of their intimate partners in their lifetime.
- Between 28 and 37% of adult men report having raped a woman.
- One in 13 women in Gauteng had reported non-partner rape, and only one in 25 rapes is reported to the police.
- South Africa also faces a high prevalence of gang rape.
- Most men rape for the first time as teenagers and almost all men who ever rape do so by their mid-20s GBV (Review Essay GBV, 2022).

There needs to be a platform where the voices of Black women are heard so that Black women can share stories that are relevant to our experiences in South Africa, where woman's rights are continuously and brutally violated. My direction opposes patriarchal oppressive notions of misogyny (sexism), and standards thrust upon the Black female body to take their agency and ownership. Women have a right to our bodies and their representation.

Statement of intention

The choreography intends to present the voices that are not usually heard, by providing a voice through dance, music, poetry, and archival voice texts from unheard victims' accounts. The other side of the story is not explored, interrogated, and discussed enough in theatre and media.

Director and writer, Ntozake Shange's *for Colored Girls who have considered suicide* writes the body of the female and denotes the physical harm and violence done to the female body "The body must speak and write about rape to express the issue of violence and oppression, otherwise it will not be heard" (Hammad, 2011: 261). The movement is lyrical, accentuated by gesture,

music, and poetry. It involves transposing anger, pain, and sadness of the outside world onto the body. According to Lamia Khalil Hammad (2011: 261), although the woman does not have a 'phallic' power to fight back with, she has her body from which she could write as her source of reaching power.

The choreography is a radical dance about addressing the physical and emotional consequences of GBV in which the body is a canvas where violence is explored. It is a response to the sexism embedded in our society and how society puts expectations on women.

Methodology

The first step I took in creating the screen dance had to do with the interviews and examine works of South African experts, Jeannette Ginslov and Nelisiwe Xaba. In my investigation, I examined their use of aesthetics, abstract style, narrative, choreography, and stage aesthetics of the female body and how I can experiment with fragmenting my body by employing cinematic and movement devices to create a narrative.

In the process of filming and choreographing, I applied a few aesthetics. I used Jeannette Ginslov's notion of location and how it influences narrative. I was very selective in choosing a location, I wanted my body to be isolated and see how the small space impacts the way I move and interact with the camera. This led me to use her modality of creating a Deleuze effect, which is choreographing instantaneously with the camera (see Appendix 1). Since the cinematographer is a male companion, I directed him to film from my perspective. He approached the subject with cultural sensitivity, respect and commitment to authentic representation. The cinematographer also had a genuine desire to represent and bring awareness around the Black female body's experience and understood the importance of what the project was about. For the cinematographer, the camera is handled with intention, it sniffs, nudges, and teasers around the dancer. I asked him to film me as I improvised, and not stop filming so that we follow the dancer's inner journey. It is not about objectifying, the politics then becomes how I engage with the camera, and not doing a literal representation of violence.

Genres like Ballet are about perfection and lines, and it perpetuates a type of male gaze. I wanted to break paradigms and norms that are representational of the male gaze and reawaken viewers. Influenced by Nelisiwe Xaba and Nyamza's juxtaposition of dance genres, I played with movement vocabulary by creating a new way of seeing choreography and the Black female

body. I worked on the theme and variations of jazz styles, including syncopated sharp movements infused with moments of stillness and gesture. I also used Avant-garde based contact improvisation which is spontaneous movement drawn from actions done while relating to the environment and this is also reminiscent of Ginslov's *Sandstone* (1988).

I explored Alvin Ailey's dance aesthetic based on his influence on modern dance. Nixon (1990: 122) asserts that the movement is influenced by West African traditional dance forms juxtaposed with ballet/jazz. It involves polyrhythms and some overly choreographed sequences/movements. The structure and selection of movement and variety are coherent with the notion of rewriting the Black female body. This dance form is suitable for this concept as it breaks away from the 'classical' dance spectrum as it focuses more on the individual.

I found ways to affect the viewer on an emotional level, using different devices such as mixing sounds and playing with different layers of sound like Xaba's *Uncles and Angels* (2013). I then sourced various clips from GBV victims from the news, oral traditional singing from young Black women, music, poetry, and moments of silence. The dance vocabulary is idiosyncratic and goes against codified techniques which make the dance work that one producer resistant (Ginslov, 1998: 47). The choreography attempts to convey this theme and the music/sound effects amplify the emotions and feelings that the images evoke.

I shot for 6 hours and divided the hours into two days. It was an invigorating process, that allowed me to explore different forms and it helped expand my knowledge of screen dance to continue refining this idea of reframing the Black female body.

Dissemination

The choreography is choreographed in a confined space with three windows.

The medium in which the recording is done is a camera and phone.

The soundtrack I used is African jazz and drum, the drum as an instrument is very loud and bold, it makes a statement, and it helps perpetuate the flow and rhythm of movement. I employed audio footage from social media around cases of gender-based violence, mainly from the victim's perspective.

The introduction of the piece employs the sound of African independence songs with, a 1970s feel; the music was originally made by Ugandan singer-songwriter Geoffrey Oryema. It is a

protest song that connotes exile; in this case, I am using it to speak back to the bodily exile of Black women. Creating a subjective piece requires one to break away from the conventional music and film scoring, I opted rather for distorting sound which is used in the middle of the piece when the music changes. I also explore the absence of sound and layering of sounds of the traditional soundscapes of Black women's singing voices and drums. I used the song 'Uyakhala Uyalila' (Ukukhala means to wail) and (Uyalila means to cry) direct translation 'She is wailing, she is crying' which is performed by AmaZulu maidens. The sound also included an effect of the dancer's heartbeat at beginning of the narrative, which then stops when the audio newsreel is introduced.



Fig.4: 'SHE IS WOMEN' (2022)



Fig.5: '*SHE IS WOMEN*' (2022)

A Reflection of *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022)

SHE IS WOMEN (2022) as discussed in the framing document is thorough and provides insight into the creative process, themes, and intentions behind the project. It's evident that the work is deeply rooted in addressing the complex issue of Gender-based violence (GBV) as experienced by Black women in South Africa. I have effectively combined theoretical concepts and practical elements in my work, creating a piece that aims to challenge societal norms and provoke critical reflection.

Overall, the project demonstrates a deep understanding of both the theoretical concepts related to gender-based violence and the practical aspects of creating a meaningful screen dance piece. It seeks to provide a platform for the voices of Black women to be heard and to challenge oppressive norms and stereotypes. The work aligns with the broader goals of activism and social change through art and storytelling.

The practical work aligns with the theoretical understanding that GBV is prevalent in African contexts and that survivors are often reluctant to speak openly about their experiences due to the sensitive nature of the topic. By using dance, music, poetry, and voice texts from victims, the screen dance creates a platform to amplify the voices of Black women who are often marginalized and silenced.

The research and analysis provide a comprehensive understanding of how screen dance can be employed as a tool to challenge conventional representations and empower the Black female body through the use of cinematic devices, choreography, and the female gaze. This integration of theory and practical analysis strengthens my argument and enriches my exploration of this important subject matter. In this reflection, I will draw upon the conventions found in the body of the research to emphasize the significance of my work in challenging and addressing these critical issues.

Creative choices

I crafted a tale that follows *SHE*, SHE characterizes the many Black women who are victims of gender-based violence, and her body becomes a canvas in which this narrative is explored.

I choreographed the screen dance in a place that epitomized a sort of strangeness and liminality to it. The movement is produced in a space that is reminiscent of linearity, structure, and norms, all the things that represent a patriarchal society. The space had a haunting feeling to it. It was very quiet and isolated and it gave me a feeling of being incarcerated and being watched. The space gives a two-dimensional geometric design that references two binaries: How women are seen in South Africa as hollow, with no depth, form, or shape. It also refers to how patriarchy is structured, it is indicative of the minds of perpetrators and the failed justice system in the country.

I created a circular narrative which is an experimental form of filmmaking using editing. The beginning of the film opens with three symmetrical windows, the middle one is cracked, with a backdrop of the city. The image is meant to denote the patriarchal structures and systems that control and paralyze a Black woman. The windows represent the limitations and box-like way and connote how women are treated in South Africa. The windows reference how Black women are brutally gazed on, we have no privacy, and the transparency of the windows including the crack is symbolic of this type of violation. Positioned in the center is a brown wooden chair, which signifies the pedestal where slaves were positioned and auctioned. I chose to place the chair in the center of the cracked window because it speaks to how women are displayed and exhibited in South Africa (see fig. 4-5: p. 63).

The image opens with me walking backward into the frame, and walking out of the frame, through fast-paced editing in front of the image of the windows and chair. Through the lighting and dark hues created, it is difficult to see who or what I am. I almost appear 'dreamlike' and ghost-like. The image then cuts to a slow cut of me repetitively rotating in one position which speeds up but is slowed down with editing with a long shot of me in the center. This image is choreographed with my shadow almost creating a conversation within oneself and exploring two realities.

This is followed by a medium-close-up shot of my face, which is blurred by the lighting and choreography. However, I look directly into the camera to disrupt the gaze. The next frame is a medium-long shot of me choreographing hand movements from the Batswana play dance that young girls do which is called 'go apeya' (meaning to cook). This references the cultural norms informed by patriarchy that influence GBV on Black women, as there is this conceptualization

that the Black women's responsibility is to cook and take care of the home and children. Here, the camera is slightly tilted to the figure and the light illuminates the gestures that I do, almost blurring out the city space completely and focusing on my movement. There is a jump cut which is a medium shot of me, much more illuminated by my movements but my face is blurred by the light. The movement is quickly improvised and infused with contemporary jazz elements of dance. This image is then interrupted by a slow-motion repetition image of the 'Batswana' gesture I did this deliberately because I did not want the audience to engage with my facial expression or emotions. I wanted the movement and cinematic elements to drive the narrative and disconnect the audience from this traditional 'looking' or 'gazing' of the Black female body. The strong hand gestures signify an internal struggle of Black women, constantly having to fight for one's rights and fighting to be heard and noticed as equal beings.

The devices used to contort my body that speaks to how South Africa sees the Black female as invisible, as unseen, and unheard. *SHES*'s body in this narrative becomes a tool of resistance as it explores subjectivities. It goes back to Cixous' idea of women using their bodies to inscribe new meanings, by writing herself, a woman will be able to return to her body that has been confiscated from her. This will give her back her sexuality, her organs; her bodily territories that have been kept sealed (Cixous, 1976).

“ A woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and history-by her movement” (Cixous, 1976: 875).

In the next sequence, I choreographed around the object (chair), almost as if sniffing around the object like an animal, shot in a medium-long shot. In this moving image, I teased around with the camera using fast-paced editing which cuts to a disrupted choreographic Afro-jazz fusion sequel. I then slowly invite the audience to a more intimate experience by using a close-up shot of the side of my face; the lighting emphasizes features such as hands on the face.

I directed the cinematographer to also include shots where my face is not present and rarely seen. This inspired me to choreograph using shots that accentuate parts of the body that is not objectified or sexualized. This is followed by another close-up shot of me facing my back towards the camera avoiding its look and looking directly outside the window. The camera moves and focuses on my hands I chose not to look into the camera because I felt like looking into the camera and looking out the window gives the idea of 'looking' and I wanted to erase this

concept of 'looking' and rather reinforce the concept of engaging critically with the body and cinema to create a narrative.

Towards the middle of the screen dance, I wanted to capture this hardened environment (the concrete floor, hardened old walls, and the chair) and created a binary by choreographing movements that focused medium to close-up shots of my feet and hands. I also used exotic movements on the chair, which is fast-forwarded in a way to not move to look sexual.

SHE IS WOMEN (2022) draws on representations of women by women, it seeks to empathize rather than objectify. The shots highlight subjectivity in such a big way by showing the inner emotive being of a Black woman in South Africa. Using the handheld aesthetic is an essential motif, as the camera moves with the dancer. I can be in rhythm with the camera and work with the camera.

I was interested in creating symmetry and breaking symmetry in the screen dance. One can see in the mid-section, my body is always aligned with the middle window. I choreographed instantaneously with the camera and used fast-paced sequences which were then followed by a cut of my shadow.

The next segment is a shadow sequence; the screen dance is disrupted by a dramatic gong. The music is used to structure the narrative; the intro song ends in this sequence of the shadow and is indicative of the next phase of the narrative. The music is mixed with background traditional AmaZulu songs sung by young women, with an overlapping authoritative voice-over of one of the victims of the Krugersdorp gang rape that happened this year. The image that follows is of me walking forward slowly into the frame and out of the frame. It is like the opening image of me walking backward at the beginning of the screen dance. However, in this instance, the figure walks slowly into the frame appearing to be, more reticent than at the beginning of the piece.

The choreography in this sequence is much slower and almost immediate. The body and the voice-over texture are in conversation. The cuts which follow are all intimate medium and close-ups of my hands holding the dress in agony as the voice-over plays. This is juxtaposed with a fast-paced and slow-paced movement phrase of gesture; the sunlight plays an important role here because the directed light illuminated the parts of my body that I wanted to be seen. I

choreographed with a lot of intensity; it was an experience in which my body had become one with the space.

It is almost as if the dancer's body and the voice of the victim become one. The body can transpose these experiences in a creative subtle way that critiques how we see Black female representation and the culture of violence in South Africa.

I then go back to this circular narrative, where I cut back into rotating like at the start of the piece. However, it is shot at a different angle; it is much closer and reveals my legs as the voice-over plays on about the brutal attack one of the young women faced.

I asked the cinematographer to shoot me standing on the bench facing the back, almost as if I am being auctioned or put on display, however, in this image... I look straight into the camera quickly and look back almost reflective of what the victim is saying about their experiences and how they feel.

The ending then goes back to the beginning to create a poetic ending, which is then perpetuated by a quick fast sequence of spinning with my hands placed on my head to represent the internal pain and anguish the victim feels. The following shot is choreographed with me on the chair to denote a type of bodily violation placed on the 'pedestal' society puts us on, almost signifying an altar, where the Black female is a sacrificial lamb for men to do whatever they please. However, this narrative takes an abrupt ending with me kicking down this pedestal to show that I am going against this altar, the space where abuse and objectification thrive. Kicking the chair is like 'destroying ' and breaking away from patriarchy and becoming heard and seen, this visibility is portrayed in the closing image of me running directly towards the camera to show this theme of visibility and taking our power back.

Mise-en-scene

The screen dance is choreographed in an unfamiliar space and isolates the female body from normative spaces using minimalist settings.

When choreographing, I thought about the notion of the self-space and exploring the relationship to the environment, how does the environment affect me? What textures, smells, and feeling does the environment give me and how do I connect with it? I used the city space and manmade

structures, dilapidated buildings that speak back to being confined by patriarchy. The three windows with the backdrop of Johannesburg represent.

Narrative structure

In terms of structure, the narrative takes a circular form, and it is constructed from a social point of view looking at social media stories of Gender-based violence: and closely draws on the experiences of victims and protesters in conversation, including using sound design to differentiate the narratives in different locations. I also used the archive and stories from social media to re-enact an event.

Costume

I was inspired by the narrative of how Dutch settlers refashioned how African women dress, by reverting them to a Victorian ‘slave’ fashion. It also references the infamous ‘humble skirt’ that African American slave women used to wear, as they were deemed appropriate to the white society of the time, by their masters. In Aily’s choreography, A Black woman in a long white skirt expresses anguish, strength, and joy through sharp gestures (Ailey, 2016). In addition, I wanted the white skirt as a costume that signifies purity and cleanliness. The movements are suggestive of being cleansed, going through a process of transformation.

I used my hair as a mechanism to break lines. Usually, in ballet and other forms of dancing such as ballroom, one’s hair needs to be neat and tied up. The choice of using dreadlocks as part of the choreography speaks to social injustice and talks back to the discrimination based on the texture of Black women.

Choreography

The process of meaning-making is fixed on the Black female experience through the women’s eyes, to explore ideas of female empowerment, identity, and autonomy. In terms of technique, I experimented with movement and improvisation. I played with repetitive phrasing and breaking phrases into sections in the piece. I explored changing the human form through choreography - creature-ness and contorting the female body to allow the audience agency to frame their view of the movement.

I directed the cinematographer to use the handheld camera method to carefully move with the dancer’s movements as if he is capturing everything moving in the environment. I explored

rhythm and spontaneity, diverse movement, creates shapes, almost improvisational. I wanted everything to flow, no form of rigidity. I experimented with how I can juxtapose different movements, from slow to fast.

Lighting

I subsequently explored lighting as a motif, shadows textures shapes, and forms. I used lighting to create shadows and distort the figure. The shadow's movement is more subtle expressive and liberated sharp movements, her alter ego of whom she wants to be.

Lighting is also used as a motif to make shadows, textures, shapes, and forms. Lighting is also used to communicate the narrative. I wanted to explore this limited location and the three windows. I was inspired by how the sun illuminated my figure. *SHE IS WOMEN* is a subjective piece. The use of color in film allows for multi-layered cinematic representation, emotions are based on every color.

Cinematic conventions

My cinematic choices are spontaneous: the use of close-ups and medium shots of very intimate details of the movement, gesture, objects, and environment has an effective impact. The subjective handheld camera is employed for this piece to convey a particular character's mental and emotional state. The camera moves with the dancer and follows the dancer's journey which draws the audience closer to the emotional experience of a character and feels more connected to the dancer's world through cinematic movement.

Using a variety of shots to tell a story can include blurring in/out and slowly /quickly panning tightly into a close-up /extreme close-up. Tilting the camera and positioning it in interesting ways. Close-up and medium body shots and edited cutaways show the intensity of the unraveling. The medium also conveys the truth of the reality in which we live and shows the invisibility we have in society as women.

Editing

Regarding editing, I played with fast-paced, cutting into the action and slow motion for impact. I also explored repetition of the same sequel of choreography edited in multiple ways, which was achieved by layering the footage, and jump-cutting to create emphasis.

Sound

I was inspired by Ama Ata Aidoo and Ketu Katrak's ideas of using oral forms to show acts of resistance. The sound is used to drive the narrative, almost to take the audience on a journey of unknowingness by introducing the dancer into the frame, almost to allow the viewer to feel what she is going through. Sandri (2012: 22) states Africans' complex sense of rhythm in requires no thought, learned skill, or musical theory, only thoughtless physical responses. I wanted to use the beat of the drum as a provocation for movement. Also in the piece, the African djembe drum music propels the movement forward.

The introduction of the piece employs the sound of African independence songs with, a 1970s feel; the music was originally made by Ugandan singer-songwriter Geoffrey Oryema. It is a protest song that connotes exile; in this case, I am using it to speak back to the bodily exile of Black women. Creating a subjective piece requires one to break away from the conventional music and film scoring, I opted rather for distorting sound which is used in the middle of the piece when the music changes. I also explore the absence of sound and layering of sounds of the traditional soundscapes of Black women's singing voices and drums. I used the song 'Uyakhala Uyalila' (Ukukhala means to wail) and (Uyalila means to cry) direct translation 'She is wailing, she is crying' which is performed by AmaZulu maidens. The sound also included an effect of the dancer's heartbeat at beginning of the narrative, which then stops when the audio newsreel is introduced.

Feminist and Intersectional Approach:

The project reflects a feminist and intersectional approach by shedding light on the unique experiences of Black women. It challenges the culture of misogyny and male superiority prevalent in South Africa and the world, addressing the layers of discrimination faced by Black women. This relates to Pumla Gqola and Laura Mulvey's concept of an alternate gaze in which Black women can choose to 'occupy subject' positions and determine the structures and the meanings of their lives. This idea advocates the goal of the research which has to do with the power of the lens of the camera and the shared authentic experience of Black women; and how Black women can redefine their societal position using the camera.

Furthermore, Xaba and Nyamza's works often explore intersectionality, acknowledging that individuals experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. In *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022) I aimed to incorporate this concept by portraying the diverse experiences of Black women in South Africa. The film showcases various aspects of the lives to the harsh realities of GBV. By portraying the complexity of their experiences, I intended to challenge simplistic narratives and stereotypes, fostering a more nuanced understanding of Black women's lives.

Ginslov, Xaba and Nyamza's conventions also create multisensory experiences in their works. *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022) utilizes a combination of visuals, sound, and movement to immerse the audience in the world of Black women in South Africa. This sensory engagement is intended to provoke a more profound emotional response and encourage viewers to reflect on the issues presented in the film.

Choreography and Movement

Drawing from Hammad's concept of using the body as a source of power and expression, the choreography embodies the physical and emotional consequences of GBV. This supports with the idea that the body can speak and write about violence and oppression, making these issues more tangible. I also draw from various dance genres, including jazz, contact improvisation, and Alvin Ailey's modern dance aesthetic, to create a movement vocabulary that challenges traditional representations. This experimentation aligns with the idea of breaking paradigms and norms reflecting the diversity and complexity of Black women's experiences. This supports the theoretical discussions on the importance of representing the full spectrum of Black women's lives and identities. I have also discussed how Ginslov's choreography incorporates contemporary and African movements, reflecting the fusion of dance forms and the agency of the female body. Her use of movement to convey messages about apartheid and freedom align with my argument that screen dance can communicate social and political issues effectively.

Nyamza's *Hatched* (2008) places a strong emphasis on physicality and movement as a means of self-expression and resistance. In *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022), I incorporated dance and movement to convey the strength, resilience, and defiance of Black women in the face of GBV. Through the physicality of the performers, the film conveys a sense of agency and empowerment, challenging the notion of victimhood often associated with GBV survivors.

Sound and Music

The use of sound and music is crucial in conveying the emotional impact of the narrative. It reflects the complexity of emotions and the African cultural context, connecting to Sandri's notion of rhythm as a thoughtless physical response. The use traditional African music and oral forms to emphasize resistance and cultural significance. The incorporation of voiceovers from GBV victims' accounts adds an authentic and powerful dimension to my work, allowing the voices of survivors to be heard.

By including these voices, I amplify the narratives of survivors and place their stories at the forefront. This relates to Ketu Katrak's inquiry on using oral forms. The use of oral forms can play a significant role in reframing the Black female body in screen dance; screen dance can use oral narratives as a means of empowerment. . I was able to deconstruct and play with language similar to Ama Ata-Aidoo in the practical component using prose and poetry, looking at personal memory and the archive to create a narrative. By telling their own stories and using the body as a form of self-expression, Black women in screen dance can take ownership of their narratives challenging historical erasure and objectification of Black female bodies in media.

Subjectivity and Agency:

The use of cinematic techniques, such as handheld camera work, close-ups, and slow-motion, adds depth to the narrative and immerses viewers in the emotional journey. The editing and repetition of sequences enhance the impact. In the choreography and cinematography choices, I have effectively centred the subjective experiences of Black women. The use of close-ups, medium shots, and intimate details of movement allows the audience to connect with the dancer's emotions and inner world.

This aligns with feminist theories that emphasize the importance of representing women's experiences from their own perspectives. By doing so, the work empowers Black women by giving them a voice and agency over their own narratives, directly challenging the historical misrepresentation and oppression they've faced. My analysis of the camera work, including shot types and framing, demonstrates how it contributes to the narrative and representation. Ginslov's use of close-ups and wide shots, along with her interaction with the environment, emphasizes the

isolation and empowerment of the dancer, supporting my claim about the individual body as an articulate thinking being.

Visibility and Invisibility:

The use of lighting, shadows, and camera angles is a striking representation of the themes of visibility and invisibility. The windows and the cracked windowpane serve as powerful visual metaphors, symbolizing how society often reduces Black women to objects of scrutiny. The deliberate choice to have my face blurred or partially obscured by lighting underscores the idea that Black women are often seen, but their voices and identities remain obscured. This supports with the theoretical discussions on how society objectifies and limits the visibility of Black women.

The closing image of me running directly towards the camera symbolizes visibility and empowerment. It conveys the message that Black women are taking control of their narratives and their bodies. This final act aligns with the broader goals of activism and social change through art and storytelling, as discussed in the research. Both Cixous and Xaba emphasize the importance of women reclaiming agency and subjectivity. The practical aimed to do just that by giving agency to the female dancer to express stories and emotions through movement. The screen dance work served as a platform for these women to assert their subjectivity and challenge the dominant narratives that have historically framed their bodies.

Narrative Structure and Repetition:

The circular narrative structure in the screen dance piece is a clever artistic choice. It mirrors the repetitive cycles of GBV and the ongoing struggle for empowerment and justice. This structural choice is informed by the theory that Gender-based violence persists, and the work conveys the idea that resistance and empowerment are ongoing battles. The repetition of choreographic sequences also reinforces this message, emphasizing the resilience of Black women. The circular narrative structure and juxtaposition of different narratives, including the victims' voices, create a powerful storytelling experience. It supports with the idea of exploring multiple perspectives and voices.

Ginslov's approach to narrative, where location and objects in the environment influence the narrative, was evident in my work. The urban environment in *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022) became an integral part of the narrative, symbolizing the challenges and obstacles women face in society. Just as Ginslov's use of narrative was influenced by the environment, my screen dance aimed to create a dialogue between the dancers and the urban landscape, conveying the idea that women's stories are intertwined with their surroundings. In addition, Xaba's performance artfully weaves a narrative around the historical figure of Sara Baartman to critique colonial representation and stereotypes. In *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022) I utilized narrative elements to symbolically represent the struggles and resilience of Black women. The urban alleyway became a symbol of societal constraints and expectations, mirroring Xaba's use of symbolism. This approach allowed me to connect with Xaba's exploration of how narrative can shape the perception of the female body.

Uncles and Angels (2012) and *Hatched* (2008) both employ innovative narrative techniques to convey their messages. In *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022), I used a non-linear narrative structure and abstract imagery to evoke emotion and provoke thought. This departure from traditional storytelling allows viewers to engage with the material on a more visceral and emotional level, fostering empathy and understanding for the experiences of Black women.

Mise-en-scène:

The choice of location, the three windows, and the chair symbolize the constraints and objectification faced by Black women. This aligns with the goal of using the environment to impact movement and storytelling. The choice of location, including the three windows and the chair, symbolizes confinement, objectification, and the culture of violence. These elements serve as powerful visual metaphors. The use of the chair as a symbol of objectification and the pedestal on which society places Black women is a thought-provoking visual element.

It connects to the research's emphasis on how women have been positioned historically and how they are seen in contemporary contexts. Kicking down the pedestal at the end of the piece represents a powerful rejection of objectification and a reclaiming of agency. This symbolism reinforces the theoretical concepts of empowerment and resistance. I have highlighted how Ginslov's choice of abstract locations and the metaphorical representation of place in her screen dance work help signify the oppression of apartheid. This aligns with my argument that the

individual body can be a site of power and that the physical environment can be used symbolically. In *SHE IS WOMEN* (2022) I adopted the convention of mise-en-scène as discussed in Ginslov's work. Just as Ginslov used abstract and metaphorical locations to convey meaning, I chose a visually striking but symbolically loaded setting for my screen dance. This setting, an urban alleyway with graffiti-covered walls, served as a metaphorical representation of societal constraints and expectations placed on women. Much like Ginslov's use of site to provide context, my choice of location in the urban environment aimed to contextualize the struggles and resilience of women in the face of societal pressures.

Costume and Hair:

The choice of costume, particularly the white skirt, serves as a commentary on the historical influence of colonialism on African women's dress. It challenges the idea of appropriateness and purity that has been imposed on Black women. In addition, I have explained how Cixous challenges the patriarchal nature of Western theatre and encourages women to write themselves, emphasizing the importance of the female body as a source of new meaning. Cixous's call for women to embrace their unique experiences and expressions aligns with the idea of using screen dance to empower the Black female body. The use of dreadlocks as part of the choreography adds another layer to this discussion, addressing social injustices related to appearance and identity.

I discussed how Xaba's performance in *They Look at Me and That Is All They Think* (2013) delves into themes of identity, societal expectations, gender, and race. Xaba's work critiques the colonial act of representation, and I have highlighted her use of costume, lighting, and choreography as tools for mediating representation and challenging stereotypes.

Breaking the Male Gaze:

I consciously avoid the male gaze by using my hair as a mechanism to break norms, emphasizing movements that aren't objectified or sexualized. This aligns with my research goal of reawakening viewers and challenging representational norms. I employed Ginslov's idea of the female gaze as an approach to recreating and reframing the representation of the Black female body. The female gaze draws on representations of women by women for women and it is how a woman sees herself. It seeks to empathize rather than objectify. Furthermore, Nelisiwe Xaba's

performance piece *They Look at Me and That Is All They Think* (2006) explores the gaze imposed upon the Black female body and the stereotypes and assumptions associated with it.

Xaba uses her body and movement as a form of resistance and critique, challenging and subverting societal expectations and representations. By confronting and questioning the viewer's gaze, Xaba's work disrupts the objectification and commodification of the Black female body, offering alternative narratives and perspectives. In addition, Ginslov's work supports my argument about the agency of the Black female body through screen dance. I have also drawn parallels between her approach and my own intention to use the female gaze to reframe the representation of the Black female body.

Excerpts of actual news footage audio.

Anonymous victim: ... as they come closer, they start shooting in the air, and now we don't know what to do, what's happening? We look around, I look around, and everyone is running. And uhm, if I'm running to the other direction, now it's no longer 3, there's this 3 and when I look to my left, there is like 15 guys. Then I run to the other side, and there's like maybe 12, so now we are surrounded. Everyone is armed, all the guys were fully armed, and uhm... they are instructing us to lie on the floor. To keep our heads down, they gonna kill u.''

News reporter: After being stripped and robbed, for this victim speaking anonymously, said she thought it was the end of the ordeal, but the reality... it was just the beginning.

Anonymous victim: it started around, the sun was still out ... until now it's getting darker. This thing, this nightmare is not ending. Crying, crying, we have cried. It is not stopping, we have prayed. And then uhm, uhm... they start taking girls one by one, and raping. And there's ditches there, so they take one girl and put her in the other ditch, and then they rape. And uhm... Multiple of them, they didn't care, they just didn't care...

News reporter: After a staggering 10 hours, it was over, and they were ordered to return to their cars. On the road flagged a passing police vehicle. And the nature of the ordeal and screaming headlines, spurred police to action. Not long after, more than 80 arrests have been nabbed...

Anonymous victim: As I go through this, no one is coming and checking on the victims...are you okay? Do you have food? I feel like it's so hard, even forgotten. I know arrests have been made, but it's so hard, we haven't forgotten. It's all just numbers over us... (SABC News, 2022)

Appendix 1: Interview

Date: 29 August 2022

Method: Recorded Zoom meeting

Time: 32 minutes

Summary

Through this interview with Jeannette Ginslov, readers gain valuable insights into the transformative potential of screen dance as a medium for challenging stereotypes and reshaping narratives. Ginslov's dedication to celebrating the Black female body in all its forms and complexities serves as an inspiring example of how art can be a powerful tool for social change and empowerment.

Ginslov describes her unique approach to using the camera in her work, emphasizing that it's not about objectifying the dancers but rather about creating a dynamic and immersive experience. She highlights her desire for the camera to become an active and exploratory element, essentially choreographing in real-time with the dancers. Her goal is to break away from binary thinking and create a malleable and palpable visual landscape that engages the viewer emotionally and viscerally. She focuses on challenging the male gaze, seeking to shift the perspective away from objectification and towards a more authentic and emotionally resonant portrayal of the human body in motion. Her approach involves breaking down traditional boundaries between the camera and the dancer to create a more immersive and visceral experience for the viewer.

Dr. Jeannette Ginslov

1. SM Setzin: Can you describe your use of camera in 'Sanctum I & II' (2009)?

J Ginslov: Sanctum brings me closer to an experience. It's not about objectifying, rather it pushes the visual imagery and breaks the binary logic between the self and visualized medium. it's about choreographing instantaneously with the camera. I wanted the camera to

be an omnivore, the camera sniffs around the dancer's body and creates a malleable, palpable landscapes.

My strategy has always been to explore an inactive approach using camera and editing to create 'carnal resonances' or Deleuze affect images (dizzy disappearance of fixed points). The camera needs to tease, sniff, nudge out the haptic and affect. The camera should be handled with intention that is fresh and engaged so that moments of liminality, between the techne and live spontaneous body may take place.

2. SM Setzin: Describe your process of experimentation in 'Sanctum I & II' (2009) with the camera and dance?

J Ginslov: I was looking at how the camera moves with a dancer. Could I move against the dancer's body? can I go into a close and extreme close-up? Can I transpose two different images together, just to shake the cartesian binary up so much so that you don't really know what you're looking at. I had to find a choreographic language and I needed to add to this visceral haptic language that was happening.

The male gaze it's about the consumption of the female body it perpetuates the sense of the other. I became aware of breaking the cartesian boundary between the camera and the dancer and looked at how can these two talks to each other so that you don't have two points of view and no hegemonic control over the dancer.

I was working with dizzy disappearance of fixed points, everything was churning. I wanted to reveal what we feel like when we are moving. When we move, we don't see everything in a logical picture that all makes sense, so you not owning what you see. However, when you are moving in an environment, everything is moving everything is shifting. I kept that idea whilst filming and editing, it became crucial that nothing was fixed and so there's no ownership. You can't other the information because it's affecting you on an emotional level, a visceral level. It is through this tactility of the film that you get the feeling of being with the film rather than stepping back and looking at it with the

male gaze. Politically, the politics lie with how I use the camera and not what I was representing. The politics became how do I engage with the camera and choreography which becomes much more performative.

I knew I wanted to do some wide shots and close-ups, but these were done in an experimental and improvised way. I thought of my legs as the perfect tripod. I had two people helping me with lights and projector, so that the lights were moving. The projector was moving. The dancer was moving. I was moving with the camera, everyone was moving.

There was nothing stable in the shot, so that's what Laura U Marks talks about. It's that haptic relationship the viewer is seeing, and it influences your state of being. That's the strength of this type of work, it challenges filmmaking and brings one closer to the lived experience of being in this world. It is about exploring the logic between the self and other, that becomes the politics rather than representing.

3. SM Setzin: In reference to 'Sandstone' (1988), how can screen dance be used to communicate social and political issues?

J Ginslov: At first, it was a live performance piece, and it was banned because of the PW Botha speech. It was first performed at the RAU Afrikaans University. The director and his wife were standing there, shocked and they said 'no you not performing this' then someone came to me and said they would like to film it for a Film Festival in Japan, so I agreed.

It was a piece I did after coming back from Europe. I saw that change had not progressed very well in South Africa and this piece was a reaction to it. I came back and I was working with Tossie Van Tonder on Afro fusion. There were a few us practitioners who were trying to explore our roots and heritage, how we lived, what we are experiencing. I was influenced by European and South African Black Afro fusion. That is why I got to a point in the choreography that was highly athletic, I would say...

Even though I practised African dance in Europe, where I trained... The influence of Tossie Van Tonder and other practitioners rubbed off me. The piece was inspired by an art exhibition by Marly Van Milton, and it was all about the human figure in art. These figures looked boy painted, naked, wearing these little beshu (traditional San/Khoi attire) skirts. I got inspired by this. A lot of people say it looks like photographs of Grace Jones in the 1980s, I do not know, I was influenced somewhere, but I am not sure. But it was an athletic piece.

It is a historic peace that is connected to the politics of the time. The body is a site of resistance, a site of archive from a feminist stance. In terms of choosing a landscape, I needed a place that signified the other. and we shot in in a day. The relationship between the figure and the landscape, is that the landscape speaks to the notion of the mine dump being equated to the system in South Africa that was indebted to the injection of gold mines. It is also referring to the millions of men who went underground and worked, you know. So, there are subtle signs and poetic leaps in the locations, and it just goes back to telling you about how important location is. Location supports the narrative. The location is important. You need to justify location. How does it connect to the choreography and the filming? How do you use the location, and what is the intention?

4. SM Setzin: How do you position the camera in your working process and creating *Sandstone* (1988)?

J Ginslov: I am arguing that it is in fact the body that is relaying the story and not just a form of dance that is portrayed through the male gaze, which is ballet. Ballet which shows us perfection, line form and in tradition, it perpetuates a type of male gaze. I was interested in breaking the norms and paradigms that were around at the time and tried to reawaken people by looking some other form like strange being that will shake them into some way of seeing a woman's body.

Some men have said that your body, it is so viral. But it is odd. So, in that way, it speaks to the otherness that reveals something. Men do not like to see a woman do gun movements or throw grenade. Men do not like to see a strong mass masculine woman. And woman also find it very off putting, a woman who do not know anything about dance asks 'well, why is it so ugly? And I say, 'I was so angry, and I just needed to explore that.' I left South Africa because of the Rubicon

speech that was used in the screen dance. So, a lot of artists were banned because we were creating work that was critical to the government and I wanted to use my experience, my body and dance forms, you know, to explore these things. It went underground once it was performed then it went to Sweden.

Then Byron Griffiths asked to film it. Interesting enough, he was the one who directed and said, 'I want to do a shot like this,' and I said 'no, no, no, no. I do not want to shoot like that. I want you to shoot away. You can look down my arm with the camera so that you can see. My arm from my perspective,' and he said no, that would be very odd. Already there was questioning, because it is my dance and I wanted to see my body, my movements, through my eyes, not his. And I was frustrated 'why won't the director listen to me?'

So, when you see the close-ups of the ear and the cutting of some of the body parts, which was me pushing him to go further. It has to do with the male gaze and the female gaze and wanting to shift his gaze to not focus on my bare breasts. I wanted him to focus on my emotion, my anger and my virility and I wanted to change his point of view. He slowly did through a lot of rehearsals. He focused on my back arching, and I had to fight for those on point of views to challenge the male gaze. And that is how the piece became a screen dance.

5. SM Setzin: In relation to body politics, what do you mean by using 'body as archive, body of experience' in 'Sandstone' (1988)?

J Ginslov: I used a choreographic language that I have not explored or seen before. There was a tendency to break lines and not go the classical paradigm of lines and fluidity. It was very precursive also representational. It was a modernist dance. I used a lot of signs and symbols that, I thought will encapsulate the imagery and portray emotions I wanted to bring across.

It was very connected to the earth and symbols of the animal. I then called myself a cosmic creature, just to be speculative, coming as some altered go, something borne of the earth. And that is why I chose the mine dump. That is why my body was painted, because I wanted myself to be born of the place, I was living in. That is why I thought of the notion of archive. Not only brain archives have memory, but body archive has memory. The body archives memory through your body schema, your lived experiences of being in your body. That is why I call it body as archive because you are archiving all this memory in your body, and it is situated not only

situated in the mind. The only way you can experience the world is through the body, and that is why it becomes a strong feminist point of view.

Through our bodies we make contact, contain, remember, remake, living stories, create memories, narrating meaning for ourselves and others.

6. SM Setzin: What role can screen dance play in highlighting gender-based violence issues against women?

J Ginslov: I read your paper; it is a loaded question. I have dealt with gender-based-violence, racial and female genital-mutilation. It is difficult to unearth that because you do not want to represent it in a way that affirms what is happening. I have seen screen dance works were students work with this notion of GBV and create screen dance films that are a representation of that. And then I go 'where does this leave me, where does this leave the viewer?' How do you challenge, restructure, or change misogynistic because it is systematic. There must be a mass cultural shift and in education, and it is not just in screen dance, its culture too (Instagram, music videos, media). It is all giving women the raw edge and it is a feedback mechanism for this violent behavior against women.

You asking a tall question...How does one become resistant with one's work? How do you change, not the male gaze, but how do you change culture because that is what is making, creating a certain positioning of the male on how to see and engage with a woman who looks a certain type of way. The sexualized body becomes a commodity, and the camera commodifies the body-it is like the camera consumes and the audience becomes a consumer.

Then how can you reframe and restructure the role of the woman? Perhaps have females on set, or someone who is a feminist in some way, you can find unique voice to alter the perception on how women are represented, so that we not just consumed, not serving a consumerist point of view.

This has put your work in a niche place, a small audience but it is your job as a cultural worker because that is what you want to do, you want to change people's perceptions. I am still doing it in a way that does not emphasis racial tension, GBV etc., its more subtle and about lived experiences.

Conclusion: Final notes

The history of Black female commodification can be traced back to colonialism, where Black bodies, particularly those of women, were objectified and commodified for the pleasure and consumption of European audiences. This objectification was closely tied to the concept of the male gaze, which refers to the perspective and desires of the heterosexual male viewer. During the colonial era, European powers exerted dominance over various parts of Africa, the Americas, and other regions. The bodies of Black women were often seen as exotic, hypersexualized, and racially "othered" in contrast to the perceived norms of European femininity.

In recent years, there have been efforts to reframe the narrative surrounding the Black female body. Activists, scholars, and artists have sought to challenge and disrupt the objectification and commodification of Black women by asserting their agency, reclaiming their narratives, and promoting positive and empowering representations.

Reframing the Black female body involves celebrating the diversity, beauty, and humanity of Black women, rather than reducing them to stereotypes or objects of desire. It involves recognizing and challenging the historical and ongoing impact of the male gaze, while centering the experiences, voices, and autonomy of Black women themselves. By highlighting the contributions and perspectives of Black women, reframing the Black female body aims to counteract the harmful narratives and representations that have perpetuated the commodification and objectification of Black women throughout history. It seeks to create space for self-definition, agency, and empowerment, challenging the dehumanization and marginalization of Black women in society.

This research serves as an act of resistance to the objectification and oppression of the female body. I am interested in shifting the representation using the medium of screen dance; screen dance is a growing field that will be used to communicate this narrative through the camera and choreography. Screen dance, which is the integration of dance and film, can be an effective tool in reframing the Black female body. Using technology, screen dance can challenge

and subvert traditional representations of the Black female body that are often limited and stereotypical.

In addition to the research, it is informed by my creative process. Gender-based violence has been an ongoing theme and conversation that society needs to engage in. I believe that learning the methodologies of film and dance and seeing the relationship between the two can open possibilities for choreographers to explore different themes and create work that has not only a cultural impact, but a social one as it is a viable source that can interrogate critical issues and bring awareness to communities for educational purposes.

As a researcher, I encountered a few challenges, firstly lack of representation and documentation: One significant challenge is the historical underrepresentation and erasure of Black women in screen dance. The limited availability of historical records, archives, and documentation specifically focused on Black female dancers and choreographers can make it difficult to uncover their contributions and experiences. Secondly, the genre of screen dance operates within a Eurocentric framework which can marginalize or overlook the experiences and contributions of Black female dancers.

Despite these challenges, researching and reframing the Black female body in screen dance is an important endeavor. By actively addressing these challenges, as a researcher, I can contribute to a more inclusive and representative understanding of dance history, challenge stereotypes, and promote the empowerment and visibility of Black women in screen dance.

I am using my research as a platform to raise awareness about Gender-based-violence in South Africa. I seek to engage in public discourse, share findings through various channels, and advocate for policy changes and community initiatives that address the root causes of violence. I also want to encourage conversations that challenge societal attitudes and promote gender equality.

Regarding recommendations to the research, I should foster collaborative relationships with the Black dance community in the future. This collaboration helps ensure that the research is grounded in the community and reflects their experiences and aspirations. The recommendations I would like to offer within the genre of screen dance is the acknowledgement of diversity in representing the experience of Black female body. I recommend works that challenge stereotypes

and preconceived notions of the Black female body. Screen dance genre needs to showcase intersectionality of Black womanhood to address issues of race, gender and identity. The genre can also bring power and awareness about Black women showing their resilience, beauty and strength through dance.

In conclusion, screen dance can be an effective tool in reframing the Black female body, offering a platform for self-expression, experimentation, and the exploration of new perspectives. By challenging traditional representations and cultural narratives, screen dance can bring attention to the embodied experiences of Black women and create a space for resistance, healing, and empowerment. Screen dance is a fertile field it contains an aspect of ephemerality not like live performance where work vanishes. Although it is still premature in South Africa, it is slowly expanding in academia. It is screened technology that can be showcased on social platforms that advocate for such issues and screen dance festivals.

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