THE RECONSTITUTION OF AFRICAN WOMEN’S SPIRITUALITIES IN
THE CONTEXT OF THE AMAZWI ABESIFAZANE (VOICES OF WOMEN)
PROJECT IN KWAZULU-NATAL (1998 - 2005)

BERNICE STOTT

2006
Amazwi Abesifazane
Voices of Women

A unique project which preserves and promotes the creativity and memory of African women

A project of
Create Africa South

Frontispiece:


BERNICE STOTT

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTERS DEGREE IN TECHNOLOGY: FINE ART IN THE DEPARTMENT OF FINE ART, DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other institution.

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do hereby declare that in respect of the following dissertation:


(1) as far as we know and can ascertain:

• (a) no other similar dissertation exists;
• (b) the only similar dissertation(s) the exist(s) is/are referenced in my dissertation as follows:

(2) all references as detailed in the dissertation are complete in terms of all personal communications engaged in and published works consulted.

Signature of Student

MAY 2006
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Signature of Supervisor

MAY 2006
Date
DEDICATION

Isak Dinesen, who wrote *Out of Africa*, once said "All sorrows can be borne if we put them in a story or tell a story about them" (Dinesen cited in Kidd, 2003:8). In response to this statement Sue Monk Kidd wrote a novel titled *The Secret Life of Bees* (2003). She said "When women bond together in a community in such a way that 'sisterhood' is created, it gives them an accepting and intimate forum to tell their stories and have them heard and validated by others. The community not only helps to heal their circumstance, but encourages them to grow into their larger destiny" (Kidd, 2003:8).

This dissertation is dedicated to the extraordinary women who have participated in this research project and have reconstituted themselves and me.

I am profoundly grateful to: Eunice Gambushe, Bongekele Joyce Mhlongo, Dolly Mbatha, Kholiwe Mkhize, Elsie Nzama, Thandiwe Mkhize, Lillian Mthiyane, Gertrude Zulu, Thuleleni Nzimande, Evelyn Madlala and Florence Mdlolo whom I did not meet in person. Your stories have borne witness to your lives and you have grown into your larger destiny (Kidd, 2003:8).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without substantial financial assistance, my work on this dissertation would not have been possible. I am particularly indebted to:

- The National Arts Council.

- The Durban Institute of Technology Research Committee.

There are individuals who helped me and to whom special thanks are due:

- Andries, my friend, fellow activist/artist and inspiration. Many, many people who have participated in the Create Africa South Project have experienced healing through negotiating their remembered histories. He has made this possible.

- Anthony Starkey, my supervisor, whose valuable support, insights and editorial patience gave shape to this dissertation.

- Virginia MacKenny, my co-supervisor in the early stages of the project. Her incisive guidance was invaluable.
- Leonard Zulu, who was my field assistant in this study. He acted as translator and transcriber of the interviews. Without his linguistic skills and personal experience of the women and the workshops, undertaking this study would have been far more difficult.

- Janine Zagel, the Chief Executive Officer of Create Africa South. Her efficiency and many e-mails kept me informed about the work of the organisation.

- Brenda Gouws, the archivist for Create Africa South, for sharing her knowledge and for many hours of patience with me.

- Helen Labuschagne from the African Art Centre, for her editorial comments and her wholehearted support for the project.

- Blaise and Rylan, my sons, who endured my 'studying' with humour and understanding.

- Richard, my partner and friend, who has willingly involved himself in my work and expressed his practical support during the research period.
ABSTRACT

This study will investigate and critically evaluate the reconstitution of African women’s spiritualities in the context of the Amazwi Abesifazane project. This project forms part of the endeavours of Create Africa South, a Non Governmental Organisation situated in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, which was initiated by the artist Andries Botha. It encourages women, post trauma, to 're-member' themselves by creating memory cloths of embroidery and appliqué reflecting on their experiences in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. This interdisciplinary study theorises that it is an archive that speaks about African women resisting\(^1\) destructive forces and reconstituting their spiritualities through the therapeutic effects of creativity. The study will not include research into the many other activities undertaken by Create Africa South.

Rupture is implied in the use of the word 'reconstitution'. Reconstitution encompasses the act of constituting again the character of the body, mind and spirit as regards health, strength and well-being of the women (McIntosh, 1970:261). In this study, spirituality is defined as the way in which the women in the Amazwi Abesifazane project reflect upon and live out their belief in God.

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\(^1\) Collins (2000:203 cited in Haddad, 2000:340), argues "that the survival strategies that make up the practice of everyday life" are in themselves forms of resistance. Rather than reducing activism to an essential list core (sic) of what constitutes "authentic" activism, space needs to be created for the potential participation of diverse forms of resistance in activist struggles".
The power of storytelling is examined from the perspectives of narratology, narrative therapy, sewing and orality/literary studies as resources for the women's reclamation of their lives. Defining feminisms in South Africa is problematised by issues of race, class and culture. In a context of poverty, everyday survivalist strategies are the diverse forms of resistance seen in the Amazwi Abesifazane project. The women’s stories, cloths and interviews are triangulated as primary data. They are examples of the rich art of resistance against despair and are located in a paradigm of hope. In conclusion, I strongly call for government support in declaring the project a national archive. The multidimensional mediums of the Amazwi Abesifazane/UbuMama projects nurture the women’s creativity and revitalise their spiritualities towards personal and national transformation.
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PREFACE

The following conventions have been applied to this dissertation:

• The Harvard System of referencing has been used.

• " - " used for direct quotations from ... or any other specified author.

• ' - ' used for quotations within quotations.

• Titles of projects, publications and works of art are italicised.

• Illustrations are referred to by their figure number in brackets.

• In the works illustrated the height measurement precedes the breadth.
  All dimensions are given in centimetres.
INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this dissertation is to critically evaluate the reconstitution of African women’s spiritualities in the context of the Amazwi Abesifazane project. In the project, post trauma, women ‘re-member’ themselves by creating memory cloths of embroidery and appliqué that reflect on their experiences in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. The Amazwi Abesifazane (Voices of Women) Project is the core project of Create Africa South (CAS), a Non Governmental Organisation, established in 2000 by Andries Botha, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Fine Art at the Durban Institute of Technology. Perceiving that black South African women were under-represented in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s public testimonies, Botha hoped to focus on and reveal their hidden stories and undocumented lives.

This study regards the Amazwi Abesifazane project as an archive that speaks about African women resisting oppressive forces in their lives and reconstituting their spiritualities through the therapeutic effects of creativity. It traces the catharsis and amelioration of trauma through visual text (the cloths), written texts (the recorded stories) and oral texts (the interviews).

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2 The Amazwi Abesifazane project is an archive in multiple form that bears witness to social history that has been obliterated in South Africa. A derivative of the Amazwi Abesifazane project is the UbuMama (the Zulu word for motherhood) project. Both projects are similar in design and conception. Both have stories embedded in cloths; in the case of the Amazwi Abesifazane project they are memory cloths, whereas the UbuMama project has birthing cloths. In this study the name Amazwi Abesifazane is used generically to include the UbuMama project.
Implicit in the word 'reconstitution' is the idea of rupture. In this study 'reconstitution' encompasses the act or mode of constituting again the character of the body, mind and spirit as regards the health, strength and well being of the women (McIntosh, 1970:261). The reconstitution of their spiritualities suggests the need for rebuilding and reconstructing a disrupted amalgam of theory and praxis. For the purposes of this study, spirituality is defined as the way in which the women in the Amazwi Abesifazane project reflect upon and live out their belief in God. The women in this study are primarily influenced by African Christian spirituality. The plural form of the word 'spiritualities' is used deliberately in the title of the dissertation to embrace the possibility of another faith being represented in the sample group. Using the word 'spiritualities' is also more encompassing of the wider group of women who have participated in the project.

Described also as an African women's theology, the women are engaged in a constant reformation of their faith to meet their experience. It is a sophisticated process of theologising. It is also a syncretistic process and this study introduces the formation of the African Independent Churches and the elements that constitute African theology. Here spirituality is more than a science of interpreting exceptional private experience; it touches every area of human experience and includes the public, social, moral and relational world. The African experience of religion is community orientated as opposed to a western European experience of private individualism. In western thinking there is a clear distinction between the secular and sacred
realm. In African tradition life belongs to God, who summons it into being, strengthens and preserves it. Religion impinges upon every aspect of human living and there is no dichotomy between faith and life.

The *Amazwi Abesifazane* project’s memory cloths make visual complex power relations. In recent years one of the central issues under investigation in the human sciences has been the relationship of resistance to power. Unlike grand studies of insurgency and revolutions of the 1960’s and early 1970’s (e.g. the Chinese Cultural revolution of 1966-9, the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974), the concern now is with unlikely forms of resistance, small scale subversions rather than large scale collective insurrections. Local resistances are not particularly tied to the overthrow of systems, or even to conscious ideologies of emancipation (Foucault, 1976:116). This dissertation traces the unlikely forms of micro-resistances\(^3\) in the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project and intends to contribute to the nascent literature surveying African feminist discourses.

At the heart of the women’s liberation movement lies resistance to domination and oppression. In my own heart, as a white female priest, lies the same resistance to oppression. In essence, the role of the Christian faith is transformation, the reconfiguring of identities. In my vocation as clergy, I have been engaged with various women’s projects amongst which are

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\(^3\) Foucault (1976:116) speaks of micro-resistances and argues that the task of analysing the mechanics of power “could only begin after 1968, that is to say on the basis of daily struggles at grass roots levels, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power”.

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women's spirituality study groups and the Diocese of Natal's Women's Conference. More recently in my growth as an artist, I have been interested in the role of theological aesthetics in the struggle for justice. Theological aesthetics is the convergence of artistic imagination and Christian faith, in keeping hope alive. In keeping hope alive in a transforming social praxis, the theologian and artist need to engage each other in critical, yet supportive, dialogue (De Gruchy, 2001:212).

This interdisciplinary dissertation will engage theoretical positions broadly located in feminist, postmodern, theological and oral/literacy frameworks. The work of a number of theorists underpins this discussion. John De Gruchy, a South African theologian, in Christianity, Art and Transformation (2001) explains the historical and contemporary relationship between the arts and Christianity with reference to the transformation of society. Spivak challenges the hegemony of colonial discourse and strongly encourages the voice of the other. Arnott analyses Spivak's usage of the term subaltern as follows: "Subalternity is a space of difference, of otherness, not a strict class position" (Arnott 1996:108). Storytelling is one of the most powerful methodologies that African women theologies have revived. Conolly, in Memory, Media and Research: Mnemonic Oral-style, Rhythmo-stylistics and the Computer (2002), draws attention to the French anthropologist, Marcel Jousse, who wished to reinstate the values of orality, and questions the hierarchy of writing in contemporary society.
Other key texts include Kristeva's *New Maladies of the Soul* (1995) and *Powers of Horror* (1982), both of which are located in a feminist/psychoanalytical paradigm. She proposes that we understand the artist and the artwork in relation to fundamental psychological crises that all humans must negotiate, and engages with useful notions of trauma and melancholy. The unequal relations of power, through which social relations are mediated, are evaluated by Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* (1977). In his essay *Body/Power* (1980), Foucault situates bodies in history and systemic discursive power, whilst claiming that where there is power there is resistance. These theoretical insights will be applied to a discussion of the micro-resistances used by the *Amazwi Abesifazane* women that are reflected in their memory cloths.

The *Agenda African Feminisms Collections* (2001-2004) and *Agenda Religion and Spirituality No. 61* (2004), are a recent body of feminist scholarship and action. A recurring theme is the tension between western feminism and African feminism. The various writers contest the notion of an all-encompassing homogenising feminism. This collection, and Beverley Haddad's work *African Women: Theologies of Survival, Intersection of Faith, Feminisms and Development* (2000), have been particularly helpful for this dissertation in valuing geographic specificity in faith and culture.

A qualitative approach to research was employed through the use of questionnaires, unstructured interviews, observations and interpretations.
The personal interviews included a core sample group of ten needle-workers from the *Zamukuzophilisa Community Project* in Umlazi, Durban (Figs. 1 and 2). In this study I only utilised data from the stories, cloths and interviews of seven, and interviews from three other women, from the *Zamukuzophilisa Community Project*. The seven women were: Bongekele Joyce Mhlongo, Dolly Mbatha, Eunice Gambushe, Kholiwe Mkhize, Elsie Nzama, Thandiwe Mkhize and Lillian Mthiyane. The interviewees whom I included were Gertrude Zulu, Thuleleni Nzimande and Evelyn Madlala. The late Florence Mdlolo, who was not a member of the *Zamukuzophilisa Community Project*, was a member of the sample group. I also conducted and utilised data from interviews with six women from KwaDabeka and central Durban who had also participated in the *Amazwi Abesifazane* workshops.

**Chapter 1** includes a broad discussion and definition of spirituality. It introduces the reasons for the formation of African Independent Churches and outlines the features of African theology. This dissertation is situated in the paradigm of Creation centred spirituality. In the context of the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project, African women’s theology is the primary survival spirituality of the women. This chapter also focuses on storytelling from the perspectives of narratology, narrative therapy, sewing and orality/literary studies.

**Chapter 2** begins with definitions of feminism(s) and a critique of western feminism(s). The issue of representation, who speaks for whom, is discussed
Figures 1 and 2:

*Zamukuziphilisa Community Project*, Umlazi, Durban, 2004, Photographs (Zagel)
with reference to Gayatri Spivak's thesis 'Can the Subaltern speak'. A synthesis of postmodernism and feminism is explored as "a way of theorising our difference as women in the South African context" (Haddad, 2000:185). Motherhood in South Africa is discussed in the context of the *UbuMama* project (Figs 3 and 4). Harnessing the energy of the arts, the *UbuMama* project is a mother-child health advocacy programme.

In **Chapter 3** I investigate the women's stories, cloths and interviews as triangulated primary data that substantiates the process of loss, hope and reconstitution.

I conclude by recommending government support for the gathering and housing of the *Amazwi Abesifazane* archive. Through the multi-dimensional oral/aural/ literary and visual mediums of the *Amazwi Abesifazane/ UbuMama* projects, the women have regained agency and resolve to reconstitute their spiritualities towards both personal and nation building transformation.
Figures 3 and 4:

UbuMama Brochure
CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE AMAZWI ABESIFAZANE PROJECT: CREATE AFRICA SOUTH

Create Africa South has two stated foundational principles:

- In the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, its premise has been that in order to heal, the individual has to be heard and their individual history must be honoured;
- To develop, preserve and publish, exhibit or market South African creativity both in the visual and literary arts (Create Africa South, 2004).

This study will not include research into other activities undertaken by Create Africa South. However, I was initially drawn to study the project because of the organisation’s holistic approach, manifest in activities such as a human and sexual rights course in Zulu, titled Know Your Body (Figs. 5-10). Visual arts education and exhibitions are promoted through the Tito Zungu Trust Fund (Figs. 11-12), and South African literature is promoted through the Mazisi Kunene Foundation (Figs 13-14). A Business Course for Crafters focuses on skills upgrading (Fig. 15) and the KwaKhulisa Trust Fund (Fig. 16) is being developed into a financial institution, offering bridging finance to grass roots crafters who have no access to conventional banks or funding (Create Africa South, 2004).
Figure 5:
Sexual Rights Course: *Know Your Body*, Ugu District, 2003, Photograph (Zagel)

Figure 6:
Sexual Rights Course: *Know Your Body*, Dududu, 2003, Photograph (Stott)
Figures 7 and 8:

Sexual Rights Course: *Know Your Body*, Umlazi, Durban, 2003, Photographs (Zagel)
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Sexual Rights Course: *Know Your Body*, Jolivet, 2003, Photographs (Stott)
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The *Tito Zungu Trust Fund* recipients: Smanga Mdlala and Samora Waka, 2004, Photograph (Zagel)

Figure 12:

The *Tito Zungu Trust Fund* recipient: Selbourne Shangase, 2003, Photograph (Zagel)
Figure 13:

*Prof. Mazisi Kunene* (Trustee CAS), Date Unknown, Photograph, Photographer Unknown

Figure 14:

*Prof. Mazisi Kunene Foundation*, Archives, 2004, Photograph (Zagel)
Figure 15:

The *Business Course for Crafters*, Umlazi, Durban, 2002, Photograph (Zagel)

Figure 16:

The *KwaKhulisa Trust Fund*, Umlazi, Durban, 2003, Photograph (Zagel)
The founder and chairperson of *Create Africa South*, Andries Botha (Fig. 17), is a South African sculptor working and exhibiting locally and internationally. From the inception of his career in the late 1970’s "his work was passionately concerned with the broad scope of events around him, at that time the effects of apartheid on society" (Leigh, 2003:96). He sees his work as wrestling with notions of identity, with a particular interest in the archiving and witnessing of historical transitions. Confluencing personal creativity and social activism he "has worked extensively to put into place a series of public projects that reflect these concerns" (*Create Africa South*, 2004). He is the sole conceptualiser, fundraiser and primary implementer of the projects. The *Create Africa South* Executive consists of Mazisi Kunene, the trustee (Fig. 13) who is one of Africa’s major poets; Miguel Petchkovsky (Fig 18), an Angolan-born Portuguese artist living in Amsterdam, who is the Creative Director for the Lusophone countries, and Janine Zagel (Fig 19) the Executive Officer who administers the projects of *Create Africa South*. She has both art and business training with a gallery management background (*Create Africa South*, 2004).

The *Amazwi Abesifazane* project has its roots in the *Community Arts Workshop*, set up in Walnut Road in Durban in 1981 to teach unemployed people marketable art skills. In 1991 Sam Ntshangase, a primary school art teacher, and Andries Botha established a small sewing centre in Umbilo Road named *Phakamani*, which means to lift up or stand up (upliftment). Financed by Andries Botha it ran for two years before Gem Melville, a lecturer from
Figure 17:

Andries Botha (Founder CAS), 2005, Photograph (Zagel)

Figure 18:

Miguel Petchkovsky (Creative Director CAS), 2004, Photograph (Botha)
Figure 19:

Janine Zagel (Executive Officer CAS) with Samora Waka, 2003, Photograph (Mrobo)

Figure 20:

Amazwi Abesifazane Workshop, Durban, 2005, Photograph (Stott)
ML Sultan Technikon was invited to take over and develop the centre. Phakamani's high quality products reached overseas markets and also won acclaim on South African soil. These precursory activist projects, encouraging black South African women to invigorate their creativity as an income generating source, formed the groundwork for the Amazwi Abesifazane project. To date the project has involved over two thousand four hundred Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa and Swazi participants (Fig. 20-22).

Create Africa South has a clear commitment to preserving and developing creativity in South Africa and promoting cultural discussions within Africa. An exhibition of cloths made by the women from the Amazwi Abesifazane project, opened at the Durban Art Gallery to coincide with the Third World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances in 2001 held in Durban. A parallel conference called ‘Creativity in Crisis Response’ was sponsored by Create Africa South, and organised with the Self-Employed Women’s Union and the Women’s National Coalition. This historic conference intended linking black South African women to one another and to global movements of women in South America, Canada and Africa. The Amazwi Abesifazane Project has exhibited memory cloths made by South African women in local, national and international exhibitions (Figs. 23-26) between 2001 – 2004 (see listing in Appendix 1).
Figures 21 and 22:

*Amazwi Abesifazane*, Cell C Project, Durban, 2003, Photograph (Zagel)
Figures 23 and 24:

*Betty Rymer Gallery, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2004, Photographs (Courtesy of the Betty Rymer Gallery)*
Figures 25 and 26:

*Okungijabulisayo Exhibition. African Art Centre, Durban, 2004, Photographs (Zagel)*
CHAPTER 2 - SECTION 1

SPIRITUALITY

Currently spirituality is a word that in contemporary times has suffered from considerable over-use. It is widely used to describe almost any principle or practice which has the remotest connection with personal religion, so much so that it is in danger of losing its meaning.

Gordon Wakefield (1983:v) gives a broad definition of spirituality noting that “In all traditions, and in many non-Christian faiths and philosophies, the underlying implication is that there is a constituent of human nature which seeks relations with the ground and purpose of existence, however conceived.” In terms of Christian theology and experience Wakefield understands spirituality as our whole relationship to God and “it concerns the way in which prayer influences conduct, our behaviour and manner of life, our attitudes to other people” (ibid). It also clearly “shapes dogma, inspires movements and builds institutions” (ibid).

In this study, to reiterate, spirituality is defined as the way in which the women in the Amazwi Abesifazane project reflect upon and live out their belief in God. Spirituality in the context of this research can thus be

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4 Theology refers to the study of God and is the rational account of the Christian faith. At times I use the terms theology and spirituality interchangeably, I understand spirituality to be the orthopraxis of reflection and action.
described as an amalgam of faith-theory and praxis and, more specifically, as African women’s spirituality.

In this chapter, I will discuss the relevance of the concept of the *Imago Dei* to this study, and I will locate the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project within the context of Creation centred Spirituality, as opposed to Classical theology. Under the canopy of Creation centred Spirituality is a family tree of contextual theologies, the primary one being liberation theology. The liberation of African countries from colonial rule began in the 1950’s and liberation movements spread to other parts of the world; theological reflection/action was birthed in response to the various movements (Richardson and Bowden, 1994:328). In the spirit of liberation theology several contextual theologies emerged; pertinent to this dissertation are feminist theology, African theology and its younger off-shoot, African women’s theology, which is a hybridisation of feminist and African theology.

The concept of *Imago Dei* is central to a theocentric Christian humanism, and implies a core sense of self, relatedness to God, society and creation. Over the centuries there have been attempts to define the *Imago Dei* (the image of God) in humankind. “So God created humankind in God’s own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them” (Genesis 1:26). Scripture is not clear about the image of God, it is not a philosophical text book, however, embedded within its theology is the implied
meaning of the *Imago Dei*. In relation to human beings the *Imago Dei* can be seen in:

1. Identity
2. Calling
3. Being-in-community
4. The image of God as a gift
5. Jesus as the human being “par excellence”
6. Human rights and the image of God.

I use criteria of the *Imago Dei* to measure the reconstitution of the women’s spiritualities.

**Identity**: to be made in the image of God endows human beings with a particular identity and with this a dignity that confers equality to all people. **Calling** recognises that to be like God means to be active and creative. To be co-creators with God is to follow the commission given by God to work, to emulate the divine activity of creation (Genesis 1:27-28). **Being-in-community** suggests some plurality or community in the Godhead, “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis, 1:26). This living-in-relationship with God implies that to adequately express God’s image in the world, it is necessary to live in community with one another. It is essentially an egalitarian concept.

**The image of God as a gift** means an expression of grace, an unmerited gift without corresponding intrinsic human virtue. It is also a proclamation of the unconditional dignity of human beings. **Jesus as the human being “par excellence”** means that he revealed to the world what God is like
(Colossians, 1:15). “The word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John, 1:14) and underscores the ultimate affirmation of humanity, that God in Jesus Christ also became human. **Human rights and the image of God:** A theistic view of human rights is based on the assumption that all human beings are made in the image of God and as such belong to God. They have the right to be treated in a way that befits such creatures (Theological Education by Extension. Doctrine 1. Creation, 1993:88).

John De Gruchy (1995:239), in a chapter entitled ‘A theology for a just democratic world order’, stresses the relationality of human beings because we are related to God. *Imago Dei* refers primarily to relationship and sociality and thus responsibility to, and for, each other and the rest of creation. He states that, “Such a relational understanding of what it means to be human has immediate relevance for a post-liberal democratic reconstruction of human society” (ibid).

How then does the notion of the *Imago Dei* translate into a post liberal democratic reconstruction of human society? More specifically, how does it affect the *Amazwi Abesifazane* women? De Gruchy (1995:267) stresses that God is a God of the powerless and poor; “God’s power is exercised for the sake of human redemption and wholeness”. De Gruchy (ibid) says that:

If the first obligation of the church is to keep those in power accountable, its second responsibility is to enable those who are powerless to become empowered so that they can participate as equals in the exercise of power.
De Gruchy (1995:268) continues to interrogate the issue of power and powerlessness with a view to transformation by saying:

The relationship between power and powerlessness has been at the centre of the struggle for democracy historically, and it remains so today, not least with regard to gender relationships. Power is the ability to control the political process: when exercised for self-advantage it is in danger of becoming corrupt. Powerlessness is the condition of those who have no meaningful way of participating in the process, and therefore no ability to protect what is justly theirs.

The Amazwi Abesifazane project provides a meaningful way of participating in the process of a struggle for democracy by reinstating and repositioning the women’s histories. It is a neglected archive about a neglected past, and provides a good example of how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as a repository of stories of South Africa’s tortured past, largely failed to include the stories of black South African women. Carol Becker (Art Journal, 2004:118) confirms this marginalisation by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission when she states:

Their stories have remained hidden. It is into this environment of ongoing historical and psychological reflection, of debate about the past and its implications for the future, that Amazwi Abesifazane, or “Voices of Women”, was imagined into being by sculptor Andries Botha. He hoped to bring focus into the often undocumented lives of black South African women, many of whom are from the rural areas and townships that suffered extreme acts of violence during the decades of apartheid.
The reinstating and repositioning of the women's histories empowers them with a sense of participation in the rebuilding of a nation's collective memory. Again, the reinstating and repositioning of the women's (her)stories empowers them with a sense of a God who 'sees' them, and a God who is a God of the poor and powerless. The *Imago Dei* refers primarily to relationship and sociality and thus responsibility to, and for, each other and the rest of creation (De Gruchy, 1995:239). As a 'lived' theology it directly confirms the *Amazwi Abesifazane* women's worth, dignity and agency, and "has immediate relevance for a post-liberal democratic reconstruction of human society" (ibid).

Introducing Creation centred Spirituality in his book *Original Blessing*, Matthew Fox (2000:3) says the book is his effort:

to deconstruct and reconstruct our inherited religious traditions of the West: to deconstruct the woefully anthropocentric and pessimistic Fall/Redemption religion (Classical Theology) that begins with 'original sin' and to reconstruct religion with the more ancient and empowering tradition of Creation Spirituality that begins with 'original goodness'.

He also speaks of displacing religion with spirituality, which echoes my own choice of the word 'spirituality' in the title of this dissertation. Fox (ibid) says Creation centred Spirituality wishes to:

... displace patriarchal control and pessimism with hope. This hope derives from a more feminist philosophy that is non-dualistic and urges compassion and creativity, including celebration and struggle for eco-justice and social justice. This book also represents my continued efforts to reground Christian spirituality in its Jewish and biblical roots, roots that celebrate both our capacity as mystics (awe as the
beginning of wisdom) and our capacity as prophets (workers of social transformation).

Fox (2000:12) contends that in the past three centuries the creation tradition has been almost entirely forgotten in Western culture and religion. He continues by saying "It has been kept alive by artists, poets, scientists, feminists and political prophets but not by theologians" (ibid). My attraction to his approach is the importance he ascribes to the trust put in images and imagination. This concurs with my own belief that theological aesthetics is the convergence of artistic imagination and Christian faith, in keeping hope alive. Believing there are many replies to the question of why the Fall/Redemption theology has dominated in the West, Matthew Fox (2000:267) states that a fundamental answer has to be that:

It has served the purposes, conscious and unconscious, of empire builders and patriarchy and certain political and economic systems to encourage a Fall/Redemption instead of a Creation centred Spirituality. Fall/Redemption ideologies help to keep the poor poor. They do not encourage the trust, the creativity, the moral outrage, the prophetic call and bonding for social transformation that the oppressed need to hear. In fact, Fall/Redemption theology is a theology of the oppressor.

In terms of emphasising the importance of Creation centred Spirituality as the underpinning of this dissertation, I include an excerpt from the appendix to Original Blessing.
This comparison highlights the differences between Fall/Redemption and Creation centred Spiritualities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall/Redemption</th>
<th>Creation centred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Spokespersons:</strong> Augustine; Thomas à Kempis; Bossuet; Cotton Mather; Tanquerry</td>
<td>Key Spokespersons: Yahwist author; wisdom writers; prophets; Jesus; Paul; Irenaeus; Benedict; Hildegard; Francis; Aquinas; Mechtild; Eckhart; Julian; Cusa; Teilhard; Chenu; feminists; liberation theologians; artists; musicians; poets (See Appendix A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith is &quot;thinking with assent&quot; (Augustine)</td>
<td>Faith is trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriarchal</td>
<td>Feminist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascetic</td>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortification of body</td>
<td>Discipline toward birthing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of passions</td>
<td>Ecstasy, Eros, celebration of passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion is a curse</td>
<td>Passion is a blessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God as Father</td>
<td>God as Mother, God as Child, as well as Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering is wages for sin</td>
<td>Suffering is birth pangs of universe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death is wages for sin</td>
<td>Death is a natural event, a prelude to recycling and rebirth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiness is quest for perfection</td>
<td>Holiness is cosmic hospitality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to past to a state of perfection and innocence</td>
<td>Imperfection is integral to all nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep soul clean</td>
<td>Make soul wet so that it grows, expands and stays green ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Fox, 2000:316).
Liberation theology falls within the ambit of Creation centred Spirituality.

Kee (cited in Richardson & Bowden, 1994:329) says that:

The theology of liberation presupposes the liberation of theology. Until theology ceases to identify with the values, interests and goals of those who benefit from structural injustice then theology can have nothing to contribute to the liberation movement.

Liberation theology had its origins in Latin America following the liberation of colonial African countries in the 1950's. Liberation movements spread throughout the Third World. In the African context the meaning of 'liberation' was the achievement of de-colonisation. However, in other parts of the world, countries had long since been decolonised. For Third World countries the meaning of liberation is freedom from dependence on the economies of the rich nations of the world.

Third World economies are geared to supplying primary/raw commodities at low cost to the developed nations. The developed nations use the commodities to manufacture expensive goods, that in turn are sold to the poor countries. International investment agencies aggravate and perpetuate the cycle of economic colonialism and dependency. Internal dependence takes place within Third World countries. This occurs where class disparities are distinguished by an enormous difference between the standard of living of the rich and the mass of the people. In South America the poor were also subjected to repressive military dictatorships (Kee cited in Richardson & Bowden, 1994:329).
The Vatican Council II in 1965, in its Pastoral Constitution on 'The Church in the Modern World', profoundly supported the Latin American bishops, priests and theologians in their attempt to reflect theologically and to act socially in their concern for the poor. In 1971 at the Synod of Bishops in Rome, the Latin American bishops were very forceful in putting forward their beliefs on the theme of justice in the world. In the same year Gustavo Gutierrez, a theologian, published A Theology of Liberation which became the key text of Liberation theology. Essentially Liberation theology sees Yahweh in the Old Testament as liberator, freeing the Israelites from bondage and forming them into a nation. In the New Testament Jesus is seen as the Christ, the Liberator, who brings life and proclaims freedom. The integration of faith and practice, orthopraxis, is an imperative in Liberation theology (Wakefield, 1993:247). In the words of Gustavo Gutierrez (cited in Wakefield, 1993:247) "To be converted means to commit oneself to the process of the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, to commit oneself clearly, realistically and concretely".

African theology, as a liberation theology, is a deliberate attempt to strip Christianity of cultural associations, the non-essential forms brought to Africa by western missionaries. African theological scholars have argued that Africans knew God, variously named as Qamata, uNkulunkulu, Modimo and uMvelinqangi), before the coming of Christianity (Theological Education by Extension notes : Systematic Theology 2 Course, 343:1996:27). It seeks to
emphasise the similarities between African cultural practices and the biblical
world view "to warrant continuity rather than discontinuity" (Phiri, 2004:17).
It also attempts to build on existing African religious traditions with a view to
restoring early Christian traditions that have been neglected.

In describing the nature of African theology, I will discuss the concepts of
community, indigenisation, spiritual forces, temperament and ancestral
veneration. The idea of community is embedded in Classical Christian
theology. However, this theology has over-emphasised western individualism
whereas a more vigorous sense of community is intrinsic to being African.
The theologian John S Mbiti has suggested an inversion of Descartes',
"I think, therefore I am" to "I belong, therefore I am" (Theological Education
by Extension Notes, 1993, Doctrine 1:103).

In terms of indigenisation, there is a need to make European Christian
theology contiguous with African traditional customs and histories without
syncretism\(^5\) evolving. In terms of spiritual forces, the traditional African view
of life sees no division between the visible and invisible worlds; people,
animals and objects have life force that acts continually, constantly, exerting
an influence. Life is a seamless totality, a whole; there is no perceived
division of the sacred and the secular (Theological Education by Extension
notes: Doctrine 1, 1993:34). In contrast to the "intellectualised Christianity
of the missionary kind" (Appiah-Kubi and Torres, 1979:117-8 cited in

\(^5\) Syncretism is a term used in the systematic study of religion, its precise application is still a
subject of discussion. Here it is used to mean: "the negative nuance of an inadmissible mixture
of religious belief or practice" (Richardson and Bowden, 1983:560).
Theological Education by Extension Notes, 1989, Christian Spirituality:248) the African temperament tends to be free, emotional and intense in its worship. The African sense of community extends to the relationships between different generations of people. African theology assures Africans that they are still in communion with their ancestors. This communion with ‘the living-dead’ is not ancestor worship, but ancestor veneration akin to the Christian communion of saints and beatification of saints (Theological Education by Extension notes : Doctrine 1,1993:33).

Who are the African Independent Churches and why were they formed? Bengt Sundkler’s book “Bantu Prophets in South Africa”, written in 1948, provided us with the first typology of the African Independent Churches (Sundkler, 1948:52 cited in Hofmeyr, 1994:211). He divided them into two major categories of Zionist and Ethiopian churches, with a sub-category of Zionist-Apostolic (messianic churches). Kiernan (1990:9) suggests that these analyses are still relevant but require modification. The differences he suggests are between a ‘word’ (book) religion and a ‘spirit’ religion, i.e. Ethiopianism is a ‘book’ religion whilst the Zionists are a ‘spirit’ religion tending towards Pentecostalism.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, black Christians, ecclesiastically speaking, were faced with three alternatives. Firstly, as members of a mission (colonial) church they could be a separate black church under white control. Secondly, they could be members of a multi-racial church where paternalism prevailed. Thirdly, they could start a new church free of the mission and multi-racial churches. Numbering around three and a half million members in 1970, they
form by far, the largest group of churches in South Africa (Hofmeyr, 1994:10).

Why were they formed needs to be approached with circumspection due to the positing of theories by white historians. However, it has been suggested that they came into existence:

- As a rejection of white control in both the mission and multi-racial churches.
- As a rejection of foreign European culture in favour of an African culture in the church.
- Disillusionment with proclaimed equality in the multi-racial churches.
- An outlet for otherwise suppressed black leadership, it included a desire for respect and power in a ‘powerless’ environment.
- A desire for the traditional structure of African society, the church organisation resembled the tribal community.
- A reaction to ‘rice-Christianity’ where missions offered education as an enticement to the gospel.
- Disillusionment the with gap between the preached message and praxis of white churches (Kiernan, 1990:75-75).

Kiernan notes “There is a noticeable shift away from explanations deriving from racial division and segregation” and a tendency to interpret it “as a positive ... response to the demands of an urban environment (Kiernan, 1990:77).
Classified as African Independent churches, Ethiopian Churches seceded from white mission churches and tried to pattern themselves on the mission churches in church organisation and Bible Interpretation but have a greater interest in healing. The term covers a wide variety of Christian groupings. The earliest of these churches were tribal churches, an example of which was the Tembu church founded by Nehemiah Tile in 1884. The Ethiopian church (by that name) begun in 1892 as a multi-tribal church led by three ex-Methodists, Mangena Mokone being the principal founder. It drew its members from the huge concentration of Africans on the Highveld.

In 1896, the Ethiopian Church attracted by the American African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) asked for membership. James Dwane was consecrated assistant bishop here in South Africa by a visiting American bishop, but was not recognised by the American bishops as a ‘full’ bishop. Dwane then approached the Church of the Province of South Africa (CPSA) and in 1900 Dwane and a group of several thousand followers were accepted into the CPSA as the Order of Ethiopia despite the CPSA’s reluctance for fear of creating segregation. They had to wait until 1979 before their own order of bishops was granted. White reaction to the creation of Ethiopian churches was two-fold. Initial suspicion was over its important facilitation of the politicisation of Africans. Mission churches worked towards creating separate black branches of their churches (Hinchcliff, 1968:23).
The name "Zionist churches" covers a wide variety of churches with similar characteristics. In 1904 the Zion Apostolic Church was started by missionaries from the Christian apostolic Church in Zion, Illinois, USA. Today most of the Zionist churches are descended from the five splinter groups that broke away from it. The original American church placed great emphasis on healing and holy living, the Zionists stress the work of the Holy Spirit and healing. Their organisation is localised rather than centralised and includes bishops (male) and women who have found empowerment in becoming prophets. African cultural features in their worship include great use of symbolism, singing, dancing and the use of drums. They display holiness theology and use purification rituals and emphasise healing, abstinence from alcohol and tobacco and the eating of meat. Rites include baptism and occasional night communions (Idown, 1965:86).

Some African Independent Churches are 'messianic' in that they believe their leader to possess equal healing and helping status as that of Christ. Isaiah Shembe's Nazareth Baptist Church in KwaZulu-Natal and Ignatius Lekganyane's Zion Christian Church in Zion City, Moria, are examples of this. Leadership succession is dynastic.

From the outset, the Zionist churches have been closely involved with Pentecostal churches and some are Pentecostal, affiliated to worldwide Pentecostal organisations. Since 1915 various attempts have been made to form associations of the African Independent Churches. The most important
and largest of these is the African Independent Churches’ Association formed in 1965. Two other organisations have been formed due to breakaways (Pobee, 1979:39).

The current typology of indigenous churches is the Ethiopian movement, the Zionist movement and its sub-category, the Zionist-Apostolic (messianic) churches. The question of how and why they were formed is complex, overall it seems to be a search for a truly African indigenous church (Idown, 1965:93).

Isobel Phiri, Professor of African Theology in the School of Theology and Religion at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, identifies African women's theologies as belonging to African theology and "to a wider family of feminist theology, which is further categorised as Liberation theology," (Phiri, 2004:16).

Phiri, referring to the work of Rosemary Radford Reuther (Radford Reuther, 1983), states that feminist theology had "its origins in the secular movement of women in the 1960's which was aimed at the liberation of women from all forms of sexism, and argued that patriarchy is the root cause of oppression of women in all spheres of life. Christian women reflected on the issues raised by the women's movement from a faith perspective" (Phiri, 2004:16).
Moving beyond the theorising of middle class white American and European women:

Christian women from different regions of the world .... in the second part of the 20th century, began the process of localising feminist theology so that it could speak to the particular experiences of a variety of Christian women. This gave rise to specific theologies which bear different names. On the African continent, women called reflection of their context and their faith, African women's theologies (Phiri, 1997a).

African women’s theology was a reaction against eurocentric feminist theology. Highlighting the plural 'theologies' as opposed to the idea of one theology, Phiri acknowledges the diversity of women’s experiences in the realms of religion, race, culture, economics and politics. African women’s theologies share with African theology the experiences of colonialism, racism, classism and exclusivism. As a protest theology, African theology protested against the colonial and missionary view of African religion and culture as inferior, and even evil. (Phiri, 2004:17).

We African women theologians accept the fact that African culture is important because it gives us our identity as Africans. Therefore African women theologians endorse African theology’s initiatives of taking African culture as part of our source when doing (sic) theology (ibid).

Noting that we acquire culture from the communities in which we are raised, and that culture is a construction of a particular community and that it is dynamic and not static, Phiri draws attention to every culture assigning roles to women and men.
Phiri (ibid) says that:

Unfortunately all African cultures have viewed women as less important than men, thereby making it difficult for women to have valid relationships with self, others (both women and men), creation and God. Therefore, African women theologians are calling men and women into the religions of Africa and society to examine their cultures again from a gender perspective.

Drawing attention to the need to include the voices of all women, not just theologians, Phiri acknowledges that the majority of African women are engaged in oral theology. This is precisely where the Amazwi Abesifazane women are positioned, practicing theology from ‘below’ and not from ‘above’. “Storytelling is one of the powerful methodologies that African women theologies have revived .... Through storytelling, African women are highlighting to the world their spiritual, emotional and physical suffering and their potential to transform their oppression” (Phiri, 2004:20). The power of storytelling is discussed in section 2 of this chapter.

The Amazwi Abesifazane women evince a hybridised, survivalist form of theology that is highly adaptive to reconstituting their spiritualities. Phiri (2004:21) states that “African women’s theologies are committed to exposing the ideological base of Christianity that maintains and justifies the oppression of women”. The Amazwi Abesifazane texts do not necessarily espouse conscious ideologies of emancipation, but their covert resistance is congruent with the subaltern reading of the Christian gospel that “encourages the struggle for liberation and recognition of injustice in the
church and society” (ibid). African women’s theology is the axis of the survival theology of the women in the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project.

**CHAPTER 2 - SECTION 2**

**NARRATOLOGY, MEMORY AND ORALITY**

African Women’s theology is the pivotal survival theology of the women in the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project, as was discussed in the previous section. Their theology/spirituality is expressed in three primary mediums: oral/aural story telling (to the workshop group), written stories which accompany the cloths and the visual stories of the memory cloths. Gerald Prince (in Groden and Krieswirth, 1997, ¶2) argues that “the narrative component of a narrative text, can and should be studied without reference to the medium in which it occurs” (ibid). While I prefer not to separate narrative from its medium, in this section I will examine story telling in the context of orality-literacy studies, “as one of the powerful methodologies that African women theologies have revived ...” (Phiri, 2004:20).

Broadly speaking, story telling can be categorised as belonging to the field of narratology which is a theory of narrative. Prince (cited in Groden and Krieswirth, 1997, ¶2) says that narratology:

... examines what all narratives, and only narratives, have in common as well as what enables them to differ from one another qua narratives ... narratives are found, and stories told, in a variety of media: oral and written language (in prose or in verse), of course, but also sign
languages, still or moving pictures (as in narrative paintings, stained-glass windows, or films), gestures (programmatic) music, or a combination of vehicles (as in comic strips).

Yet beneath stories is an embodiment of sensory experiences intertwined with memory; collective memory which is derived from sentiments, sensations, feelings that are beyond words. In *Sensuous Scholarship*, Paul Stoller, an anthropologist, "provides graphic and sensuous accounts of two interactions with Hanka spirits in a Soughay compound. Between these two accounts, Stoller argues that "embodiment is not primarily textual; rather, the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds and tastes, all of which trigger cultural memories" (Stoller cited in Conolly, 1999:3). Stoller is clear that "the power of collective memory does not devolve from textual inscriptions. It stems from stories (the oral tradition)" (ibid).

The importance of the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project as a significant archive of memory and orality is highlighted by Sienaert and Conolly when they discuss the work of the French anthropologist, Marcel Jousse: "In order to rehabilitate orality, Jousse had to find its main strength and literacy's main weakness: memory" (Sienaert and Conolly, 2000:2). Jousse (1990:163 cited in Sienaert and Conolly, 2000:3) stated that "Memory is the whole of man and the whole of man is memory". The pivotal question of Jousse's anthropology was: "How does the Anthropos, situated at the very core of the Universe's perpetual motion, react to this activity and hold it in his Memory?" (ibid). Of all living beings, humankind, for Jousse was the most mimic in a
dynamic cosmos where all parts interact or play. Humankind has a unique ability, unlike the anthropoid, to copy all the actions of the cosmic environment. Jousse (1990:163 cited in Sienaert and Conolly, 2000:3) believes that:

Moreover, he alone can consciously re-play what has been played on and in him – what has been im-pressed. His interiorised impressions are 'mimemes', and the re-play of these stored 'mimemes', their 'ex-
pression' in other words, is 'memory'. Thus all memory is psychomotor in origin and the strength of the recall, re-play or memory will be proportionate to the strength of the play of the original gestural elements.

Critical to understanding Jousse's anthropology is the idea of gesture. Gesture in his terminology "is the result of a reverberation, of an action of the universe in man" (Sienaert, 1990:92). Hence, gesture is a subtle living energy which propels humankind and shapes itself in the form of thought or expression and obeys biological rhythm (Sienaert, 1990:94). In this dissertation it is important to note that Jousse's notion of the anthropos playing out, or replaying, what has been im-pressed is the original of all art, 'he' cannot do without art (Sienaert, 1990:95). Hence memory exists a priori to art or creativity. Art, poetry and craft are expressive behaviours that record the socio-cultural archives of civilisation (Conolly, 2002:4).

"Memory is the reactivation of gestures previously internalised, shaped, played in us with the co-operation of our body" (ibid). To emphasise the
viscerality of memory, Candice Pert, a bio-physicist from Georgetown University observes:

These recent discoveries are important for appreciating how memories are stored not only in the brain, but in the psychosomatic network extending into the body, particularly in the ubiquitous receptors between nerves and bundles of cell bodies called ganglia, which are distributed not just in and near the spinal cord, but all the way out along pathways to internal organs and the very surface of our skins (Pert, 1997:173, cited in Conolly, 2002:165).

Jousse understood memory to be “recorded literally in the viscera, in the flesh” (Sienaert and Conolly, 2000:5). Seeing humankind as psycho-physiologically indivisible, every heart, every memory and every fibre of the body developed unceasing memorisation from early youth onwards (ibid). Prior to written records rhythmic singing, recitation or chanting, structured with mnemonic formulas which Jousse called the oral style, informed and taught the nations of the world. In summary, Jousse wished to reinstate the values of orality (Sienaert and Conolly, 2000:2). Jousse’s thesis was “that human expression was rooted in gesture, that language was a complexus of roots, that oral language was a laryngo-buccal geste and that writing was, at least in origin, no more than the stabilisation of oral language” (ibid). Jousse’s book, the Oral Style, fundamentally questions the hierarchy of writing in contemporary society and “pleads for the rehabilitation of the values of orality” (ibid).

The introduction described the Amazwi Abesifazane project as encouraging women, post trauma, to re-member themselves by creating memory cloths
of embroidery and appliqué reflecting their experiences in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. According to the project founder, Andries Botha (2003), the hyphenated word re-member is deliberately used by *Create Africa South* to suggest both a psychic dismembering and re-membering of the women's lives. This particular word, particularly when hyphenated, helped to posit the hypothesis of this dissertation. 'Re-membering' implies the reconstituting of a corporeal body and a person experiencing self-actualisation; the re-integration of a person into a society or group and/or a re-ordering of a body politic.

The *Amazwi Abesifazane* workshops foreground stories, memory and orality. Although they are not in the oral style in the form of rhythmic recitation or singing, they do operate in the oral-aural/gestural-visual modes and include the written mode. However, by committing a representation to paper (Jousse on oral style cited in Conolly, 2002:2), by "putting performance on the page" (Chamberlin cited in Conolly, 2002:2), or on the cloth for that matter we attempt the impossible, we distort "these living propositional gestures, ... by representing them graphically in space, when they should be danced in time" (Jousse cited in Sienaert, 1990:102).

Spirituality, feminisms and the reconstitution of body, mind and spirit through creativity are key constructs of this study. When the cloths are exhibited in galleries, the gallery viewer sees the visual text and reads the written text, these two mediums are the privileged mediums carrying the
stories in that context. Completely absent to the gallery viewer is the oral-aural/gestural mode in the form of workshop interaction, that forms part of the healing process of the women's lives. Faith is disrupted by crises of enormous proportions that beset women who are poor and struggling to survive. Carol Becker (2004:122) draws attention to consciousness raising amongst women: "It is through the telling of stories in words and images that the women begin to understand that their lives are like those of many other women. This recognition is the beginning of feminist/social consciousness." The project acknowledges and honours the psychophysiological indivisibility of the women by privileging stories, memory and orality and it provides a significant example of the role of art making as an agent of social/personal transformation.

CHAPTER 2 – SECTION 3

NARRATIVE THERAPY

"Stories are medicine. They have such power; they do not require that we do, be, act anything; we need only listen. The remedies for repair or realisation of any lost psychic drive\textsuperscript{6} are contained in stories" (Estés, 1992:15). The reclamation of lost psychic drives, through the healing process of telling stories, is the hypothesis of this dissertation; the reconstitution of African women's spiritualities in the context of the Amazwi

\textsuperscript{6} A psychic drive can be described as the energy needed to move one forward, moving a person towards attaining a goal.
Abesifazane project. I have defined reconstitution as the act or mode of constituting again the character of the body, mind and spirit as regards the health, strength and well being of the women. The Amazwi Abesifazane stories are written and visual texts where catharsis occurs through an aesthetic and poetic reading of the body, mind and spirit. Stories are medicine for the Amazwi Abesifazane women; the telling of stories strengthens their ground and purpose of being.

So as not to claim stories as ‘belonging’ to the discipline of psychotherapy, Estés says, “Story is far older than the art and science of psychology, and will always be the elder in the equation no matter how much time passes” (Estés, 1991:19). When asked what it is that she ‘does’ in her consulting room to help women, she replied “I place substantial emphasis on clinical and developmental psychology and I use the simplest and most accessible ingredient for healing stories. Most times we are able, over time, to find the guiding myth or fairy tale’ that contains all the instruction a woman needs for her current psychic development. These stories comprise a woman’s soul drama” (Estés 1992:15). Her work incorporates art making. “Art is important for it commemorates the seasons of the soul, or a special or tragic event in the soul’s journey. Art is not just for oneself, not just a marker of one’s own understanding. It is also a map for those who follow after us” (ibid). The Amazwi Abesifazane project is very conscious of being a new archive, a

7 The notion of myth or fairy tale does not imply a believed but untrue story with lesser gravitas than ‘reality’. As a Jungian analyst, Estés would be referring to the “collective unconscious which is made up of the cumulative experience of all human generations, stored in the form of universal archetypes” (Rohmann, 2002:213). “Archetypes include the mythic figures such as the Hero and the Wanderer” in the human psyche (Rohmann, 2002:214).
different map privileging orality, visuality and the literacy of subjugated knowledges.

Two psychologists, J Freedman and G Combs, describe how their therapy was influenced by the work of Milton Erikson. They became interested in the therapeutic use of stories, Erikson believing that people have the capacity to “actively re-author their lives” (Freedman and Combs, 1996:10). Containing educational intent, his therapeutic work “involved expanding and enriching people’s stories about themselves” (ibid). Also influenced by the Australian family therapist, Michael White, they became less interested in solving problems and more interested in ‘thickening’ stories “that did not support or sustain problems. We discovered that as people began to inhabit and live out these alternative stories, the results went beyond solving problems. Within the new stories, people could live out new self-images, new possibilities for relationship, and new futures” (Freedman and Combs, 1996:16).

Edward Bruner (cited in Freedman and Combs, 1996:33), states that ... "stories become transformative only in their performance". The key to this understanding is the notion of the performative, a story is re-enacted, retold or reconstituted for an audience or public (which may be one other person). “When life narratives carry hurtful meanings or seem to offer only unpleasant choices, they can be changed by highlighting different, previously un-storied events or by taking new meaning from already-storied events, thereby constructing new narratives” (Freedman and Combs, 1996:32). An
interesting correlation is Jousse’s research, which focused on the oral style “performing four functions: recording, memorising, knowing and understanding” (Conolly, 2000:125). He was clear that memory “supports the process of learning by repetition in performance” (ibid).

Not believing there is an ‘essential’ or ‘true’ self, Freedman and Combs work with people to distinguish which of the many selves is preferred in certain contexts or stories. Then they work to assist them in developing and living out the ‘preferred selves’ in the narratives that support their growth (Freedman and Combs, 1996:35). Freedman and Combs are specific about their process of working towards preferred stories that extend into the future and act as instructive guides.

For them, the simple act of listening constitutes a revolutionary act and sets in motion the inner life of the storyteller. Their listening comes from “a not knowing position and is not an ‘I don’t know anything’ position. Our knowledge is of the process of therapy, not the content and meaning of people’s lives” (Freedman and Combs, 1996:44). In deepening their listening they look for gaps in their understanding, asking people to fill in the details or they may listen “for ambiguities in meaning” and then ask “people how they are resolving or dealing with these ambiguities” (Freedman & Combs, 1996:47). They use ‘reflective listening’ to summarise and check on the sense of the person’s story. Through the process of listening, reflecting, questioning and commenting, people “can’t help but examine their stories in
new ways”, and in this process “new meanings and new constructions emerge” (ibid).

Estés tells of her visceral experience of ‘clanswomen’ story tellers who speak “in the plain voice of women who have lived blood and babies, bread and bones. For them, story is a medicine which strengthens and arights the individual and the community” (Estés, 1992:16). As instructive guides through the complexities of life, Estés suggests that “stories enable us to understand the need for and the ways to raise a submerged archetype” (ibid).

Estés has a doctorate in ethnic-clinical psychology which is the combining of clinical psychology and ethnology (Estés, 1992:14). Essentially this dissertation is also an ethnological study, and the work of Freedman and Combs is relevant because it is underpinned by ‘social constructionism’. Its main premise is “that the beliefs, values, institutions, customs, labels, laws, divisions of labour, and the like that make up our social realities are constructed by the members of a culture as they interact with one another from generation to generation and day to day. That is, societies construct the ‘lenses’ through which their members interpret the world” (Freedman and Combs, 1996:16). Listening to individual people’s stories, and to cultural and contextual stories, is important from a social constructionist world view. Recognising that culture can oppress people, cultural narratives can shape individual stories. Dominant narratives emerge over other narratives and
“these dominant narratives will specify the preferred and customary ways of believing and behaving with the particular culture. Some cultures have colonised and oppressed others. The narratives of the dominant culture are then imposed on people of marginalised cultures” (Freedman and Combs, 1996:32). In the final chapter I explore the genre of stories of the women in the Amazwi Abesifazane project, whilst being mindful of the internalised dominant narratives concerning race, class and gender.

The ideas that the unmasking of dominant narratives, and the performance of stories, lead to transformation are manifested in the cloths and stories of the Amazwi Abesifazane project. Michael White (following Foucault) argues that dominant stories can saturate and subjugate people’s lives. It becomes important then that the therapist helps unmask the “so-called truths” that “hide their biases and prejudices” behind the “disembodied ways of speaking that give an air of legitimacy to restrictive and subjugating dominant stories” (White cited in Freedman and Combs, 1996:57). White argues that when ‘meaning is performed’ on local and particular stories of individuals and groups, they become an effective “insurrection of subjugated knowledges that also claim many possibilities beyond the restrictive dominant narratives” (White cited in Freedman and Combs, 1996:40). Independently, Andries Botha (2005) underscores White’s statement saying that the Amazwi Abesifazane project “Registers a position that undermines the dominant narrative of South Africa. It is the voice of insurrection that destabilises the monolithic narrative. It is an alternative voice.”
The theologian, Gerald West, also points out that poor and marginalised women are under heavy surveillance. There needs to be both a safe social site and sufficient time for the articulation of their theologies (West cited in Haddad, 2000:301). The *Amazwi Abesifazane* workshops are safe sites for the articulation of the women's theologies; they are not traditional therapy forums. There is no therapist who, through skilful listening and reflection, highlights new meaning from the painful narratives with the client. There is no therapist who unmaskes the hidden prejudices of dominant and subjugating stories. There is no therapist who, with the storyteller, develops and expands a preferred self; who begins to live out a newly constructed narrative. Each story stitched into the fabric is not the 'counter story', nor is it the 'narrative of the preferred self'.

However, what is present is the safe social site and sufficient time afforded by the week-long workshops. In addition the *Create Africa South* philosophy gives weighty recognition to the archival importance of the women's stories. The subject of the cloths is *A day I will never forget*. After communal sharing of the stories, the narratives are written down and their memory is stitched into a cloth becoming an art work. In Jousse's terms art is the record of the socio-cultural archives of civilisation (Conolly 2002:4). I would argue that the art work, the act of creativity (reconstituted memory) constitutes the pivotal 'new story' where the women experiment with new self-images for new futures. The act of creativity transforms the senselessness of suffering from hopelessness to an understanding of it. Suffering is witnessed by
others and foregrounds the severity of the women’s negative experiences. Not only is the telling cathartic, but it is also a rite of passage. Dignity, acknowledgement and worth are accorded the woman storyteller, as other women listen to the events perceived by her as traumatic.

Through the process of making the cloths the women construct new motifs or guiding metaphors for their lives. Both the oral retelling of stories and the visual re-remembering of them constitutes for each woman a transformative process in her life.

CHAPTER 2 – SECTION 4

SEWING AND MICRO-RESISTANCES

In her book, The Subversive Stitch, Roszika Parker examines sewing (embroidery) as a site of micro-resistances for women. Along with the written ‘story of my life’ texts, the Amazwi Abesifazane cloths are the women’s site of micro resistances to their oppression. The women espouse a hybridised spirituality, a visual text (cloth) that depicts both a narrative of suffering and a narrative of their potential to transform their oppression. Before describing the genre of stories and visual symbols, I will briefly outline the historical precedents of encoding women’s stories, for, as Parker suggests, “to know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women” (Parker, 1986 : foreword).
"Has the pen or pencil dipped so deep in the blood of the human race as the needle?" asked the writer, Olive Schreiner (Schreiner cited in Parker, ibid). Parker's retort was 'no', it is the needle or the art of embroidery that has been the educator of women into the feminine ideal. Paradoxically it has "also provided a weapon of resistance to the constraints of femininity" (ibid). Although it was not always so, the gender division of labour assigned women to sewing and men to 'tougher' external pursuits outside the home. Embroidery signifies the home and the family and has become "indelibly associated with stereotypes of femininity" (Parker 1986:2). Parker's understanding of femininity is that it is "the behaviour expected and encouraged in women ... by society", it is a psycho-social construct (Parker, 1986:3).

During the Medieval period, Parker argues that "both men and women embroidered in guild workshops, or workshops attached to noble households, in monasteries and nunneries (sic). Embroidery was considered the equal of painting and sculpture" (Parker 1984:17). The generic name for ecclesiastical embroidery produced in England from approximately 900 to 1500, was Opus Anglicanum. It was exported all over Europe and reflected the growing wealth of the church obtained through enormous endowments and ecclesiastical power, centring upon a revived papacy. "The new authoritarian, militant spirit of the church needed art to reflect, assert and impress its power on the people. The magnificent vestments of Opus
Anglicanum, the richness of the materials used in their creation – gold, silver gilt, silk, velvet and seed pearls – associated the trappings of earthly power with heavenly power” (Parker 1986:40,41).

At the commencement of the Renaissance, a division of media into crafts and fine art began and embroidery was “considered a lesser art form than painting and sculpture” (Parker ibid). The art/craft hierarchy became more clearly defined in the eighteenth century when art education separated art academies from craft based workshops. Simultaneously the ideology of Victorian femininity was evolving and embroidery was regarded as ‘natural’ to women, and becoming of her gender. “Embroidery by the time of the art/craft divide, was made in the domestic sphere, usually by women, for ‘love’. Painting was produced predominantly, though not only by men, in the public sphere, for money” (Parker 1986:5). By the eighteenth century embroidery was a signifier of a leisured, upper middle/aristocratic lifestyle, “not working was becoming the hallmark of femininity” (Parker 1986:11). The characteristics of Victorian femininity were:

...docility, obedience, love of home, and a life without work – it showed the embroiderer to be a deserving, worthy wife and mother. Thus the art played a crucial part in maintaining the class position of the household, displaying the value of a man’s wife and the condition of his economic circumstances. Finally, in the nineteenth century, embroidery and femininity were entirely fused, and the connection was deemed to be natural (Parker: ibid).

Paradoxically, while embroidery has been a means of inculcating notions of femininity and powerlessness, it has provided both support and satisfaction.
for women that has enabled them to negotiate the narrow constraints of the feminine ideal by stitching into their cloths that which could otherwise not be spoken (Parker, ibid).

The twentieth and twenty first centuries inherited the full weight of Victorian literature linking embroidery as a 'natural' feminine pursuit that 'naturally' endorses a woman's femininity. Studies done by Cock (1990) and Labode (1993) argue that mission education for African women and girls in South Africa was modelled on the Victorian ideal of motherhood and domesticity. Weekly prayer meetings were also gatherings to teach skills such as sewing, washing and laundry work (Cock and Labode cited in Haddad, 2000:267). Notions of devout Victorian domesticity were transported to Africa and Southern Africa through missionaries perceiving the need for the heathen African women to transform the "kraal" into a "home in which Christianity could flourish" (Haddad ibid). Nettleton extrapolates (in Schmahmann, 2001:32):

... a male/female collectivity in the production of items which involved needlework among most South African indigenous peoples as having existed prior to the introduction of glass trade beads, and prior to the introduction of sewing classes by missionaries in various mission stations in the nineteenth century, I would also like to postulate that needlework became largely gendered as female, or at least as feminine, only after missionary influence on these two fronts.

In discussion with the Amazwi Abesifazane cloth makers most of them claim that their knowledge of needlework came through the school curriculum which, prior to 1994, was the product of 'National Christian' education
(M. Sanli, T. Magwasa and Z. Shibe 2003). Prior to 'National Christian' education, sewing in KwaZulu-Natal was controlled by the mission churches. Although the project is complex in its conception, with its roots in the Community Arts Workshop and Phakamani, Andries Botha was greatly influenced by the ibique (Zulu beaded love letter) and Ndebele beadwork. Both art forms carry culturally encoded messages and the conformance with Scott's notion of infrapolitics is striking. The messages take place in public view and yet they are in the realm of the politics of disguise and anonymity. Botha was also influenced by the eighteenth and nineteenth century European and English samplers owned by Brenda Gouws (2003), who became the Amazwi Abesifazane archivist. Like the ibique, the samplers exhibit similar latent symbolism. Botha perceived the correlation between all three art forms, the covert nature of the iconography embedded therein leading to the creation of the Amazwi Abesifazane project.

Whilst the Amazwi Abesifazane cloths are invisibly affected by the values of devout Victorian domesticity linked to embroidery, they are a fusion of European needlework trajectory and the beadwork tradition of KwaZulu-Natal. "Historically, the beadwork of KwaZulu-Natal took the form of linear syntax or single beaded strands until approximately one hundred years ago when a new form - bead fabric - developed" (Papini p.c., 1999, cited in Wells, Sienaert and Conolly, 2004:73). They go on to say that the ibique (love-letter) is the best known example of bead fabric, now generally sold to tourists visiting Durban, which is attached to a small card explaining its
meaning. Taking the form of interlinked geometric patterns, the designs of traditional beadwork relates in some way to male/female relationships, courtship and marriage (ibid). "Traditionally, in Zulu culture, knowledge is imparted primarily through the performed media of song and dance, storytelling and proverbs" (Wells, Sienaert and Conolly, 2004:75). They further note that taboo topics are an exception, they are expressed in the mediated form of beadwork which has a detailed system of fixed communication describing "ideas of intimate and sexual nature" (ibid).

In the Siyazama Project, a traditional beadwork and AIDS intervention programme in KwaZulu-Natal, the authors Wells, Sienaert and Conolly (2004:73) speak about the project acting as an authoritative mode "of communication to circumvent the Zulu cultural taboo on the discussion of matters of personal intimacy - ukuhlonipha ...". ukuHlonipa and

... the women's lack of English and scribal writing ... threaten to render the rural bead workers powerless, silent and invisible in the war against AIDS. The beadwork designs of the rural women of KwaZulu-Natal far transcend accepted traditional modes and norms, and challenge socio-cultural health and economic issues that threaten their lives and the lives of their families and communities. The Siyazama Project has thus changed and is changing the self and community image of those most affected by the AIDS pandemic, the Zulu women of rural KwaZulu-Natal (ibid).

Similarly, the Amazwi Abesifazane project also circumvents ukuhlonipa. In the interviews, the women repeatedly reiterated the encouragement given to them by Create Africa South to speak about the otherwise unspeakable, and the power of breaking consensual silences. Limited expression within the
framework of bead fabric tradition permits interstices of expression. However, it is expanded through the memory cloths. Referring to the *Mapula Project*, Brenda Schmahmann, in her journal article titled *Stitches as Sutures*, says “While embroidery provides women with a mechanism to articulate concerns that they would feel unable to express in every day discourse, their works do not necessarily record their experiences and attitudes directly” (Schmahmann, 2005b:2). Like the *Siyazama* and *Mapula Projects*, the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project also provides the women with a 'voice' and the opportunity to reconstruct the very fabric of their lives. Likewise it is also “a significant example of the role of design as an agent of social transformation” (Wells, Sienaert and Conolly, 2004:73).

Turning to Southern African sewing collective precedents Brenda Schmahmann, in her book *Material Matters*, discusses four collectives: the *Weya Project* that existed in Zimbabwe, the “*Kaross Workers* in the Northern Province, *Mapula* in North West and *Simunye* in Mpumalanga, that were initiated in 1998, 1991 and 1999 respectively” (Schmahmann, 2000:8). Schmahmann in her Journal article *On Pins and Needles* comments on four groups who existed prior to the first democratic election. The endeavours of *Xihoko, Chivirika*, the *Kaross Workers* and *Mapula* projects have been forerunners in that they “… have indicated that it is indeed possible to use embroideries to help economically disadvantaged women achieve a modicum of financial independence” (Schmahmann, 2005a:170).
In the Weya work she takes up the issue of the individual woman’s voice being compromised. She asks, "... If mediation by outsiders facilitates saleability, does it not also promote dependency as well as countering the ability of needlework projects to provide women with a ‘voice’? (Ibid). This issue will be expanded on in Chapter 3, Section 4, titled ‘the voice of poor and marginalised women in the Amazwi Abesifazane project’.

In her discussion of representational strategies in Weya Appliqués, Schmahmann (2000:60) notes that:

... the act of representation has given needle workers the opportunity to articulate perceptions about their environment and society. Their appliqués do not of course literally ‘reflect’ social conditions in rural Zimbabwe, but they have enabled women to express opinions, desires and fears that they would normally leave unspoken. Indeed, as I will show, many of the themes selected by Weya needle workers allow for a questioning of inequalities between men and women that are commonplace in rural Zimbabwean communities.

The art of the feminine (needlework) has given African women the opening to question and to speak covertly about the disallowed in their cultures.

The notion of needlework as the art of the feminine “has affected women of all classes but in specifically different ways” (Parker, 1986:208). In traditional African societies, individuals doing needlework are as likely to be men as women (Nettleton cited in Schmahmann, 2000:21). However, African needlework “only became gendered as female when there was an
Interpellation of a Western system of classification of both forms of production and hierarchical aesthetic labour" (Nettleton cited in Schmahmann, 2000:20). In South Africa the gender division of labour brought about pronounced economic inequality. A shift to a money economy in the nineteenth century forced African men into migrant wage labour and kept women in rural areas. The restrictive legislation also prevented women from becoming effective agricultural producers and limited their entry into the money market (Callinicos, 1980:30). It has left a legacy whereby poverty has affected the production of traditional needlework; needlework is now a gendered activity reflecting economic inequality, with a tendency to be geared towards the tourist market.

To overcome the problem of poverty circumscribing the content of the needlework (confining it to the tourist market), and desiring to preserve the 'voices of women' as a primary source of history, the Amazwi Abesifazane project has embarked upon a policy of funding to support it (to date one and a half million rand). In addition, a Business Course for Crafters and a Drawing Course for Crafters are offered to the women in the programme. These strategies provide palpable material benefits for the women and contribute to the reconstituting of their spiritualities.

This chapter investigated spirituality, narratology, narrative therapy and sewing as a site of resistance in the context of the reconstitution of the spirituality of women in the Amazwi Abesifazane project. Within the context
of this study, spirituality refers to the integration of faith and practice of the women in the Amazwi Abesifazane project. The Amazwi Abesifazane texts evince a hybridised form of spirituality. African women’s theology is the axis of the survival theology in the project. Without espousing conscious ideologies of emancipation, the women struggle for “survival, liberation and life” (West cited in Haddad, 2000:192). In the project their spirituality is expressed in three primary mediums: oral/aural story telling, scribal story telling and visual story telling. Story telling is described as one of the most potent methodologies revived by African women’s theology (Phiri, 2004:20). This is supported by Stoller and Jousse who postulate that "... the power of collective memory does not devolve from textural inscriptions. It stems from stories (the oral tradition)” (Stoller cited in Conolly, 1999:3).

The visceral ‘re-membering’ of the women in the project honours the psychophysical indivisibility of the women by privileging stories, memory and orality. For the women stories are medicinal and they "... can’t help but examine their stories in new ways”, and in this process "... new meanings and new constructions” emerge (Freedman and Combs, 1996:47). Although sewing is traditionally a male/female endeavour in Africa (Nettleton cited in Schmahmann, 2001:32) it has become “largely gendered as female” (ibid), and the memory cloths as artwork have offered the women in the Amazwi Abesifazane project a site of micro-resistances against the patriarchal and oppressive forces in their lives. Through the cathartic process of telling stories and making the cloths the women construct new motifs, or guiding
metaphors, for their lives. The project provides space for healing and hearing and thus for the reconstituting of their spiritualities. It is a significant example of the role of stories and art-making as agents of social/personal transformation.

In the next chapter I define a range of feminist ideologies and critique western feminism. A dialogical relationship between postmodernism and feminism is suggested as a theoretical framework for understanding the Amazwi Abesifazane project. I seek to privilege the notion of subjugated knowledges as a way to excavate, recognise and recover poor and marginalised women's voices in the Amazwi Abesifazane context. I thereafter highlight the UbuMama project as an opportunity for communal resistance to counter the low valuing of motherhood in multi-sectors of society.
CHAPTER 3 - SECTION 1

FEMINISM(S), POSTMODERNISM AND THE 'VOICES OF WOMEN'
PROJECT IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

In the previous chapter I argued that the women in the Amazwi Abesifazane project resist destructive forces in their lives by forging a survival faith/strategy that shapes notions of activism, liberation and solidarity as seen in their memory/birthing cloths. It is a personal, renewed sense of self-worth, and the affirmation of their significance in the world through artmaking, made visual in the public sphere. Their stories are seen and heard, both by one another, and a larger national and international audience throughout the world. Although the "women themselves might not name their resistance as 'feminist', it is nonetheless resistance, and thus in broad terms consistent with the feminist spirit that infuses women throughout the world" (Haddad, 2000:155).

In this chapter I discuss feminism(s), critique western feminism, and highlight the dialogues between postmodernism and feminist theory. Postmodernism, with its emphasis on agency, subjectivity and particularity offers a theoretical framework for understanding the voice of poor and marginalised women in the Amazwi Abesifazane project.
CHAPTER 3 – SECTION 1

DEFINING FEMINISM(S)

Feminist ideologies provide a theoretical context for this research project. Defining feminism(s) is problematic; it is deeply contested terrain. In the South African context this is further problematised by issues of race, class and culture.

In Africa there are different understandings of African feminism, and during the past decade African women have begun critiquing western feminist writings (Amadiume 1997; Imam et al 1997; Ogundipe-Leslie 1994 in Haddad, 2000:153). Ogundipe-Leslie asserts, together with other scholars, that “in the final analysis African women must theorize their own feminism” (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994:208 cited in Haddad 2000:153). African feminist scholars such as Steady (1987), Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) and Nnaemeka (1998a) state that the defining mark of African feminism is its holism; it takes into account the total humanity of African women against the backdrop of a lack of basic human rights. In these ways it differs from western feminism (Haddad, 2000:154).

The African feminist spirit strongly resists radical feminism which Nnaemeka sees “as often excluding men from debates on women’s issues, western women’s stridency against motherhood, and their over-emphasis on sexuality” (Nnaemeka 1998a:7 cited in Haddad, 2000:155). She argues that
In African feminism the issues of race, class and sexual orientation are subsumed and incorporated into the basic issues of everyday life that are oppressive, hence such issues are addressed “as they configure in and relate to their own lives and immediate surroundings” (ibid).

Feminist thought is kaleidoscopic and is far from a monolithic ideology. Accommodating several species under its genus, ‘western’ feminist theory can be identified as essentially liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist or postmodern.

Liberal feminism, as its name suggests, embraces liberalism; it is a political philosophy that was spawned in Europe, England and North America, and is associated with the history of France. “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” was the essential dictum of the French Revolution. For classical liberals, the ideal state protects civil liberties (for example, voting rights, property rights, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of association). In contrast, welfare liberals see the ideal state’s focus to be on economic justice, rather than on civil liberties. Most contemporary liberal feminists tend to fit the welfare or egalitarian mould (Tong, 1989:12). South Africa’s current constitution is regarded as one of the most liberal constitutions in the world. The Amazwi Abesifazane project’s context is influenced by this ideology to a greater or lesser extent. Liberalism purports to protect civil liberties such as voting rights, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of association.
Whatever equality the human community may have enjoyed, Marxist feminists claim that women's oppression originated in the introduction of private ownership of the means of production by relatively few persons, originally all male. Marxist feminists account for all women's oppression, whether proletarian or bourgeois, as the product of the political, social and economic structures associated with capitalism (Tong, 1989:39). Under Marxism women would be economically freed from men, and therefore equal to them. The global effects of capitalism, and the widening gap between rich and poor, are directly experienced by the Amazwi Abesifazane women who struggle in a context of inconsistent and meagre incomes.

Radical feminists argue that Marxist feminists pay minimal attention to gender class as they locate oppression in patriarchy, a system characterised by power, domination, hierarchy and competition. Articulating the deeply entrenched nature of the sex/gender system, radical feminists insist that women's oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression. Tong (1989:71) says that this implies:

1. That women were historically the first oppressed group.
2. That women's oppression is the most widespread, existing in virtually every known society.
3. All women's oppression is the deepest in that it is the hardest form of oppression to eradicate and cannot be removed by other social changes such as the abolition of class society.
4. That women's oppression causes the most suffering to its victims, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, although the suffering may often go unrecognised because of the sexual prejudices of both the oppressors and the victims.

5. That women's oppression therefore provides a conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression.

Radical feminism focuses on questions around the control of women's bodies, reproduction and mothering (Tong, 1989:72). Mothering and reproduction are issues centred on in the UbuMama (Zulu word for Motherhood) Project, an off-shoot of the Amazwi Abesifazane project, a project which is discussed later in this chapter.

Tong (1989:5) says that "For psychoanalytic feminists the centrality of sexuality arises out of Freudian theory and such theoretical concepts as the pre-Oedipal stage and the Oedipal complex". According to Freud, in the psychosexual development of a female child she notices her lack of a penis, surmises that she is castrated and from that time develops an envy of the penis. Critiques of Freud's construct centre around his biological determinism and phallocentricism (Tong, 1989:5). It is argued by Tong that psychocanalytic explanations for women's oppression do not provide a complete explanation for female subordination (ibid). Certainly in the Amazwi Abesifazane context social constructions of femininity, and the effects of legal, political and economic institutions on a woman's powerlessness relative to men, must be taken into account.
The socialist feminist project can be described as the confluencing of psychoanalytic, radical and Marxist streams of feminist thought. Socialist feminists are dissatisfied with the gender-blind character of Marxist thought, and its tendency to privilege worker's oppression over that of women's oppression. This is the essential difference dividing Marxist and socialist feminism. Socialist feminism's desire to synthesise Marxist, radical and psychoanalytic insight under one conceptual genus, runs the risk of eroding the differences amongst women. Few feminists wish to achieve unity at the expense of diversity (Tong, 1989:174-175). Socialist feminism is an appealing theoretical model for this dissertation because of its inclusive stance; yet, unlike postmodern feminist theory, its inclusivity does not dilute the necessity for political action.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was a French philosopher, novelist, social critic and political activist, a founder of feminism and leading exponent of Existentialism (Existentialist Feminism). The Second Sex (1949), her major theoretical text, is arguably the key text of twentieth century feminism. With considerable breadth it scrutinises the situations of women in many spheres: politics, religion, literature, education, work, motherhood and sexuality (Tong, 1989:184). Existentialist Feminism is interested in women's lived experience and the world of everyday knowledge. Lay knowledge is pertinent to this dissertation and the Amazwi Abesifazane project; it seeks to excavate common sense, wisdom and experiential knowledge (Mouton, 2001:38).
Examining women’s social/intellectual marginalisation, de Beauvoir theorised that women are stuck in the realm of immanence, “defined by and limited by their biological functions, whereas men alone are transcendent, able to create new ideas, institutions and objects” (de Beauvoir paraphrased in Rohmann, 2000:39). She argued that men have defined themselves as “the subject, the Absolute, and women as the ‘Other’ different from them and hence inferior” (ibid).

Postmodern feminism, discussed more fully in this chapter, takes de Beauvoir’s understanding of ‘otherness’ and turns it on its head. Although women remains the ‘other’, post-modern feminists celebrate its advantages as a way of being, speaking and thinking that leads to plurality, diversity and difference. Hence postmodernism offers new possibilities for post-apartheid theorising. This dissertation celebrates the multiple ‘otherness’ of the Amazwi Abesifazane archive. Before turning to the relevance of postmodernism for this research project, I will outline the critique of ‘western feminism’ by ‘third world’ women and women of colour. I highlight the absence of race and class in definitions of feminism(s) and speak about issues of representation, more specifically who represents whom in the South African gender debate.
CHAPTER 3 - SECTION 2

CRITIQUIING WESTERN FEMINISM: ISSUES OF RACE AND CLASS IN DEFINITIONS OF FEMINISM(S) – (SPIVAK’S VOICE OF THE SUBALTERN)

The notion of a unified ‘global sisterhood’ began to be challenged in the 1980s by women of colour in Britain, Europe, Africa, Asia and the United States, and other countries across the world. They wanted “to unearth and eradicate the assumption that women share an essence that transcends socio-economic location, historical location, and other variables” (Armour 1999:16). Conversely, and more recently Amina Mama (2001:61) states:

To put it bluntly, white feminism has never been strong enough to be ‘the enemy’ - in the way that say, global capitalism can be viewed as an enemy. The constant tirades against ‘white feminists’ do not have the same strategic relevance as they might have had twenty years ago when we first subjected feminism to anti-racist scrutiny. Since then many Westerners have not only listened to the critiques of African and other so-called third world feminists - they have also re-considered their earlier simplistic paradigms and come up with more complex theories.

Viewing black feminism in the context of African-American resistance to oppression, Angela Davis (1944-) and bell hooks (1951-) have challenged both black men and white middle class feminists: black men for absorbing a phallocentric patriarchal model of masculinity transferred from white male hegemonic practices, and white middle class feminists for neglecting questions of race and class when confronting issues of gender. In Feminist
Theory: From Margin to Centre (1984), bell hooks criticises white middle class theorists writing from the 'centre' of society, for failing to account for those on the margins (Rohmann, 2000:139). The landmark texts of Angela Davis (1981) and bell hooks (1981) alerted black and white women to different histories with exposure to different kinds of social control (Armour, 1999:17).

In Britain, black feminist activity is more recent, coinciding with the last fifty years of postcolonial migration and settlement, which has brought together women of colour from Africa, Asia, India and the Caribbean. During the 1980s these marginalised groupings formed a strategic voice, or critique, against white socialist feminists. The key concerns focussed around family, patriarchy and reproduction, and highlighted black women's experience as being very different from that of white women (Haddad, 2000:148). Theorist H S Mirza (1997:3) argued that white academic feminists failed to critically engage with issues of imperialism and racism.

Chandra Mohanty's statement that "Beyond sisterhood there is still racism, colonialism and imperialism" (Mohanty, 1988:77) underscores her landmark critique of feminist scholarship as colonial discourse. Her particular concern is how western feminists represent the 'third world woman' as a composite and undifferentiated 'other'. "This image usually depicts women of the third world as uniformly poor and powerless and is juxtaposed against an image of modern, educated and sexually liberated western women" (Haddad, 2000:150). When images of third world women are presented in much of
western literature, African women are codified and defined in first/third world binarisms which perpetuate a form of cultural imperialism (Mohanty, 1988:81).

Melissa Lucashenko (1994, cited in Bulbeck 1999:204), a self-defined black feminist, believes “The major obstacle effecting black feminism is white racism in the feminist movement.” For some writers such as Mohanty (1991:4) white women “can align themselves with and participate” in the “imagined communities” which make up the third world, providing they accept that the oppressions of gender cannot displace the oppression of imperialism.

‘Other women’ have critiqued western feminisms’ ‘othering’ of the ‘other woman’ and this issue of who represents whom is critical to the South African debate (Arnott 1996; 1998; de la Rey 1997; Hassim & Walker 1993; Sunde and Bozalek 1993 cited in Haddad, 2000:185). In this project it is crucial to reference the influential work of Gayatri Spivak (1988; Landry & Maclean 1996). As a feminist Marxist deconstructionist Spivak is a contemporary critic working at the intersection of French literary theory and third world politics. The core of her debate postulated in her essay Can the Subaltern Speak is the question of “who can, or should, 'speak for' the voiceless and alternatively, what is involved in the process of appearing to 'give' them a voice of their own?” (Arnott, 1996:77). Spivak’s term ‘subaltern’ is understood by Arnott (1998:108):
... as a space rather than a fixed identity. To the extent that it functions as an identity it does so in relational terms, as a relationship, or non-relationship, to capital development and to the discourses of political independence, democracy, justice and national identity with the modern state. Subalternity is a space of difference, of otherness, not a strict class position.

Spivak offers two ways of understanding representation of the voice of the subaltern. Firstly, representation is a 'speaking for', or a 'speaking on behalf of' the subaltern. Objectifying the subaltern 'as other' presumes that the academic knows her better than she knows herself (Cochrane, 1999:98). This conceals the real role of the intellectual, whose interests and desires 'disappear', and the subject status of the subaltern is ultimately denied. It creates the impression "that the voice with which the intellectual speaks is the authentic, unmediated voice of the subaltern" (Arnott, 1998:82). 'Listening to' is also a position. This is problematic for Spivak, because the factors and forces/ideologies that make up the subaltern's fractured subjectivity are unaccounted for: the subject is not outside of ideology (Arnott, 1998:82).

The second understanding of representation offered by Spivak is that of the intellectual 'speaking to' the poor and oppressed woman as opposed 'to speaking for' or 'listening to her'. Spivak thus alerts intellectuals to the subjectivity of themselves and those with whom they dialogue. Haddad and Cochrane are both critical of Spivak's "too strong a view of the hegemonic power of dominant discourse" (Haddad, 2000:187, Cochrane, 1999:98). For
Spivak the speech of the subaltern is constrained and ideologically constituted. She, therefore, cannot knowingly represent herself or 'speak', and the silence can only be broken by the intellectual. Haddad chooses to refer to her “work with poor and marginalized women as a speaking ‘with’” (Haddad & Sibeko, 1997 cited in Haddad, 2000:188) thus recognising her subject status and that of those with whom she works and emphasising the collaborative nature of their relationship (Haddad, 2000:188). This ‘speaking with’ the subaltern offers a paradigm for my own relationship with the Amazwi Abesifazane women, where difference can be used creatively “to power a genuinely dialectical interaction between two vigilantly foregrounded subject positions” (Arnott, 1996:87).

CHAPTER 3 – SECTION 3

POSTMODERNISM AND FEMINISM IN CRITICAL DIALOGUE

A dialogue between postmodernism and feminist theory is very necessary for the women’s project\(^8\) in South Africa. A postmodern approach embraces women’s diversity and seeks to draw out previously subjugated voices and knowledges. Postmodern feminism theorises and stresses women’s subjectivity and agency; for this reason I suggest it contributes to understanding projects such as Amazwi Abesifazane which engage poor and

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\(^8\) 'The women’s project' is a term coined by Beverley Haddad (2000:156-157). In South Africa there is no organisation that has been constituted as a women’s movement that represents all its women. Haddad accounts for the activist/academic divide along racial lines "... different histories of resistance that have informed the women's project" (ibid).
marginalised women. As a theoretical framework it encourages dialogue and exchange across the cultural, racial and class divide, and provides the inception for dialogue between equal subjects for my theoretical analysis and fieldwork.

Philosophy has been a prime site for postmodernist debate and the leading figure in this regard is Jean Francois Lyotard. Encapsulating perhaps the most powerful theoretical expression of postmodernism in his book The Postmodern Condition : A report on Knowledge (1979), Lyotard calls for a rejection of the ‘grand narratives’ (that is, universal theories) of western culture. Lyotard believes that these theories have lost all their credibility, and that the ethos of postmodernism calls for incredulity of metanarratives and the abandonment of universalist truth. More specifically, postmodernism is a reaction to the body of knowledge constituted during the Enlightenment, characterised by optimistic western philosophies (Lyotard cited in Rohmann, 2000:115). The core conviction of these philosophies was that reason would illuminate humankind and “lead to perpetual social, political and scientific progress” (Rohmann, 2000:115).

These “optimistic western philosophies grew out of and expressed the expanding relations of capitalist societies and contributed to the development of ideologies that supported colonialism, the slave trade, and the expansion of western patriarchal relations” (Haddad, 2000:175, paraphrasing Hartsock, 1990b:17-18). Postmodernism as a philosophical movement is a form of
scepticism, scepticism about authority, received wisdom and, above all, it questions the idea of metanarrative which is "the attempt to explain all of human endeavour in terms of a single theory or principle (e.g. Marxism, Freudian psychology, Structuralism)" (Rohmann, 2000:310).

Postmodern feminism has an uneasy relationship with liberal, Marxist, radical psychoanalytic, socialist and existentialist feminism(s), because each subscribes to a metanarrative in its theoretical analysis and the concomitant praxis of emancipation through political action. For postmodern feminism each metanarrative purports to provide both the explanatory theory for why women are oppressed, and the ten steps to achieve true liberation. Prior to postmodern feminism, 'second wave' feminism, which usually describes the post-1968 women's movement, tended to define feminism(s) "as a social and political force, aimed at changing existing power relations between woman and men" (Thornham cited in Sim, 2002:41). Postmodern feminists are drawn to the notions of plurality, multiplicity of difference with no final, reductive narrative, hence its embrace of indiscriminate inclusiveness that could foreclose any grounds for political action (Rohmann, 2000:311). In that sense it could be construed as conservative, weakening the political dimension of women's projects, since it offers no resistance to the status quo.

With regard to solidarity amongst women, feminists such as Nancy Hartsock have reacted strongly against the implications of deconstruction. She
queries: “Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjection becomes problematic?” (Hartsock, 1990a:163)

Sylvia Walby, a Marxist feminist, has argued that postmodernism “has fragmented the concepts of sex, race and class, denying the pertinence of overarching theories of patriarchy, racism and capitalism” (Walby, 1992:31). Theoretical concepts such as ‘structure’ are diluted into ‘discourse’, resulting in power being conceptualised “as highly dispersed rather than concentrated in identifiable places and groups” (Walby, 1992:48).

I argue that postmodernism has compelled white feminists to confront the political questions of subjection, power and difference. The idea of a pluralism of feminisms, and a feminist solidarity that is multi-layered, has appealed to “postmodern feminists from the third world and black feminists from the first world” (Haddad, 2000:181).

Hartsock, critiquing Foucault, argues that he focuses on the relationship between power and knowledge, calling for resistance and exposure of power relations rather than overturning them. After an early flirtation with orthodox Marxism, Foucault became disillusioned with it and the bourgeois establishment it sought to transform. “In place of these meta-issues, Foucault advocated a local, small-scale but tenacious resistance to power”
(Sim, 2002:247). Hartsock concludes her critique of Foucault by paraphrasing Marx and says, "The point is to change the world, not simply to redescribe ourselves or reinterpret the world yet again" (Hartsock, 1990a:172). In contrast to Hartsock's thinking it is this 'politics of location', or 'situatedness' and small scale resistance to oppressive power, that I wish to foreground in the Amazwi Abesifazane project.

Suggesting points of convergence between postmodernism and feminism Barbara Creed, summarising the arguments of Craig Owens in The Discourse of Others (H. Foster, ed., Postmodern Culture 1983 cited by Thornham in Sim, 2002:44), says:

(1) Both argue that the 'grand' or metanarratives of the Enlightenment have lost their legitimating power. (2) Both postmodernism and feminism argue that Western representations, whether in theory or in art, are the product of access to power not truth. (3) A critique of binarisms is shared by both, i.e. thinking in binary oppositions (either one thing or its opposite), e.g. self/other, mind/body where one term is privileged and the other devalued. (4) Both seek to heal the breach between theory and practice, between the subject of theory and its objectification of the subject.

The task at hand, says Meaghan Morris in The Pirate's Fiancée (1988) is "to use feminist work to frame discussions of postmodernism, and not the other way around" (Morris cited by Thornham in Sim, 2002:52).
Using feminist constructs to frame discussions of postmodernism, I conclude that the multiplicities of different knowledges⁹ in the Amazwi Abesifazane project are an account from the margins that need to be viewed as primary, constituting a subordinate world of knowledge that eschews metanarratives (Thornham cited in Sim, 2002:52).

I began this section by arguing that a dialogue between postmodernism and feminist theory is very necessary for the women’s project in South Africa. Postmodernism sees contemporary society as being extremely fractured. Given our fracturedness as women in South Africa, postmodern theorising that acknowledges subjectivity, particularity and agency, could provide a way forward in the future transformation of our society.

CHAPTER 3 – SECTION 4

THE VOICE OF POOR AND MARGINALISED WOMEN IN AMAZWI ABESIFAZANE (SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGES)

The metaphor of the ‘voice’ has come to include notions of power, agency, healing, dignity and reconstitution. The strategies of ‘being heard’ break the silence of subordinate groups such as the women in Create Africa South’s projects. This section explores the questions: Why do women feel silenced? What are the forces that silence them? How do they negotiate ‘a voice’?

⁹ They are not narratives of the powerful.
A component of Create Africa South's mission statement is “to set up conversations with historically disadvantaged communities and individuals with a view to developing creative industries that will lead to individual autonomy and personal empowerment” (Botha, 2002b:1). The flagship project, Amazwi Abesifazane, was launched to realise a foundational principle of Create Africa South: “In the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, its premise has been that in order to heal, the individual has to be heard and their individual histories must be honoured” (Botha, 2004:3). Botha conceived the project as a response to the absence of the histories of black South African women in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s processes. To his credit the project is a ground-breaking paradigm. Within the South African women’s project, recognition and recovery of poor and marginalised black South African women’s discourses is largely uncharted territory.

“The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s mandate was to hear those narratives offered by the victims of apartheid (limited to the period between 1960-1994) and to determine who was, in fact, a victim (a term specific here to those brutalised by politically motivated violence)” (Becker, 2004:117). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been criticised for its narrow version of the truth, where the experiences of a minority of victims and perpetrators were reflected (Mandini, cited by Bundy in James and van der Vijver, 2000:19). Becker (2004:118) says:
Because black South African women, for example, were not widely included in the process, their stories have remained hidden. It is into this environment of ongoing historical and psychological reflection of debate about the past and its implications for the future, that Amazwi Abesifazane, or 'Voices of Women' was imagined into being by Andries Botha. He hoped to bring focus into the often undocumented lives of black South African women, many of whom are from the rural areas and townships that suffered extreme acts of violence during the decades of apartheid.

This section draws attention to the dynamics behind the apparent silence of subordinate groups, exemplified by the Amazwi Abesifazane women. "Subjugated knowledges" is a phrase used by Michael Foucault (1980:81-82). There are two understandings of it. When historical contents are "buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemisation" they are then "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1980:81-82). The other understanding pertinent to this study refers to a set of knowledges "that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task ... naïve knowledges located low down on the hierarchy ..." (Foucault, 1980:82). The knowledges of the Create Africa South women are new knowledges that in the past have been considered unworthy of, or inadequate for, academic reflection. In response to the interview question: "What learning from the project was the most valuable for you?", the women evinced awareness of the issues of power and hierarchical knowledges. "I learned that everything in the world are being done by those who have more knowledge that us" (Mdlala, 2004).

"Besides using my hands, I learned how to empower myself. After that story I wanted to do more research about how black people were traumatised, which I did. I found out that people are now scared to talk. Now I am
attending Mangosuthu Tech for Community Extension course and this is my first year” (Shibe, N. 2003).

Recovery of ‘subjugated knowledges’ also represents the resurgence of knowledge suppressed by cultural taboo and patriarchy evidenced in some of the replies to the fieldwork question, ‘Why is it difficult for African women to speak their stories?’

“I think it is their culture. They were somewhat taught not to say anything no matter what. Women kept inheriting that up until the current generation” (Sauli, 2003).

“Many times before women used to be put aside from whatever was happening and they were scared to talk because all we knew was that only a man could speak and be listened to” (Dlamini, 2003).

“I think it is the way women were brought up. We were taught not to say a word if you were a woman” (Shibe, Z. 2003).

The retrieval process of the Create Africa South cloth making project also occupies the area of dangerous memory; given a ‘safe’ environment and platform, dangerous discourse is negotiated and helps the uncovering of subjugated knowledges. Gambushe (2004) says that:
There are many factors that contribute to women being silent about things that hurt them. Others feel that their problems are too embarrassing to talk about, others regard problems as ‘family problems’. It could even end their marriage. They tolerate everything for shelter, support, etc. Sometimes it’s things that could put you into prison if you talk about it. Women are not so brave to tackle their problems head on.

In relation to the Create Africa South premise that “In order to heal, the individual has to be heard and their individual history must be honoured” (Botha, 2000:3) the question arises: how then do subordinate groups negotiate ‘a voice’ or strive against the negation of their knowledges?

The work of James Scott (1990), a social scientist, is helpful in revealing the interaction between dominant and subordinate groups when they encounter one another. Scott (1990) argues that discourse takes place in both ‘a public and hidden realm’. In the encounter both groups present a public transcript. The agenda of the dominant group’s public transcript “is designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalise the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemise the dirty linen of their rule” (Scott, 1990:18). The safest discourse of the subordinate group is to flatter the aims of the elite group (Scott, 1990:18). The second response is that of an ‘off stage’ discourse that is hidden and these “hidden transcripts” make possible political dissension and frisson (Scott, 1990:18). Strategically lying between the public and hidden transcripts is the third realm of “infra politics” (Scott, 1990:19) which Haddad refers to as “rumours, gossip, folk tales, euphemisms, rituals, codes, and so forth” (Haddad, 2000:262). Whilst this takes place in public view it is “a politics of disguise and anonymity ...
designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors" (Scott, 1990:19). The fourth level of discourse can be explosive and occurs when either the dominant or subordinate group’s hidden or public transcripts rupture.

Of particular interest to me is the application of Scott’s notion of “Infra politics” to this project; in describing the discursive acts of the oppressed, Scott (1990:xi) privileges their autonomy and dignity. The Amazwi Abesifazane project’s memory cloths make visual complex power relations. They are a site of resistance highlighting the women’s survivalist strategies to myriad disempowering forces. Visual works in themselves are encoded language and, in that sense, occupy public and hidden transcripts. The project is a “memory retrieval and archival project, and deals with the memories of the women of South Africa” (Botha, 2004:1). It functions at the level of ‘infra politics’ away from formalised historical content, yet it is a serious cultural and historical archive that addresses a gap in the search to reconstruct South Africa’s history.

Haddad contends that it is the voices of poor and marginalised black South African Women that represent the most ‘disqualified’ of all knowledges (Haddad, 2000:261). It is this ‘disqualified’ voice that is privileged in the Amazwi Abesifazane cloths and engages women in the dignified task of “recovering information and transforming memory into creative works that could serve as reference points for the repositioning of personal and
collective history” (Botha, 2002b:1). It is the strategy of ‘being heard’, retrieving ‘the voice’, that reconstitutes the dignity and worth of the women and thus their spirituality.

CHAPTER 3 - SECTION 5

MOTHERHOOD IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE AMAZWI ABESIFAZANE CONTEXT

In South Africa the role of motherhood, like definitions of feminism, is a contested terrain. Conflicting views of motherhood are espoused by women of different race and class. Haddad (2000:170) comments that:

... surveying the literature on women’s political organisations in South Africa during the twentieth century, it soon becomes apparent that women often organised themselves out of their experience as ‘mothers’. During the liberation struggle when protesting, for instance the pass laws, women would use rallying cries such as ‘we are the mothers of the nation’ and ‘we need to protect the rights of our children’.

In Haddad’s survey, the subject of motherhood as a basis for organised resistance has come to be known as ‘motherism’. I put forward the view that this is drawn from Catherine Achonulu’s naming of Motherism (Mama, 2001:61). In this section I discuss Create Africa South’s UbuMama project, a derivative of the Amazwi Abesifazane project. The project was initiated by Create Africa South in partnership with Imagine Chicago, the World Health Organisation and the White Ribbon Alliance. It has provided a platform for black South African women to engage in a particular form of organised
resistance, to voice their mothering/birthing stories to engender activism around maternal, newborn and child health care in a global context.

Deeply concerned with body politics, the health of women and children and related ontological issues, the UbuMama summary document states:

The proposed UbuMama (Zulu word for motherhood) project will present, at the April 7-8, 2005 meeting in New Delhi on the occasion of World Health Day and the first-ever summit of the international partnerships for maternal, newborn, child health, the foundation for an arts-based initiative to invigorate the valuing and protection of mothers’ lives worldwide. It will symbolically represent the birthing stories of the most vulnerable women from global sites with a high incidence of maternal death. A delegation which includes high visibility leaders in partnership with black South African women artists representing communities where the risk of maternal death is especially high will bring this process to the summit as a ritual and set of products which give voice to mothers’ birthing stories and the support needed to ensure maternal health and sustain the promise that children’s lives represent (Zagel, 2005).

The phrase “and sustain the promise that children’s lives represent” (ibid) is a core ontological statement that speaks about the future and hope. The South African theologian, John de Gruchy, speaks of hope as being about the production of a new reality for a damaged society. “During the struggle against apartheid, keeping hope alive was of the essence. To lose hope was to surrender the power to bring about change” (de Gruchy, 2001:212).

Andries Botha (2005), one of the primary conceptualisers of the project, stressed the role of the mother as a signifier of hope and nation builder. He cited Nelson Mandela’s mother as a woman of exceptional imagination and
nurturance, from whom her son inherited stature and vision. Furthering the argument of the origin and development of the individual being, Lyn Holness (2004:70) says:

I have identified three dimensions of this 'pivotal life experience' symbolised in Mary's relationship with her child, Jesus. First, the mother-child relationship marks the beginning of an individual's relating with 'the other'. What Jesus was to become had its foundations at conception, when a mother begins to live in relationship with her child - the beginning of 'personhood'.

Following Lyn Holness' ontological 'personhood' argument, the World Bank has committed financial support for early child development "on the basis of the fact that the quality of the first few years of a child's life has a multiplier effect on society" (Keating and Hertzman, 1999; Young, 1996 in Richter, L, 2004:6). Mary Eming Young, in her survey for the World Bank entitled From early child development to human development: Investing in our children's future, says:

Early child development (ECD) programs that comprehensively address children's basic needs - health, nutrition and emotional and intellectual development - foster development of capable and productive adults. And early interventions can alter the lifetime trajectories of children who are born poor or are deprived of the opportunities for growth and development available to those more fortunate. These facts are well known today and are founded on evidence from the neurological, behavioural and social sciences, and the evaluation of model interventions and large, publicly funded programs (Young, 2002:1, cited in Richter, 2004:10).

In 2004 the World Health Organisation published a guide for interventions to improve health, growth and psycho-social development of children and their
caregivers. The Director-General, Dr Lee (cited in Richter, L, 2004:vii) states in the review that:

Nearly eleven million children died before reaching their fifth birthday in the past year. Almost 40% of these children die within the first month of life. Millions of children survive but face diminished lives, unable to develop to their full potential. Poor nutrition and frequent bouts of illness limit the young child’s opportunities to explore the world during a critical period for learning basic intellectual and social skills.

Comprehensive, overall early child development (ECD) strategies have in the past been lacking. Either there has been limited recognition of the child’s relationship with a primary caregiver in child health circles, or psychologists have emphasised psycho-analysis of the caregiver. Desiring a holistic approach the World Health Organisation’s review aims firstly to gather considerable information on the interactions between the mother and the child (Lee cited in Richter, 2004:vii). Across cultures, in both advantaged and resource-poor countries, it identifies “two fundamental qualities that determine the caregiver’s ability to provide effective care: sensitivity and responsiveness to the child. These skills enable the caretaker to detect the child’s signals and to respond appropriately, in synchrony, to meet the child’s needs” (ibid).

Secondly, the review summarises the World Health Organisation learnings. A child who is at risk in an environment of poverty and violence is more able to be resilient against its damaging effects, provided the child has a strong

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10 The word caregivers is used in the book to denote people who look after infants and young children. It is a preferred term: “... many young children are not looked after by their biological mothers” (Richter, L, 2004:6).
care-giving relationship that supports the child's physical, emotional, intellectual and social health. Warm and responsive care-giving for children who are at risk is adverse conditions can extend their protection. Richter (2004:52) draws attention to conditions of worsening social disruption and the multiplier effects for future generations:

Conditions of chronic and worsening poverty prevail in many parts of the world. There are countless communities fraught with violence and instability. Thousands of people flee their homes each year in search of food, safety and a better life. The impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, like the homelessness of children following the Second World War, is a crisis of human development whose effects will endure for several generations through its impact on young children.

Finally the World Health Organisation review calls for “the need to integrate interventions to promote better caregiver-child interactions into the design of primary health care programmes for mothers, other caregivers, newborns, and young children” (ibid).

The UbuMama project is an integrated intervention in the area of mother-child primary health care, with a particular focus. Describing itself as an arts based initiative it intends to “harness the power and energy of the arts” (Zagel, 2005). It sees creativity and the elevation of imagination “as a source for community change in poor communities throughout the world” with the power to raise consciousness and political support for the indivisibility of maternal and child health (ibid).
The new clarion call of early child development programmes is the indivisibility of maternal and child health. However, in order to contextualise the *UbuMama* project I need to return to the conflicting views of motherhood between women of different race and class in South Africa. In 1991 at the Women and Gender in Southern Africa Conference, Julia Wells’ paper (1998:253 cited in Haddad, 2000:170-171) argued that:

Maternal politics are clearly not to be confused with feminism. Women swept up in mother-centred movements are not fighting for their personal rights as women but for their custodial rights as mothers.

Citing different examples of reactionary women’s movements in Africa, Amina Mama makes a similar comment that women have been mobilised by undemocratic regimes without their own autonomy. The movements are also:

... not about redressing gender injustice or transforming oppressive gender relations. So in this sense it is useful to have a clear idea of what we mean by a gender politics that is geared towards the wholesale liberation of women (Mama, 2001:61).

Analysing the ‘mothers of the nation’ theme, Gaitskell and Unterhalter (1989, cited in Haddad, 2001:172) assert strong differences between Afrikaner nationalism where motherhood was ‘home-centred’, and the conceptualising of motherhood within the African National Congress, which is seen as “a dynamic force for change”. Gaitskell and Unterhalter classify motherhood as an oppressive force for white women and conceptualise it as a liberatory
force for black women (ibid). Amina Mama’s observations contradict the latter. I would suggest that rather than setting up opposing binaries, a more complex view of all women is needed.

Walker believes that debate on motherhood constructed along racial lines is problematic. She brings greater clarity by suggesting “three dimensions of motherhood that need exploration: practise, discourse and social identity” (Walker, 1995:424 cited in Haddad, 2000:173). Walker stresses the need to take seriously women’s own self-image of their motherhood and their creation of social identity as they negotiate their daily lives (ibid). The stories accompanying the birthing cloths in the UbuMama project reflect the practises, discourses and social identities of the women. The desire to provide effective care (sensitivity and responsiveness) is a high priority:

“I knew I was going to bring a precious person into the world ... I give my son all the love he deserves” (Ndlovu, 2005), (Fig.27).

“We (the father and mother) both sat down and looked at our new baby and were filled with happiness as our baby was healthy as I had eaten healthy food while I was pregnant. Our baby came from a loving couple and we make sure that our baby gets everything he deserves” (Mpanza, 2005), (Fig. 28).
Figure 27:


Figure 28:

Keeping hope alive in adverse circumstances was frequently reiterated: "I wish that his father finds work so we can have a brighter future and hope that everything improves as I am an independent woman" (she is employed) (Ndlovu, 2005).

"It was in 2004 when the day to give birth to my son, Laziwe, came. Things were difficult for me. The hospital chased me away as they told me that the time to give birth had not come yet. I went back home but I knew I was in labour. When I arrived back at home I gave birth. My mother-in-law and her sister helped me a lot. They took me back to the hospital again. I am not sure whether or not my son would have lived if my mother-in-law had not been there. I thank them both for saving my baby's life and mine. ... They are giving hope for the future (Mkhize, N. 2005), (Fig. 29).

The consequences of poverty often place severe stress on the parent-child relationship, with the additional ignominy of a depreciated status in a community. Enormous perseverance and tenacity can give women a sense of bravery and pride in their image of themselves as mothers.

"At times it is so hard being a mother. My baby girl was born four years ago. I named her Pilasande. Her father was unemployed and it was difficult to survive as I had to buy her formula and nappies. I decided to sell fruit with my baby tied on my back. It was difficult but as a mother I had to be brave and slowly managed to financially survive. When I had some spare money I
Figure 29:

Figure 30:
was able to buy nappies and food for her. The Government grant made a huge difference to our standard of living and today she is very healthy" (Kathi, 2005), (Fig. 30).

The *UbuMama* project is a multi-dimensional, multisectorial initiative that lays emphasis on the agency, subjectivity and particularity of the women’s lives. It validates their experiences and projects their importance to a global audience. In a communal effort the South African participants have been given an opportunity to realise their political capabilities:

The April (2005) summit, hosted by the Indian government and attended by many top international and national leaders, will provide a critical opportunity to garner the political and financial engagement and commitment necessary to ensure maternal, newborn and child health become a priority for country level policy makers from around the world (Zagel, 2005).

Locally in Umlazi, KwaZulu-Natal, the art workshops have included maternal-child health care education. In terms of transforming gender relations, the project’s core value was “to invigorate the valuing and protection of mothers’ lives worldwide” (ibid). I previously described African spirituality as more than a discipline of interpreting private experience. It is a reflective practise that touches the public, social, moral and relational world. The multi-dimensional nature of the *UbuMama* project has significantly rebuilt the self-esteem and spirituality of the KwaZulu-Natal women participants.
This chapter began with definitions of feminism(s) and a critique of western feminism. It explored a synthesis of postmodernism and feminism as a way of excavating 'disqualified' women's voices. The UbuMama project is investigated as a platform to engender activism around maternal and child health care.

In South Africa defining feminisms is problematised by issues of race, class and culture. In Africa, feminism's defining mark is holism. Women conflate many issues such as race, class and sexual orientation, into the issues of everyday life. Against the background of poverty in the Amazwi Abesifazane project I suggest these everyday struggles are survivalist issues. Discussion of Gayatri Spivak's thesis Can the Subaltern Speak is helpful for this dissertation (Arnott, 1996:77).

I argue for a dialogue between postmodernism and feminist theory as being necessary for the women's project in South Africa. Postmodernism embraces women's diversity and seeks to draw out subjugated voices and knowledge. I suggest that James Scott's notion of infra-politics, the politics of disguise and anonymity amongst subjugated voices (Scott, 1990:19), is the mode of resistance of the visual work of the Amazwi Abesifazane women.

Motherhood in South Africa is contested terrain. Against a background of global and local (Umlazi) environmental threats, the UbuMama project is holistic, feminist and multi-dimensional in its vision. Its narrative, visual and
performative arts initiative intends to raise the revaluing of mothers’ lives and those of young children.

In the next chapter I will define the scope of the study and the research process. Working within a feminist research paradigm the dissertation has affinity with interdisciplinary work. Foregrounding the sample group of women from the Zamukuziphilisa Community Project, I use triangulation theory to triangulate the stories, cloths and interviews. I highlight multiple theories to support my contention that the women reclaim their spiritualities after various forms of dislocation.
CHAPTER 4

AN ANALYSIS OF THE MEMORY CLOTHS, BIRTHING CLOTHS, STORIES AND INTERVIEWS: LOCATING THE RECONSTITUTION OF SPIRITUALITIES

The reconstitution of African women's spirituality through the Amazwi Abesifazane project is the central hypothesis of this dissertation. Writing in Art Journal Carol Becker (2004:134) speaks about the object of the Amazwi Abesifazane women's labour as being "work of personal reclamation in written and pictorial form" and an ... "ongoing contribution to a historical archive". Re-constitution or reclamation implies that either a previously constituted state has been disrupted or a person's life has been dislocated by an event or events that seriously alter a former equilibrium, after which a process of reclamation takes place. In this study I contend that the act of creativity regenerates the women's sense of agency: being re-directed with a new purpose.

CHAPTER 4 - SECTION 1

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study a qualitative approach to research was employed through the use of questionnaires, unstructured interviews, a video recording, observations and interpretations. I investigated the women's stories, cloths and interviews as forms of triangulated primary data that substantiate the
process of loss, hope and reconstitution. It is an 'emic' study wishing to capture the respondent's point of view, their experience of the project and, in terms of reconstitution, their created meaning from it.

I undertook an analysis of secondary data reviewing spirituality, narratology, narrative therapy, micro resistances, feminism(s), postmodernism, and evaluated their application in the context of the Amazwi Abesifazane Project. The women's stories (the texts) are both primary data and historical data; historical in that they are written records and oral accounts of past happenings and events.

This study makes use of data triangulation. Data triangulation was introduced into the social sciences by Webb et al in 1966 and elaborated by Denzan (1970). The concern was to:

... overcome the complacent dependence on single operational definitions of theoretical concepts, and to supplement the use of the interview or questionnaire with unobtrusive, non-reactive measures 'that do not require the cooperation of the respondent and that do not themselves contaminate the response' (Webb cited in Blaikie, 2000:262-3). In short, they wished to improve the validity of the measurement of theoretical concepts by the use of independent measures, including some for which there could be no reactivity from respondents. In claiming that all research methods are biased, they argued for the use of a collection of methods, or multiple operationalism, which, they believed, would reduce the effect of the peculiar biases of each one (Blaikie, 2000:262-3).

Triangulated data was drawn from the stories, cloths and interviews of the women. Two sets of data, the written stories and visual cloths, did not
require the co-operation of the respondent, and do not themselves contaminate the responses (ibid). I also employed theory triangulation that approaches data "with multiple perspectives and hypotheses in mind ... to extend the possibilities for producing knowledge" (Flick, 1998:230). In this study the term 'triangulation' refers to the multiple theoretical perspectives which are interdisciplinary, such as postmodernism, feminisms, narratology, narrative therapy, micro-resistances in sewing, et al.

It should be noted that "Feminist research has an affinity with transdisciplinary work" (Reinharz paraphrased in Haddad, 2000:6). As a theoretical lens, "Feminist research thus not only stretches methodological norms, it also reaches across disciplinary boundaries" (ibid). Conolly (2002:100 citing Klein, 1990 and 1996) draws attention to the more holistic term 'interdisciplinary' meaning 'drawing on more than one discipline simultaneously'. Interdisciplinarity precludes the notion of 'crossing boundaries'. Implicit in the terms transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary is the notion of 'crossing boundaries'. Reinharz argues that feminist research is more a perspective than a methodology, and speaks of a hermeneutic of suspicion that guards against an uncritical acceptance of research conventions. Feminists have a preference for creativity in defining the research paradigms (Reinharz paraphrased in Haddad, 2000:6). I strongly identify with the creative process in my methodological choices, especially since the focus of the study is on relationships and foregrounding the subjectivity of the women.
The core sample group for this research project consisted of women from the Zamukuziphilisa Community Project who participated in the Amazwi Abesifazane and UbuMama projects. The Zamukuziphilisa Community Project (Figs. 31-32) women were chosen because they were a geographically stable group. At no time was there a pre-selection of the women according to their faith or denominational adherence, in order to preserve the integrity of project. They made memory cloths, birthing cloths, wrote their stories and were interviewed. In this study the cloths, stories and interviews of seven women from the group were used. They were: Bongekele Joyce Mhlongo, Dolly Mbatha, Eunice Gambushe, Kholiwe Mkhize, Elsie Nzama, Thandiwe Mkhize and Lillian Mthiyane. I used interviews with three women from the project. They were: Gertrude Zulu, Thuleleni Nzimande and Evelyn Madlala. The work of the late Florence Mdlolo is illustrated and discussed in this chapter. She was not a member of the Zamukuziphilisa Community Project. I chose her work because her autobiography and cloths are a substantial contribution to the data collection. Personal interviews were conducted with six other women in KwaDabeka and central Durban, who had also participated in the Amazwi Abesifazane workshops. In this study I have referred to data drawn from interviews with the additional group of six women. All the interviews took place between October 2002 and July 2005.

Leonard Zulu acted as the interpreter and transcriber for most of the interviews. He is employed by Create Africa South as the Office and Field
Figures 31 and 32:

Zamukuziphilisa Community Project, Umlazi, Durban, 2005, Photographs (Stott and Zagel)
Manager and supervises the embroidery workshops. He was well known to
the women and trusted by them. Given the Zulu culture’s hierarchical
patriarchy, the woman may have been guarded and restrained with him. As
the researcher, I was mindful of this possibility but they did not appear to be
restrained with him and his presence did not seem to jeopardise the project.
In his capacity as Field Manager he appeared to deliver to the women the
Amazwi Abesifazane project’s imperative to "speak out". The remaining
interviews were interpreted by Nqobile Hadebe from Create Africa South
and Octavia Mthetwa, and transcribed by me. In this study the stories are
cited in isiZulu and English. Like Bev Haddad (2001:11) “I have chosen to
incorporate fully into the English text the vernacular Zulu as spoken ... I have
deliberately done so to give priority to the voice of the women who are the
subjects of this study”.

The title/topic of the Amazwi Abesifazane workshops was ‘A day I will never
forget’. The process of the workshops involved the women being encouraged
to write down their stories (if they could), if not, a facilitator transcribed
them. Although the subject is a neutral one, invariably traumatic apartheid
era events surfaced. The women were then asked to represent their
narratives visually. The memory cloths are small, approximately 25 x 30 cm.
Their size is relatively consistent and they combine embroidery, appliqué
and/or beadwork.
The two primary facilitators of many of the workshops (but not all of them) were Tholakele Zuma (Fig. 33) and Leonard Zulu (Fig. 34). Describing the process Leonard Zulu (2005) writes:

Before I and my assistant/s go to meet a group, we ask somebody in the community to organise the group, the venue and the accommodation for us. When we finally meet the group, we introduce ourselves and our intentions. We tell the group about the incentive. We also tell them what we are going to do with the cloths. We then allow them time to ask questions. We provide them with the material and ask them to begin. While we give them the information, we don’t forget to mention to them that we will stay with them for five days and will give them their incentive on the sixth day. Usually it’s Monday to Friday. Sometimes things are not as rosy as we always expect them to be, but we always have to get on with it. When collecting the cloths there are pressures and risks the facilitators have to endure. The cloths themselves must always be protected, not only against theft but also against decay. Deterioration can result from a drop of water falling on them or touching the cloths with bare hands.

CHAPTER 4 - SECTION 2

AN ANALYSIS OF THE MEMORY CLOTHS, BIRTHING CLOTHS, STORIES AND INTERVIEWS: LOCATING THE RECONSTITUTION OF SPIRITUALITIES

The Zamukuziphilisa Community Project was founded in 1993 by Eunice Gambushe. Zamukuziphilisa means ‘try to make a living’. The group of women involved in the project live in K Section in Umlazi. In an endeavour to impart skills that will provide women with an income, Mrs Gambushe has for many years taught women sewing and beading.

\[^{11}\text{The women were paid for their archival cloths.}\]
Figure 33:

*Tholakele Zuma* (Workshop Facilitator CAS), 2005, Photograph (Stott)

Figure 34:

*Leonard Zulu* (Workshop Facilitator CAS) with Andries Botha (Founder CAS), 2004. Photograph (Zagel)
Eunice Gambushe is married with one son and lives in J Section, Umlazi. At present she is not caring for any children at home and proudly states that the women in the project are “her children” (Gambushe, 2005). Born on 1st March 1943, she reached Standard 5 (Grade 7) in her education. Her sewing/beading career began in Standard 1 (Grade 3) when her family told her to “forget about school” (ibid) because they had no money to pay for her school fees. In 1954 she bought beads, cotton and needles and her neighbour taught her fabric beadwork. She began selling her work on the old national freeway that passed through the Valley of a Thousand Hills.

Her school career was sporadic, depending on whether she was living with her aunt or her biological parents. She was employed by the KwaZulu Development Organisation for eight years. After its closure, Gambushe decided to teach sewing and beading to local women at her home, free of charge. She owned two sewing machines at that time. Within a year she had built up a stock of twenty-two machines and moved the Zamukuziphiliisa Community Project to an outbuilding on her property. From her story we learn of her personal trauma. When the narratives are put together “we begin to grasp the weight of the women’s collective plight” (Becker, 2004:123). Eunice Gambushe (2000), (Fig. 35) writes:

Ilanga engingeke ngalikhohlwa, ilanga ekwasha ngalo iProject yathela indawo kwakwiyika J1890 khona eMlazi. Usuku kwakungu mhlaka 19 May 1994 ngo 6am. Angimbonanga umuntu owashisayo ngabona nje umlilo usuvutha, kwasha imishini engu22 yokuthunga kanye nayo yonke impahlia, kwaze kwafika izimto ezimbili zokucisha umlilo.

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Figure 35:

_Eunice Gambushe, 2000, Photograph (Botha)_

Figure 36:

Okwangiphatha kabuhlungu ukuthi kuleProject kwakusizakala abantu bakithi abampofu okunamanje basahlupheka.

The day I will never forget was when the project was burnt down at J1890 Umlazi. This incident happened in May 19 1994, at 6am. I did not see the arsonist. I only saw the fire burning, 22 sewing machines were burnt. Other valuable things were also burnt. Eventually two trucks from the fire department arrived. What really hurt me is that, that project was helping our very own people who were poor, and even today they are still suffering.

In her memory cloth (Fig. 36) Gambushe stitches the story with a headline in red thread against a grey background. It says 'What traumatised me was when my project burnt down and sufferings never went away from me and the entire community'. The representation of these powerful feelings is seen in the vivid red of the writing and the roof of the house symbolise the act of arson. The red contrasts with the remaining colours which are harmonious. Above the image of a house, representing the Zamukuziphilisa Community Project, is the outline of a large sewing machine; this refers to the significant capital loss of twenty-two machines in the fire. Flanking the house are two green pairs of scissors referencing the activity of sewing and its income generation.

Gambushe (2005) revealed that despite her strong faith she struggled to come to terms with the destruction of the Centre in 1994. In her encounter with the Amazwi Abesifazane workshop, she described herself as "listening attentively to the offer to voice out the political violence so it would not stay inside forever". She clearly recognised the maleficence of internalising emotional pain and the hope of releasing it. "I believed that offer, and in the
workshop and cloth making I spoke out the pain I had been feeling for a long time. I was hoping that it would take the burden off my shoulders, which it did”. She said “What really hurt me is that, that project was helping our very own people who were poor, and even today they are still suffering” (Gambushe, 2005).

A devout Christian (she is a regular member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Umlazi) she took up ‘the offer’ to participate in the Amazwi Abesifazane project as it gave her the opportunity to speak about the otherwise unspeakable. This process reconstituted her spirituality. This is evidenced by Gambushe (2005) describing the Amazwi Abesifazane project as having changed her life and strengthened her faith in God. A woman of considerable tenacity and vision, sustained by her faith, she re-opened the sewing centre in 1995, eight months after the fire. An article in the Ilanga newspaper about the Centre’s destruction attracted donations of sewing machines.

In 2004 she represented the Amazwi Abesifazane project and travelled to Portugal for an exhibition of the memory cloths at the Culturgest in Lisbon (Figs. 37 and 38). Gambushe was astonished at the public’s response to the cloths. In the interview (2004) she said that, “It was the first time I had seen an exhibition. I learned that what we had been doing was no child’s play. People loved it. People bought cloths just to keep them in their homes”. The exhibition provided public affirmation of her worth and that of
Figure 37:

_Eunice Gambushe in Lisbon, Portugal, 2004, Photograph (Zagel)_

Figure 38:

_Culturgest Exhibition, Lisbon, Portugal, 2004, Photograph (Zagel)_
her co-participants. Had their collective pain not had a forum in which to be articulated, the women’s dislocated state is likely to have remained unchanged. For the participants, the Amazwi Abesifazane project was described by Starkey (2005) as “a vehicle of self-discovery and self-recovery whereby the women’s changed status has had an enormous effect on their lives”.

Pregnancy is another form of changed status for the women, and their birthing stories have been honoured in the UbuMama Project. Thandiwe Mkhize (2005) was born on 21st October 1963. She is married with six children, three of whom are still dependent on her and living at home in J Section in Umlazi. She completed Standard 8 (Grade 10) in her education. Thandiwe Mkhize (2005), (Fig. 39) writes:


I started to feel the signs of labour pains about 12 o’clock at night, then I told my husband that I feel labour pains he went out to hire a car, to take me to hospital. What made me happy is that my husband told me that he is going with me to the hospital. When we arrived at the hospital nurses helped me to give birth to my baby. After that I
Figure 39:

_Thandiwe Mkhize_, 2005, Photograph (Zagel)

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Figure 40:

Thandiwe Mkhize. Birthing Cloth. _When I was pregnant_, ca. 2005. Cloth with embroidery (25 x 30 cm), irreg.
was so happy and I praise you God, I give you the glory and I have a song for you which says “you heard what God I want and you gave me what I need” the joy I was having in my heart made me to name my child “Ntokozo” (joy). I love my son, I was very happy when I was pregnant and everything was quick.

Mkhize’s cloth (Fig. 40) is embedded in the pilot birthing garment\textsuperscript{12} (Figs. 41 and 42) that was destined for the first-ever summit of the International Partnerships for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health in New Delhi, India. The text on her cloth reads ‘Being pregnant is difficult because you never know whether you are going to give birth to a baby or an animal. You do not know whether or not you are going to survive.’ The cloth is a stylised, sewn representation of herself on the left hand side with a smaller figure, her son, Ntokozza, on the right. Motifs of trees and plants are placed to the sides of the individual cloths in the pilot garment as repetitive and unifying elements. The trees and leaves in Mkhize’s cloth reflect the lively, joyful expression of the story. Walker’s comments are relevant here, the discourse, practice and social identity of the woman as mother needs to be held together when theorising motherhood in gender debates (Walker cited in Haddad, 2001:173).

For Mkhize (2005) the \textit{UbuMama} experience broadened her mind as she listened to the teaching content and discussed maternal health care issues with the women. As a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church she has a strong sense of her identity as being made in the image of God and her

\textsuperscript{12} A unique pilot garment was made onto which various birthing cloths were appliquéd. This pilot garment was the model for similar projects in other countries.
Figures 41 and 42:

_UbuMama Pilot Garment_, ca. 2005, Birthing cloths with embroidery embedded in garment (25 x 30 cm), irreg.
sense of calling to be active in her God given abilities. In this context, Mkhize (2005) said, “We must use our hands, eyes and other parts of our bodies so that God can be happy that he gave us our bodies and we are using them to feed ourselves”.

The latter statement epitomises survivalist spirituality: “Survival is a material reality of millions of poor and marginalised women’s lives” (Haddad, 2000:401). She notes that the socially transformative work of gender activists in the field of development needs to operate at macro and micro levels of practical strategies, that bring relief for women struggling to survive. Mkhize reported that the project strengthened her faith in God (Mkhize, 2005).

Crises of every description face the women of the project who live in conditions of poverty with an inadequate social infrastructure. Severely disabled, Kholiwe Mkhize is looking after the children of her siblings who are orphans. Kholiwe Mkhize (2005), (Fig. 43) writes:


I am a young mother who raises four kids, which are not mine, their mothers passed away. They were my sisters and my brother. The first one was born 07.07.2002, the second 16.07.2002 and other 20.09.2004. I don’t have my own child because I am disabled. I can’t
Figure 43:

*Kholiwe Mkhize*, 2005, Photograph (Zagel)

Figure 44:

stand the hardiness of carrying the unborn baby. The way my body is, I can't fall pregnant.

Born on 23rd February in 1974, she contracted tuberculosis in 1988 which led to curvature of her spine. Her home is Inkandla Farm but she lives in J Section, Umlazi. A committed Christian, she is a member of St John's Apostolic Church, but seldom goes to church due to her physical condition.

Stitched into her birthing cloth are these words 'I am staying with these children who lost their parents in this house because I love them'. This statement is strongly reinforced by the cloth's visual content (Fig. 44). The narrative is simple, offering only a glimpse of the grief and hardships experienced by Mkhize. Three small people (children) wait in the house for someone (Kholiwe herself?) to come home with physical and spiritual sustenance. They peer out in anticipation. The background of the cloth is covered with a sky of cross stitches. The story is charged both with poignancy at her inability to have her own children and the children's loss of a parent. In the words of Becker (2004:123) "All it takes is the loss of one caretaker to create a disastrous situation for a child and mother".

Strongly identifying with the role of mother, Mkhize (2005) said she "loved being with other mothers". Being-in-community with them during the project enabled her "to speak about what has been hurting me for a while now" (ibid). In terms of reclamation of her spirituality, she reported a sense of dignity (the *Imago Dei* as gift), through her participation (ibid). She is
most proud of “trying to be happy” (ibid). Dominant cultural stories of loss, poverty and hardship can saturate and subjugate people’s lives. New meaning from a painful narrative has taken place: “The project changed my life a lot. I think of myself as an important person just by being part of the project. The other thing that changed my life was the incentive that I received” (ibid). She has a disability grant; however as a physically disabled breadwinner/care-giver, her involvement in the Zamukuziphilisa Community Project is an endeavour of great valour amidst poverty and marginalisation.

Random and calculated acts of violence are endemic lessons, and legacies, of apartheid. Dolly Mbatha (2000), (Fig. 45) writes:


In 1995, I was on the bus travelling from Dumbe to Bilanyoni. A car which had three occupants drove passed. It stopped in front of the bus and they started shooting. Two passengers from the bus were injured. One of those was my uncle’s child and the other was unknown. The child’s name was Bongumusa. My uncle was heartbroken and he has never forgotten because his son got shot.

Not living with her own three children and not being married, Mbatha (2005) is acutely aware of loss. She lives at the Zamukuziphilisa Community Project itself, the women there are her family. Church attendance at the Israel Zion Church was regular until January 2005 when a division in the congregation

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Figure 45:

*Dolly Mbatha, 2000, Photograph (Botha)*

Figure 46:

occurred. Born 2nd April 1966, she went up to Standard 5 (Grade 7) in her schooling and achieved a diploma in fashion design at a city centre college. Her colleagues regard her as an efficient and accomplished fashion designer (Gambushe, 2005).

Occupying a third of the memory cloth (Fig. 46), Dolly Mbatsha stitches text which recalls her relative’s painful memory. It reads ‘He has never forgotten what happened, he is still hurt and his heart is sore because his son was shot and killed.’ Against a charcoal background, in bright orange embroidered writing, is her story. Above it is a bus, illustrated with beadwork, full of commuters. Approaching the bus is a car with three occupants. The car is outlined with turquoise beads. The firing of guns is depicted by the use of yellow flares. It is aesthetically pleasing until one reads the narrative. Carol Becker touches on the viewer’s ambivalence when she says that, “The horror of the cloths often rests in the almost childlike representation of figures ... At times the images even seem innocent, benign, beautiful or playful in form and colour, until one reads the fragment of text ...” (Becker, 2004:131).

The killers of her nephew were not arrested and brought to trial. She was drawn to the project because “I wanted to take out the pain that was existing inside me for a long time” and the workshop “changed my life so drastically because I managed to take out the pain.” The experience of her story being ‘witnessed’ by others “strengthened my faith and I was able to forgive and forget” (Mkhize 2004). This does not address her particular experience of
failed justice, but the catharsis of the storytelling process was a dramatic event of spiritual reconstitution. Desmond Tutu (1999:219) comments that:

In forgiving, people are not being asked to forget. On the contrary, it is important to remember, so that we should not let such atrocities happen again. Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what has happened seriously and not minimising it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence. It involves trying to understand the perpetrators and so have empathy, to try to stand in their shoes, and to appreciate the sort of pressures and influences that might have brought them to do what they did.

Forgiveness is not being sentimental. The study of forgiveness has become a growth industry. Whereas previously it was something often dismissed pejoratively as spiritual and religious, now because of developments such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, it is gaining attention as an academic discipline studied by psychologists, philosophers, physicians and theologians.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva (1982:84) engages with the concepts of trauma and melancholy, and proposes that we understand the artist and the artwork in relation to fundamental psychological crises that are negotiated through the artwork. Becker (2004:134) believes the memory cloth project provides “a form that gives shape to the narration of tragedy – one important function of art”.

Another important function of art is to interpret extraordinary events of life. Elsie Nzama’s birthing story speaks of unfulfilled yearnings to be a mother and then the joy of having her new baby. Her story is titled *The Goodness of being the Mother*, and Elsie Nzama (2005) writes:

Bangihlinza ke ngahamba ngo- 8 ekuseni mhlaka 22 ku-June 1978 ngaze ngaphaphama ngo 4pm ntambama ngisebuthongweni ngabona abanye omama ababili kodwa engingabazi bathi kumina ngiyabona ukuthi ngingaboshesha ukuza esibhledlela manje usuze wahlinzwa ukuze uholo umtwana. Ngase ngiyabazela ukuthi nqacala ngaya eMtholampilo (Clinic) kwathiwa angilale ngoba i - BP yami iphezulu kakhulu base bengidlulisele esibhela eKing Edward.


ngakhululeka ngasengithi uJehova unguMelusi wami yingakho ngamqamba ngathi uMalusi baqhubeka ubumandla bokuba ngumama.

I have been hungry for being the mother since I was still young. Every weekend when I was a child, me and my friends we would play and I always wanted to play the part of being a mother.

But when I grew up, it took me a long time to have a baby, up until I have thirty years, without having a baby and that hurt me so bad. But in 1978 I got a baby. I got my baby through an operation at King Edward Hospital, even though the doctors there said I could not get the baby because I was over age.

They said the child could be hurt on the head during delivery and she or he would have some mental problems in future, so I needed to deliver my child through an operation.

They did the operation approximately at 8 a.m. on 22 June 1978. I got my consciousness at 4 p.m. When I woke up, I saw two women and they told me it was early for me to be at the hospital and my blood pressure was very high, so they could not help me with anything all they could suggest is that I must take some rest in the hospital for few days before I go.

For me I was very surprised that I could be a mother but I learnt a lesson that I would never approach the hospital before due time just because I needed to have a baby sooner. I named him Nkosinathi in 1979. I called him that name because sometime I would wake up in the evening to check that he is still breathing, and of course he would still be breathing, and I realised that God is with us. He was born on the month of 7 December 1979, and that was my last day I attended the clinic until the 23rd of February 1980.

When I came back to the clinic for the second time, the nurse there did not treat me well, because I had not attended the clinic on a regular basis. Even though the nurses did not want to help me, the doctor decided to welcome me and everything went well, and I thank God for that.
Nzama is married and living in J Section. Her two children are her greatest achievement in life and she is currently caring for her three grandchildren. She was born on 1st September 1940 and reached Standard 5 (Grade 7) in her school education (2005). Jousse understood the visceral nature of memory as stored in the body and recorded in the flesh (Sienaert and Conolly, 2000:5). Nzama (Fig. 47) speaks of a gnawing hunger to be a mother through many layered memories of childhood.

The text on her birthing cloth announces ‘Hooray! Nkosinathi my child, I love you, grow up.’ Nzama’s cloth (Fig. 48) is covered in detail and filled with colourful hues: sea greens, royal blues, shocking pinks and viridian greens, and a varied fretwork of stitches. Proportionately, the artist’s hand is too large for the body; this is the hand that holds her longed-for son. In the background is the menacing figure of a nurse. This image disturbs the pleasure of the imagery.

Several of the birthing stories report the hierarchical and indifferent attitudes of medical staff at provincial hospitals and clinics, and give visual form to Becker’s statement that “From the stories represented in the memory-cloth project, we learn about the uneducated and underrepresented, left without resource or recourse” (Becker, 2004:123). The maternal/child health care programme that accompanied the UbuMama workshops were valuable education inputs into the women’s lives. Nzama (2005) said, “My mind was opened, I am a woman who likes to grow in knowledge and information
Figure 47:

Elsie Nzama, 2005, Photograph (Zagel)

Figure 48:

together with other women.” The workshop changed her attitude to teenage pregnancy. “I always thought that I was going to chase my daughter and probably never talk to her again if she ever got pregnant, but now I know that I won’t have to do that. I will know what to do and how to do it” (ibid).

Nzama has been publicly acknowledged through the exhibition of her memory cloth, and has become more resourced in her life skills. A member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, her emotional-spiritual equilibrium is more holistically constituted, post the project and, because of the project, she re-affirmed that “without God there is nothing I can do on my own” (Nzama, 2005).

Carelessness is a leitmotif of an inadequate medical infrastructure resulting from systematic neglect during the apartheid era that remains a blight in South Africa today. Lillian Mthiyane (2005) (Fig. 49) writes:

Figure 49:

*Lillian Mthiyane*, 2005, Photograph (Zagel)

Figure 50:

When I gave birth to all my children everything went well but what is sad is that when my sister Elsie gave birth it was difficult. She was in pain for three days and her body was swollen, doctors tried everything to help her. After four days they used scissors to take the baby out, but the baby died. She was in hospital she couldn't move or walk. It is difficult for her even now, she is paralysed for the rest of her life and she can't walk. I hate King Edward Hospital because of their carelessness. Now I am the mother of her three children, they are all young. The first born is ten years old, the second child is eight years old and the last born is four years old. Now I take care of my sister, bath her, feed her, it is difficult to be a mother. All this happened in year 2000.

Since Mthiyane is not a young woman (born 11th February 1937) and is hindered by arthritis. Her sister's paralysis is a demanding experience for her. In terms of narrative therapy, this story unmasks the hidden prejudices of the dominant cultural milieu of 'lack of care towards people'. It is a story of subjugation and it does not evoke a story of 'the preferred self'. However, I argue that the 'performative' creates the new story; the act of telling the story, and visually recording it, transforms the participant.

Shown at the base of the cloth (Fig. 50) is King Edward Hospital which irrevocably changed the course of Mthiyane's life. Small figures of the medical fraternity sit at a table (the symbol of bureaucratic decision making), meting out the decisions (or lack of) that caused the paralysis of her sister. Irony is present in the image of the smaller table adorned with a bowl of flowers representing life. Above this tableau is the figure of Mthiyane bent backwards, staggering in disbelief and bewilderment as she beholds two tiny figures, one is her sister's child, the other is her own. The explanatory text

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on the left reads ‘My sister’s child has become mine.’ The text on the right reads ‘My child is beautiful and I love her.’

Such are the stories of everyday life of the women of Umlazi and the Amazwi Abesifazane project. African women’s theology is formed in the matrix of survival; the extreme change of a family structure suddenly needing to incorporate three more children and a disabled adult who needs to be bathed and fed like a helpless child. Living in Umlazi (J Section), Mthiyane is married with four children of her own and, as a breadwinner, is informally employed at the Zamukuziphilisa Community Project. She left school at the end of Standard 7 (Grade 9). Haddad (2004:401) comments, “Oppressive material conditions do not have a neutral gender face. They impact women more significantly than men in poor and marginalised communities and poverty affects women in particular and more severe ways.” She argues against the notion that poor and marginalised women accept their victimised state, saying “survival, as a resistance strategy, is more complex than feminist theorising suggests” (Haddad, 2004:405).

Mthiyane (2005) reports that the project “has changed my life a lot. Even when I am walking on the street I feel that I am a new Lillian”. Her prayer life has been confidently altered, “Whenever we do something here (the Centre) we start with prayer. Before I came here, I used to pray only when I go to bed. Now I pray in the morning as well”. Although she is a regular member of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Umlazi, she evinces a new
found dignity (the *Imago Dei*). Haddad (2004:405) underscores this critical quality in the women’s survival theology when she says, “Survival embraces a dignity, a quality of life, that is intricately intertwined with these women’s understanding of God”.

The project has had an impact on Mthiyane’s material circumstances. When asked the question, “Do you believe that God cares about this project, if so, why do you believe this?”, she responded, “I received money through this project and I settled some of my debts” (Mthiyane, 2005).

Gertrude Zulu (2005), a co-participant similarly reported, “We received some money through this project. It was the first time that I pushed a big trolley full of groceries”. The interview with Thuleleni Nzimande (2005) revealed that the project “has changed my life a lot because now I can put some food on the table for my kids”.

The *Amazwi Abesifazane/UbuMama* women “employ strategies that show agency and resistance to their material conditions of oppression” (Haddad, 2004:405). The project has boosted their morale in their agency. Haddad (ibid) makes the connections between faith, material conditions, personal and social transformation so relevant to this study:

Political liberation might have arrived, but surviving the daily realities of life continues to prescribe the lives of most South African women of faith. While liberation from oppression under girds the epistemological framework of gender studies, the context of survival must first be understood and analysed. If not, our understanding of “liberation”
from oppression will remain flawed and our political agendas will continue to have little impact on the lives of poor and marginalised women. Religion itself, so integral to this marginal discourse of poor women, is often neglected in feminist debates. To speak of “women’s development” or of “women’s liberation” without including the faith dimension excludes a large part of the lived reality of these women’s lives. This study has shown that the interconnectedness between faith and material conditions is crucially important to both survival strategies and to resistance practices that can lead to social transformation.

Desmond Tutu (1999:209) wrote, “The world had expected that the most ghastly bloodbath would overwhelm South Africa. It had not happened.” However, the legacy of ethnic internecine strife, fomented by the apartheid government, continued after 1994. Born in 1941 (October 28th) Bongekile Joyce Mhlongo (2000) (Fig. 51) writes:


On February 10 1996, at night, I heard some voices and the screams of a woman asking for help from the community. It was a group of men. When I checked the time, I noticed that it was midnight. They were talking saying she must be killed while others were saying she must be burned because she was a witch, that she was the one who killed Mr Buyani Mbasa. I saw some people running and I went out too, to see what was going on because the screaming, shouting, crying and sounds of gun fire were continuing. I found two dead bodies.
Figure 51:

*Bongekele Joyce Mhlongo*, 2000, Photograph (Botha)

Figure 52:

That of a man and a woman. They were lying on the ground. They had been shot and stabbed and their hands had been amputated.

The blood was flowing. They were tied together by their arms. Those were Mr and Mrs Nswelekazi. What was the indelible pain in my life ever since was to see the barbaric killing which was performed through weapons. And there was no help from the community whatsoever. It shows that people are now without conscience.

Stitched onto her memory cloth is this text ‘What traumatised me in my life was to witness people killing others. They were dying so painfully, they were killing each other. People have no conscience any more.’ In Mhlongo’s cloth (Fig. 52), against a pearl grey background is the figure of a dead woman and a man with no hands. They are surrounded by men wielding knobkerries, sticks and a gun. The rhythmic orange and turquoise beading is visually bold and belies the ‘off stage’ discourse of Mhlongo’s infrapolitics; it is still dangerous to speak of this event. The cloth is a blunt statement reflecting Mhlongo’s deep shock. The murdered woman shown in the cloth is singled out to carry in her body all that is awful in the psyches of the community. The actual perpetrators are depicted here. The invisible perpetrators of fear and irrationality are not.

“It shows that people are without conscience” (Mhlongo, 2005). Mhlongo’s intrinsic belief in human goodness was profoundly shaken. Propositional faith refers to a person’s intellectual consent to creeds, whereas experiential faith is that which is lived out. She believed in being the Good Samaritan until her encounter with the murdered couple. She said “I thought that being a good Samaritan is not always a good idea” (Mhlongo, 2004). Although she is a
regular member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the event caused a serious rupture in the integration of her faith.

Mhlongo's question during the interview (Mhlongo, 2005) was, "Why do men ill-treat women?" Expurgating the terrible memory of viewing the couple, by publicising it in cloth-making, was very cathartic for her. "I just wanted to tell that tragic story. I wanted the world to know about that kind of violence that brings so much uncertainty and traumatises communities" (Mhlongo, 2005). Not married, Mlongo lives with and cares for her three children in J Section, Umlazi. She attained Standard 5 (Grade 7) level in her education, and is very proud of her children who give her "all that I need" (Mhlongo, 2005). Communal relations are important to her. Being-in-community is a mark of the Imago Dei, and relationality is a strong feature of African theology. Its disruption implies a serious spiritual/corporal breach of the life force of all in the community.

Keith Thomas (cited in Ehrenreich and English, 1973:14) states that 'witches' (throughout history) were invariably poor. Commenting on witch hunting spanning four centuries (from the 14-17th centuries), Ehrenreich and English (19973:26) speak of witches representing "a political, religious and sexual threat to the Protestant and Catholic churches alike, as well as to the state ... The point is obvious, the witch craze did not arise spontaneously in the peasantry. It was a calculated ruling class campaign of terrorisation". The local application to South Africa is somewhat similar. Witch hunting does not
have a gender neutral face, it targets the poor and marginalised. Blame is
projected onto a person or persons and their death expedites the ills of the
community.

The *Amazwi Abesifazane* project helped Mhlongo to reconstitute her belief in
the compassion of people, in contrast to the behaviour of the men in the
witch hunt witnessed by her. Desmond Tutu expressed his 'desperate' wish
that, in seeking solutions, we "would not despise the value of seemingly
small symbolical acts that have a potency and significance beyond what is
apparent" (Tutu, 1999:227). Mhlongo's public art work is an example of a
small, symbolical act of great significance.

Florence Mdlolo (Fig. 53) is one of the women in the project who has told her
entire story. She illustrated the episodes of her life with forty memory
cloths. Her autobiography *I could hear the voice of my child* was published
by *Create Africa South* (Fig. 56) in 2004. Her stories are shocking and they
"seem unimaginably brutal, and yet they occurred" (Becker, 2004:131). The
book's account begins with the violence of 1989; "the whole world was
shaken when the political parties who were banned were unbanned", and
"... the moon turned into blood and it was covered with darkness" (Mdlolo,
2004:8-9). Political parties fought for dominance and a bloodbath of
shootings, necklacing, arson and Kangaroo courts ensued. Becker
(2004:134) speaks of "senseless violence enacted from the outside against
helpless people" ... and "the senseless violence that oppressed people enact

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Figure 53:

Florence Mdlolo, 2001, Photograph (Botha)

Figure 54:

on each other”. Entitled Violence in 1996-1997: Train Victims (Fig. 54), the
story and the cloth depicted in the book describe the conflicts between the
ANC and the IFP post liberation. Florence Mdlolo (2003) writes:


Kweminye imindeni babethola abantu babo emakhazeni nase zibhledlela.

Isiphetho
Lwashiilikumeza udlame kwalanjwa kwavalva nezitolo

Babebanga imizila yezimo to namataxi bangabi nandaba nemiphefumulo engenacala banaka ezabo izingxak wasiphandle.

Okwababuhlungu ngukuthi bashisa ubhuti wami safika beqeda kumlayitha ngopetrol ephuma amathumbu, ikhanda lasi lifusekile seliqhashele ngaphandle.

Igama lakhe kwakungu Zolile Mdlolo, umzala wami yena ufe ngesibhamu kunamagobolondo ezinhlamvu.

Igama lakhe nguXolani Gwele washiya ingane eyodwa nengoduso yakhe.

Baningi abantu abalaphelkela izimpilo zabo, kanjalo nemindeni nemizi kwacekelwa phansi. Babebuya emsebenzini beya emakhaya kodwa abafikanga emakhaya.

A lot of people lost their lives, and consequently, families were
destroyed. They were coming from work to their homes but they
never reached their homes.

What was so sad:
Criminals had found a way to rob people of their things. They chased
them with knives. Cars were hi-jacked. Those who went to work
would thank God for coming back home alive. Others resigned from

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their jobs while some were dismissed because of being absent from work for so many days, because of the lack of transport. People would find their loved ones in hospitals or their bodies in the morgue.

**Conclusion:**
Violence victimized us all. Families starved as stores closed. They were fighting over taxi routes. They never cared about innocent people, but their own selfish needs. The sad thing is that they burned my brother. When we came, they had just set him alight using petrol. His intestines were still outside and his head was all dark with smoke, but they had shot him first and his name was Zolile Mdlolo. This was evident because of the bullet cartridges. My cousin Xolani Gwele was also killed. He left behind one child and his fiancé.

In Mdlolo’s cloth the sweeping arc of the snake-like train provides a deep perspective as it curves across the top of the cloth. The cloth is full of movement. Against a black background, figures are running in every direction. A mayhem of robbery, looting and stabbing is depicted. A house, a car and a body are burning. Red stitching represents the deadly flames. Red is dominant. A running figure, the windows of the train, and the border are emblazoned with the colour of blood.

Mdlolo’s first cloth (Fig. 55) traces her family’s experiences of apartheid.

Mdlolo (2000) writes:

Kusukela nags 1950 ukuya ko 1960 kuze kube yimanje njengoba sekuze kwafika ama omhla akoko ngobandulu lo emnyakeni edluile. Ngang’inoxelwa ngumkhulu ethi, babephila kabuhlungu bethatha amapasi besebenza emakhishini emizini yabamhlophe. Uthi wawungagoduku ye ukhaya ubone abantwana bakho kwakuphoqeka ukuthi unathise imali basebenzelwa uR1,50 ngenyanga uma uthola kangocono uhole uR3,00. Uthi okwakubuhlungu kunako konke ukuthi uma ucela kumlungu wakho wayekwenzela incwadi ayibhale ayinike ukuthi uyiyise ehovisi elithize awazi ukuthi ibhaliwe ukuthini. Uma ufika lapho bayifunde lenzwadi uyobona uma kufika izimto uvalele endlini encane, ayokushaya lamabhunu ube mbokoboko akude dele usuwopa. Futhi kwakuthi uma inyanga iphelele kulo doppass onawo
Figure 55:

Figure 56:
From the 1950s to the 1960s, I’ve been hearing about apartheid. My grandfather tells me that they were forced to carry passes while they were working in the kitchen (as domestic workers) for white people. They were unable to go to their families, they would only send money. They were earning a lousy R1.50 a month. Those who were the highest paid workers were earning R3.00 a month.

The painful thing was that if you were spending a night at the your boss’s house, he/she would write you a letter which you would take to a particular office. You would not know what was in that letter. After they have read that letter they would put you into a small room and beat you up. They would let you go when you were bleeding. Every month end your employer would have to sign on your pass otherwise you would be arrested and you would be stamped with the following abbreviation: D.L.B You then would be sent back to your rural area.

One thing which I witnessed with my own eyes was that there was one store, but there are two doors. One door is for the whites and the other is for blacks. The money though, at the end of the day went to the same safe. The one door was written like this, “Non white” while the other was written as follows, “Whites only”. Those who accidentally used whites only door, would be tied on a tree and be beaten up like hell. Some victims would lose their teeth there. And you could not lay a charge anywhere.

We only knew that a white person could be arrested after we voted and Mandela became president. We have come far away with apartheid. There are cripples, some can’t see (they are blind) because their bodies were poisoned. This was not done to white people. Some things bring back painful memories. Because we don’t have brothers because of apartheid.

A dividing line down the middle of the cloth symbolises apartheid. On the left is the sign of insult, ‘non-white’. Stitched below this are two ‘brown’ people whose footsteps approach the ‘non-white’ entrance. A white and yellow threaded form follows the green arrows to the ‘white’ entrance. The right
side images the pass system and its constraining paternalism; a policeman holds a pass book and interrogates two people. Against a black backing cloth their attire is detailed in embroidery work of red, white and green. The complex composition is completed by a yellow police van, yet another sign of the system's control of people's movements.

In 2002 Florence Mdlolo died as the result of an asthma attack. Her family "struggled for more than four hours to secure the transport to get her to hospital" (Botha cited in Mdlolo, 2004:1). So many of the narratives, like Mdlolo's, are the stories of the struggle of everyday life, "of being neglected by a social system, of having no safety net, no infrastructure, not even the most minimal, such as telephones, motor vehicles, and clean drinking water" (Becker, 2004:133). She continues, "It is ironic and devastatingly tragic that Mdlolo died as a result of the same absence of infrastructure she writes about so lucidly" (Becker, 2004:134).

In the absence of an interview, I will construct a sense of Mdlolo's reconstitution of her spirituality from her writings. The defining mark of African feminism and spirituality is its holism. Life is a seamless garment and religion impinges upon every aspect of human living. There is no dichotomy between faith and life. It is utterly clear from her book that Mdlolo's life was highly traumatised with deep ruptures in her social, moral and relational world. She was a "woman who experienced such enormous personal and political adversity in her life" (Botha cited in Mdlolo, 2004:1).
However, through the process of designing and producing the cloths, and writing her book, Mdlolo found her voice. She reconstituted her ability to act; as Tholakele Zuma (2002) claims, "You heal your heart with your art, you get to help yourself". Mdlolo (2004:4) writes "I feel privileged and honoured to get this opportunity to write this book. I have always had this dream, since I was young" (ibid). Re-imaging herself as a woman with a clear calling to write (the Imago Dei), in her preface she thanks Mrs X P Sosibo, "who is the one who encouraged me to use my talent of writing and to do some craft work" (ibid).

The communalism of African theology stresses the righting of relationships. Being-in-community (the Imago Dei) is restored for her as the Amazwi Abesifazane project facilitates her forgiveness of her father. "With the arrival of Andries Botha though, at Mbuyeni, Kwa-Shangase Tribal Authority, Ndwedwe, I found a chance of voicing my feelings and I could now tell my story to my dead father. I also forgave my father" (Mdlolo, 2004:4). A healthy benchmark of psychological and spiritual healing is the ability to be interdependent, people take care of themselves by taking care of others. In her book she proclaims "With this book I intend to give love to those who were never given love at their tender age and to those who still don't get love anywhere, even now" (ibid).

The Amazwi Abesifazane project derives neither its theoretical underpinnings nor its funding, from Christian sources. I emphasise again that the women
were chosen because they were a geographically stable group. This was the reason for the selection of the sample group. In order to preserve the integrity of the project the women were not selected according to their faith or denominational adherence. However, the surprising result for me is the extent to which faith is 'a large part of the lived reality of these women’s lives' (Haddad, 2000:405). In the Amazwi Abesifazane project the sample group revealed that most of the women belong to, and regularly attend mainline or African Independent church groups such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Zion Christian Church, the Uniting Presbyterian Church, the Apostolic Faith Church and the Israel Zion Church. The late Florence Mdlolo is the exception; I was neither able to glean information about her church affiliation, nor her spiritual practices. More importantly, the women’s faith practices are engendered. The Amazwi Abesifazane project has encouraged them in acts of resistance which facilitated the reconstitution of their spiritualities.
CONCLUSION

In Christianity and Democracy (1995) John De Gruchy speaks of the need for a concrete utopian vision (as opposed to an abstract utopia) in the realisation of a just world, and he says:

By relinquishing utopia human beings lose the ability to imagine new possibilities for the world, or the will to shape history. The concrete utopian vision of reality is the only way whereby we can break free of the circularity of a closed ideology, express judgement upon it, and pursue the goal of a more just world order (1995:230-31).

In the pursuit of a more just world order he makes a distinction between democracy as a vision of society and democracy as a system of government. Democracy as a vision of society is "a society in which all are respected as equals, in which difference is enriching not divisive, and in which human beings discover freedom and fulfilment" (De Gruchy, 1995:274). However, the notion of democracy as vision is still in need of this 'concrete utopia' which "is always beyond full realisation, and yet every victory for human equality, freedom, justice, peace and the integrity of creation is a step towards fulfilment" (ibid). The Amazwi Abesifazane project is a step towards the realisation of fulfilling this 'concrete utopia'.

The images depicted in the Amazwi Abesifazane cloths are neither those of a 'concrete utopia', nor are they literal images of transformation. De Gruchy argues: "art that depicts the brutality of war and violence can change attitudes and open up the possibilities of a future without violence" (De
Gruchy, 2001:201). He refers to the audience’s response. One could extend De Gruchy’s argument to artists who are changed by their own depiction of war and violence. However, what is clear from the evidence is that the process of the workshops enables the women “to believe in the possibility of a just society and therefore to anticipate an equitable future that does not yet exist” (Becker, 2004:134). Menán du Plessis, a South African author, spoke of a new direction in South African Art in a speech in 1986, when he said “It is not the morally self-conscious art of liberal protest, nor is it the defiant art of outrage, it is the diverse, complex, extraordinarily rich art of resistance” (du Plessis cited in Williamson, 1989:9). The Amazwi Abesifazane cloths are examples of this rich art of resistance and hope.

Rephrasing Okwui Enwezor (from Remembrance of Things Past:27), De Gruchy (2001:212) states, “Hope is about the production of a new reality for a damaged society”. He amplifies this in terms of vision, art and social praxis and says:

This is a far cry from an easy optimism about the future, but it is about a refusal to succumb to despair. ... 

Of course, not all artists are hopeful: many despair of the human condition, as have and do some of the greatest theologians. But even when it reflects despair, art expresses the human urge to creativity, and as such it is indicative of the hope that continually seeks to break through into human consciousness. Artistic creativity can never be satisfied by Nietzsche’s nihilism even when it despairs of the world, for it is of the essence of creativity that it continually imagines new futures as it seeks to transcend the cul-de-sacs of the past. Hope enables us to transgress the boundaries of what is presently deemed realistic and possible (De Gruchy, 2001:212).
Resisting patriarchy and despair, I would argue that the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project is located in this paradigm of hope.

"The Truth and Reconciliation's greatest contribution was to give back to South Africa its heart" (James and van de Vijver, 2000:4). The greatest contribution of the *Amazwi Abesifazane* project is that it has given back to the women 'their hearts'. For *Create Africa South* the archiving of the women's histories immortalised their ontological significance as human beings. *Create Africa South* sees the need for the resurgence of the women's knowledges which were suppressed by political marginalisation, cultural taboo and patriarchy, in order to bring individual and collective liberty. Throughout my research, my speaking with the women revealed that they were aware that their set of knowledges have been disqualified as inadequate to their task (Foucault, 1976:116). The project has given the women the opportunity to find their voices, excavate their subjugated knowledges and reconstitute their spiritualities.

In this dissertation the cluster of humane values surrounding the idea of the *Imago Dei* are helpful criteria for accessing the process of reconstituting the women's spiritualities. The project has affirmed that each woman bears the gift of the *Imago Dei*, the very likeness of God within her. She is an expression of God's grace. She bears this unmerited gift without corresponding human virtue. I have centred this dissertation within Creation centred Spirituality because it is feminist in motivation, non-dualistic and
non-hierarchical. It seeks to bring about a sociality that privileges partnerships, relatedness and equality in the struggle for eco, gender and social justice. Trusting in images and imagination, it is also a theology for the poor that imagines transformation away from all forms of poverty, be it individual or national. These values are claimed by Create Africa South. It "holds that Amazwi Abesifazane (Voices of Women) promotes the idea that a traumatic history can only be transcended by making visible an underdisclosed past in order that a new future may be individually and collectively imagined" (Create Africa South, 2005).

The interviews revealed that the above statement was practiced by Create Africa South in the workshops and did bring about the transcending of women's traumatic histories. Linked to this was the women's substantial Christian faith that consciously prototypes Christ as liberator, as the one who brings freedom and liberty. Under the canopy of Liberation theologies is African women's theology which shares with African theology the indivisibility of life itself. There is no division between the visible and invisible worlds, between the sacred and the secular. Hence the Amazwi Abesifazane women's spirituality is formed in the matrix of material survival. Their daily struggles to survive are resistances; resistances "located in the fine meshes of the web of power" (Foucault, 1976:116).

African women's theology shares with African theology a protest against the experiences of colonialism, racism, classism and exclusivism (Phiri, 2004:17).
The Amazwi Abesifazane women’s expressed spiritualities are congruent with African women’s theology, however protest is more covert as they negotiate culturally entrenched patriarchy that sees women as less important than men. Contiguous with African women’s theology, the Amazwi Abesifazane women engage in oral theology ‘from below’. Stories highlight their suffering and transform their oppression.

Three primary media are used in the workshops to mediate narratives: oral/aural storytelling, written stories and visual stories. The narratives are the embodiment of sensory experiences intertwined with memory, beyond words. In the Amazwi Abesifazane context the stories become transformative in their ‘performance’. When the memory cloths are exhibited, it is the gestural mode that is missing and not recorded. This dissertation is a partial recapturing of that record by tracing the process of the women’s healing. Listening constitutes a revolutionary act (Friedman and Combs, 1996:44) and the Amazwi Abesifazane workshops privilege memory and orality in the telling of stories. Reconstituted memory is the act of creativity and the women derive a sense of generativity from ‘making visible an under-disclosed past’. (Create Africa South 2005).

Aware of their disqualified voices, the women’s interviews, cloths and stories evidence ‘infrapolitics’ or ‘off-stage’ discourses. Occupying a space between a public and hidden realm, the works manifest elements of disguise. These discursive acts of the women shield their full identity, or hidden transcripts.
Small scale subversions, or local, low-profile acts of resistance, are present in
the *Amazwi Abesifazane* context as they "operate daily under patriarchal
surveillance" (Haddad, 2000:342).

On the level of organised resistance and public advocacy, the *UbuMama
Project* has offered the *Amazwi Abesifazane* women a platform to engage in
activism around mother/child health care. It raises the re-valuing of women’s
position in society, as attention is drawn to the quality of the first few years
of a child’s life. This has a multiplier effect on society. Like countless black
South African women, their cloths, stories and interviews evince the women’s
sacrifice of their own lives for the sake of their children.

The *Amazwi Abesifazane* women’s everyday practices are survival strategies,
they are the arts of resistance. The visible, audible and gestural
opportunities of the project have significantly helped them ameliorate rupture
or trauma in their lives, which enables them to remain hopeful, anticipating
‘a new future’ (*Create Africa South*, 2005).

**RECOMMENDATION**

In this study, I stated that the *Amazwi Abesifazane* cloths are a neglected
archive of a neglected history. As such they deserve to be adequately
housed for public viewing. They are literally and figuratively a fragile
archive. South Africans are currently engaging in a rigorous pursuit of our
oral/visual history and the *Amazwi Abesifazane* cloths and texts are worthy of being included as full partners in this pursuit. It requires timeous funding and concentrated gathering of information. Marginalised black South African women are primary sources of history, they are witnesses of a previously invalidated history. Their memories could be obliterated as the mortality rates in South Africa are so alarmingly high.

Highlighting the Government's recognition of the necessity to pay homage to the memory and "... aesthetic history of previously marginalised groups", Schmahmann (2001:46) also comments:

> Since 1994, South African public buildings have been identified as having the potential to provide a forum the display of works by individuals or groups marginalised in the previous dispensation. This aim to achieve greater inclusivity has manifested itself both in plans for the refurbishment of existing buildings and the acquisition for new structures (Schmahmann, 2001:43).

Schmahmann herself does not call for the public display of needlework. However she does note that "Needlework projects have the potential to be allied with a drive to develop awareness and rewrite the histories of various people in South Africa" (Schmahmann, 2001:45-46).

the gathering and housing of the Amazwi Abesifazane archive. The White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage claims that a failure:

... to invest in the arts, culture and heritage would constitute grave short-sightedness on the part of government and a failure to recognise the healing and recreational potential of arts and culture in a period of national regeneration and restoration (cited in De Gruchy, 2001:195).

In addition to this, I quote Carol Becker (2004:134), “For South Africa, remembering – personal and collective – has become a national project”.

In conclusion, I believe that the very act of creativity has encouraged the women of the Amazwi Abesifazane project to resist oppressive forces in their lives: cultural/political dislocation, poverty and the hegemony of patriarchy. The process of the project has affirmed their dignity and identity post apartheid within their current dispensation of poverty. This study aims to contribute to the nascent and growing body of African feminist discourses and theologies of resistance. In my role of researcher I am deeply grateful to have been reconstituted and reshaped in my relationship with the women.

Through the therapeutic effects of creativity hope is kept alive. The Amazwi Abesifazane/UbuMama project is multidimensional: through the oral/aural/visceral/literary and visual mediums of the projects, the women have regained agency and resolve to reconstitute their spiritualities towards both personal and national transformation.
LIST OF EXHIBITIONS:

Local:

Durban
2001 One hundred cloths were exhibited in the Durban Art Gallery, African Art Centre and at the parallel event held by Create Africa South during the World Conference Against Racism at the eThekwini Business Centre in 2001.

Pietermaritzburg
2001 Fifty framed cloths were exhibited at the Tatham Art Gallery Annex from November to December.

Durban
2004 African Art Centre – Okungijabulisayo Exhibition, August.

International:

Europe

Sixty two framed pieces were exhibited at:


2003 Imagine IC, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, September – November.

50 framed pieces at:

2004 Culturgest, Lisbon, Portugal, May.

USA


2003 Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, January – June.

One hundred and fifty cloths.

2004 Betty Rymer Gallery, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, April – July.

INTERVIEW DATES:

Individual interview with Tholakele Zuma, Durban.
08 October 2002

Amazwi Abesifazane participants at KwaDabeka, KwaZulu-Natal.
19 October 2003

Amazwi Abesifazane participants at Zamukuziphilisa Community Project, Umlazi, Durban.
23 June 2004
08 March 2005
29 June 2005
20 July 2005
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Schmahmann, B. 2005b. Stitches as Sutures: Representations of trauma and recovery by women in the Mapula Embroidery Project. African Arts 38(3). In Press – Draft copy from author (b.schmahmann@ru.ac.za), 20 June 2005 e-mail to B. Stott. (dobsonrt@telkomsa.net).


Zagel, J. (jzagel@worldonline.co.za). 25 January 2005. Re: UbuMama Summary document. E-mail to B. Stott. (bernicest@telkom.sa.net).
INTERVIEWS


Gouws, B. 2003. Interviewed by B. Stott, 260 Montpellier Road, Durban, 17 September 11.00.


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