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How to cite this thesis
Artistic responses to violence against women and children in South Africa.

by

Heidi Mielke

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Magister Technologiae (Fine Art)
in the
Department of Visual Art
Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture
University of Johannesburg

November 2015

Supervisor: Prof Kim Berman
Co-supervisor: Vedant Nanackchand
DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is, apart from the recognised assistance, my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Technologiae (Fine Art), in the Department of Visual Art, Design and Architecture, University of Johannesburg. It has not been previously submitted by me for any other diploma or degree.

______________________________
Heidi Mielke

Signed on this ____ day of ___________________ 2015
ABSTRACT

The purpose of my study is to investigate artistic responses to violence against women and children in South Africa. Through the writings of Mamphela Ramphele and others, I contextualise the epidemic crisis of violence in South Africa and ground the study within a social justice paradigm. Within this study, I show a range of ways that art and artists respond to the social injustices by analysing different artistic modes such as political art and activist art. Using the works of South African artists, like Sue Williamson, Judy Mason and Berni Searle, I present artistic examples of work that responds particularly to violence against women in the Truth and Reconciliation commission. In order to identify ways in which a deeper social awareness can be experienced through the artworks, I investigate the communicative power of an image by focusing on the tripartite relationship between the intention of the artist, the power of artworks and viewer’s responses. Particular artworks which explore themes of violence against women and children, by artists that include Sue Williamson, Berni Searle, Judy Mason, Diane Victor, Zanele Muholi and myself, are discussed through a qualitative, visual and comparative analysis. Each artist discussed within this study, has their own unique approach; however, there is a shared objective to utilise visual expressions as a communicative tool to heighten social consciousness and awareness of violence against women and children in South Africa.

Key words:
Violence against women and children in South Africa, political art, activist visual art, Diane Victor, Zanele Muholi
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INTRODUCTION

Context of the study

As a visual artist born in a post-apartheid democratic South Africa, and having been personally affected by the levels of violence, my study examines artistic responses to gender and child-based violence in South Africa. I further explore the link between artistic responses with active social engagement. Nomusa Makhubu and Ruth Simbao (2013:301) acknowledge the complex challenges facing South Africa, stating that the arts in South Africa have a responsibility to reflect not only what is happening, but should also proactively contest and challenge the injustices that occur on day-to-day basis. Makhubu and Simbao (2013:302) pose the question “How can the arts facilitate a process of meaningful transformation?” The aim of this study takes up the challenge of Makhubu’s and Simbao’s question, as the intention of the study is to examine the role of art in responding to the issue of violence against women and children in South Africa. This study falls within a social justice framework in which I adopt a position of art for social transformation. I identify a range of ways that art and the artist can respond to social injustices through the analysis of different artistic modes such as political art, activist art, community-based art and art therapy. Artworks by South African artists that embody some of these approaches are presented as exemplars of social awareness and consciousness. Particular artworks by Diane Victor and Zanele Muholi are discussed through a visual and textual analysis as they explore themes of violence. I also focus on the tripartite relationship between the intention of the artist, the power of artworks, and the viewer's response, in order to identify how social awareness and consciousness is achieved. My study examines factors that influence a range of artistic responses to violence against women and children in South Africa.

Aims and objectives

The primary aim of my study is to investigate how visual art may respond to violence against women and children in South Africa. In order to achieve this aim, the first objective will be to establish the context, terms, definitions and theories related to the study of violence against women and children in South Africa. This context includes an analysis of the concept of power in the tripartite relationship between the image, the viewer and the artist within the framework of a social justice paradigm. I briefly discuss the concept of power in relation to the image versus the viewer. I also identify and define four different kinds of artistic responses, characterising the different roles that art can perform in response to
social injustice. The second objective is to analyse and compare selected artworks by contemporary South African artists, particularly Victor and Muholi, whose representations reveal different aspects and approaches towards violence against women and children. This analysis will help inform and contextualise the third objective which explores my artistic response which addresses violence against women and children in South Africa.

Theoretical positioning

The overarching theoretical framework of my study is situated within a paradigm of social justice. From within this paradigm, I adopt a position of art for social transformation, and draw from feminist theorists such as Lippard (1994 &1995), Goldbard (2006), Felshin (1995), Platt (2010) in order to address artistic response to violence against women and children in South Africa. As indicated in my aims and objectives, I argue the importance of art for social change in this study, and demonstrate its role by analysing pertinent artworks by contemporary South African artists, who address this form of violence against women and children. The theoretical position of social justice which I present is echoed by former President Nelson Mandela (2002) and Dr Mamphela Ramphele’s (2008) work on social engagement in South Africa. I refer to Ramphele’s theoretical position on the need for citizens to actively engage in matters of social injustice and violence in a post-apartheid South Africa. Ramphele’s contextualization of South Africa’s socio-political, economic and cultural dilemmas of the post-apartheid era is pertinent to this study and helpful in framing my position in this study. Although Ramphele does not write directly about art as social transformation, she offers a reading on the causes of violence against women and children, and the psychosexual angst within a society entrenched by authoritarianism, which helps focus my study.

Katy Deepwell (1995:5) argues that the concept of feminism is used by women as an empowering tool, which provides a platform for women to raise their concerns and perceptions regarding what it means to be a woman in patriarchal societies. I draw on pertinent articles that form part of the edited volume Gender Law and Justice 2007, in which Catherine Albertyn, Lillian Artz, Helene Combrinck, Shereen Mills and Lorraine Wolhuter (2007:300) unpack sexual assault as something, which is not only an individual act of violence or even sex, but should be considered as a reflection of the unstable structures, morals and values of society (Albertyn et al 2007:300).
Chapter outlines and their respective literature

Introduction

The introduction provides the aims and objectives, chapter outlines and their respective literature, terms and definitions, and the context of social violence in South Africa. Within the context of social violence in South Africa, my theoretical framework, which is grounded within a social justice paradigm, is informed by the writings of former President Nelson Mandela (2002) in the forward of the *World Report on Violence and Health*, and the writings of business and political leader, activist, and academic Mamphela Ramphele in *Laying ghosts to rest; dilemmas of the transformation in South Africa*. Works by Albertyn *et al.* (2007) in *Gender Law and Justice*, David Bruce (2007:2), a senior researcher in the Criminal Justice Programme at the Centre of the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR); Irvin Waller (2006), an international expert in the field of crime prevention, and Gary Kynoch, (2008) in *Urban violence in Colonial Africa: A case for South African exceptionalism*, amongst others, help to identify the different factors which contextualise the epidemic of violence in South Africa. This introductory discussion therefore informs a deeper analysis into gender-child-based violence.

Chapter 1: The power of the image and the power of the viewer

In Chapter 1, I consult the writings of Steven Dubin (1992:2013), Roland Barthes (1977) Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2002) in order to discuss the power of the image and the role of art in addressing social justice. I look at specific political art current at the time of writing, and consider society’s responses to the commercial use of satirical illustrations that have been published in *Jyllands-Posten* (a Dutch magazine) and *Charlie Hebdo* (a French magazine). Both the illustrations that were published in *Jyllands-Posten* and *Charlie Hebdo*, which depict Islam’s prophet Mohammed, are examples of how a form of visual expression is used to draw attention to the editors’ perceptions of social injustices. I visually analyse artworks by Brett Murray and Terry Kurgans and discuss aspects of Mark Hipper’s work in order to investigate the responsiveness art has in creating social consciousness, through interrogating the composite relationship between the power of the viewer in relation to the power of the image and the intention of the artist.

Within this chapter I further discuss the role of political art and activist art, with particular examples in order to demonstrate the impact art can have in the enablement of social awareness. I present a brief
literature review of the above-mentioned roles, noting selected examples of artworks that have responded to the social injustices of violence and trauma.

Chapter 2: No country for women and children

The main aim of chapter 2 is to conduct a visual analysis of specific artworks by Victor and Muholi, which respond to different aspects of violence against women and children in South Africa. I identify and discuss how social awareness and consciousness may be achieved through art with a focus on two modes of representation, that being political art and activist art. The discussion is also focused around the tripartite relationship between the intention of the artist, which will be understood through the use of the artists’ own words, the communicative power of selected artworks, and specific published accounts of strong public reaction towards particular works from both artists.

Chapter 3: Over my dead body!

In chapter 3, I explore my own response to violence against women and children, which consists of a range of hand-printed, photographic printmaking techniques, namely Vandyke brown printing and photopolymer photo-gravure, as well as mixed-media prints. I have captured digital photographic images that have been manipulated, and some have been juxtaposed with newspaper clippings that convey responses of violence against women and children which I have collected over four years. The prints vary in size – from small intimate prints to large life-size prints. Within each of the works I have grappled with the uncomfortable territory of trauma and violence. I have intentionally avoided further victimisation and sensationalism, by consciously not revealing the identity of the victims. I have therefore actively turned the camera on myself and have utilised symbolic metaphors to ‘perform’ and depict generic and specific cases of violence. I have used natural objects symbolic of alienation or defence (such as the introduction of skulls, hair and thorns in relationship to the softness of skin) to engage the paradox and discomfort of violence and vulnerability.

My work is influenced by Victor’s use of seductive surfaces to draw the viewer in and repel simultaneously with unpalatable content. I explore this through the use of text as image and through manipulating my photographic medium. I am also influenced by Muholi’s understanding of activism in relation to content and public space in that I chose to exhibit my work at the women’s jail at Constitution Hill during the 16 days of activism campaign for No Violence against women and children campaign. My particular choice of venue provides me with a space to engage with creating awareness through an
activist mode of public engagement and interaction. My exhibition aims to reflect and respond to the unacceptable levels of violence, to stand up with the victims of abuse and send a message that embodies the title of my exhibition: Over my dead body!

**Conclusion**

The conclusion of this dissertation reinforces the importance of the need for transformation of social attitudes to reduce violence against women and children in South Africa. I argue that political and activist modes of representation provide a platform for the artists to address social injustices in the hope of altering attitudes, with the aim of social transformation. I contend that simply categorising particular artists work within each mode can be limiting and restrictive. Other complex factors of engagement has the capacity to spark debate and open up dialogues which can facilitate different forms of awareness. I discuss these factors and reiterate their functions with particular examples. I summarise Victor’s, Muholi’s and my own artistic responses to violence against women by demonstrating how visual art can provide a deepened consciousness of social justice in South Africa.

**Terms and definitions**

In order to demonstrate the power of art in addressing social injustices, I define and provide examples of various modes of art. These modes include political art, activist art, community-based arts and art therapy. The definitions are helpful in distinguishing different approaches and objectives, although my study will only focus on two of these modes, namely political and activist art.

**Political art**

Politics determines not only the way in which power is distributed in a given society, but also challenges and solidifies an ethical stance. Thus, political art can be understood as art that addresses ethical issues within a society through a politically engaged being who recognises the interlaced relationships between politics, art and liberation (Escobar 1994:49). Mieke Bal (2010:2) states that “political art is art because it is political; it is art by virtue of its political “nature”. Susan Noyes Platt (2010:xv) echoes Bal’s (2010:2) sentiments by stating that art is rooted within politics. Despite the intention of the artist, to some degree the artist partakes within a political process. This is due to the social act of analysing art and constructing meaning. I support the position that the artist who chooses to engage with subject matter that encompasses current social realities and political concerns can simultaneously have their
work understood as political art, as well as in some instances, extended into a mode of artistic activism (Platt 2010:xiv).

**Activist art**

Nina Felshin, author of *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism* (1995:9) defines and examines activism art through an analysis of twelve different practices which are all characterised “by the innovative use of public space to address issues of socio-political and cultural significance, and to encourage community or public participation as a means of effecting social change.” Felshin (1995:5) defines activist art as a “confluence of the aesthetic, socio-political, and technological impulses … that have attempted to challenge, explore, or blur the boundaries and hierarchies traditionally defining the culture as represented by those of power”. According to Felshin (1995:5), activist art is a culmination of a democratic need to give a voice and a face to the disenfranchised in order to reach a wider audience.

**Community-based art**

Arlene Goldbard (2006) states that “Community cultural development” (Goldbard 2006:20) denotes the work of “artist-organisers and other community members collaborating to express identity concerns and aspirations through the arts and communication media. It is a process that simultaneously builds individual mastery and collective cultural capacity while contributing to positive social change” (Goldbard 2006:20). Similarly, Barbara Beyerbach and Ramalho (2011) reflects on the art process as something which “contribut[ed] to [a] deeper understanding of issues of power, oppression and commitment to social change” and they note the importance of introducing “social justice through the arts” approach to teaching (Beyerbach & Ramalho 2011:4).

Goldbard (2006) has considered the space where art and democracy meet and considers the concept of culture as being “an effective crucible for social transformation, one that can be less polarizing and create deeper connections than other social arenas” (Goldbard 2006:43). She also argues that the artist has a role as an agent, which encompass the concept of social transformation, thus demonstrating one of the roles in which art can be utilised in addressing social upheaval within a society (Goldbard 2006:43). An example where I personally experienced this was in 2013 when I was fortunate enough to be part of a team of students from the University of Johannesburg who participated in a week-long, arts-based community engagement programme in HamMakuya, north-eastern Limpopo province, co-ordinated by Prof. Kim Berman. Students were tasked to be active citizens and engage
with the community to communicate a social message about rape and teen pregnancy. Art-based interventions that included photography, printmaking and mural-painting were used to facilitate the community engagement and interventions. This mode, although relevant to engaging social issues in collaboration with community partners, will not be pursued due to the limitations of this study.

**Art therapy**

Shaun McNiff (2005:xiii) describes another purpose for art that is art as a space which “kindles dignity and self-respect” through art therapy. It is within an artistic activity that a sense of freedom and expressive power can be experienced. The use of art as therapy can therefore be utilised as a method of healing trauma (McNiff 2005: xiii). An example of this work is carried out at *Lefika La Phodiso - The Art Therapy Centre* which is an art therapy centre in South Africa that uses art as a tool to help people who have been affected by abuse, crime, poverty, xenophobia, and HIV and AIDS to express themselves (Lefika online:[sp]). According to *Lefika La Phodiso’s* online website, they use art as a form of therapy because it is a “recognized form of psychotherapeutic healing”. It is an exploration of material and expression that uses a variety of different image-making processes, such as “drawing, painting, clay work and collage” in order to evoke different feelings and meanings. The artworks created often echo the unconscious forces and experiences that influence a person’s life and may “elicit fears, associations, desires, fantasies, hopes, dreams and memories”. The therapist/counsellor’s role is to facilitate a safe space in which the “voice of the image can be heard and understood” (Lefika online:[sp]).

**Lefika La Phodiso/The Art Therapy Centre**, in partnership with Constitution Hill and The Department of Arts & Culture, curated an exhibition entitled *Mapping Future*. The main focus of the exhibition was to raise awareness surrounding child protection in the inner city of Johannesburg. Lefika aimed to give children a voice, using art in support of Child Protection Week in May 2013. The exhibition was a collaboration between Lefika and the children in the surrounding areas who are exposed to high levels

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1 This project is discussed by Berman & Allen (2012), in an article “Deepening students’ understanding of democratic citizenship through arts-based approaches to experiential service learning”.

2 According to Hayley Berman (2005:173) “[a]rt therapy in South Africa emerged from a place of political violence in which a need for training and providing services to children and adults suffering from trauma who were affected by the political struggle, arose (Berman 2005:173).

3 According to *Lefika La Phodiso* (Lefika online:[sp]) murals act as a visual voice. They have been used throughout history as a platform for expression, as a way to send a message or inform on a particular theme or issue. Murals may address human rights issues, personal or group experiences and thoughts, and reveal the context and climate of community and political situations…[murals ] provide the space for children [youth/adults who are] at risk to ‘speak’ to their community about their community; to tell a story, express an opinion, convey a wish or demonstrate change.
poverty, abuse and crime, and their guardians. One of the objectives of the exhibition, was to showcase and celebrate the children’s personnel narratives and highlight the lack of protection that they receive, despite living so close to the Constitutional Court. Part of the exhibition was a week-long educational workshop directed at scholars and educators, as well as parents and guardians from the surrounding areas, with the primary focus directed at children’s rights. Due to the limitation of the study, I will not be discussing this mode further on; however, including it within the terms and definitions is important as it demonstrates a different function that art can have in contributing to addressing violence against women and children.

**Contextualising social violence in South Africa**

In the Forward of the *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002:[sp]), Mandela⁴ (2002:[sp]) notes that violence has marked and burdened the twentieth century with its legacy of mass destruction that has resulted from new technology that is saturated with ideologies of hate. Although this is not the only legacy that humanity must endure and rise up against, it is the legacy of the extensive “day-to-day individual suffering” (Mandela 2002:[sp]). It is the pain and suffering of children who have been abused by the people who are meant to protect them. It is the mistreatment, humiliation and abuse of women who have been violated by their partners. It is the elderly people who are maltreated by their caregivers, to name but few examples (Mandela 2002:[sp]). It is this suffering which reproduces itself, as the younger generations are influenced by the violence that distinguished the older generations. On a subconscious level, the victim learns from the victimiser and thus the social conditions that nurture and breed violence are perpetuated.

Violence is universal in so far as its presence is manifested in every society, and it flourishes in the “absence of democracy, respect for human rights and good governance” (Mandela 2002:[sp]). Patterns of violence are more prevalent in societies in which authorities encourage the use of violence through the examples they set, which often hinder the hopes of a country’s economic and social development. Many people who are affected by violence on a daily basis believe that it is engraved within the human condition; however, Mandela (Mandela 2002:[sp]) presents a more optimistic view in which violence can be prevented and violent cultures present within society can be inexorably altered for the better. The individual, communities and governments can make a difference by “illuminating the different faces

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⁴ This contextualisation by Nelson Mandela is valuable to cite here as his political position formed the ethical foundation of South Africa’s Human rights constitution.
of violence" (Mandela 2002:[sp]) in order to ensure that the most vulnerable citizens in society may have a chance for “a life free from violence and fear” (Mandela 2002:[sp]). Mandela stresses the point that the root of violence needs to be addressed in order to transform “the past century’s legacy from a crushing burden into a cautionary lesson” (Mandela 2002:[sp]). However, addressing the roots of violence in the hope of transformation is a complex task that requires a certain amount of understanding with regard to all the components that contribute to the high levels of violence that are experienced in certain societies.

According to Ramphele (2008:10), South Africa is experiencing many crises within its democracy, and is still plagued by the ghosts of its past such as racism and inequality, which challenges present-day society (Ramphele 2008:15). Ramphele draws attention to the facts that South Africa’s inherited authoritarian political legacy has not disappeared in the face of a new democratic national constitution; therefore, Ramphele suggests, authoritarianism should be acknowledged in order to move forward (2008:113). She asserts that child abuse is “the worst outcome of an authoritarian culture” (Ramphele 2008:114) and that the rising statistics of child abuse is a sign of the social and economic pressures in the South African society. According to Ramphele (2008:114), South Africa’s high figures of reported child-abuse cases constitute “a window into the sick souls of families across the country”. It is children who fall victim to abuse in authoritarian societies, as authoritarian figures take their frustration out on the most vulnerable amongst them (Ramphele 2008:114). Ramphele (2008:135) therefore encourages a form of “active citizenship for channelling anger into creative energy”. Achieving this new direction would create a new platform for our democracy, in which the foundation creates a branch of a civic-mindedness that embodies a form of “public service, which involves community and interpersonal relationships” (Ramphele 2008:13-14).

According to Ramphele (2008:13), “transformation of a society entails a complete change in both form and substance, a metamorphosis”. South Africa’s transformation into a post-apartheid society is without precedent (Ramphele 2008:13). The country has had to struggle with simultaneous political, social and economic transformations. Ramphele defines ‘transformation’ as a term which “denotes fundamental changes in the structures, institutional arrangements, policies, modes of operations and relationships in society” (Ramphele 2008:13). The transformation of South African society calls for a new “reorientation from past values and practices defined by racism, sexism, inequality and lack of respect for human rights towards the values reflected in our national constitution” (Ramphele 2008:13). Ramphele’s concepts of the active citizen and transformation are relevant to my argument, as I argue that the artist
has the potential to encourage a form of transformation while encompassing aspects of active citizenship.

In 2012, approximately sixty-five thousand sexual offences were committed in South Africa (UN human rights … 2013:[sp]). This statistic cannot be seen as a true indication of the extent of the problem, as the South African Police Service (SAPS) estimates that many instances of rape and sexual abuse go unreported – women’s organisations have suggested that the figure is “some twenty times higher” (Albertyn et al 2007:295). According to Albertyn et al. (2007:295), “[the] frequency, extent and nature of violence against women in South Africa [have] gained worldwide attention”. According to statistics, a quarter of South African men have confessed to having raped a women or child (UN human rights 2013:[sp]). Not only are the statistics exceptionally high for sexual offences, but studies have shown that there are 15,000 murders and more than 100,000 charges of violent robbery committed in South Africa every year (South Africa plagued … 2013:7).

An international news report presented an alarming perspective of the violence in South Africa. It reported that the underlying problem appears to be the embedded nature of violence within the society, which many scholars believe is a holdover from the brutal days of apartheid (South Africa plagued … 2013:7). The assumptions regarding media reports, which name South Africa as one of the most violent societies in the world towards women and children (Hunter-Gault 2009:[sp]), support the focus of my study as I challenge the responsibility of the artist to oppose and reflect upon the pandemic of violence against the more vulnerable members of society. The following cases illustrate the starting point for my practical portfolio.

On the second of February 2013, 17-year-old Anene Booysen, who had been gang-raped and disembowelled, was discovered by security guards at a construction site in the Western Cape. The extent to which her body had been mutilated was such that she would later die from her injuries in Tygerberg Hospital (Zuma condemns Bredasdorp… 2013:[sp]). The Toronto Star article described South Africa as a country “still reeling from the brutal rape of a 17-year-old girl in the pastoral town of Bredasdorp, near Cape Town” (South Africa plagued … 2013:7). The brutal rape and murder of Anene Booysen has incited much soul-searching in a “country that often appears numb to sexual violence and is known as the world’s rape capital” (Buried in a … 2013:[sp]). Subsequently, Navineetham Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, described sexual violence in South Africa as being on a pandemic scale and has called on authorities to do more to tackle this problem (UN human rights … 2013:[sp]). This incident is just one example of the approximately 66,387 sexual assaults that South
African citizens have endured within the 2012/2013 reporting year (SAPS 2013: [sp]). According to SAPS’s *Crime Statistic overview RSA 2012/2013* (SAPS 2013: [sp]) Anene’s murder can be added to the list of 16 259 reports of murder, as well as the 185 893 assaults with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm that were reported to the police during the 2012/2013 timeframe.

According to Bruce (2007:2), violence in any form has the power to undermine the “common moral and value code within any society”. Violence threatens the aspirations of any modern society that reveres values of “peace, individualism, emotional well-being, stability and equality” (Bruce 2007:2). Violence also threatens the standard of the development of economic growth and equality within a society. Bruce (2007:2) identifies South African youth as constituting a considerable percentage of both victims and perpetrators of crime, particularly violent crime. He further identifies a number of factors, such as HIV and AIDS, unstable households, economic instabilities, the legacy of apartheid, and the increasing availability of drugs and alcohol, which are known to contribute towards the perpetration of violence.

In 2009 the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) presented a final supplementary document entitled *Why Does South Africa have such high rates of violent crime? Supplement to the Final Report of the Study on the Violent Nature of Crime in South Africa*. (CSVR 2009: [sp]) which addresses the question of what makes levels of violent crime in South Africa so high, and why South Africa is different from other countries in this regard. According to this report (CSVR 2009:10), there is not one solitary reason which clarifies the high levels of violence in South Africa. Violent crime in South Africa, along with other countries, is the product of multiple factors. These factors are not entirely unique to South Africa. However, it is the way in which they interact with each other that shapes the context of violence that is distinctive to specific countries. Factors that are associated with South Africa’s high percentage of violent crimes include apartheid and specific characteristics of the post-apartheid era, as well as other “factors including in particular South Africa’s regional context” (CSVR 2009:10).

It has been two decades since South Africa’s transition into democracy, yet the country continues to be tainted by the ghosts of violence that is deeply rooted in apartheid (CSVR 2009:5). Rapid industrialisation, combined with apartheid’s implementation of the migrant labour system, added to the high levels of violence within the urban environments (Kynoch 2008:23). Waller (2006:23), an international expert in the field of crime prevention, believes that children who have grown up in harsh conditions (such as apartheid) with negative family or school experiences tend to become consistent criminal offenders. Apartheid, the migrant labour system, and influx control had an immensely
destabilising effect on the African families, and these factors may have contributed to other aspects of South Africa’s broader social and economic transformations (CSVR 2009:6). Thus, many of the children who were affected by apartheid and predominantly came from the poorest communities have grown up in unstable and, frequently, child-headed households. It is these children who were affected by problems such as alcoholism and violence (CSVR 2009:6). Another contributing factor that stems from apartheid is the “psychological legacy of institutionalised racism,” (CSVR 2009:7) in the form of suppressed feelings of inferiority and low self-worth. This, combined with the easy availability of firearms and the minimal or informal mechanisms of justice in addressing crime within the township areas, played a central role in the escalating evolution of violent crime resulting in a criminal culture, which has been entrenched within some township areas in South Africa (CSVR 2009:7).

Gender based violence

Debra Delaet (cited by Romni Sigsworth 2008:6) defines the concept of gender-based/sex-specific violence “as the particular types of violence experienced by women and men because of their biological sex”. Gender-based violence refers to violence which is a result of “social constructions of masculinity and femininity”. Gender-based violence can therefore affect both men and women as both sexes can be victims and perpetrators; however, it is usually the woman who is targeted because of her “biological sex and status in society during times of conflict”. Women experience sexual violence in times of conflict in the form of: “mass rape, forced pregnancy, forced prostitution, forced marriage, and sexual slavery” (Sigsworth 2008:7). In addition, women also endure suffering both during and after conflict in the form of “domestic violence extreme economic vulnerability and secondary victimisation through institutions such as the criminal justice system”.

According to Sigsworth (2008:5), gender-based violence does not only occur as a result of conflict, but will continue to persist, post-conflict, despite a transition to democracy. The root cause of violence against women, suggested by Sigsworth (2008:5), is the disproportional power relationships between men and women. Sigsworth (2008:9) argues that feminists have identified two analytical frameworks when examining the explanations that sanction gender-based human rights violations. The first is the distinction between the public and private realm, and the second is the continuation between ordinary
and extraordinary levels of violence. Albertyn et al. (2007:300) consider sexual assault as something which is not only an individual act of violence or even sex, but which should be considered as a reflection of the unstable structures, morals and values of society. In the case of South Africa, the high levels of sexual assault reflect the “substantial gender power inequalities that [still] pervade” (Albertyn et al. 2007:300). The high levels of violence against women suggest that there is a connection between the economic and social structures in society. The frustration experienced within the working/public sphere is filtering into the private realm (Albertyn et al. 2007:300-301).

Albertyn et al. (2007:300) argue that violence against women cannot be divorced from the broader social context. In a society such as South Africa, which is structured around class and racial lines, it is expected that the power imbalances found in patriarchal relations will collide with those arising from class and race. In a South African context, the “working class (and, particularly, black) men” experience feelings of oppression and impotence in the public domain. Their frustration is likely to filter into the private domain in the form of dominating the more vulnerable sex, which in most cases is the woman. High levels of unemployment, combined with men not fulfilling the stereotypical traditional role of the breadwinner, may result in feelings of emasculation, which is likely to cause assertions of power in relation to women. Albertyn et al. (2007:301) identify women’s economic dependence on men as one of the most fundamental structural constraints that South African women face. One of the consequences of this male-dominated perception is that women can become a possession to be owned. This sense of viewing women as property endorses and condones the use of violence against “their” women.

According to Ramphele (2008:103), sexism is expressed in its most severe form through violence and abuse. It is the intersection of gender, class and racism disadvantages which place women at the feet of those who are meant to protect them. Ramphele (2008:104) contends that intimate partners, who turn into an abusive killers, are often the victims of a system that has made it difficult for them to be

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5 Etienne Krug, Linda Dahlberg, James Mercy, Anthony Zwi and Rafael Lozano in the World report on violence and health (2002:149) define sexual violence as: any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. Coercion can cover a whole spectrum of degrees of force. Apart from physical force, it may involve psychological intimidation, blackmail or other threats – for instance, the threat of physical harm, of being dismissed from a job or of not obtaining a job that is sought. It may also occur when the person aggressed is unable to give consent – for instance, while drunk, drugged, asleep or mentally incapable of understanding the situation. Sexual violence includes rape, defined as physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration – even if slight – of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body parts or an object. The attempt to do so is known as attempted rape. Rape of a person by two or more perpetrators is known as gang rape. Sexual violence can include other forms of assault involving a sexual organ, including coerced contact between the mouth and penis, vulva or anus (Krug et al. 2002:149).
“effective in exercising their roles as providers as defined by a male-dominated society.” Anger and resentment turn inward and often find an outlet in the closest target. Ramphele (2008:106) argues that rape has become a major epidemic concern which “blots out our post-apartheid track record as a society.” Ramphele (2008:106) believes that rape is the “ultimate weapon of domination by men over women” as well as “a weapon of subordination of men by men”. Ramphele (2008:106) states that:

rape is an expression of powerlessness and lack of self-respect. It is a perversion of the gift of sexuality that defines us as humans. In the human species sexuality is not just about procreation; it is also a celebration of mutual celebration of the body. Sexual intercourse is the ultimate act of making oneself vulnerable to another. It is an intimate act of trust. Rapists are like bullies who, because they feel inadequate and are unable to form meaningful relationships, prey on unsuspecting vulnerable victims instead. The bully in rapists is most evident when they rape children and frail people. Such acts are the ultimate expression of self-loathing that comes from the loss of that which defines us as human and enables us to draw boundaries between right and wrong. The same applies to incestuous sexual violence. A man who can rape his own daughter or a child entrusted to him has lost his humanity.

Ramphele (2008:108) believes that there is a “frightening level of tolerance of violence against women and children in our society.” In order to transform a society that is entrenched in patriarchy requires “a radical shift from traditional comfort zones” (Ramphele 2008:108). Core values and rights should manifest in all relationships. Any form of child abuse should be outlawed (Ramphele 2008:108) This applies to any form of violation of the bodies of children in the name of traditional customs such as genital mutilation (Ramphele 2008:110). Ramphele (2008:110) argues that “[c]hildren have a right to protection and respect that the state and society owes them.” There is, therefore, a “need for the redefinition of what it means to be a man so as to enable young men to meet the challenges of a social context of equality” (Ramphele 2008:110). Society as a whole needs to work together to develop and expand their consciousness, in order to overcome the trappings of sexism

According to Ramphele (2008:27), in order to “embrace a comprehensive framework for transformation” that reflects the values of freedom, the frame of reference needs to be shifted. Ramphele (2008:27) considers this to be a form of spiritual transcendence, which forces one to be true to his or her convictions, even at the cost of becoming “vulnerable by abandoning known ways of seeing the world and engaging with others to explore different approaches”. For me, art is one of these different approaches, as I consider it to be a powerful visual tool of communication that can question, challenge and confront the ills of society in the hopes for transformation. The aim of the next chapter is to unpack this concept further through a discussion regarding the power of the image and the role of art in addressing social justice.
CHAPTER 1:


Certain images have the power to capture our attention: “they grab us, hold us in check, and refuse to let go – until we are able to sort through a mixture of emotions” (Dubin 1992:4).

Steven Dubin (1992:3) argues that images have the ability to compress intensely complex ideologies and sentiments into a single frame. Some images have the capacity to seduce the viewer yet simultaneously repulse them, which makes for potent and powerful material. The image has the power to intermingle, interrogate and investigate complex concepts that fall within other social spheres, such as the socio-political and economics of a society, religion and identity (Dubin 1992:4).

Roland Barthes (1977:32) questions “How does meaning get into an image? Where does it end? And if it ends, what is there beyond?” Barthes argues that all images are polysemous. This means that the image has the capacity to hold a multitude of meanings and interpretations in which the viewer can choose to either engage with or simply ignore. Barthes further argues in his essay The death of the author (1977:142) that meaning does not always directly come from the author; meaning is actively created by the reader through a process of textual analysis. When applying this theory to understanding the plurality of image, the viewer can be regarded as active in the creative process of constructing meaning. The viewer’s independent interpretations of the image activates the power of the image. This is due to each person’s individual biography, their present state of mind at the time of viewing the image, their morals and values, their past experiences, and knowledge of art (Dubin 1992:6).

Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2002:10) consider the practice of looking as a means of making sense of the world we live in. Looking is an activity which embodies a greater understanding of direction and purpose. Looking is a choice. Through the process of looking, people are able to negotiate the concept of meaning as well as social relationships and interactions. Looking is a practice which involves learning to interpret and ultimately involves relationships of power. Single images have the power to serve a multitude of purposes in which they appear in different settings and can mean different things to different people. Throughout history, the image has been used as a device to represent, understand and convey various concepts about nature, societies and cultures (Sturken &
Cartwright 2007:13). The image is something which is affected by the power relations of the societies that people live in (Sturken & Cartwright 2002:72).

According to Susan Noyes Platt (2010:xiv) in *Art and politics now: Cultural activism in a time of crisis*, the artist who is convinced of and uses the power of their art to address contemporary political concerns has many paths and courses to choose from in terms of responding to social injustices. Platt (2010:xiv) identifies two types of political activists who use their work to comment on a particular political issue. Firstly, a political activist may be identified as someone who utilises “caricature, parody, pithy slogans, street theatre, impoverished costumes, floats, giant puppets, YouTube, My Space, etc.,” (Platt 2010:xiv) to reach a broader audience. Two examples that epitomise this type of political activism, which were particularly current in the news during the time of writing, can be seen in the controversy surrounding the satirical depiction of the prophet Mohammed, the first of which was published in 2005 by a Danish magazine, *Jyllands-Posten* (Dubin 2012:12), and the second more recently, in 2015, by a French satirical weekly magazine called *Charlie Hebdo*.

The response to both caricatures, which satirize the life of the prophet Mohammed, have been deadly and has sparked catastrophic repercussions and with regard to the *Jyllands-Posten* that still resonate a decade later. Both publications, which defiantly refused to censor its pictures, have stoked fury amongst some members of the Muslim community and some have reacted, and retaliated through protest, sanctions and violence (Dubin 2012:12-13). These strong social responses and reactions demonstrate the power an image has in creating a form of social awareness and consciousness, surrounding perceived injustices that are based on the inability to understand cultural differences that

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6 Depicting representations of the Prophet Mohammed is considered by some (but not all) to be one of the most serious forms of blasphemy in Islam (Dubin 2012:12).
7 The images that were depicted in the Danish magazine *Jyllands-Posten* vary – one cartoon depicts a queue of suicide bombers who are eagerly waiting outside the gates of heaven, only to be informed by the prophet Mohammed that the supply of virgins, that is to say their reward for the acts of service performed in their lifetimes, had been depleted (Dubin 2012:11). A second frame portrays an angry Prophet Mohammed, whose turban has transformed into a bomb with a lit fuse (Dubin 2012:12).
8 According to Max Read (2015:[sp]), *Charlie Hebdo* had been a target due to their intentionally controversial and provocative satirical cartoons and illustrations. *Charlie Hebdo* can be considered a politically conscious magazine whose stance is typically left and is vocally anti-authoritarian, anti-religious, and anti-institutional (Read 2015:[sp]).
9 On Thursday the 8th of January 2015, the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine tweeted a cartoon of ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi with the caption “Best wishes and good health”. Not long after the tweet was published, the headquarters of the magazine was stormed by three masked gun men who gunned down twelve people (ten of the magazine’s journalists and two police officers) (Stunned France mourns … 2015:[sp]).
10 The editors of the *Jyllands-Posten* magazine declared that the motivation behind the publication of the images was to openly confront the fact that a writer of a children’s book hit a creative dead-end when he sought drawings to accompany his text about the life of the Prophet Mohammed and ultimately self-censored his work out of fear of reprisal from Muslim extremists should he depict illustrations of the Prophet Mohammed (Dubin 2012:12).
resonate between a typical western and a typical eastern mind set. The cartoons that depict Mohammed are not simple illustrations. They include distinct political undertones that have the power to incite responses, some of which are violent. These images have the power to bring forth debates surrounding the perception of intolerance of difference within certain societies. Whether it is through an editorial illustration or whether it is through an artwork, images have the power to create strong reactions. Aspects of visual expression can generate tremendous international responses, some of which are violent because of an inability to understand or tolerate cultural and religious differences. In as much as these cartoonists and editors used satire to draw attention to, and provoke debate around, an issue which they felt was unjust or extremely relevant, some visual artists exploit similar visual tropes, as well as public platforms and mass media such as You Tube and Facebook, in order to communicate their ideas.

Zanele Muholi is an example of a visual artist who uses social platforms outside the gallery space, such as YouTube documentaries to draw attention to social injustices and social inequalities of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community. Brett Murray, Victor and Muholi are relevant examples of artists who use their work to generate and provoke social awareness. Particular artworks identify these artists as Platt’s (2010:xiv) “second type of political artist” because they have been professionally trained to filter their ideologies through aesthetic metaphor by means of traditional forms of art, including painting, sculpture, printmaking, drawing, performance, photography, film and video (Platt 2010:xiv).

I agree with Dubin (1992:2) in his explanation of the ability of art to encompass a multitude of different meanings. It can reflect the social realities or simply ignore them; it can assist in defining the social conventions or confront them. Art has the power to comfort or irritate, either uniting people or wrenching them apart. Whether art inspires admiration or provokes condescension, no one can deny that art has a certain amount of power (Dubin 1992:1). Many artists routinely push boundaries whether it is artistically, morally, sexually or “those of decorum, order and propriety” (Dubin 1992:2). The artist is therefore a significant, symbolic deviant of society, as they are able to call out the negative responses from the majority. Dubin (1992:2) explains that deviance indicates that there is an unbalance within a society, and deviance can therefore contribute to a society’s flexibility and growth. However, deviance can have a dual character, as deviance can result in society mobilising around challenges towards the status quo, which unwittingly may also lead to dogmatism. Deviance therefore can be both positive, and simultaneously transgressive, as it can embody seeds of change, but it also has the potential to produce social rigidity and stagnation (Dubin 1992:3). Artists who grapple with uncomfortable territory
seem to walk a complex and difficult path and at times may even cross a line, whereby they run the risk of ‘rocking the boat’ of what is considered acceptable. However, the concept of acceptability is much more complex and is rooted in notions of the power of the image versus the power of the viewer.

An example which epitomises the power of an image versus the power of the viewer can be seen in *The Spear* (2010) (see Figure 1.3) exhibited by Brett Murray in his exhibition *Hail to the Chief II* 2012. *The Spear* is based on a 1967 poster of Russian liberalist Vladimir Lenin, by Soviet artist Victor Ivanov. Murray mocks this iconic poster by replacing Lenin with the South African president Jacob Zuma with his genitalia exposed. *The Spear* forms part of a series of artworks in which Murray satirically comments on what he perceives to be the greed, corruption, abuse of power, lack of morals and bad governance of the ruling elite in South Africa.

Murray intentionally inverted the roles of South African liberation heroes into, as Dubin (2012:177) puts it, “tenderpreneurs (officials who use their power to secure lucrative government contracts)”. Murray deliberately transformed “idealistic freedom and resistance slogans” into cynical materialistic sayings. For example, in *The Struggle* (2010) (see Figure 1.1) Murray changes Solomon Mahlangu’s last words before his execution at the hands of the apartheid regime in 1979 from “Tell my people that I love them and that they must continue the struggle” (Dubin 2012:177) to a sarcastic and insolent statement. Both *The Struggle* and *Amandla* (2010) (see Figure 1.2) are examples of Murray’s attempt to humorously mock and goad the ruling elite in order to expose the greed and corruption (Dubin 2012:177).

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11The works on the show ranged from sculptures, etchings and silkscreens which combined motifs of the ANC logo and insignia, with iconic symbols from freedom struggle posters integrated with Soviet propaganda (Dubin 2012:177).
In a preview of the exhibition in the City Press, a journalist singled out The Spear. In response to the article, the following two weeks were filled with a cascade of angry reactions. According to Dubin (2012:177), The Spear had the power to transfix a country, which was plain to see when it triggered heated debates around “the enduring legacy of colonial and apartheid injustices in a democratic South Africa, the politics of reconciliation, the status of traditional cultural beliefs within the contemporary world, individuals’ rights and responsibilities, and censorship.”

The controversy that was sparked by The Spear is not an example of a battle fought over the content of the artwork, but rather reveals much deeper and complex concepts. Murray’s painting provided the president and his followers with a convenient incident for political opportunism, as The Spear became a useful scapegoat to deflect criticism. According to Dubin (2012:181), the reactions to The Spear generated feelings of blind fury which where churned into a poisonous brew of racism and xenophobia that caused the ANC to collectively unite against a common cause – something which had not occurred since coming to power in 1994. Dubin (2012:182) further explains that Murray reports feeling “emasculated”, “voiceless” and “profoundly humiliated” when The Spear was labelled as being racist, and claimed that his intention had been overlooked.

12 Some of the reactions included the African National Congress filing for an emergency court interdict to have the painting removed; an elder of the Shembe Church protested that Murray should be stoned to death; additional death threats were aimed at Murray, his family and staff from the Goodman Gallery; and the general sectary and Minister of Higher Education Blade Nzimande called for a boycott of the City Press newspaper. In Durban, protest marches where led by one of Zuma’s four wives and in Johannesburg the painting was defaced with paint on two separate incidents on the same day, which resulted in the painting being taken down (Dubin 2012:177).

13 Murray (Dubin 2012:180) explains that; “I painted it without a dick, I thought it was interesting enough, in the context of the other work looking at soviet memorabilia and the pseudo-Soviet kind of rabblerousing that happens here in the name of people, but actually it’s for the few, the chosen few. So it was in the context of that I thought it was interesting sans dick. And then I kind of, as is my nature, I just wanted to make something a little more provocative … I just decided to, rather than didn’t. It’s in the nature of making work, that’s what happens, you make these decisions and then you stick with it.”
Murray acknowledges that some people could have a different interpretation of the work. However, he disputes the claim that the painting is racist by arguing that the work could be interpreted on many different levels. Murray highlights the complexities surrounding the power of an image. The controversy surrounding *The Spear* epitomises how an artist is able to compress intensely complex ideologies into a single image. It also highlights the power relations within a South African society and reflects aspects of power of the viewer through the reading or interpretation of the work, which invokes debate regarding the acceptability or appropriateness of art works. This inevitably places artists’ works in a tenuous position, based on the argument that each artist has a right to his or her freedom of expression, in relation to another’s right to dignity.
Another example of a battle which was fought over the content of an artwork that revealed much deeper and more complex concepts is found in Terry Kurgan’s work entitled *I’m the King of the castle*¹⁴ (1997) (see Figure 1.4). The work comprises of 39 full-figure C photographic prints rendered in sepia, in which Kurgan’s six-year-old son is ‘play-acting’ various masculine roles, such as a cowboy, warrior and a ninja, and in some instances is depicted naked (Dubin 2012:145). According to Tracy Murinik (2004:194), the work addresses the misunderstandings surrounding the representation of children and challenges the notion of representation through the relationship between the mother and child. On the other hand, Dubin¹⁵ (2012:145) believes that the work brings “childhood sexuality and the eroticised bond between mother and child to the fore. These different readings of Kurgan’s work emphasise this complex relationship of power between the viewers reading of the work and the artist’s intention in the making.

Figure 1.4. Kurgan, T. *I’m the King of the Castle*. 1997.
C Prints

¹⁴The work was first exhibited in the 1997 *Purity and Danger* exhibition, curated by Penny Siopis (Dubin 2012:145). The artists in the show chose to use the “body as their site of inquiry, a space of secrecy and abuse that had been cloaked with the shame of repressive religious morality and politically conspiratorial silences” (Dubin 2012:145).

¹⁵According to Dubin (2012:145) some of the reactions to Kurgan’s photographs where “chilling”, “nauseating” and “pornography”.
The use of photography as a medium may also be interpreted as problematic, as photography borders on iconicity; which in turn narrows the distance between the subject and object, between subject and viewer and represents, (arguably) too closely, the actual child cavorting naked in front of the viewer. According to Susan Sontag (1977:4), “to photograph is to appropriate the thing you photographed” and therefore, in the case of Kurgan’s images, this implies that Kurgan is possibly objectifying her six-year-old son. Sontag (1977:14) further argues that there is something predatory about the act of taking a photograph, as the subject can be turned into objects that can symbolically be owned. This concept further problematises Kurgan’s images, as the viewer can presumably own Kurgan’s work without any consent of the six-year-old subject. Furthermore, the act of taking a photograph may be seen as a more passive action. However, despite this, Sontag (1977:12) associates photography with sexual voyeurism as it is a way of implicitly encouraging whatever is going on in the photograph to continue happening.

According to Sontag (1977:23):

... any Photograph has multiple meanings; indeed, to see something in the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination. The ultimate wisdom of the photographic image is to say “There is the surface. Now think –or rather feel, intuit –what is beyond it, what the reality must be if it looks this way.” Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy.” (Sontag 1977:23)

This concept, coupled with the subject of a six-year-old boy cavorting in different poses in front of a camera (seen in I’m the King of the Castle: Detail 1 (1997) (see Figure.1.4) and I’m the King of the Castle: Detail 2 (1997) (figure.1.5), opens the artwork up to different interpretations. The viewer is forced to consider the realities that may lie beyond the artwork. This combined with some of the formal aesthetics that can be found in the artwork, such as the white sheet that the boy poses on and against (reminiscent of a bed) with the soft lighting, may lead the viewer to analyse the images in a sinister and disturbing manner. This further emphasises Sontag’s (1977:10) concept of equating the photographer with being an active voyeur who is in a position of power and thus masters the situation that is being photographed.
Figure 1.4.1. Kurgan, T. *I'm the King of the Castle: Detail 1.* 1997. 
C Prints D 
42 x 29 cm 
Installation view, Purity and Danger, Gertrude Posel Gallery, Johannesburg 
(Kurgan [sa]:[sp])

Figure 1.4.2. Kurgan, T. *I'm the King of the Castle: Detail 2.* 1997. 
C Prints 
42 x 29 cm 
Installation view, Purity and Danger, Gertrude Posel Gallery, Johannesburg 
(Kurgan [sa]:[sp])
Terry Kurgan on her online website 16 entitled *Terry Kurgan makes projects about photography*, discusses her intention for *I'm the king of the castle*, as well as expands on her thoughts regarding the controversy by stating that:

... over 15 years later, people who meet me for the first time often say – “Oh, you’re that artist who takes pictures of her children without their clothes on!” My children have grown up and exited this ‘frame’, but looking back at this body of work now, they are still, to my mind, quite ‘achy’ images of a little boy performing himself for his mother, trying on different versions of masculinity and himself. The work disturbed some people and others loved, and were moved by it. In retrospect, I think the disturbance had quite deep social roots. In her book, *Family Frames*, Marianne Hirsch has a chapter titled *Maternal Exposures* (which title I later borrowed for a new work). She writes about how usually, children have desires to which mothers respond. And, in terms of the theory out there with regard to how children acquire subjectivity, culture values a maternity that casts an enabling and mirroring look at the child, supporting the child’s subject formation. The notion of mutual recognition, and mutual desire (his imaged by the photographs, and mine suggested by the fact that I took them) is very threatening and unsettling. Perhaps this is why some people found the work objectifying and even dangerous to the children. But it certainly stimulated lively and polarised responses that got me thinking about what family photographs mean and how they are so intensely linked to the retrieval of lost. That’s a thread that continues to run through my work still today, perhaps more so: the relationship between visual records and absence.

Delving into similar territory, another artist, Mark Hipper (1960–2010), was targeted in a similar manner less than a month later (Dubin 2012:146). Despite this, the significant difference between Kurgan and Hipper’s work was that Hipper’s representations were inspired by his imagination through paintings and drawings (Dubin 2012:146). Hipper presented an exhibition in which he was exploring notions of childhood sexuality, which ran concurrently with the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 1997 (Dubin 2012:146). The intended function of *Viscera* was for Hipper to display candid portrayals of children coming to terms with their own sexuality. According to Dubin (2012:147), Hipper considered the honest depiction and discussion around sex to be healthy; whereas some critics believed this to be harmful and dangerous. One such critic was the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Lindiwe Sisulu,17 who raised concerns with the Film and Publications Board over the exhibition, which had been “sensationalised in a newspaper account, although she had not then personally viewed it” (Dubin 2012:146). Other critics included the South African Council for Child and Family Welfare and the area’s National Council of Child Welfare. The complaints resulted in the Film and Publications Board sending two of their members to Grahamstown to view the exhibition themselves.

16 http://www.terrykurgan.com/work/
17 “Deputy Minister Sisulu acknowledged that hers was a “conservative African background and [she] was strongly against pornography”. Her outrage put her in the same camp as Deputy Speaker Kgosietsile; both interpreted the work of young white artists as “being offensive and dangerous to people whom they believed where the most vulnerable, namely woman and children” (Dubin 2012:147).
Even though some of the images displayed a boy masturbating and close-ups of children's genitalia, the Board did not deem the exhibition as pornographic or sexually stimulating for viewers (Dubin 2012:146). They did, however, restrict the viewing of the exhibition to children of over 12 years old and ordered that a warning sign be posted in the front so that viewers would know what to expect when observing the exhibition. What is significant in Hipper’s case is that he did not make use of live models, unlike Kurgan, whose photographs depict her son. What appears to be often overlooked is the intention of the artist, which, according to Dubin (2012:147), was that Hipper never intended the work to be sorely about children. The work was also about Hipper and his wife’s relationship in which every person carries a child within them, and at the time Hipper’s paintings revolved around the concept of fragility and experiencing vulnerability.

These controversial issues surrounding Murray's, Hipper's and Kurgan's works spark debates, which reveal ideas that are more objectionable than the artworks themselves. They evoke the uncomfortable realities of socially unacceptable behaviour that leaves an impression on the viewer. Murray's works are primarily directed at the South African audience. However, they embody broader questions pertaining to the inherent flaws of humanity as a collective. These controversies serve to highlight the fact that art is not limited to a prescribed set of values, and in fact has the ability to challenge the mindset of individuals who view the work. The response to these artists' work may in some cases be negative, but the function and purpose cannot be denied, as a form of awareness is created through analysing how and why such responses occur in society. All three artworks reveal how the power of an image is activated by the act of viewing of the image.

**The role of art and the artist in addressing social justice**

In South Africa there are many ways in which artists have responded to social injustices. The case of Anene Booysen's violent murder was not the only incident to incite a public response. Another similar
The case that caused a public uproar was the 2002 rape of nine-month Baby Tshepang. This attack, which brought about condemnation throughout the country, compelled the judge to describe the incident as “the most gruesome violation of human rights he [had] ever ruled on” (Seemungal:sa). Although the rapist, David Potse, received a sentence of life imprisonment, there was a public outcry for the reinstatement of the death penalty (which was abolished in 1994) (Seemungal:sa). Diane Victor (a visual artist) and Lara Foot-Newton (a playwright and actor) are two artistically prominent South Africans, who have responded to notions of social justice concerning the brutal rape of Baby Tshepang through their work. Victor’s etching Made to Measure (2003), which forms a part of her Disasters of Peace series, references numerous victims of child sexual abuse (Dubin 2011:sp), with particular reference to the rape of Baby Tshepang (Dubin 2011:sp). Foot-Newton’s inspiration for her one-act play, entitled Tshepang, Based on Twenty Thousand True Stories, was grounded upon her association with the age of the rape victim and her daughter, who was roughly the same age as Tshepang at the time of the horrific incident.

The story of the rape of such a young child “… brought to light many further acts of abuse, rape and sodomy” in post-apartheid South Africa (Uthembalethu-Tshepang 2011:sa). Both Victor and Foot-Newton are examples of artists using visual expression as a poignant language to critique the social pandemic of violence, and in this case violence against children. Both artist’s works embodies Lucy Lippard’s (1994:v) description of art which is something which “opens eyes, exposes causes as well as symptoms, connects to larger issues in endless different ways, sliding into life experiences from life experiences”. It is the foundation that bridges the gap between the artists and audiences in order to “build social change, speak for social justice, or simply introduce other voices, other visions” (Lippard 1994:v).

Political art: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

As indicated in the introduction, the focus of this study considers two modes of artistic responses to violence; political and activist art as exemplified primarily by Victor and Muholi. However, the context of

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19 The child’s grandmother did not want her real name to be published in order to protect the child’s identity, so she gave her the nickname Tshepang which means “have hope” (Seemungal:sa). Tshepang was raped in an informal settlement in Louisville, Northern Cape, South Africa. Her grandmother found her crying uncontrollably in her blood-soaked bed. Statements by Dr Heniz Rhode of the Red Cross Children’s Hospital in Cape Town reinforced this tragic event as he expressed his horror at the brutal manner in which her body had been torn apart. He continued by stating that no normal anatomy was present and that she, in all likelihood, would have lost consciousness during the rape due to the severity of the pain her body was forced to endure (Seemungal:sa).
the political use of art to expose hidden truths can be understood in considering works by artists in response to some of the issues that emerged from the Truth and Reconciliation commission.

According to Platt (2010:xiv), the artists whose work is committed to dealing with contemporary political issues use the power of art to expose what is kept invisible. An example of three South African artists’ work, which can be considered as political, is Sue Williamson’s work namely *Joyce Mtikulu-toas h-Col. Nic van Rensburg*; *Truth game Series* (1998) (see Figure 1.5), Judy Mason’s work, *The Man Who Sang and the Women Who Kept Silent* (1996) (see Figure 1.6.1 – 1.6.3) and Berni Searle’s *Darker Shade of Light; Discoloured series* (1999) (see Figure.1.7.1 – 1.7.2). Through these artworks, these artists are responding to the social and ethical injustices committed against women during the apartheid era, which were made known through the testimonies that were given before the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC)20. Despite the fact that none of these above-mentioned artists can be simply categorised as political artists, the examples which I have selected embody aspects of political commentary that is significant to the political event of the TRC.

Williamson is an example of an artist whose visual representations, *Truth Games* (1998) (see Figure 1.5), deal directly with the testimonies given at the TRC, and specifically with the death of Joyce Mtikhulu’s son, Siphiwo Mtikhulu. While Williamson’s artwork pays tribute to the TRC’s invaluable function, it also critiques the Commission’s concept of “victimhood” (Miller 2005:42), which is defined by the Commission as comprising the circumstances surrounding an individual who physically experienced politically motivated violence under the apartheid regime (Miller 2005:42). The artwork highlights how violence committed upon one’s child/family member affects those around the victim, for example, in the many acts of sexually orientated atrocities inflicted on innocent victims.

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20 Since the mid-seventeenth century, the domination of white colonial rule in South Africa was characterised by an oppressive racist regime, which subjugated the black population in all matters of their daily existence. From 1948 until 1994, the apartheid system, devised by the Nationalist Party (NP) government, promoted an ideology of racial and ethnic separatism (Peffer 2009:xvi). In 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) successfully contested South Africa’s first democratic elections, which saw political power transferred to the black majority for the first time since the early days of colonialism in the Cape. However, the country’s transition from apartheid to a constitutional democracy was uneasy, especially in terms of families who needed to come to terms with the loss and suffering inflicted through atrocities endured during apartheid. According to Kim Miller (2005:40), in order to facilitate a programme of healing across the nation, the new democratic government instituted the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which investigated “politically motivated forms of violence and human rights violations committed during apartheid” (Miller 2005:40). One of the Commission’s primary goals was for survivors of atrocities to utilise the TRC as a sympathetic platform to gain a form of understanding and acceptance surrounding crimes and violence experienced during apartheid. It was also considered a safe space whereby a voice was given to individual victims who had previously been oppressed. Through this platform, the commission aimed to acquire and construct a more comprehensive portrayal of South Africa’s distorted past (Miller 2005:40). Visual representations, along with oral testimonies, therefore played a central role in the efforts of the TRC in articulating people’s experiences of violence and trauma.
In the TRC’s hearings, sexual violence was represented as a defining experience of gross human rights violations towards women\textsuperscript{21}. Despite sexual violations not being restricted to one sex, women were encouraged to testify, whereas men seemed to avoid testifying about violations that had been committed against women. Sexual violation of women and children was prevalent in South Africa, and according to Finoa Ross (cited by Miller 2005:43) remains an “institutionalised form of violence”. Ross (cited by Miller 2005:43) acknowledges the importance of women’s testimonies of their experiences of

\textsuperscript{21} One of the concerns of the commissioners was that the Commission would not obtain the whole story of the gross violations of human rights that were experienced (Ross 2003:16). This concern grew as two distinctive patterns began to emerge earlier on in the public hearings. The first concern was that although there were approximately equal amounts of men and women who testified, for the most part, women described the suffering and violations of the men in their lives, instead of testifying about the violence that was inflicted against them, as opposed to the men who affirmed their own experiences. The second concern was that women who actively participated in opposing the apartheid regime seldom testified (Ross 2003:17). Seventy-nine per cent of women gave statements regarding violations committed to men, whereas only eight per cent of men’s testimonies concerned violations committed against women (Ross 2003:17). As a result of this pattern, the Commission, as well as the media, referred to woman as a secondary witness (Ross 2003:17).
sexual violence. However, she believes that the fact that men were not called to testify reveals certain
gender imbalances in the way that sexual violence has been viewed.

Mason’s *The Man Who Sang and the Women Who Kept Silent* (1995) (see Figure.1.6.1 - 1.6.3) is one
of the few artworks that honours the accounts of the men and women who came forward during the
TRC. Her work deals with the courage and deaths of Phila Ndwandwe and Harald Sefola, whose
struggle had been described in TRC hearings by the perpetrators (Law-Viljoen & Nel 2008:123).
Ndwandwe was shot by police after being kept naked for weeks in an attempt to force her to inform on
her comrades. In order to preserve her dignity, Ndwandwe crafted a makeshift pair of panties out of a
blue plastic bag. This garment was later found still wrapped around her pelvis when her body was
exhumed. In response to Ndwandwe’s story, Mason collected discarded blue plastic bags, which she
then fashioned into a blue dress (Law-Viljoen & Nel 2008:123). A letter addressed to Ndwandwe is
painted on the skirt of the dress. The letter reads as follows:

Sister, a plastic bag may not be the whole armour of God, but you were wrestling with flesh
and blood, and against powers, against the rulers of darkness, against spiritual
wickedness in sordid places. Your weapons were your silence and a piece of rubbish.
Finding that bag and wearing it until you were disinterred is such a frugal,
commonsensical, house wifely thing to do, an ordinary act ... At some level you shamed
your captors, and they did not compound their abuse of you by stripping you a second
time. Yet they killed you. We only know your story because a sniggering man remembered
how brave you were. Memorials to your courage are everywhere; they blow about in the
streets and drift on the tide and cling to thorn bushes. The dress is made from some of
Figure 1.6.1 Mason, J. *The Man Who Sang and the Women Who Kept Silent* 1. 1995.
Oil on Board.
166cm x 122cm
Constitutional Court collection
(Law-Viljoen & Nel 2008:124)

Figure 1.6.2. Mason, J. *The Man Who Sang and the Women Who Kept Silent* 2. 1995.
Mixed media
221cm x 70cm x 45cm
Mason’s work is relevant to this study, as her work commemorates and responds to the violence and abuse that women experienced during the apartheid regime. Mason’s work is particularly poignant as it has become a symbol of social injustice through the context of being displayed in the constitutional court. It represents violence without literally depicting victimization. *The Man Who Sang and the Women Who Kept Silent* (1995) not only honours the strength and bravery of Ndawandwe, but also validates the reality of the violence that was committed against women in such an oppressive period. Mason and Williamson’s work are similar in nature in that each artwork responds to the experience of trauma and violence during apartheid. However, Mason’s focus is particular to the abuse experienced by women and giving a sense of dignity and humanity back to them, unlike Williamson’s work, which highlights the traumatic effect that violence may have on the family members of the victim.

Another artist whose work comments on violence committed on women during the TRC is Berni Searle. In her artworks, Searle focuses on documenting the narratives of trauma and violence using digital photography. Searle’s *A Darker Shade of Light* (1999) (see Figure 1.7.1 - 1.7.2) uses a different artistic
response to the violence committed against women and children during the apartheid regime, as the work does not focus on one specific traumatic event or an individual’s story, like Mason’s, but rather documents women’s experiences of physical violence in general. Searle uses and manipulates her own body as her subject in order to challenge the “historical invisibility and silencing of South African women” (Miller 2005:48), not only during apartheid and TRC hearings, but also up until the present day.

The formal aesthetics of Searle’s representations have an undeniable beauty which has the capacity to draw the viewer in, and yet simultaneously depicts an unpalatable image of violence. According to Susan Sontag (1977:20), acknowledging a photograph that depicts suffering does not necessarily strengthen the conscience or a person’s ability to be compassionate. It can also distort a person’s perspective. Once the viewer has seen such images, they tend to want to see more images like them, which have the tendency to transfix and anaesthetise. I believe that it is this concept, coupled with the aesthetic qualities of Searle’s work, which makes her work so powerful in telling the stories of gender-based violence committed during the TRC.

The artwork not only highlights the gender bias displayed during the course of the TRC hearings, but also raises the issue of violence against women within a post-apartheid context. The series illustrates how the South African female body has been a site of violence in the past and continues to be a place where varied forms of violence occur, despite the end of apartheid (Miller 2005:49). According to Kim Miller (2005:49), South Africa’s new constitution is considered to be the most progressive in the world in terms of gender equality and awareness. Despite this, statistics have proven that conditions for women have in fact worsened, with statistics regarding physical and sexual violence being considered the highest in the world (Sigsworth 2009:12). Searle creates intimate images of violence in order to question the truth, which is not immediately visible or obvious to the naked eye. The use of photography as a medium suggests a form of documentation, in which Searle seems to present visual evidence of violence that has been committed and may still be continuing. The distorted format as well as the indication of damage within the printed image extends this perception of violence. The reference to specific body parts in her work can also be associated with privacy and intimacies, as these body parts tend to be hidden from public view (Miller 2005:49). Searle therefore presents the female body in pain in order to address historical, as well as contemporary, silences about violence against women (Miller 2005:50).
Figure 1.7.1 Searle, B. *Darker Shade of Light; Discoloured series (detail, the soles of the feet)*, 1999. Installation with Polaroid transfers digitally reproduced on backlit paper and light boxes. Dimensions varied. (Miller 2005:46)
Activist art

The second mode of artistic responses to violence considered in this study is activist art; in which artists actively use their art as a tool to provoke some kind of social change. According to Nina Felshin (1995:10), activist art is more about process than being object- or product-orientated, and is commonly found in public spheres, as opposed to the conventional art world venues. As a practice, it generally can be associated with temporal interventions such as “performance or performance based activities, media events, exhibitions, and instillations”. Activist art usually utilises media, such as newspaper adverts, billboards, posters, subway and bus advertising, with the intention to create a meaning which subverts the usual intentions of commercial media. Activist cultural practices are commonly collaborative, as many artists have noted that working in this manner takes the emphasis off the individual personalities, which may hinder the impact of the work (Felshin 1995:11). When activist artists extend their collaborative practices towards an audience or community, the process is
considered public participation. Such participation is a vital catalyst of change as it is a strategy which has the potential to engage with both the individual and the community. Participation is often considered an act of “self-expression or self-representation by the entire community” (Felshin 1995:12). Through such creative expression, the individual is empowered and is able to obtain a form of visibility, a voice and awareness that they are part of a bigger picture. The personal therefore becomes political, and change becomes possible. An example of an artist whose work epitomises this concept is Muholi, whose work will be analysed further in Chapter two.

Barbara Beyerbach and Tania Ramalho (2011:203) believe that activist art has the potential to “raise questions, inform and mobilise action on social justice issues ... [and] the power to unite diversity around a central vision for humanity” (Beyerbach & Ramalho 2011:206). Art is a discipline that has a unique outlook in representing, understanding and critiquing the world that we live in. It has the power to influence uninformed citizens, who are then given the opportunity to shape and interrogate new identities, develop and improve skills, and act in a manner which cultivates change within their communities (Beyerbach & Ramalho 2011:207). Beyerbach and Ramalho (2011:209) describe activist art as an “inventive, imaginative, soulful, and humanizing process that raises consciousness and connects us across differences”.

Lucy Lippard (1995:247), author of The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays, considers the role of art within a feminist paradigm, in which art functions as an “educating, healing, and empowering process”. Lippard (1994:v) describes visual art as something which is “political” because it has the power to open eyes, “exposes causes as well as symptoms”, and engages with larger issues in a multitude of different ways that embody life experiences. Art is therefore a bridge which connects the artist to an audience through which social change is built and a conversation around issues pertaining to social justice is introduced (Lippard 1994: v). An example can be seen in the essay, Rape: Show and Tell, found in The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays, Lippard (1995:245), which analyses different artworks that form part of a travelling exhibition, simply called “Rape”, which was started by Stephanie Blackwood at Ohio State University. In each city, the organisers would ensure that the show was centred on public consciousness awareness. The show was comprised of a variety of different styles, from a range of different artists, some of whom where rape survivors that embraced complex concepts that ranged from violence, fear, and anger to that of guilt, aggression and a unthinkable sickening brutality. Common public reactions to such works include questions and statements like “But you wouldn’t want to hang this in your house!” “Art is supposed to be beautiful. Why show violence and ugliness?” Lippard (1995:245) considers these questions to be valid and argues that such images
belong to public art. Such images do not necessarily belong only in people’s living rooms but also have a space in people’s museums, universities and women centres. These artworks are considered public art because they embody the true “silent screams” of the vulnerable members of society. Due to the epidemic levels of rape, such hard-hitting images need to be made public. I agree with Lippard(1995:247) that combining representations of analysis rage, compassion, and tenderness, such art in all its outrageous intimacy depicts not images of terror but “images of strength in the face of terror” (Lippard 1995:247).

Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art is another example of how art can be used as a form of art as activism. The exhibition is a multi-media, traveling contemporary art exhibition that incorporates artworks by 30 international artists, with the purpose of promoting awareness about the source of violence against women. In 2013 the exhibition travelled to the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG). The exhibition highlights the fact that gender-based violence is a universal problem. The aim of the exhibition is to generate a dialogue surrounding the universality of violence against women, using art as a form of storytelling in order to generate understanding, empathy and empowerment for women who have been affected by violence. The exhibition also questions whether art can generate social change in order to gain a new understanding surrounding an old problem of violence against women (Rosenberg 2014:[sp]).

According to the curator of the exhibition, Randy Jayne Rosenberg (Rosenberg 2014:[sp]), the narratives and visions that are reflected in the artworks encourage the viewer to re-evaluate their perceptions about gender-based violence (see Figure.1.8.1 and Figure.1.8.2). She believes that, through art, one is able to understand the core essence of the problem of violence against woman through an international perspective. The main focus of the exhibition is centred on the social structures that allow for violence against women to be perpetuated. The exhibition is meant to engage with the viewer in a positive manner, where a sense of empathy for the worldwide stories of women is felt (Rosenberg 2014:[sp]). The exhibition is divided into different sections, namely Violence and the individual, Violence and the Family, Violence and the Community, Violence and Culture, and Violence and Politics. These divisions of the show demonstrate the different spheres in which violence can manifest itself, demonstrating the complexities and magnitude of the responses to the epidemic issue of violence.
Figure 18.1. Gabriela Morawetz, Poland J’aïrevque... (I have dreamed that...), from The Sleeping Self series. 2008-2009 Pigmented ink jet photos on Hannemuler paper. Dimensions Unknown (Zoratti 2014: [sp])

Figure 18.2. Patricia Evans, USA Hidden in the radiant green, a man waits. In hate-blinded hands, darkness waits. 1999 Silver gelatin prints (Dimensions unknown) (Jason 2013: [sp])
In concluding this chapter, I have discussed the power that resides within an image in order to question, confront and respond to socio-political issues. I have established not only the power of the image, but have also discussed the power that resides within the viewer through an analysis of the controversy surrounding the work of Murray, Kurgan and Hipper. I have expanded on the political and activist mode in discussing the role of art and the artist in addressing social justice. Within the framework of the artistic mode of political art, I have discussed specific work by Williamson, Mason and Searle which embody aspects of political commentary that is significant to the political event of the TRC. I have elaborated on the definition of activist art and have provided examples which embody these characteristics. This will be mediated by a discussion surrounding specific works by Victor and Muholi in the next chapter, where I explore specific artworks that incite debates, arouse responses and evoke possibilities of social change.
CHAPTER 2:

NO COUNTRY FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

In referring to the basic instincts of activists, Ramphele notes the importance of questioning, challenging conventional wisdom and risk-taking. Ramphele (2008:135) argues that:

"It is these activist instincts which can be a valuable asset in building a more innovative and dynamic citizenship. Questioning is vital to keep those in authority on their toes. Challenging authority and conventional wisdom is important. Leaders perform better if they anticipate having to justify their policies and actions to those whom they represent. Passivity invites arrogance from leadership (Ramphele 2008:135)."

The main aim of this chapter is to identify and discuss how social awareness and consciousness may be achieved through an analysis of particular artworks by Diane Victor and Zanele Muholi. My objective for this chapter is to examine the power of an image in relation to particular works of Victor and Muholi which draw attention to social injustices, and to further unpack particular works that explore themes and metaphors of violence – particularly violence against women and children. I focus the discussion around the tripartite relationship between the intention of the artist – which will be understood through the use of the artists’ own words – and the communicative power of artworks, as well as through specific published accounts of strong public reaction towards particular works from both artists, in order to identify how social awareness and consciousness is achieved.

Diane Victor

Victor is a contemporary South African artist who uses etching as a “vehicle for critical social commentary” and does not sugar-coat her discontent (Green 2006:sp). Victor’s hard-hitting, and direct approach to art embodies themes of social justice but her work resists simple categorization. I have selected specific works that I regard as political because they embody characteristics which seeks to agitate and disrupt society’s complacent attitudes to selected social issues. I therefore discuss selected work within the context of political art that cross boundaries and provide critical responses to acts of violence. This approach is particularly evident in the etchings that form part of her Disasters of Peace series.
According to Elizabeth Rankin (2008:89) the motivation behind Victor’s *Disasters of Peace* series was her sense of revulsion at not only the social injustices of the inconsistent application of the law and the wrongs that human beings suffer on a day-to-day basis, but also at how little attention was paid to even horrific violations of human rights. The series was initiated with *Why Defy* (2003) (see Figure 2.1.1) where Victor reacted to a report of the horrendous abuse of a woman who was not only gang raped over a three day period, but had her face burnt and disfigured with an iron. The brand name of the iron provided Victor with an ironic title.

Figure 2.1.1 Victor, D. *Disasters of Peace series: Why Defy*. 2003.
Etching, aquatint, and drypoint
28 x 32 cm
Edition of 25
(Rankin 2008: 45)

22 According to Rankin (2011:85), Victor’s *Disasters of Peace* pays homage to Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes’s series of etchings entitled *The Disasters of War* which was a response to the devastating side of the Spanish war of independence. However, Victor’s *The Disasters of Peace* addresses the violence of peace in post-apartheid South Africa.
Victor’s artistic response to the violence unmasks the abuse in a potent manner, leaving a viewer feeling uncomfortable and uneasy about the content. Victor’s response to the subject of violence against women and children is a forceful critique and perhaps the display of sexual abuse of children may explain why Made to Measure (2003) (see Figure 2.1.2) and In Sheep’s clothing (2003) (see Figure 2.1.3) sparked controversial debates within the University of Pretoria’s Faculty of Law and in the public sphere regarding the function and purpose of art in society, which will be unpacked further on within the chapter.

Both prints Made to Measure and In Sheep’s clothing reference the numerous victims of child sexual abuse, although Made to Measure particularly references the rape of Baby Tshepang (Dubin 2011:sp). Steven Dubin (2011:sp) describes Made to Measure as depicting “a violation that […] defies comprehension […] embodied in a graphic and unforgettable visualization” as Victor juxtaposed a naturalistic depiction of a crying infant with an x-ray view of the child, and within the x-ray view an engorged and erect penis can be seen penetrating her vagina through to her chest. In Sheep’s Clothing depicts a lamb-child sitting passively on the end of a bed with her legs spread in order to sexually accommodate a formidable man whose face is buried within in her crotch. Victor has also rendered a wolf in a stylised cartoon manner, jumping across the bed, which appears to suggest the wolf from Little Red Riding Hood and which may symbolise the threat and danger that is inflicted by the predator. Both artworks respond to the brutal horrors of violence against children in a direct and forceful manner that is self-consciously provocative, demanding an emotive response from any viewer. I argue, therefore, that both artworks index Victor’s art for social justice as a personal political act. Victor (2015) therefore does not consider Made to Measure (2003) and In Sheep’s Clothing to be overtly political in nature. Victor’s (2015) intention for the Disasters of Peace series was to force people to look at and engage with content that they would rather not want to face. Victor (2015) elaborates on her intention by stating that:

I make images on a very selfish level. I make images to purge them from myself. I have done it since I was a child. It’s almost a kind of art therapy. I draw things out of myself. If something upsets me, the second I have drawn it doesn’t make it any better for the person who suffered it, but it is my way of dealing with things. I draw them out, I make them and I try and understand the process of what I am looking at through that. It is something which I have done my whole life. The intention of those images [Made to Measure and In Sheep’s Clothing] was to face these things, look at them: it happens in many households in every society. The strongest front page Star newspaper that I ever saw was pretty close to the time that I made Made to Measure, which was after the rape of baby Tshepang. The front page of the Star newspaper consisted of a blank space because they couldn’t show the image of the girl because it would be considered as too problematic for society. The strength of them saying that an image could have the power to traumatisre our society so much more than them saying the child was nine months old, and she is going in for reconstruction surgery because she was half torn apart. People can deal with the text but
they couldn’t show the photo and I remember thinking, “yes that’s it.” It’s that primitive thing. The second you see it, it penetrates through all your blocks and gets stuck in your psyche and doesn’t go away. Reading, you can subvert it, work around it, and intellectualise it until it becomes a fact, an image goes through that. It’s a very primitive thing. You see and it becomes part of you.

Figure 2.1.2. Victor, D. Disasters of Peace series: Made to Measure. 2003. Etching, aquatint, and drypoint. 28 x 32 cm Edition of 25. (Rankin 2008: 46)
These images depict profoundly distressing behaviour which provokes feelings of anger and emotional pain, as they border on literal representations of child molestation and rape. They are intensely invasive images, reference actual events, and reflect the perceived breakdown of civil society. Within *In Sheep’s Clothing*, the viewer is forced to acknowledge the overweight man kneeling in front of a small

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23 Within the period from 2003 to 2005, the University of Pretoria designed a new building for the Faculty of Law (Heyns 2005:3). The construction of the building was based on the Dean of Law’s conceptual focus which was meant to mirror the characteristics of South Africa’s Constitution. These characteristics embody values of equality, human dignity, transparency, democracy, diversity and the achievement of each person’s potential (Heyns 2005:4). The Dean of the faculty was largely responsible for choosing the art works that would be displayed within the building (Heyns 2005:4). A number of Diane Victor’s *Disasters of Peace* etchings, including *Made to Measure* and *In Sheep’s Clothing* were selected for the Centre’s ground floor. Responses to their subject matter by the academics within the faculty were mixed, as some felt the works demonstrated the need for the protection of human rights, while others felt uncomfortable and offended by them. Consequently, both artworks were removed from display and were relocated elsewhere within the Faculty (Heyns 2005:4-5). This controversial act of censorship incited an outcry amongst the university and art communities as many felt that, in denying the public the right to view the content of the images, this also meant denying them the means to respond to the atrocities of daily life, thus censoring freedom of expression (Zitzke 2010:24).
child with his head between her legs. Despite this literal depiction, the inversion of the child’s head into a sheep’s head references motifs of biblical innocence and sacrifice, as well as helplessness. The subtle details of the girl’s room, coupled with the inscribed nursery rhyme ‘Daddy’s Girl’, suggests notions of an ‘incestuously loved’ daughter which only amplifies the horror of the act. Made to Measure also does not literally depict the actual rape and molestation of a baby, but instead through the method of using a phallus filling an X-ray interior of the body of an infant, forces the viewer to come to terms with the sickening reality of what the act implies.

The viewer is forced to acknowledge these realities and this demonstrates the power of Victor’s images. The images have the power to make the viewer see cruelty. They bring home the reality of the suffering of the helpless members of society with a forcefulness and irrefutability. The images depict the violation of the body which exposes the vulnerability of the human form. The directness of the images robs the viewer of an alibi of ignorance, and forces the viewer to confront what human beings are capable of doing to one another. This gives the image its power.

Victor (2015) affirms that there is power in an image, although whether it has the power to change or affect society is debatable. Victor (2015) believes that image-making in the art world has become too isolated and the visual image loses its power because of the placement of the image in conventional exhibition spaces. As a result of this, Victor (2015) does not believe that art has the capacity to create meaningful transformation. By placing an image that deals with social justice concerns in a pristine white cube gallery space, the artist is possibly ‘preaching to the converted’, as the gallery-going public is also conventionally a culturally, politically and socially engaged and critical audience. In order to achieve more public outrage and social transformation, the artist must find a way of taking the artwork out of such spaces and penetrate public spaces. In order for images to have a truly effective impact, they have to be seen by society. Images therefore need to infiltrate social media and materialise on public television, and personal computer and cell phone screens, as well as public spaces such as billboards and advertising hotspots. Images need to communicate with a wider audience other than the typical gallery-going audience because, according to Victor (2015), striving for a dramatic response out of a gallery-going audience is almost impossible as they are also “jaded”, coming to a show with certain aesthetic expectations. The Disasters of Peace series is an example of Victor’s work which has been exhibited in both commercial gallery spaces and public spaces. According to Victor (2015), the Disasters of Peace series goes to collections which are often corporate, and the reaction of absolute disgust from certain individuals within the University of Pretoria’s Law Department, who were not gallery-goers, was revealing. Victor (2015) was faced with accusations such as, “How dare you bring
this revolting imagery into our pristine sanctum of legal justice?” and “How dare you display these images that we are going to have to deal with in the real world?” Such strong reactions from non-gallery goers are important to this discussion as these responses indicate and reinforce the point that an image has power. It demonstrates that the power of the image is also activated by the space in which it is displayed.

In 2011, for the Klein Karoo Nationale Kunstfees (KKNK) exhibition held in Oudtshoorn, Victor exhibited her work in a butchery, a car dealership and at an undertakers.24 Victor noted the reaction was more worthwhile when she displayed her work outside of a gallery space, as it was forcing the viewer out of their comfort zone and utilizing space as a tool to force the viewer to engage critically with the work. Victor (2015) was interacting with people who were coming into town to do their shopping, “and all of a sudden they were confronted with images that they could question and respond to as opposed to a select audience that was going to make the effort to drive down to Oudtshoorn and walk into a gallery”. By exhibiting the work in public spaces, Victor was allowing her work the opportunity to visually communicate with a broader audience and in doing so, utilising space in such a way that it did not compromise the power of the image. As indicated earlier, Felshin (1995:11) described activist art as a process which involves public participation, potentially engaging both the individual and the community. Felshin (1995:11) further states that such participation is a vital catalyst of change. I would argue that in these instances, Victor moves beyond the political into an activist mode through her artwork.

According to Victor (2015), the visual image has power and strength. Society in general seems to have perfected blocking anything hard-hitting. It is easier to block written text, as opposed to the image. The primal nature of a drawing, a photograph or any visual image tends to subvert society’s blocking systems and as a result, has the capacity to hit home. It is the “primitive strength of an image” that Victor (2015) still believes in. It is communicating, using the visual that has the ability to force human beings to see one another and hopefully strive for social change. In striving to create meaningful

24 Victor (2015) further clarifies that:
In the undertakers I did ash drawings. In the undertakers they had a display room for coffins where you can go pick your coffin like you would pick a car. It’s a space which dramatically exploits people. I just did a couple of very light ash drawings and they really freaked people out. It’s a small town which was on the cultural route, so people who came down to see artwork or go see plays had to go into an undertaker to see the artwork. It was forcing a viewer to go to an undertaker when you are not in a state of bereavement and just prepared to pay a lot of money. Essentially you were seeing the artwork and then you were seeing coffins lined up the same way people sell cars in a state in which you could actually respond to that because you weren’t emotionally traumatised by the death of a loved one and those are the people I was interested in talking to more so than the people who come into actually buy a coffin.
transformation or awareness, Victor (2015) argues that one has to be more subtle in communicating the desired visual message. In order to get the viewer looking at the image and thinking about the issues related to the concept, the visual artist has to be sensitive to the social climate of any given society. Victor suggests that in South Africa, people are so bombarded with images of horror and violence that they block them out. Victor (2015) considers this as a survival strategy. The average person is aware of the violence and horror that occurs within South African society, yet Victor (2015) finds that they do not interrogate it nor think it emotively through, because doing so would be too much to handle. Victor (2015) believes that South African society ironically acts out violence, but does not want to be reminded that it happens. Victor (2015) has, therefore, found that she has been more successful as a visual artist by producing images that are subtle in nature, yet still hold true to their original concept, in order to engage a critical and thinking public.

According to Victor (2015):

It was easier in the eighties and nineties to get hard hitting images into galleries because in the 80s and 90s there wasn’t much work selling. You didn’t make works that you wanted to sell. The art industry has changed a lot in the last 30 years. It’s now about making money. It’s not about making a difference. Before there was no money to be made because you were desperately believing that an image would go out and attack a system. It was much easier because there was a system which had a target painted on it that you could respond to - but now it’s all about making money. I learnt that when you put up very strong images on a wall and you watch people, it’s no good talking to people because very few people are honest when they comment on your work unless you really anger them. Most people say, “Oh, that’s interesting,” and they back out. Watch people’s body language [while they look] at hard-hitting images they give it a five meter [distance], they look at it …breathe in, gasping, and will not come any closer… “Sies!” and immediately as a visual communicator, which is what I am, I am failing. You are not actually managing to communicate; you are getting that lockdown too soon, which is ironic considering how sensitised to violence we as a society are, through the visual and through text.

Victor (2015) therefore focuses her attention on producing images that are subtle in nature, in which she works on a technical level in order to ‘seduce the viewer’. Her images play a game of attraction and repulsion: the technical skill draws the viewer in and only after looking does the viewer realise what they are looking at. It is therefore in that space that the image can be used for social awareness and consciousness, as the viewer is seduced into looking at an image and as a result given the space to contemplate, question and respond.
Zanele Muholi

Zanele Muholi is a contemporary South African artist who defines herself as visual activist first, and an artist second (Williamson 2009:130). In her book entitled *Photography as activism; images for social change*, Michelle Bogre (2012:xii) considers activist photography as “something which is governed by intent and process – a passionate voice driven by a moral vision, filtered through a perception of how the photographer perceives the world”. Muholi uses both her voice and her photography to challenge the social injustices of homophobia and radicalised patriarchies in South Africa. Her work actively engages with the political inequalities associated with gender-based violence, something which is of particular importance to her in a society where black lesbian women often find themselves victims of hate crimes, rape and family disownment. According to Raël Jero Salley (2012:58), Muholi’s photographic images reference and critically reconsider established visual traditions, while simultaneously responding to acts of violence and dehumanization, resulting in an expanding visual archive which embodies “various complexities of community and nation”. Within *Figures and Fiction: Contemporary South African photography*, Tamar Garb (2011:11) argues that South Africa’s archive of imagery contains the socio-historical circumstances which are inherited from the complex systems of colonialism and post-colonialism). Within South Africa’s earliest forms of photography, people were depicted in terms of three main categories of representation – ethnography, portraiture and documentary. People were therefore represented within the historical visual archive through anthropological and ethnographic frame works. Contemporary South African photographers, however, invoke, rebuke or embrace these forms of representation in order to position themselves in relation to pressures of the present. According to Salley (2012:64), Muholi confronts the legacy of the gaze of the camera, as well as responds to the frameworks which were constructed by the racial tropes of essentialism that were a result of the apartheid government. This complex reading of Muholi’s images has been expanded on by Andrew van der Vlies.

Muholi’s images “create new taxonomies of difference to counter the specular orthodoxies and clichés of previous image regimes”. Van der Vlies (2012:142) argues that Muholi’s photographs subtly subvert from “many of the well-worn images of the colonial and apartheid representational archive”. According to Garb (2011:14), “the development of anthropological and ethnographic photography in Southern Africa has left a vast and complex archive.” The early European photographers continuously subjected the African people to standardised positions and postures in order to create a stereotypical image of the
African male and female. According to Garb (2011:14), “[a]nonymity is the hallmark of these figures.” They were represented with “no names, no individuality and no identifying idiosyncrasies.” Van der Vlies (2012:142) argues that Muholi both quotes from and undermines “tropes of photographic representation of African women” by invoking Garb’s (2011:12) three filters of figuration – ethnography, documentary and portraiture. Van der Vlies (2012:142) argues that Muholi’s images serve as counterpoints to the “history of ethnographic photographing of types, as well as those catering to prurient European interest in indigenous African women’s bodies under the thinnest veneer of scientific interest in the tradition of the spectacularisation of the black body.” An example of this was the objectification of Sarah Baartmann25 or Saartjie Baartman, the so-called “Hottentot Venus”.

In an interview with Garb (2011:288), Muholi considers the invasive side of the camera as well as the politics of representation by stating:

I find it difficult to just go into a community where I don’t know who the people are and just invade their space and take their images and produce a book. I have seen there is a trend over a period of time, how the othering and politics of representation has been going on for decades, for ages...My principle over the past few years has been to capture those who I know; people who I know by name and surname. If you look at the history of African photography or African anthropology you hardly have the names and surnames of the people. It is very important to know the people that I photograph.

Muholi is driven by her desire to change this inequality in the hope of transformation. Thus, she epitomises Bogre’s (2012:xii) definition of an activist photographer, as she can be considered to be an engaged citizen who uses the power of the camera to depict the wrongs that need to be made right, through her methods of capturing and freezing moments so that evidence is created. Muholi (2013) affirms this in the documentary Zanele Muholi: We live in fear (2013) by stating, as a means of motivation and her intention, that:

We live in fear. Death happens to bind us. Hate crimes have become a binding factor for the LGBTI communities. We come together to either give support or to confirm that somebody has been killed. Then that person becomes a statistic. Another case number becomes part of our history and what are we doing about it? Do we always go and attend funerals and then after funerals you go home and wait for another funeral, what? You have to document. You are forced to document...I’m using visuals as a way of creating

25 According to Deborah Wills (2010:4), Saartjie Baartman was born in South Africa in 1789 and was brought to England and placed on exhibit 1810. For five years Baartman was placed in a cage on a stage in London and Paris, and also performed for private functions. Sander Gilman (1985:213) notes that:

Sarah Bartmann was exhibited not to show her genitalia but rather to present another anomaly which the European audience ... found riveting. This was the steatopygia, or protruding buttocks, the other physical characteristic of the Hottentot female which captured the eye of early European travelers. Thus the figure of Sarah Bartmann was reduced to her sexual parts.
awareness. Capturing the moments, those truths and realities the world will learn about our cultures. I could give you something tangible and say “feel it, this is it, see.” You are invited to be in that space, even though you were not there.

According to Sue Williamson (2009:130), Muholi’s artistic response to gender-based violence can be perceived as an activist response because she makes the viewer aware that one’s identity as a human being is in a constant state of flux and reinterpretation. In Zanele Muholi Faces and Phases, Muholi (2010:6) describes her artistic practice as an example of visual activism which confirms and illuminates the identity of the “black queer” in South Africa. Kathrin Thomas (2010:423) in Zanele Muholi’s Intimate Archive: Photography and Post-apartheid Lesbian Lives describes Muholi’s project as an archival project that mirrors many of the same concerns of visibility and invisibility that have defined feminist scholarship since the 1970s. Muholi’s photographs follow in the tradition of “feminist/lesbian art-making practices” (Thomas 2010:424) but still create new spaces of representation in South African visual culture. Some of the images that appear in Muholi’s book, Only half the picture (2006), invoke these conventional characteristics of lesbian/feminist representations. Dada (2003) (see Figure.2.2) is a black and white photograph which depicts a naked, bare-breasted black woman whose identity has been cropped out of the frame and is seen to be strapping on a dildo, and Period iv (2005) (see Figure.2.3) depicts a bare-chested black woman sitting with her legs open, displaying a sanitary pad, which can be read and understood in the context of testing the limits of propriety in contemporary art.
Both *Dada* and *Period iv*, therefore, lay claim to a visual space that embodies a black lesbian experience, and both photographs make an important political/feminist point regarding the visibility and identity of the representations of black lesbians in post-apartheid South Africa. Creating a platform of visibility for black lesbians in South Africa is central to Muholi’s project, as South Africa has no anti-hate-crime legislation (Muholi 2010:6). Rampant hate-crime, therefore, renders the LGBTI community invisible and coming out exposes members to the harshness of patriarchal compliance. It is therefore important to Muholi to use visual expression to “mark, map and preserve” (Muholi 2010:6) the movements of the LGBTI community in order to educate future generations. According to Gabeba Baderoon (2011:403), Muholi is very sensitive to time in her work as she wants to create “narratives with depth, with a past and a future.” Muholi is therefore reserving a “pattern of absence in the visual archive” and according to Baderoon (2011:30), is conscious of the history of the representation of black life, of which she is a part.

Muholi uses her photography to confront the notion that lesbian practices are a foreign concept to African cultures. Muholi interrogates and exposes the taboos that surround black female same-sex practices and offers an inside/personal view into the challenges that the black LGBTI community faces in a post-apartheid democratic South Africa (Muholi 2006). In Muholi’s monograph *Only half the picture* (2006), complex concepts of trauma, desire, sexual intimacy, community, and black female oppression are carefully interwoven with the aesthetics of the depiction of the body (Thomas 2010:428). For instance, in *Triple iii* (2005) (see Figure 2.4), the cracked toenails in conjunction with the dark markings along the outer edges of the thigh are reminiscent of bruises and stains, and serve as indications of hardship and violence. The posture of the bodies alludes to the stillness that is associated with sleep, and a form of protectiveness, kinship, intimacy and tenderness can be observed. However, there is something disturbing about the arrangement of the bodies lying on the floor. The hard concrete floor, along with the single sheet that the bodies are arranged on, is not indicative of a comforting and loving environment. Violence, fear and hardship are therefore suggested. Similarly to Victor, Muholi is able to depict cruelty and the violation of the human form in a sensitive yet direct manner that has the power to leave the viewer feeling uncomfortable.
Figure 2.4. Zanele Muholi. *Triple iii*. 2005
Silver gelatine print
375 x 500mm
Edition of 8 + 2AP
(Muholi 2006:74)

Muholi’s *Hate crime series* is another example of how she challenges the viewer to think differently regarding the issues of sexuality and subjectivity (Thomas 2010:430). *Case Number* (2004) (see Figure 2.5.1), along with *Hate Crime Survivor I* (2004) (see Figure 2.5.2) and *Hate Crime Survivor II* (2004) (see Figure 2.5.3), are displayed in conjunction with one another and depict a story of horror, violence and pain. *Case Number* depicts a seemingly insignificant small piece of crumpled lined paper (offset against a black backdrop), which was issued by the Meadowlands, Soweto, South African Police Service. *Only Half the picture* 2006, *Case number* – a seemingly insignificant piece of paper – is further understood in conjunction with *Hate Crime Survivor* and *Hate Crime Survivor II*. Handwritten on the piece of paper are details of a case that is allegedly that of the survivors of *Hate Crime Survivor* and *Hate Crime Survivor II*. The viewer can observe information, such as the date of the incident, the name of the inspector who was assigned to the case, and an official stamp, as well as a phone number. One can also decipher a line which reads “ATT. Rape and Assault GHB [grievous bodily harm]”. 
Case number is followed by *Hate Crime Survivor I* which depicts a closely cropped portrait of a woman who is only visible from her knees to her waist. Through the vertical position of her arms and the stripped lines of her pants, the viewer’s attention is drawn to the woman’s wrists and hands which are positioned over her lap in the centre of the photograph. The gesture of curving her forefinger and thumb into a circle, thus creating a dark hole, suggests the point of entry into her body, an indicator of the violated vagina through possible rape. This trauma is further reinforced by her wrists, on which three hospital identification tags can be observed, which is suggestive of what she has gone through. The hand gesture, along with the hospital identification tags and the title of the work, indicates that the woman in the image is an unambiguous victim of trauma or rape. However, she is not subjected to any humiliation through a prying gaze. The viewer cannot see her identity. Muholi has captured an individual whose experience has been recorded, but whose dignity has been preserved.
Hate Crime Survivor II is the final image to appear in the triptych. Here, the viewer can observe a figure in a hospital ward, on a high bed, under a pile of dark bedclothes, on a white sheet. The camera angle renders the hospital bed as a large imposing structure that foreshortens the figure, thus almost reducing the figure into something vulnerable, insignificant and barely even there. The only real indicator that renders the figure legible is found within the title “survivor” which tells the viewer that they are looking at a person and not a pile of disregarded bedclothes (Thomas 2010:430). The image seems to suggest the physical and psychological effect rape can have on the human form.
The significance of juxtaposing Case Number with Hate Crime Survivor and Hate Crime Survivor II is to portray irrefutable archival evidence of ‘curative’ or ‘corrective’ rape. The inclusion of Case Number...

26 Andrew Martin, Annie Kelly, Laura Turquet and Stephanie Ross’s (2009:3) ActionAid report describes ‘corrective’ rape as an act whereby ‘men rape women in order to ‘cure’ them of their lesbianism. Martin et al (2009:6) argue that the source of discrimination against the LGBTI community is found within heteronormativity. This is the idea, according to Martin et al (2009:6), which is “dominant in most societies, that heterosexuality is the only ‘normal’ sexual orientation, only sexual or marital relations between women and men are acceptable, and each sex has certain natural roles in life, so-called gender roles.” The men and woman who challenge and transcend these gender roles are often faced with discrimination, as well as violence.
serves to illuminate the violence and the after-effect of violence that precedes the issuing of the case number. The *Hate crime series* therefore has the power to challenge the viewer to think differently about the oppression of sexual orientation. Muholi’s artworks are unapologetic in nature and have the power to force the viewer to cross into unfamiliar and uncomfortable territory in a similar way to that of Victor. An example that embodies this concept can be seen in the controversy that occurred in August 2009, when Muholi showcased a number of her photographs, alongside nine other black South African female artists, at the *Innovative Women* exhibition at Constitution Hill in Johannesburg. The then Minister of Arts and Culture, Minister Lulama Xingwana, walked out of the exhibition before her opening speech, deeming some of Muholi’s images (see Figure 2.6) that depicted black women affectionately holding one another as offensive, sexually explicit and against nation building (De Kock 2009:sp). Xingwana (2010:sp) defended her actions by releasing a statement but in which she, in my opinion, unknowingly demonstrated her ignorance of the function and purpose of art. The reaction by the Minister caused a public outcry and consequently Muholi’s photographs became the centre of a debate regarding homophobia, freedom of expression and queer experience (Thomas 2010:422). Muholi and many others felt that that the Minister’s reaction demonstrated blatant homophobia, which possibly reinforced the continuation of hate crimes against black lesbians in South Africa (De Kock 2009:sp). This controversy raised pertinent questions surrounding the function of art in a post-apartheid era, as this reaction by the Minister demonstrated society’s inability to distinguish between the taboo of pornographic images and the display of lesbian intimacy. Zanele Muholi (2013) discloses her intention by stating:

> I produce pictures that are intimate because I am an intimate being. This intimacy that disrupts the perpetrator leads us to being killed. It starts by the same-sex love that is disorganizing the mindset of the homophobe … Projecting positivity sometimes can lead to change. Projecting brutality and violations could lead to further violence.

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27 The Minister stated:

In August last year, I was invited to speak at the “Innovative Women” Art Exhibition at Constitution Hill. Upon arrival at the Exhibition, I immediately saw images which I deemed offensive. The images in large frames were of naked bodies presumably involved in sexual acts. I was particularly revolted by an image called “Self-rape”, depicting a sexual act with a nature scene as the backdrop. The notion of self-rape trivialises the scourge of rape in this country. Contrary to media reports, I was not even aware as to whether the ‘bodies’ in the images were of men or women or both for that matter. My reaction was guided by the view that these ‘artworks’ were not suitable for a family audience. I noticed that there were children as young as three years old in the room. I was not aware of the sexual orientation of the pictures or the artists and my reaction was not based on anti-gay sentiments as implied in some media reports on the matter. To my mind, these were not works of art but crude misrepresentations of women (both black and white) masquerading as artworks rather than engaged in questioning or interrogating - which I believe is what art is about. Those particular works of art stereotyped black women. (Xingwana 2010:sp).
In Xingwana’s (2010) statement regarding “… whether the ‘bodies’ in the images were of men or women or both for that matter” the minister (unknowingly) reveals an insightful interpretation into the viewing of the image. Some of Muholi’s photographs do walk a thin line regarding the distinctions between the representations of men and women “or both for that matter”, leaving the viewer feeling unclear as to the sexuality of the subject matter. However, by stating that the representation of lesbians can only be described as “… crude misrepresentations of women (both black and white) masquerading as artworks rather than engaged in questioning or interrogating …” Xingwana indicates the way that certain images have the power to challenge the conventions that govern the gaze (Thomas 2010:425).

According to Andrew van der Vlies (2012:140) in *Queer knowledge and the politics of the gaze in contemporary South African photography*, Zanele Muholi and others, what seemed to unsettle Minister Xingwana “was that one such as she could be made, unexpectedly, in a public space, to look upon photographs of lesbians.” In an interview, Muholi (2011) defends her role as a visual activist by stating:

I refuse to be limited. We need to produce documents that speak to larger audiences, and we need to bear in mind that not everyone will accept or tolerate but regardless somebody will learn something out of it. Feedback [can] be good. Feedback [can] be negative. It doesn’t matter. The fact that it is done, it means that we [are] moving a step further and also to say that even if you don’t understand, you refuse to understand you have something to process. It’s your duty. It’s your responsibility and if you don’t agree, give it to others who will agree.

In light of the controversy that surrounds some of Muholi’s work, her series of black and white confrontational portraits, *Faces and Phases* (2010), provides a counterpoint to the more sexually explicit images which sparked controversy and debate. In *Faces and Phases* (2010:6), Muholi presents
the existence and resistance of the LGBTI community through positive imagery. Muholi considers *Faces and Phases* (2010:7) from an insider’s perspective that simultaneously celebrates and commemorates the lives of the different black homosexuals that Muholi has met on her journeys. Muholi (2010:6) articulates the position that “Faces express the person, and Phases signify the transition from one stage of sexuality or gendered expression and experience to another”. *Faces and Phases* (2010:7) depicts the histories and struggles that the LGBTI community continues to face.

According to van der Vlies (2012:148), Muholi’s project simultaneously transcends nationality (*Faces and Phases* includes portraits from Canada, America and South Africa) yet upholds a commonality amongst lesbian experience, as well as subverting any expectation of representing a ‘black lesbian type’. Muholi (2010:7) poses these questions in her artist’s statement for the viewer to contemplate whilst engaging with the images:

What does an African lesbian look like? Is there a lesbian aesthetic or do we express our gendered, racialised and classed selves in rich and diverse ways? Is this lesbian more “authentic” than that lesbian because she wears a tie and the other does not? Is this a man or a woman? Can you identify a rape survivor by the clothes she wears?

According to van der Vlies (2012:150), Muholi is painstakingly ethical with the treatment of her participants insofar as she knows them all and secures their permission for every exhibition in which their portraits will be exhibited. Muholi is sensitive to the fact that some of her participants have been violated and does not want her camera to become a further violation. According to Raël Jero Salley (2012:64), Muholi maintains close relationships with her participants in, outside of, and beyond, the production of the photographs. Most of the participants who appear in *Faces and Phases* are clothed in everyday attire and are portrayed as young, healthy individuals. The participants look squarely into the camera lens with unwavering, certain and defiant gazes which affirm their individuality, as well as confront the viewer. When exhibited, the photographs that embody *Faces and Phases* are matted, framed and are displayed in long lines or grid-like structures (see in Figure 2.7.1).

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*Figure 2.7.1 Zanele Muholi. Faces and Phases (Installation view). 2011. Digital Photographs 91.4 × 64.8 cm (each)*
According to Salley (2012:62), the images reference historical portraiture due to the appearance, pose, gaze and dress of the participants. For example, Ziyanda Daniel, Buitenkant Street, Gardens, Cape Town (2011) (see Figure.2.7.2) is displayed standing in front of a grey wall, her head slightly tilted to the side, with a prominent Mohawk hairstyle. Daniel’s pose is open and frontal, which one can interpret as signifying confidence or defiance. This concept is further reinforced by the manner in which Daniel meets the viewer’s gaze with a piercing, confrontational stare. The arrangement of Daniel’s frontal pose allows the viewer to focus on her clothing, which consists of a black t-shirt with the word “Poker” and a silhouette of a simple graphic female figure bending over in a provocative and sexualized manner. The word “Poker” in conjunction with the female figure can be associated with the concept of gambling which, in its turn, is synonymous with risk. This may indicate or allude to the risk that Daniel takes in embracing her sexuality. The risk is further echoed in the consent that Daniel gives to Muholi in juxtaposing her name with her image as being named and identified, which can be dangerous as it can be seen as a form of ‘outing’. In my opinion, there is something extremely powerful in naming something because in the process of naming, I believe that you are affirming that existence. On the one hand, this may be seen as dangerous for the participant, although on the other hand it also defies the historic convention of never naming black subjects who disappear into a historical void of anonymity.

The plain backdrop forces the viewer to engage with Daniel. The viewer feels compelled to acknowledge Daniel’s defiant pose, her facial expression, her clothing and personal hair style. The viewer is faced with a young, confident, stylish, ordinary woman who is not afraid to confront the viewer with her piercing gaze. Van de Vlies (2012:147) suggests that Muholi’s primary concern when recording lesbian subjects is to allow her participants to be the subjects of their own gaze. Daniel openly acknowledges the viewer, and in doing so asserts her own identity.

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28 This concept is further unpacked in Chapter 3
According to Baderoon (2011:405), within *Faces and Phases*, Muholi alludes to the past uses of the identity photograph in a contemporary manner. South Africa has a tradition which dates back to the colonial period of the Dutch settlers, through to the apartheid government of utilizing the image to capture and arrest. Baderoon (2011:405) argues that during apartheid, the pass laws comprised one of the most “intrusive and damaging forms of state control”. People of colour were forced to carry an identity document called the ‘passbook’ or ‘dompas’ and failure to produce such a document resulted in arrest or reallocation to a different homeland. Within the passbook, through the use of an identity photograph, the state was able to disenfranchise, racially divide and restrict movement. In 1994, when
South Africa became a democratic state, these laws were abolished. However, post-apartheid, the identity book and its identity photograph still seem to have an effect on the movement of the average South African citizen, as one cannot open a bank account, or get a driver’s licence or apply for a job without producing it. Within the ID book, the citizen must declare his or her gender. This, according to Baderoon (2011:404), is problematic for transgendered people whose identity photographs do not match their physical appearance. The theme of the watchful gaze of the state can be identified within *Faces and Phases*, along with other historical traditions such as the portrait. Muholi alludes to the symbolism of the ID Photograph within *Faces and Phases* as the ID photograph, according to Baderoon (2011:406) relies on the concept of image as fact, as well as proof of existence.

In fighting for social equality, Muholi’s photographs have the power to contest stylised visual representations and ideologies. Individual photographs can therefore be used to represent a majority, thus becoming “iconic pictures of struggle” (Salley 2012:65). According to Salley (2012:65), Charles Sanders Peirce defined the icon within semiotics as “a diagrammatic sign that exhibits a similarity or analogy to the subject of discourse.” Nicole Fleetwood (2011:33-34) argues that photographic icons may be used as evidence of “overcoming social and political injustice”. These photographic images may be used to aid political agendas, which are “meant to manage legacies of race, gender and sexually-based subjugation”. The danger, according to Fleetwood (2011:33-34), is that the image may be “neutralised for easy incorporation into an existing social imaginary”.

The images in *Faces and Phases* resist this integration by means of their non-iconicity. Muholi renders the portraits in intentionally non-iconic modes. Salley (2012:65) argues that Muholi’s artworks “mobilise against iconicity because if any singular image in *Faces and Phases* were to be appropriated as a definitive representation of a black lesbian existence, the project would be misunderstood as a typology of black lesbian sexuality”. Muholi therefore utilises everyday scenes and local collaborators that allow for “alternative modes of visual engagement”. In resisting the iconisation of black lesbians, *Faces and Phases* “resists the political endeavours that name, tame and classify”. Salley (2012:65) argues that by using the portrait, the photograph depicts “local, every day, lived experiences”, which therefore questions the “stable classification system for sex or gender identity”. *Faces and Phases* are “self-presentations” that utilize subversive resistance in order to “articulate beauty, as well as tell stories of community that would otherwise be unimaginable” (Salley 2012:65).

The purpose of Muholi’s images is to claim a space of identity for members of the LGBTI community within the field of visual art (Thomas 2010:434). Through the process of “claiming”, Muholi’s work
affirms the complexities that are associated with the queer experience in post-apartheid South Africa. Her works demand political recognition. However, an image holds power and producing images that reveal the identity of the participants may lead to further victimisation and violence. Muholi walks a fine line in her fight for social transformation and awareness. On one hand, Muholi’s images have the power to make visible the violence that is experienced by black lesbians and shift the focus to the centre of social life. On the other hand, Muholi has to consider the audience and space in which her artworks are viewed, given the social climate of certain spaces in South Africa where intolerance for homosexuality is met with ‘curative’ rapes, hate crimes and murders. Muholi, therefore, plays a dangerous game by actively affirming and creating a positive identity for members of the LGBTI community in the hope for social transformation, and thus has to be sensitive as to who her audience is and where she exhibits her work in order to avoid further victimisation of her participants.

In April 2010, van der Vlies (2012:141) attended a panel discussion which was hosted by the Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town that featured three artists: South Africans Muholi and Anton Kannemeyer, and African-American artist Glenn Ligon. During the course of the discussion, Muholi was asked by an audience member “why her work appeared in this safe ‘white’ space, when she claimed she wanted to challenge ‘black’ attitudes” van der Vlies (2012:141). Muholi responded by highlighting the dangers that black lesbians face in the townships. She would, therefore, only showcase her work in the townships if the safety of her participants, as well as of herself, could be guaranteed. An edited version of Muholi’s response to the question was published in Art South Africa (Muholi 2010:24), in which Muholi suggests who her ‘real’ audience might be:

My audience is not here. My audience is those people who look at two lesbian women in a photo and say that it is a shock: “Oh my God, don’t show that!” That is my audience. I don’t know who my audience is. I know that I have brothers who give me a space to showcase my work, but then I don’t know how far or how safe other spaces can be become. We are at a gallery here. My audience is at the [Cape Town train] station, at Gugs taxi rank, where a different mindset occupies that space. That’s the audience, or that’s the space that I’d like to penetrate. You have different kinds of audiences in different spaces occupying different positions in this country, and I happen to interact with all those audiences. The president is my audience. And a whole lot of other Zulu men who might not agree with my images, because Zulu men don’t dress up like they do in my photographs. I’m still looking for my audience.

According to van der Vlies (2012:142), Muholi responded to the issue of “culture commodification and how it fixes in time a sense of culture that endorses bigotry” in comments that where not published by the transcript, adding that her audience also included “those she called ‘my people
in KZN [KwaZulu-Natal]’ who make bead-work that becomes art-work in galleries, ‘but’, in her words, ‘who don’t have access to a space that is queer” (van de Vlies 2012b:142).

Muholi’s artworks can be described as aesthetically provocative, yet simultaneously able to produce compelling political meanings, which carry a hope of social transformation. Muholi uses her work to capture pleasure and beauty, instead of focusing on or submitting to the negative aspects of her subject matter (Salley 2012:68). According to Salley (2012:67), Muholi’s photographs can be seen as images which catalyse a range of reactions that the viewer is forced to contemplate through concepts that fall between sexuality, blackness and power. Muholi’s work actively strives to achieve a form of social consciousness and awareness for the members of the LGBTI community, in the hope of achieving social transformation.

Diane Victor and Zanele Muholi are two examples of artists who question, challenge and strive for a form of social consciousness through visual expression. Both artists have used particular works to filter their ideologies through aesthetic metaphors in order to generate a dialogue between the artist and society. Through an analysis of particular artworks, I have shown how the power of art can lead to increased social consciousness, through a discussion surrounding the tripartite relationship between the intention of the artist, the power of artworks, and the viewer’s response. With this in mind, within the next chapter, I will discuss my own artistic response to violence against women and children through a qualitative, comparative and visual analysis.
CHAPTER 3:
OVER MY DEAD BODY!


The primary aim of this chapter is to discuss my own role as an artist through a discussion of the work for my master’s exhibition, which responds to violence against women and children in South Africa. The exhibition will be installed at the women’s jail at Constitution Hill during the 16 days of activism campaign for No Violence against Women and Children campaign which runs from 25 November 2015 (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women), through to International Human Rights day on the 10 December 2015. Exhibiting at this time, and in this context, is appropriate as the aims of the campaign mirrors that of my study, which is to increase awareness surrounding violence against woman and children in South Africa, Constitution Hill is a former prison, situated on top of a hill, which overlooks the City of Johannesburg and is home to the Constitutional Court of South Africa. Within the site there are permanent exhibition spaces, such as the Women’s jail museum, Number Four museum, and Old Fort museum. These exhibitions “showcase South Africa’s rich heritage and advocate human rights” (Constitution hill on line: [sp]). According to Constitutional Hill’s website, “exhibitions and guided tours have been designed as an interactive experience, offering visitors the opportunity to participate in the building of Constitution Hill” (Constitution hill on line: [sp]). These tours act as catalysts for discussions surrounding awareness which is linked to the intentionality of my work. The venue provides a space for heightened public exchange and interaction in which I engage with an activist mode of public engagement and consider the challenge of creating awareness surrounding the pandemic of gender- and child-based violence. I want the visual voice of my work to add to the other voices of Mason, Searle, Alexander, Muholi and Victor in protest and advocacy against violence, as well as empathy in the support for the scourge of gender-and child-based violence.

In this chapter, I explore and discuss the practical component of my research in each series of work, which consists of a range of hand-printed, photographic printmaking techniques, namely Vandyke brown printing and photopolymer photo-gravure, as well as mixed-media prints. I have captured digital photographic images that have been manipulated; some have been juxtaposed with newspaper
clippings that convey responses to violence against women and children which I have collected over the years. The prints vary in size, from small intimate prints to large life-size prints. Through the discussion of my own artistic response to violence against women and children in South Africa, I align myself with both aspects of political and activist intentions in my work, with the intention of creating social awareness. While I am aware of the reductive positioning of classification of my work as “a political artist”, this body of works explores different modes of representations which are metaphorical, suggestive and ambiguous in nature.

In responding to violence against women and children, I consider the power of the image and politics of representation. I utilise signs and symbols to create meaning. I have considered my own intention for the artwork, and acknowledge that each viewer will bring with them their own experiences and knowledge when engaging with the work. This will lead to a multitude of different interpretations of the work which is outside of my control. I am hoping for the work to be received by the viewer in ways that provoke responses such as anger, rage, disgust, empathy and sympathy. I have utilised various methods to capture the viewers’ attention in order to instill a range of different emotions that compress complex ideologies and sentiments into a single image. I have engaged with the power that resides within an image in order to represent, understand and convey a message of awareness. I use the image to make sense of the world that surrounds me and reflect and respond to the social realities of violence against women and children. Within each of the works I have grappled with uncomfortable territory and intentionally avoided further victimisation by consciously avoiding the identity of the victims. The intention for my exhibition, titled Over my dead body, is to draw from Katy Deepwell’s (1995:5) concept of feminism in which my works can be seen as empowering tools which raise awareness and social consciousness.

This chapter is divided into two sections that echo two different approaches or modes of representation in my body of work; each section considers a different approach to violence, as represented in my work. The Crime Board displays the more direct and hard-hitting ‘activist’ mode of representation. It presents prints of newspaper cuttings and documents that are grouped together, interspersed with more ambiguous images of my manipulated photo-etchings, and a range of self-portraits from when I was a child to now, some of which have been added with drypoint. These form a reference point for the viewer to ‘read’ the context in which these images emerge. The second section consists of a visual analysis of two series of large-format prints, Three Foetuses and Sentinels, in which I consider the relationship of meaning with the form and process of Vandyke brown printing, which for me adds an important visual and conceptual element to my artistic responses to violence.
Crime Board

This body of work is influenced by the political and activist modes; which are utilised by artists like Zanele Muholi and, in particular cases, Diane Victor. The Crime Board consists of an installation piece, and comprises a variety of visual expressions that respond to, question and challenge violence against women and children in South Africa. On the Crime Board, visual imagery is scattered amongst the prints of sections of newspaper articles that serve as a reference to the political motivation behind the exhibition as they reference to specific moments of the horrific reality of violence and abuse that is found within South Africa. I re-work each newspaper cutting by photographing it, exposing it in the darkroom, and printing it as a “fine” photographic screenprint or Vandyke brown print. This manipulates and changes its status from just a cutting of a newspaper print to a fine print. Through re-representing the newspaper cutting, I am re-aestheticizing the original newspaper cutting, which changes the way the viewer interacts with the work. By presenting these pieces of text as image, I intend to alter the viewer’s common experience of dismissal and denial to one of engagement, as the viewer is compelled to view the work from a different perspective. In re-aestheticizing the cuttings, I am exploring and acknowledging the power of the visual as well as utilising text as image.

An example of an artwork in which the original text has been manipulated and re-aestheticized can be seen in Muholi’s five beaded (see Figures 3.1.1 – 3.1.2) recreations of hard-hitting newspaper headline boards that according to Renee Hollema ([sa]:[sp]) function simultaneously as a record and memorial. According to Renee Hollema ([sa]:[sp]), the headlines refer to brutal deaths of black lesbians in South Africa and have been sourced from newspapers such as the New Age, News Day and Daily Voice. By recreating the headlines using beads, Muholi has altered the viewer’s experience of engaging with just ‘another’ headline which creates a different experience of the work.
According to John Berger (1972:10), an image offers a direct testimony with regard to representing “the world which surrounded other people at other times.” Berger (1972:10) therefore argues that an image is “more precise and richer than literature.” In her book entitled On photography, Susan Sontag (1977:4) echoes Berger’s (1972:10) sentiments as she argues that “to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed.” This means that the viewer relates to the world through a photograph. Sontag (1977:4) argues that print is less invasive than photographic images, as a photograph has the power to turn the world into “mental objects”. The written text is an interpretation of the world; however, a photograph cannot be understood as a statement of the world, but rather as a piece of the world, “a miniature reality that anyone can acquire.”

Newspaper cutting (2013) (see Figure.3.2.) is an example of one of the original cuttings, in comparison to Oh little ones, I won’t forget you. (2015) (see Figure.3.3.) With regard to Oh little ones, I won’t forget you, I have enlarged the text and have zoomed in on the specific sections within the newspaper cuttings. With this process, I am able to change focus, zoom in, overlay text and image, and manipulate the experience of reading something that becomes too unacceptable to digest. In this way I am also acknowledging the concept of language with regard to the concept of symbols and semiotics. In her text titled Julia Kristeva, Noëlle McAfee (2004:1) argues that Kristeva’s theory of language in the thesis of
Revolution in Poetic Language is that meaning is not just constructed denotatively, "with words denoting thoughts and things". Meaning is created to some degree by the "poetic and affective aspects of texts". In reading the multiple stories, I am consciously forcing the viewer to experience a multitude of affect responses such as horror, disgust, revulsion, anger, sympathy, and empathy.

Figure 3.2. Heidi Mielke. Newspaper cutting. 2015.
(unknown source: approximately 2014)
I intersperse small, intimate photopolymer gravures in between some of the prints of newspaper cuttings. The gravures consist of a range of small, sometimes quite abstracted, obscure, symbolic or ambiguous images. The purpose of the inclusion of these small gravures is to reinforce the disturbing nature of the stories that is found in the text, as well as create a sense of discomfort and unease and disrupt the relationship between what the viewer is reading and what they are seeing. The viewer’s experience of the text is linked to a variety of obscure images, such as the damaged chicken head (seen in Damaged chick (2013) (see Figure.3.4) or a disregarded skull (seen in I’m not laughing (2015) (see Figure 3.5). The text is therefore the indicator of meaning. Utilising the juxtaposition of the ambiguous prints with the prints of the newspaper cutting, I am engaging with ways of seeing: the power of the image, image as image and text as image.

The intention of the intimate size, combined with the strange ambiguity of the prints, is to capture the viewer’s attention, with the purpose of ‘forcing’ the viewer to engage with a range of different emotions,
such as sympathy, repulsion, seduction, disgust, and empathy. Thus, I am considering the power of the image and I am utilising the politics of representation, such as metaphors, signs and symbols, to create a form of awareness.

Figure 3.4. Heidi Mielke. *Damaged chick*. 2015. 13 x 13cm
Photopolymer gravure
In his book *Ways of seeing*, Berger (1972:7) argues that "[s]eeing comes before words." Through the act of seeing, human beings establish their place in the world. However, Berger also argues that words are used to explain this world (1972:7). According to Berger (1972:8-9), seeing is a choice that is directly affected by the knowledge and beliefs of a person. ‘Seeing’ is not an isolated practice, as a person will always look at the relationship between themselves and what they are looking at. Berger (1972:9-10) considers the image as “a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance or a set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved”. Within every image is a way of seeing. Berger (1972:10) argues that photographs are not mechanical records of reality. In engaging with the photograph, the viewer is slightly conscious of the role of the photographer in selecting the specific shot. However, despite the viewer’s awareness of the role the photographer, the viewer’s perception and appreciation of an image is dependent on their own way of seeing.
In purposely disrupting the relationship between what the viewer is reading in relation to what the viewer is seeing, through the juxtaposition of ambiguous photopolymer gravure prints, I am consciously trying to avoid the predatory side of photography, as I want to avoid further victimisation, exploitation and sensationalism. Sontag (1977:8) argues that photography is a tool of power. Despite the camera being considered an observation station, the act of photographing is something more than passively observing. Sontag (1977:12) compares photography to sexual voyeurism, as it is a way of explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on to keep on happening. To take a picture is to have an interest in things as they are, in the status quo remaining unchanged (at least for as long as it takes to get a “good” picture), to be in complicity with whatever makes a subject interesting, worth photographing—including, when that is the interest, another person’s pain or misfortune.

Sontag (1977:13-14) describes the camera as something which presumes, exploits, trespasses and distorts. It is a predatory weapon akin to a gun. Sontag (1977:14) argues “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.” In taking a photograph, the photographer is complicit in another person’s “morality, vulnerability, [and] mutability. I therefore have intentionally avoided depicting graphical photographic images that would illustrate the cruelty of violence, in order to circumvent this exploitative role of photography or image “taking”. The viewer is therefore confronted with images that are ambiguous and symbolic in nature, such as Damaged chick (2015) and I’m not laughing (2015).

The text as image prints are intended to create an emotive response within the viewer as the stories are derived from acts of violence, brutality and abuse that I have come across over the years. The stories below illustrate the political motivation and driving force behind some of the selected works. According to Annabel Grossman and Steve Hopkins (2014:sp) in an article entitled Ugandan maid secretly filmed throwing a child across a room and stomping on her pleads guilty to torture, a 22-year-old nanny was caught on a closed-circuit television (cctv) camera beating, kicking and stamping on Arnella Kamanzi, an 18-month-old child. Within the short 1:58 video clip, which was rapidly absorbed into mass circulation on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, Tumuhiirwe is seen trying to force-feed Arnella before slapping her in the face. Arnella proceeds to vomit the food onto the couch

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29 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmDemn3x6i8
and floor, to which Tumuhiirwe responds by throwing Arnella off the couch, face-down, onto the floor. Tumuhiirwe then hits Arnella with a torch multiple times before kicking her in the face and stomach. Tumuhiirwe then viciously stomps on and stands on top of Arnella’s back with her entire weight before dragging Arnella by one arm to another room while Arnella lets out a gut-wrenching scream. It is this scream alone that haunts me, follows me and motivates me. My artworks provide me with a space to come to terms with such violence and abuse and therefore like Victor my art becomes a form of therapy.

Another story which can be found in the Crime Board is that of Toddler bitten, kicked, slapped. According to Tanya Farber (2014:4) Childline described the case as “[a] horrendous act of violence against a child” as it involved a two-year-old boy who was fighting for his life after undergoing emergency surgery after he was tortured for several hours in front of his mother. According to Farber (2014:4), the Police spokesman Malcolm Pojie said that the little boy had “bite wounds on his body, while his feet had been burned with boiling water. He had also been slapped and kicked in the head and had been forced to eat his own faeces”. Pojie said it was also clear from forensic investigations that the perpetrator had placed a brick on the boy’s chest and then repeatedly jumped on it.

Another ‘average’ case found in the newspaper is that of a 13-year-old boy from Brakpan who is accused of grooming his 6-year-old neighbour for sex. According to Botho Molosankwe (2014:[sp]) in an article that was published in The Star entitled Teen rapes neighbour 6, on the 4th of November 2014, the 16-year-old brother left his sister in the care of his friend and neighbour while he left to visit his grandparents, who lived down the street. Upon his return, he found his friend “penetrating his sister anally” (Molosankwe 2014:[sp]). It is unclear as to the length of time that the 13-year-old neighbour had been raping the 6 year old girl. After she was examined, it was found that the 6-year-old girl had been penetrated repeatedly and was infected with HIV and another sexually transmitted diseases. A neighbour of the family reported that “[t]he girl said the boy did it to her all the time and that she was not aware that she was supposed to tell anyone about it” (Molosankwe 2014:[sp]). The 6-year-old girl seemed unaware of the severity of the situation, stating that she “doesn’t want her abuser jailed, saying he is her boyfriend … [and that] [s]he misses him.” (Molosankwe 2014:[sp]).

The main objective of displaying these stories within the Crime Board is to engage with the viewer on an emotive level. My intention is for the viewer to feel repulsed and disgusted after reading about the cruelty that human beings are capable of inflicting on one another. Within the Crime Board I have also integrated signs and symbols of violence into the physical surface of the board. I have cut into,
punched, smashed, stepped on and physically disrupted the surface of the board. In areas using screen printing as one of my substrates, I have overlaid and repeated headlines of practically horrific articles of violence onto the board, as well as over prints (see Figure. 3.6.1 - 3.6.3) in an attempt to highlight the conglomeration of violence that is the reality for women and children in post-apartheid South Africa. Photopolymer prints can be found embedded within the surface of the board, as well on top into the surface of board.

Figure.3.6.1. Heidi Mielke. Crime Board. 2015. 203 cm x 247 cm. Mixed Media
Figure 3.6.2. Heidi Mielke. Crime Bored (detail). 2015. Mixed Media
The purpose of the disrupted physical appearance of the Crime Board, combined with photopolymer images and prints is to seduce and intrigue the viewer, with the aim of keeping the viewer fixed on engaging with the work. I want to simultaneously attract and repulse the viewer in order to facilitate a form of contemplation and questioning. The function of the Crime Board is therefore similar to that used by Victor, who captivates her viewers by seducing them with the aesthetic quality of her surfaces and masterly techniques, and then ‘hitting’ the viewer with the meaning, after they have engaged with the work. The objective of the Crime Board is to present the facts to the viewer in a hard-hitting manner. However, within the rest of the body of prints, I move beyond the hard statistics and facts and interrogate spaces that are not necessarily so literal or graphical in nature. Muholi has also considered and challenged the exploitive role of photography by forming personal relationships with the participants.
Another manner in which I try to avoid the exploitive role of the photograph is by turning the camera on myself as subject. Within both the *Three Foetuses* and *The Sentinels* I have used my body to embody and perform responses of violence and abuse. My intention for these pieces is to create a different response to the *Crime Board* which directs the perception of the viewer and serves as an emotive piece that informs the rest of the works. The intention for the *Three Foetuses* is to create a, sympathetic and empathetic response within the viewer, whereas *The Sentinels* embody more of an activist, political, and direct response. For me, the *Three Foetuses* represent the first stage of development of transformation.

**Three Foetuses**

*Three Foetuses* is a triptych which consists of three female figures which can be seen lying in the foetal position. The series was initiated through an exploration of digital prints which later transformed into small photopolymer prints and ultimately became large-scale Vandyke brown prints. Within the intimate photopolymer prints, I experimented with juxtaposing animal skulls with female nude figures. For me, the motif of the skull can have a variety of different interpretations, some of which are death, decay and deterioration. *I’m not laughing* (2015) (see Figure.3.7.1), *What do you say to a woman with two black eyes?* (2015) (see Figure.3.7.2) and *…nothing, you’ve told her twice already!* (2015) (see Figure.3.7.3) are three examples of some the studies that I have experimented with using the photopolymer technique. Within each print, the skull of a bull covers the identity of the female figure and serves as a metaphor of violence and abuse. The skull can also be indicative of the remains that are left behind after a hunt, thus associating the female figure as the victim of a hunt, often discarded or left to die after an act of violence has occurred.

The female figure is seen to be positioned on a white sheet, which is reminiscent of the earlier discussion surrounding Terry Kurgan’s *I’m the King of the Castle*. (1997) (see Figure.1.4.1 -1.4.2). The formal aesthetics within the prints, such as the skull, the white sheet, the camera angels and the dark colour pallet, forces the viewer to consider a more sinister reality that lies beyond the confines of the print. The specific camera angels serve as an indicator of the presence of the photographer who can be seen as an active voyeur and thus in a position of power. Therefore, the concept of perpetrator versus victim is alluded to.
Figure 3.7.1. Heidi Mielke. *I'm not laughing*. 2015. 13 x 13 cm.
Photopolymer gravure.

Figure 3.7.2. Heidi Mielke. *What do you say to a woman with two black eyes?*. 2015. 13 x 13 cm.
Photopolymer gravure.
I'm not laughing, What do you say to a woman with two black eyes?, and …nothing, you’ve told her twice already! form the catalyst for the Three Foetus series, which can be seen as small explorative studies that have been interspersed throughout the exhibition (see Figure.3.7.4). Within Three Foetuses, the identities of the figures have again been hidden behind skulls in an attempt to avoid any further victimisation. However, I have used the Vandyke chemical to cover parts of the skull in order to make the skull less prominent and overpowering. This creates a disfigured and unidentifiable identity, thus representing all women victims of violence and abuse. Each figure within Three Foetus is lying in the foetal position, which along with the title of the work is indicative of vulnerability, interdependency and helplessness, which seems to render the figures as passive victims. However, I have introduced elements of agency and self-preservation through symbols of defence through the use of hair, thorns and blackjack plants. Throughout the tryptic I have physically exposed each object on top of the Vandyke chemical and as a result, the object appears as a white negative within the print, which is suggestive of a capacity for defence.
Figure 3.7.4. Heidi Mielke What do you say to a woman with two black eyes? and …nothing, you’ve told her twice already! 2015.
Photopolymer gravure
Exhibition detail
Constitution Hill (Women’s Prison)

_Foetus i (2014-2015)_ (see Figure 3.8.3.) mirrors the figure seen in _Foetuses iii (2014-2015)_ , although sections of the Bidens pilosa (blackjack) plant can be seen covering the body. The inclusion of the blackjack plant acts as another symbol of potential defence. According to a report conducted by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2011:1) the blackjack plant is considered to be “a common, widespread and extremely troublesome weed” which is often found living in wild, urban areas (Black jack production … 2011:2). This is indicative of a space in which rape often occurs. The report (2011:3) further describes the fruit of the blackjack plant as “unpleasant, hairy and able to penetrate rapidly through several layers of clothing.” The seeds of the blackjack plant are described as small, slender, black bristles with a tiny claw at the tip of the seed which can hook onto any soft surface such as clothes and fur. The function of inserting the blackjack into this work, is to represent an invasive, uncomfortable and prickly form of defence.
This concept is further echoed within Foetus ii (2014-2015) (see Figure 3.8.2) where the female figure’s back is facing the viewer, with sharp thorns protruding out of her back. I have intentionally positioned the figure in a white background to emphasise her isolation and vulnerability. I place thorns which I picked from an acacia tree which grows in my back yard, and placed them on top of the negative transparency of the figure, before exposing the image in the direct sunlight. The thorns are long and sharp, and when touched can cause a certain amount of pain. The thorns have the potential to cause bleeding and pain and symbolically represent a deterrent to rape or any form of physical abuse. The metaphoric function of the thorns is similar to Victor’s use of thorns in Apollo & Daphne\(^{30}\) (2009) (see Figure 3.9). According to Anthea Buys ([sa]:[sp]), the female figure, Daphne in Apollo and Daphne, sprouts thorns to prevent Apollo from raping her.

\(^{30}\) Within Apollo and Daphne, Victor references the Greek myth where Daphne pleads with her father (Peneus) to turn her into a laurel tree (which Victor substitutes with a South African thorn tree) in order to protect her from the love-struck Apollo, who had been cursed with unrequited love by Eros, the god of love.
When creating *Foetus iii* (2014-2015) (see Figure 3.8.3), I imagined the figure to have a conglomerate of hair cascading out of her vagina and out of the skull onto the body and into the dark background. I envisioned the hair to function as a superpower of abject defence that might frighten and repulse the perpetrator. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva (1982:4) defines abjection as something which “disturbs identity, system, order. [It] does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite”. Kristeva (1982:53) further argues that human beings reject the abject parts of themselves that they find disgusting: ‘clean and unspoiled’ bodies, forever repulsed by their own physical flows, bodily discharges and wastes. For Kristeva (1982:53), urine, blood, sweat, tears, semen, breast milk, pus, and for my purposes hair, stand as signifiers of the abject. By covering the female ‘victim’ in an object such as hair, a repulsive surface is created that serves as a form of defence.
Figure 3.8.3. Heidi Mielke. *Foetuses iii*. 2014-2015.
103.5 x 74.5
Vandyke photographic hand print
Watercolour and Fabriano paper

Figure 3.9. Diane Victor. *Apollo & Daphne*. 2009.
37.2 x 47.4 cm
Dry point
(David Krut projects [sa]:[sp])
My intended function for the *Three Foetuses* is to simultaneously represent vulnerability, as well as to arm them with symbols that have an agency for power and self-protection. When creating these figures, I imagined them to have the potential to transform one day transform from their foetal states of helplessness and vulnerability, to stand up in strength, defy their status and become sentinels.

**Sentinels**

The *Sentinels Series* consists of nine life-size Vandyke brown photographic prints on cloth. In the series I explore my own identity; that of being a young, white South African woman, in relation to violence against women and children in South Africa. I utilise my body as a vehicle to “perform” or recreate elements of generic and specific cases of violence in a suggestive and ambiguous manner. The figures, printed on cotton cloth, and intended to hang or hover throughout the exhibition space, represent sentinels, whose role is to stand and keep watch over the victims of violence. They are intended to metaphorically guard the spirit of the damaged and abused women and become advocates of courage, resilience, inner strength and empowerment. In these ways the sentinels symbolise the possibility of transformation through becoming guardians and protagonists for the survivors of violence. Like the *Three Foetuses*, the *Sentinels* was initiated in 2013, through small photo-polymer and drypoint prints I made called *Anene i* (2013) (see Figure 3.10.1), *Anene ii* (2013) (see Figure 3.10.2) and *Anene iii* (2013) (see Figure 3.10.3) which was a response to the violent murder of 17-year-old Anene Booysen, who was found by security guards on the second of February 2013 after having been gang-raped and disembowelled at a construction site. According to an article in the *Mail and Guardian* entitled *Zuma condemns Bredasdorp rape as shocking, cruel and in humane* (2013:[sp]), Anene’s doctor felt it necessary to give full disclosure of the extent of Anene’s injuries, in order to present a full and irrefutable impression of the cruelty of her attackers. Not only had Anene been gang-raped, but she had also been cut from her stomach down to her genitals. The reason Anene did not survive was attributed to the fact that she had lost a large portion of her intestines due to the fact that one of her attackers ripped her torso open, stuck his hand inside and ripped them out.
Figure 3.10.1. Heidi Mielke. *Anene i*. 2013.
Photopolymer gravure.
39 x 12 cm

Figure 3.10.2. Heidi Mielke. *Anene ii*. 2013.
Photopolymer gravure.
39 x 12 cm

Figure 3.10.3. Heidi Mielke. *Anene iii*. 2013.
Dry point
47.7 x 10.2 cm
Within the course of my studies, the small explorations of Anene i–iii evolved and transformed into life-sized Vandyke brown photographic prints which form part of the Sentinel Series. Remember Anene i (2015) (see Figure 3.11.1) and Remember Anene ii (2015) (see Figure 3.12.2) are two examples of two of the figures which make up the nine Sentinels. Within Remember Anene i and Remember Anene ii, I have strapped my breasts with clear cellophane plastic, and can be seen wearing white panties. My hair resembles that of a used or abused doll, as it sticks out in matted clumps. I confront the viewer with my gaze and cross my feet in a Christ-like manner. In Remember Anene i, I claw into the side of my body and a cow’s tongue is placed on top of my lower torso – from my vagina towards my upper stomach. In Remember Anene ii, my hands are clasped into fists alongside my body and a sheep’s intestines lies on top of my stomach. Both the cow’s tongue and the sheep’s stomach are symbolic metaphors of the mutilation and gang rape of Anene. The cow’s tongue symbolises a phallic object, which insinuates the violation of the rape, whilst the sheep’s stomach references the disembowelment. Despite the suggestion of violence and mutilation, the figures are depicted as strong women who confront the viewer. This is reinforced through their confrontational gaze, and the defensive body language of the hands.
Representing Anene’s death serves as a reminder and a lesson for other women in terms of who they are and who they become. Despite the images being derived from violence, the figure is represented as calm and contained. She is alive and emits a form of power and strength. The duel function of these
figures is to both remind the viewer of abuse, violence and cruelty, and also to project a feeling of hope, resilience and agency in the victim.

The medium of Vandyke brown printing as a process is relevant in my depiction of these figures, as the quality that one can get through painting hand-mixed emulsion onto cloth is more expressive than the look of a contemporary, hard-edge digital photograph. The typical dark brown\(^{31}\) colour of the process, combined with its history,\(^{32}\) creates a nostalgic and timeless effect which allows for a painterly, explorative and expressive approach. The process enables me to incorporate or enhance the meaning of the artwork by applying different marks, tones, lines and shapes. Through the application of the emulsion and experimenting with the exposure, I am able to manipulate the tonality and give an illusion of depth in the print. The specific colour of Vandyke brown also aligns itself with the concept of the works, as the dark reddish/brown colour could reference congealed blood. The painterly and expressive application of the liquid emulsion, which oozes and seeps into the paper, is reminiscent of stains which in itself can be seen as an index of the body to be found through the magical trace of the photographic process.

The photographic exposure of the image usually occurs under strong ultra-violet light, of which the sun is the most common source. However, the weather can be erratic and therefore a darkroom exposure of an ultra-violet lamp can also be used. Using light, and specifically the sun, as a source to create an image enhances the meaning of my work as I consider the final image as something which has been ‘born’ or created out of light, introducing the creative act as emergent of hope and regeneration.

Darkness – the absence of light – is also evident within the process, as most of the preparation work and sensitising is done within the confines of a dark room. The dark room is a meaningful space for considering the relationship between process and enhancing the meaning of the work, as my overall experience of the dark room is sometimes menacing and ominous. The Vandyke brown chemical is light-sensitive, thus the only light source is emitted from a few safety lights. The safety lights illuminate a reddish or yellow hue, which enhances the ominous atmosphere in which I work. Due to the nature of the chemicals, the dark room must be kept cool at all times. The cool temperature, together with the sinister light, creates an uncomfortable space that also mirrors the concept of my work. The dark room in the art department at the University of Johannesburg is a narrow, claustrophobic space which is

\(^{31}\) The Vandyke processes’ name is derived from the deep brown pigment, used by the Flemish painter Van Dyck (White 2000: [sp]).

\(^{32}\) According to Wynn White (2000: [sp]), the Vandyke brown print is an alternative photographic process which is based on the first iron-silver process – argentotype. The argentotype process was invented in 1842 by the English astronomer, Sir John Herschel, and has similar chemistries to the Vandyke brown process. Both processes utilise the action of exposing UV light on ferric salts that have been applied to an absorbent surface, for example paper and cloth.
secluded from the outside printing studio. The dark room offers no real connection to the outside world. It is often just me, alone, in a dark, cool space, with the stories of violence as my companions. These environmental conditions seem core to my process because through darkness, slowly, an image is created, using light and water, symbolic of emergence.

Within the Sentinel series, and through the Vandyke process, I am able to manipulate the image to enhance and reinforce the meaning. The process allows me to exploit the darker tones, as well as experiment with darkening the image. I am also able to manipulate the process by over-exposing certain areas in order to reduce some of the detail. This can be seen in comparison with the photographic digital reference (see Figure.3.12). For example, I am able to take away some of the detail of the breasts, to reduce the potential eroticism of the female form. By darkening the background, I am able to allow for the form to emerge out of, or be submerged in, a dark space.

![Image](image1.png)

Figure 3.12. Heidi Mielke. Remember Anene i.(digital). 2013. 53.98 cm x 159.17 cm

![Image](image2.png)

Figure 3.11.2. Heidi Mielke. Remember Anene i. 2015. Vandyke brown photographic hand print.

Egyptian cotton.

195 cm x 65 cm
The Sentinels utilise ambiguity, metaphor and suggestion in order to create a comparable impact to that of Victor’s intensely invasive, literal representations of child molestation and rape, which provoke feelings of anger and emotional pain. My intention is for The Sentinels to provide the viewer with an emotive experience. In order to achieve this, I display them in uniform rows, printed on narrow strips of Egyptian cotton and are hung from the ceiling as an installation (see Figure 3.13.1 – 3.13.2). The thin sheets of cotton fabric enables the figures to be displayed in an ethereal and fragile form. They delicately float above the viewer, mimicking spirit-like, ghostly figures. The viewer interacts with the figures by moving in between them, and in so doing, activates a relationship though a kind of performance. The viewer looks up at the figures, thereby increasing their sense of power and The Sentinels become signifiers of strength and resilience.

Figure 3.13.1. Heidi Mielke. The Sentinels. 2015. Vandyke brown photographic hand print. Egyptian cotton. Exhibition detail#1 Constitution Hill (Women’s Prison)
Within the Gothic window triptych, *No country for old women* (2013) (see Figure.3.14), Victor has also considered and responded to the gender-based violence in South Africa. According to Von Veh (2014:[sp]), *No Country for Old Women* seems to utilise “the ‘scare’ tactics of Romanesque tympanums” to expose the results of continuous gender-based violence. *No Country for Old Women*
documents examples of rape, murder and mutilation of women, thus depicting “a hell on earth rather than a nebulous future punishment” (Von Veh 2014:[sp]). According to Von Veh (2014:[sp]), the title of Victor's work was inspired by the murder of Victor's helpless and vulnerable 82 year old aunt, Angela Reardon, who can be seen on the extreme left panel. Victor's aunt was murdered by robbers and buried in a shallow grave in her vegetable garden, so the intruders could continue clearing the house without interruption. Within the artwork, the figure which represents Angela Reardon holds the very spade which was used to bury her.

According to Von Veh (2014:[sp]), Victor responded to the mutilation and murder of Anene Booysen by representing Anene intertwined within her own intestines and is placed in a coffin-like panel beside less-sensationalised victims of women abuse. One of the victims (seen in the third panel) depicts a beaten and bruised woman, with her lower half clothed in a coyote skin. According to Von Veh (2014:[sp]), the figure serves to represent the brutal rape and murder “of black lesbians that have been reported in Cape Town and Johannesburg from 2007 to 2013”. The child on the far right panel depicts a small child, who according to Von Veh (2014:[sp]), “represents literally hundreds of cases of the abuse and murder of children.”

Similar comparisons can be drawn between Victor's use of the coffin-like panel and the narrow, elongated frame seen in The Sentinels, as each figure within the Sentinels is placed within a dark, narrow, backdrop which has connotations of a grave. The metaphor of death is further echoed in The Sentinels through the suggestion of rigor mortis, as the figures bodies can be seen lying in a stiff, rigid position.
As in *The Sentinels*, the medium is considered in order to enhance the meaning of the work. Within *No country for old women* (2013), Victor utilises the medium of smoke in an attempt to juxtapose a ghost-like ephemeral effect with the tradition of glass stained windows. According to Victor (2013:[sp]), the function of the altarpiece is to honour the women who have been affected by violence and abuse. The altarpiece serves as a reminder to the viewer of the continuous gender-based violence, and reiterates through the medium of smoke, the vulnerability and fragility of the women represented within the piece. According to Von Veh (2012:80) in *Burning the Candle at Both Ends: Life Loss and Transience in the work of Diane Victor*, Victor employs the medium of drawing with smoke as a less confrontational

33 The function of stain glass windows was to educate the masses and remind them of their need for God.
approach. Drawing with smoke creates more of an unusual and experimental method of mark making which has the capacity to enhance the underlying meaning of the work. The technique was first employed in Grahamstown in 2004 where Victor depicted numerous portraits of victims of AIDS (Von Veh 2012:8). The series consists of 36 portraits which Victor photographed (on a single day in October 2004) of patients at the St Raphael HIV/Aids Centre day clinic in Grahamstown (Stevenson 2005: [sp]). The medium of drawing in smoke is meant to “evoke the transience of human existence, and the liminality of lives dismissed or marginalised by society” (Von Veh 2012:8).

Von Veh (2014:[sp]) argues that within No country for old women, Victor has “quite literally turned the victims into contemporary martyrs, and like her Disasters of Peace series they refer directly to contemporary events, so they perhaps lack subtlety in their attempt to illustrate the worst aspects of certain documented atrocities.” Von Veh (2014:[sp]) further contends that there is a real need for such a militant and direct response to current social ills in South Africa today, where uncomfortable ‘truths’ necessitate uncomfortable viewing. Resistance art under apartheid was about raising public consciousness in response to social injustice, and after the move to democracy for a while it appeared unnecessary. It is clear, however,[…], that enthusiasm for the newly democratic South Africa is being eroded by continuing social challenges. The failure of our state to redress past inequalities ensures that exploitation and injustice remain, resulting in on-going violence and crime.

The Sentinels do not necessarily utilise the direct, literal or militant approach used by Victor in order to achieve what Von Veh (2014:[sp]) calls an “uncomfortable viewing” when responding to an “uncomfortable truth”. Instead, The Sentinels utilise ambiguity, metaphor and suggestion as an alternative artistic approach in responding to a representation of injustices against women and children. A possible reading of the work is that each figure in The Sentinels confronts the viewer by glaring down at them. They watch the viewer watching them and provoke feelings of unease and discomfort. The abject objects (the cow’s tongue and sheep’s stomach) have been placed on The Sentinels’ bodies to reinforce the uncomfortable feelings of viewing the piece, as they encompass metaphor, ambiguity and suggestion in order to challenge the viewer in their experience of the work.

Similar comparisons with regard to this viewing of the work can be made between Jane Alexander’s female figure Stripped (‘oh yes’ girl) (1995) (see Figure 3.15). According to Arnold (1996:116), Stripped (‘oh yes’ girl) is an example of an artwork that responds to violence against woman, as forms of
mutilation can be viewed within the body through the metaphor of decay. According to Von Veh (1998:2), Stripped (‘oh yes’ girl) embodies “most of the major discourses concerning mankind today such as power, violence, suffering, religion, morality, and identity”. However, Von Veh (1998:2) argues that “Alexander has not been prescriptive, but has allowed for a multitude of sometimes conflicting meanings to exist in an open ended poststructuralist way that requires spectator involvement …”. Alexander’s artistic response with regard to Stripped (‘oh yes’ girl) can therefore be seen as open-ended avoidance of categorisation. On the other hand, I consider The Sentinels to embody moments of ambiguity, suggestion and metaphor, whilst simultaneously responding in a direct, activist political approach to violence and abuse.

Within Remember Anene i and Remember Anene ii, the violence and mutilation is suggested through the use of the sheep’s stomach and the cow’s tongue. Despite the evidence of violence and mutilation, the figures are depicted as strong women who confront the viewer. This is enforced through their confrontational gaze, and the body language of the hands. This is directly in contrast with the figure in Stripped (‘oh yes’ girl), who according to Von Veh (1998:7), is depicted as limp and worn out. The figure does not reveal any strong supporting bone structures under her skin; instead she is depicted in a feeble and meek position (possibly dead) which is reinforced by a metal stand. Within The Sentinels series, the figures have not been presented on a stand, as this suggests more complex issues of display, gender and concepts of identity with relation to the female nude (Arnold 1996:117). The ‘stand’ also refers to display constructs in which certain assumptions, associations and ideologies are revealed or concealed through visual presentation. The woman is literally presented to the viewer as an object as she is bound to the support of the stand.

Alexander creates this effect by allowing certain areas of the underlying bandage to protrude through the skin, as though the body is disintegrating in certain places such as the abdomen and knees (Von Veh 1998:4). These wounds seem to resemble that of “a corpse after oozing blood or bodily substance have long been cleaned up and stopped flowing” (Cooper 1998:46). The wounds may also allude to an unseen trauma as they serve the purpose of displaying evidence to the viewer of abusive behaviour (Cooper 1998:46).
By Alexander placing a full, naked female form on a stand for display, *Stripped* (*oh yes’ girl*) (1999) seems to comment broadly on the complexities surrounding the issues of gender and display. John Berger (1972:54) argues that:

> *to be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others yet not recognised for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude...Nudity is placed on display...to be on display is to have the surface of one’s own skin, the hairs of one’s own body turned into a disguise...The nude is condemned to never be naked. Nudity is a form of dress. In the average European oil painting of the nude the principle protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front.*

In both *The Sentinels* and *Stripped* (*oh yes’ girl*) (1999), the protagonist is the viewer, rather than the traditional male spectator which was found in the average European oil painting. By gazing openly at the naked female form, the viewer holds the possibility of condemning the female form by scrutinising her every feature without consequence. Despite this, *The Sentinels* actively challenge this by confronting the viewer through the use of their gaze. They look at the viewer, who is looking at them. In this work, I attempt to deny the potential sexual consumption and erotising of the female form through the method of strapping the breasts against the body using clear cellophane, as well as by over-exposing the Vandyke chemical in order to obscure the representation of the breasts. The figures in *The Sentinels* represent and respond to the women who have been victimised by violence and abuse.
This is enforced through suggestive indicators, such as the animal organs and the physical damage of body through my introduction of matted and clumped hair.

The use of hair as a metaphor in *The Sentinels* figures can be seen to have similar interpretations to that of Alexander’s figure. According to Von Veh (1998:8), the use of hair in Alexander’s figure could be an indicator of femininity, abuse or sickness. The embedded clumps of hair suggest notions of an unfinished process of creating a different identity or persona. The loss of hair is also suggestive of a form of overuse and abuse which has connotations of the metaphor of a Barbie doll that has been overused and over-played with. The loss of hair can also result from chemotherapy treatment for cancer, or from old age (Von Veh 1998:8). Within *The Sentinels*, the figures’ hair has also been depicted in matted clumps in order to reinforce and reference misuse, mistreatment, abuse and violence.

In responding to violence against women and children in South Africa I utilise photographic printmaking techniques to create my own unique form of visual expression. I use different modes of representation to engage with viewer in the hope of deepening their awareness. These modes encompass the politics of representation such as suggestion and metaphors in order to symbolise violence. I engage with the potentially exploitative role of the photograph by actively avoiding further victimisation by turning the camera on myself as well as utilising ambiguous metaphoric objects such as the skull, hair, thorns and dead chickens. By re-aestheticising newspaper cuttings into fine art prints, I aim to coax the viewer to experience feelings of anger, revulsion, disgust, sympathy and empathy. I use my own body as a visual tool to “perform” or recreate elements of specific and generic cases of violence in order to stand with survivors of violence.

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35 Alexander’s use of the motif of the overused doll can also be analysed further in the form of the integration of power relations. An abused or overused toy may signify the hostility and aggression that is found within children’s play (Cooper 1998:48). A battered or worn-out toy may also symbolise an object to which a child holds unabated attention, fascination and endearment, as children “place great amounts of symbolic value in an object that appears neglected, damaged and abused” (Cooper 1998: 50). The concept of the abused and overused doll, coupled with notions of a more sexually mature body, may also evoke ideas of sexual abuse as well as issues pertaining to the sex worker. According to Arnold (1996:16), the figure was inspired by Alexander’s observations of two sex workers who worked on Long Street in Cape Town. The body is presented with some natural beauty which is subverted through the “assertion of unnatural mutilation” (Arnold 1996:117). Some areas invite the viewer to admire the erotic female (the breasts and genitalia), while the damaged and incomplete surfaces signify forms of woman abuse. Powell (1995:13) explains that *Striped (‘oh yes’ girl)* (1999) is a “seductress and victim at the same time, an object of fascination and an object of abuse.”
CONCLUSION

"Violence against women is the most pervasive yet under recognised human rights violation in the world" - (Ellsberg & Heise 2005:9).

South Africa’s constitution is founded on the democratic values of the right to freedom, human dignity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism (The Constitution of...[sa]:3). However twenty-one years after liberation, the country still struggles to combat the discrimination, marginalisation and victimisation of women. Patriarchy still remains deeply entrenched within the psyche of South African people, which has destructive effects on society (Ramphele 2008:75). Despite the reported decline by 5.4% of sexual-offence crimes in this year’s report (SAPS 2015: [sp]), incidents of sexual offences and rape still remain stubbornly high. Von Veh (2014: [sp]), argues that the purpose of resistance art under apartheid was to raise “public consciousness in response to social injustice”, and according to Von Veh (2014:[sp]) this seemed unnecessary after the transition into democracy. However through the examples discussed within this study, it is clear that South Africa still faces significant social challenges that result in ongoing violence and crime, with women and children bearing the brunt of it. Marion Arnold (2005:24) argues that in order “for social transformation to occur, attitudes have to change.”

Political and activist art are two artistic modes discussed within this study that can be argued to facilitate a platform where attitudes can change in a quest for social transformation. Both artistic modes engage in raising questions, inciting debates, arousing responses and informing viewers about social justice concerns. In order to frame this investigation throughout the study, I have chosen to look at political and activist modes of artistic responses to violence in relation to particular examples from a range of contemporary South African artists. This in itself has been particularly challenging; I have found this approach to be somewhat limiting, as there are other complex factors of engagement that do not reduce into clear categories or modes. Some of these factors considered include intention versus interpretation, freedom of expression versus the right to dignity, and issues of censorship and self-censorship.

Williamson, Searle, Mason, Muholi, Victor and myself are some examples of artists who have used a visual voice to respond to the epidemic crisis of violence against women and children in South Africa. Through visual images, these artists are able to raise awareness of certain injustices, which are a result
of current socio-political power relations within South Africa. Each artist uses individual and diverse approaches, but their collective intention is to use their visual expression to interrupt and enhance a heightened consciousness, in the hope of transformation. Therefore, the visual image is used as a tool to expose the prevailing inequalities and abuse of power in the post-apartheid era.

What becomes evident in this study is that the visual image contains a certain amount of power, as it has the capacity to compress a multitude of complex ideologies and sentiments. The image can simultaneously seduce and repulse; confront and comfort the viewer. However, what is indisputable, is that the power of the image can only be stimulated and released by active viewing. Looking at and interacting with the visual image is an active choice. Through the process of looking, the viewer is able to consider the concept of meaning and relationships of power. The viewer engages with the visual image from within the framework of their own experiences, knowledge and social conditions. The visual image can, therefore, have a range of interpretations which is outside the control of the artist. Therefore, one has to consider the complexities surrounding the didactic power relationship between the intentions of the artist and the power of the image, versus the interpretation of the image by the viewer. This has been discussed in each chapter with reference to particular examples. For example, in chapter one, I briefly discussed the use of political art with regard to the commercial use of satirical illustrations that had been published in Jyllands-Posten and Charlie Hebdo. The purpose of this discussion was to demonstrate how a form of visual expression can be used to draw attention to perceptions of social injustices and an intolerance of cultural and religious difference, which sparked furious and violent responses.

In addition, I considered the potential impact of power relationships between the intentions of the artists versus the interpretation of the image by the viewer in relation to the works of Murray, Kurgan, Hipper, Muholi and Victor. Within each example there is an engagement of broader socio-political and economic complexities within South Africa. In my opinion the public outcry that some of the artworks incited, reveal the inability of the public to understand or tolerate differences, as well as an inability to interpret images in a complex and layered reading. This was seen in the discussion regarding the controversy of Murray’s The Spear, which reflected a battle not fought over the content of the artwork; it revealed much deeper and more complex reactions of intolerance, racism and xenophobia. This is further seen in the controversy of Muholi’s Being image, in which the interpretation by the previous Minister of Arts and Culture, Minister Lulama Xingwana, revealed an inability to distinguish between the taboo of pornographic images and the display of lesbian intimacy. The minister’s reaction could also be interpreted as homophobic, as it demonstrated an intolerance of the gay communities’ freedom of
expression. Similarly, the responses from the academics of the University of Pretoria Faculty of Law department, to Victor’s *Made to measure* and *In sheep’s clothing*, revealed questions regarding the artist’s right to freedom of expression versus another person’s right to dignity and respect. I argued that these particular cases of controversy contribute to public awareness by opening up debate and dialogue which strengthens the public’s engagement and consciousness about the unacceptable levels of violence and intolerance in South Africa.

I have argued further, that Victor and Muholi are conscious of the role that the viewer plays when responding to social justice inequalities. Victor’s intensely direct images expose a raw truth, and are perceived by some as invasive, reflecting the breakdown of civil society. Victor's images, force the viewer to engage with the overt cruelty depicted, which ultimately exposes the violation and vulnerability of the people. The power of Victor’s images, lies in her technical ability to seduce the viewer with her aesthetic skill, whilst simultaneously repulsing them with the shocking content. Victor’s hard-hitting images deny the viewer the alibi of ignorance and thus provide a space for the viewer to contemplate, question and respond. My own work is influenced by Victor’s use of seductive surfaces to draw the viewer in and simultaneously repel with unpalatable content. I explore this through the use of text as image and through manipulating my photographic medium.

Muholi’s images can be described as aesthetically provocative, and yet they are simultaneously able to produce compelling political meanings, which carry the hope of social transformation. Through her images Muholi endeavours to make visible the violence experienced by black lesbians in South Africa, and ultimately, within the field of visual art, she claims a space of positive identity for members of the LGBTI community. However, on the one hand, Muholi walks a dangerous line by consciously producing images that reveal the identity of the participants, in a climate where intolerance results in corrective rape and murder. On the other hand, in revealing the identity and naming of her participants, Muholi’s images defy the historical convention of representing the black female, and challenge the exploitive role that can be associated with photography. She does this by forming personal relationships with her participants and actively acknowledging them within her work. She also carefully chooses contexts to exhibit her work, which sometimes provoke or challenge her audiences. She is also careful to protect her participants in order to avoid further victimisation.

Within my own artistic practice, I use photographic printmaking techniques to respond to violence against women and children, and engage with the potentially exploitative role of the photograph. Like Muholi, I look for ways to avoid further victimisation and sensationalism by actively turning the camera
on myself, and consciously acknowledging the politics of representation. I use signs, symbols and metaphors; natural objects symbolic of alienation or defence (such as skulls, hair or thorns in relationship to the softness of skin), to engage the paradox and discomfort of violence and vulnerability. My work is also influenced by Muholi’s understanding of activism in relation to content and public space, in that I chose to exhibit my work at the women’s jail at Constitution Hill during the 16 days of Activism Campaign for No Violence against Women and Children. My choice of venue provides me with a space to engage in creating awareness through an activist mode of public engagement and interaction.

In the Crime Board series (see Figures 3.6.1- 3.6.2) I try to create meaning through the poetical aspects of text by re-aestheticising newspaper cuttings into fine art prints. In reading the multiple stories within the fine art prints, my aim is to consciously direct the viewer to experience a multitude of responses such as horror, disgust, revulsion, anger, sympathy and empathy, which serves to inform the rest of the body of my works. Throughout my body of work, I utilise ambiguity and suggestion to symbolise violence and I use my body as a vehicle to “perform” or recreate elements of generic and specific cases of violence. In doing so, I advocate courage, resilience, inner strength and the empowerment of women.

While one can not measure the impact of art within a society, this study has set out to demonstrate how visual art can provide a heightened consciousness of social justice in South Africa. A single visual image may not have the capability to actively change the problem of violence and abuse. However, its power lies within its visual communicative ability to question, challenge, respond to and confront in the hope of social transformation. Within my own artistic practice I cannot physically change the high levels of violence against women and children in South Africa. However, I can strive to increase societies’ understanding of the epidemic issue of violence, actively stand for the victims of an authoritarian culture, and send a message that embodies the title of my exhibition: Over my dead body!
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APPENDIX 1: