

**MY JOURNEY OF AWARENESS:**  
**A STUDY IN MEMORY, IDENTITY AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT**

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

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### **Dedications:**

In loving memory of my late father.

With special gratitude, love and respect to my mother.

In commemoration, respect and gratitude to my foremothers.

I am grateful to my husband for his support and patience, and

I am grateful for my son for his inspiration and for becoming part of my life.

I dedicate this to my family, my community and fellow self-study practitioners,

you have all formed a critical part of my journey of awareness.

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**Abstract:**

I believe that the election in 1994 of the first democratic government in South Africa has presented a challenge to all South Africans in different ways. I believe that one of the principal challenges that the 1994 elections presented to my conservative Calvinistic Afrikaner community was to address its personal, family, community, national and international identity/ies. Arising out of this perspective and perception, I have explored my and my family memory/ies to answer questions about my identity.

My study is a journey of awareness: a self-study exploring my identity through critical self-reflection and the development of my art practice. My self-study is multi-disciplinary: it employs interchangeable methodologies allowing for various forms of knowledge generation. My journey of awareness is a “living theory” in which I have developed my “living standards of judgement” and addressed my “living contradictions” (Whitehead 1985; 1989; 2008a; b; c; d).

My study illustrates the symbiotic research and creative process of developing an understanding of my identity as a white Afrikaans woman through practicing my art. My art practice assisted in the action/reflection process as well acting as a tool for social action and transformation.

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## INTRODUCTION

My dissertation will provide you with an overview of my journey of awareness.

My journey of awareness is a self-study that explored my identity as a white Afrikaans speaking woman during and post-Apartheid. I explored my, my family and especially my mother's memories as a form of inquiry. The inquiry included the use of memorabilia, visiting and engaging in significant places and by sharing our stories and our lived experiences.

My journey of awareness was undertaken to develop a better understanding of my art practice and of my beliefs. My journey was to find meaning that would contribute to my knowledge and development as an artist self and my personal self. My dissertation will introduce the various self-study methodologies employed followed by discussing my journey of awareness by referring to my action/reflection cycles and the insights gained from them. The dissertation addresses the development of my awareness through critical self-reflection by contextualising the self in an Afrikaner Calvinistic social and cultural context. The dissertation illustrates the move from nostalgia to finding meaning in both my artwork and my life. It also illustrates the symbiotic relationship between my art practice and making sense of my belief and value system. My work addresses notions of etiquette and serving by contextualising and commenting on the role of women within an Afrikaner Calvinistic framework.

Although my study is multi-disciplinary in its means of exploration, it falls categorically within Fine Art. And, although the classical understanding of Fine Art can be described as "painting, sculpture, and engraving" (The Free Dictionary by Farlex 2009), I specifically position my artwork as art for social action and social justice, thus that my art serves a purpose of creating awareness and to deliver social commentary. My journey of awareness included the making of artworks that acted as a platform to tell my story as well as a means of self-discovery, reflection and expression. I also discuss the various forms of representation (Eisner, 1988; 1993; 1997) and how each form of representation served its own purpose in the telling of my story. I conclude by

discussing and showcasing my solo exhibition 'Onthaal Onthul', I further provide an argument that my self-study and my art served as tools for social action and transformation.

## **1 THE ORIGINS OF MY JOURNEY OF AWARENESS**

### **A Search for Meaning: Improving my Practice**

At a group art exhibition held in 2006, the curator of the gallery approached me and said to me: "Naretha, your work is beautiful and nostalgic. I also work with family photographs, so please tell me what your work is about?" After an uncomfortable silence, I realised that I had no answer. I knew then, that I had lost my artist's voice. I felt lost and I needed direction. I felt disconnected from my practical work. I realised that I was unsure why I was working with nostalgia as a theme and that I did not fully understand the true meaning or motivation for it, besides a general feeling of nostalgia and longing for times gone by and for those who had passed away. De Beer (2009:82) cites Stoller (1997) explaining that this disconnection or feeling of being "disembodied" was possibly due to the lack of an "implicated-and-embodied" relationship with my work. The lack of understanding of the meaning of my work was an indication of a lack of understanding of my life and my sense of identity. My work suggested a need to remember my past, but it also suggested a lack of understanding why I had this strong sense of nostalgia, and longing.

Embarking on a journey of awareness, allowed me to reconnect with my "embodied knowledge" (Whitehead 2008d:6) through critical self-awareness. It allowed me to become aware of, develop and explore the "implicated-and-embodied" (De Beer 2009:82) relationship with my work by being aware of the "embodied knowledge" expressed through my artwork.

My journey of awareness undertook to answer the core research question: “How do I improve my understanding of my practice?” (Whitehead 1985; 1989; 2008a; b; c; d). The aim of asking this question was to develop my artist’s voice, to become aware of my self as person and my self as artist, to become aware of my “embodied knowledge” (ibid, 2008d:6) and to develop an understanding of the expression of this “embodied knowledge”. Asking and attempting to answer this question allowed me to consciously create artwork that translated or represented my emerging knowledge and understanding, thus creating work that had something meaningful to say.

While my study was aimed at reconnecting my self as a person to my self as an artist, it was also a search for understanding my self as a human being by searching for the meaning of my life, my family and my life stories. Through my journey of awareness I developed a multitude of questions that guided and assisted me in inquiring and understanding the socio-political and cultural context of my upbringing. The aim of all these questions was to develop a better understanding of the Self, of my identity and the values that underpinned my artwork and the principles I lived by. My self-study was an attempt to reconstruct a “fragmented personal and cultural identity” as described by de Beer (2009:78).

## **A Search for Meaning: Understanding my Identity**

### **‘Losing’ my ‘National Identity’**

I was a twenty-year old first year fine art student at the University of Pretoria when, in 1994, the first democratic elections were held in South Africa. The elections signalled the end of Apartheid and the end of the forty-eight year long Afrikaner Nationalist Party’s political rule. For white Afrikaners like me who had grown up in a conservative Calvinistic community supporting the Nationalist Party’s ideology, the first democratic election meant a drastic shift in my and my community’s socio-political landscape, but was also a sudden shift in our understanding of our national identity and self identity.

This sudden shift of a social group that had for forty eight years been in a politically powerful position, acting as the 'dominant minority' group ruling the country and its people, left the group with a sense of uncertainty and insecurity and a sense of 'loss'. Antone and Hill (1992:2) labels this notion of "confusion and disruption" amongst the people of an ethnic group as "ethnostress". The authors provide an explanation of various kinds of ethnic disruption, such as the significant disturbance of a national identity that can result in the confusion and even loss of a sense of self, identity, beliefs and values that used to be grounded in the ethnic or national group identity. They identify that the notion of "ethnostress" can be due to the "the disruption of the cultural beliefs or joyful identity of a people" (ibid:4-5). The white Afrikaners sat in a comfortable position prior to the democratic elections. However, it was this sense of comfort and security that was significantly disrupted and turned into a space of uncertainty and lack of clear direction, with the democratic elections in 1994.

With the democratic elections in 1994, all the people of South Africa had to adjust to a new political system – some with joy, and others with a sense of loss and disorientation. This system introduced new regulations and new policies, as well as a new ruling party, posing new opportunities and challenges for its people, but specifically presenting an identity crisis for the white Afrikaners who were removed from their ruling seat.

For me as a white Afrikaans speaking woman, Afrikaner Nationalism was no longer the focus and drive. Instead I, as a white Afrikaner, had to deal with the guilt of having created this 'political mess', even as I was dealing with the sense of loss. Steyn (as cited by Jansen 2009:34) argues that this feeling of loss for the Afrikaners was further complicated by a feeling of shame and guilt. Further to dealing with this sense of shame and guilt was the struggle of making sense of my 'reality'. I was lost in my understanding of what my identity was supposed to be. My understanding of my past 'reality' was shifting as I uncovered the 'truths' about Apartheid through my journey of awareness.

The notion of indoctrination with a specific focus on Afrikaner Calvinism became a key aspect during my journey of awareness. Jansen (2009:42) argues that the

younger white Afrikaners had to come to terms with “the lies, the indoctrination, the misinformation that was their received knowledge throughout the Apartheid years. As they grapple with the past deceptions they must make sense of new realities”. During my journey of awareness, I realised that the deceit I experienced was that I was ‘protected’ as a child from the ‘truth’ of my social and political landscape. My lived framework encouraged and spoke of the Afrikaners, without highlighting the Afrikaner Nationalist strategy we had (un)wittingly contributed to. Jansen (2009:70-80) mentions how the family, school, the church and other cultural networks contributed to the transmission of knowledge. Jansen (2009:70) illustrates the transmission of knowledge by citing Lambley (1980):

The Afrikaner child, like children everywhere in their different communities, is brought up on Afrikaner values and perspectives of life. But, unlike other children, the Afrikaans child finds these values expressed uniformly at every level of society...At school he hears this from all his teachers, he reads it in all his books. At home his parents reiterate the same values – if there is any conflict between school and home it is usually over [the] degree of adherence to the same values, not over different sets of values. As the child grows up, he hears the same ideas expressed at church, on the radio and on television, reads them in Afrikaans newspapers, magazines, comics and in Afrikaans novels, plays and at the cinema.

Marris (as cited by Jansen 2009:47) further explains that this feeling of loss and confusion, is further complicated in our inability to process it if

...the meaning of what has been lost was never satisfactorily resolved. Its ambiguities, or our ambivalence toward it, complicate the task of reconstituting the enduring meaning of the lost relationship for the future. There may, for instance, be a residue of conflict and anger which cannot now be worked out in a living relationship. Trying to deal with that conflict retrospectively may make it harder to work out what sense to make of the future.

The challenge for me as one of the 'children of Apartheid' was that I had to deal with this guilt, even while I felt I had no part in creating this political dilemma. My journey of awareness was to establish what these feelings of regret, anger, and disappointment truly meant to me. Paradoxically, I have fond and nostalgic memories of my childhood, remembering a sense of freedom, feelings of safety and a strong sense of community. I can relate to Jansen's comment when he says that when white Afrikaans people speak of their upbringing - of stories filled with fond memories talking "about a tranquil rural upbringing, stern but warm parents, family laughter around an open fire, memorable sporting events" (ibid:147), "stories about cohesion and community, order and stability, peace and harmony" (ibid:148) and that their stories did not recall notions of "poverty, civil conflict, state brutality, murder, or torture" (ibid:148).

My childhood was of happy memories. I was oblivious to what was really happening in my country. I had no true concept of Apartheid, as it was a word we used and heard very little in our home and community. My father was very strict about our exposure to media especially limiting our television time. We would occasionally watch the news with our parents, especially when 'something significant' had happened and we would hear messages about '*die swart gevaar*' ('the black threat'). The news would present tainted messages of whites being described as 'victims' and blacks as 'violent attackers and protestors' (Bird and Garda, n.d.). The media presented a world 'out there' as dangerous, a concept that did not really exist in our community. My understanding was that 'blacks' were different from us, but I was unsure why that was so. I had learned about 'the other', as something that was different and separate from us, yet I had not made the connection that this notion of 'the other' was regulated by Apartheid. As a child I wondered why our domestic worker and gardener had to use a separate toilet and eat out of separate plates and drink out of separate mugs. I would - out of curiosity - visit our domestic worker and her children at their 'servant quarters' to see what their lives were like, but that was as far as my awareness went.

Following the change in South Africa's political landscape in 1994, came the messages of wrongdoing which I, as a white Afrikaans speaking woman, heard through various forms of media broadcast. By this time I was a young adult who was studying at University with more open access to the media. Jansen (2009) points out that these

messages were often made public through the announcement of newly instituted public holidays which commemorated struggle events and heroes, and through the revised school curriculum. These evoked many emotions, leaving many Afrikaners with the feelings of guilt and shame I referred to earlier. These messages contributed to my growing awareness of what Apartheid had entailed. Jansen (ibid:37-44) generalised and defined groups of Afrikaners based on how they processed their loss of power. These responses ranged from absolute denial as if nothing had happened, to recognizing that 'terrible things' had happened and that we needed to be aware of them, do something about it, and move on.

This last statement resonates with the purpose of my self-study. My journey of awareness was to better understand my self, my community, my upbringing, my heritage and to develop a better understanding of my current beliefs and values. The need for awareness was to implement change, transformation and improvement, of my self as person and as my self as artist. I also was aware that my artwork should deliver meaningful messages that in themselves could and would encourage awareness for the potential transformation of others.

In many ways I can relate to Jansen (2009:56) when he argues that the 'children of Apartheid' "suffer directly and intensely, sometimes with devastating consequences, for something they did not do". Jansen (ibid:53) further refers to Hoffman's (2002) theories of "paradoxes of indirect knowledge", where he questions how the 'children of Apartheid' hold such knowledge and strong emotional bonds with Apartheid although they never directly experienced it. In my case, I never experienced the 'battles' or any of the unrests. I did however experience a safe and content 'whites only' childhood. Yet now, my internal battles deal with the social conflicts born from Apartheid. Jansen provides the rationale behind this explaining that it is not only about the experience, but rather about an indirect knowledge that resonates "within the lives of the second generation" (ibid:53). Jansen further argues that it is the "transmission" of knowledge from one generation to another, and how this transmitted knowledge influences the children in an emotional way. He continues to say that this knowledge is "relational" (ibid:53) as the bond between the parents and their children are emotionally intense as they share a 'problematic' past. Jansen strengthens this argument of transmitted

knowledge as powerful by saying that “this knowledge nevertheless (...) carries emotions and memories, which have real effects on the lives of the second generation” (ibid: 54).

It was this growing awareness of Apartheid and my life history as an Afrikaner that encouraged me to develop a better understanding and to establish what that meant for my identity, values and beliefs as a post-1994 Afrikaans speaking white South African woman.

## **Losing my Father**

My father passed away in 1995, a year after the first democratic elections. We were a close family, with my father playing a significant role in ‘keeping the family together’. I grew up on a smallholding outside Pretoria in an Afrikaans-speaking community. It was there that my father built our house, where I lived my entire childhood and young adult life, where I attended school and university and it was also there that my father passed away.

My father was in many ways my mentor, and the loss of his presence had a momentous impact on my life. He especially influenced the core decisions I made in life, such as what to study, which religion to follow, which boys or men I should or should not befriend, and the lifestyle I should follow. Being a young woman entering a transformative and fragile stage of adulthood meant that the death of my father resulted in a search for meaning. Getting to grips with his death was a long, confusing and difficult process, and the core reason for the feeling of a ‘loss of my identity’.

The political shift along with the death of my father gave me enough reason to question my identity, my values and my beliefs. Losing the iron fist and the patriarch who guided me with such strict guidelines meant that I was ‘freed’ to search for a better understanding on my own terms. My journey of awareness allowed me to contextualise my concerns, and through a systematic research and creative process I was able to develop, clarify and affirm the beliefs and values that I lived and worked by. Embarking

on this journey of awareness, meant that quite a few questions needed to be answered, and in order to do that required me to employ various methodologies and methods.

## **2 THE METHODOLOGY OF MY JOURNEY OF AWARENESS: CONDUCTING A SELF-STUDY AND DEVELOPING MY LIVING THEORY**

I explored a range of research methods to develop a holistic understanding of my self-identity, self-knowledge and self-awareness as well as developing an understanding of and answering my core research question: “How do I improve my understanding of my practice?” following Whitehead (1985; 1989; 2008a; b; c; d).

My journey of awareness has been a multi-disciplinary self-study that has focused on qualitative methods that have encouraged critical self-reflection and contextualisation. Applying a multi-disciplinary study allowed an examination and exploration of various disciplines including an anthropological, sociological and fine art perspective. My study can be described as a “living theory” (Whitehead 1985; 1989; 2008a; b; c; d), a methodological and theoretical framework that forms the base structure by providing a framework that encapsulates all of the methods employed in my study.

Conducting my self-study included action research (McNiff 2002, 2009; Whitehead 1985; 1989; 2008a; b; c; d), autoethnography (De Lange and Grossi 2009; Ellis 2004; Grossi 2007; Reed-Danahay 1997; Russell 1999), visual methodologies (Allnutt, Mitchell and Stuart 2007; De Lange, Mitchell and Stuart 2007; Grossi 2007 ) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Huber 2002; Pavlish 2007; Pinnegar and Daynes 2007). Each method served a different function in my journey of awareness. The methods often overlapped and intersected during the process and often complemented each other by providing different perspectives and forms of inquiry.

I frame my journey of awareness and living theory as a self-study. By doing this I have created an umbrella for all the methods which I have used throughout my study. The notion of self awareness and self-study is, as explained by Conolly et al (2009) not a

new concept, but dates back as far as ancient oral traditions in various cultures and languages. Conolly et al cites Socrates who said: "Know thyself ... and then canst thou be false to no man", suggesting that our actions are a means of "self-monitoring" (ibid: 98). Conolly et al elaborates on self-study as a form of research that produces insights "into our own personal and/or community knowledge" (ibid:102) with a sense of authority, as the insights "speak from the self, for the self, and about the self in a voice that only the self can use" (ibid:102) and that these insights revealed to the self and to others raise awareness and allow for reflection. De Lange and Grossi (2009:195) argue that the self in the self-study acts as the "researcher, the research and as the researched". Jousse (2000:25) complements this notion by saying that through introspection and self-awareness

... man becomes aware of man: the experimenter is simultaneously the experimented. Man is no longer 'this unknown': he becomes his own discoverer. The only person one can know well, is oneself. But to know oneself well, one must observe oneself thoroughly. The true laboratory is an observation laboratory of the self, so called because it is difficult to see oneself. That is why it is necessary to create what could best be called 'Laboratories of Awareness'. While we will never be able to step outside of ourselves, yet, thanks to Mimism<sup>1</sup>, everything that is re-played through us, is within us.

Jousse (2006:81) further states that "we have all that is needed in ourselves to build ourselves a solid world" and that "awareness comes from the inside, not from the outside" (ibid:131). My study included close introspection and critical engagement in my social context and personal history by exploring my place of birth, my community and my childhood. Self-awareness, as per Pithouse, Mitchell and Moletsane (2009) requires critical reflection in order to understand the context the self is situated in, and the broader context that influences our self-identities. Pithouse, et al (2009:3) describe self-study as an "exploration of 'the self' as a lens through which to look critically and creatively at not only individual experiences, viewpoints, and actions, but also the broader historical, social, political, and

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<sup>1</sup> Jousse (2001:191) defines mimism as "voluntary and involuntary play and replay of the cosmos by anthropos", thus that we as humans 'record' or mimic external influences from the cosmos and replay it.

institutional contexts and issues that situate and interact with them". They further argue that self-study is "an ongoing process of construction and reconstruction" (ibid:8) by continuously looking at the engagement of the self with 'the other' and social context.

### **Living Theories Methodology: Inventiveness in Methods**

My research question "How do I improve my understanding of my practice?" suggests methods to explore the "How", such as "How do I do it?" (Whitehead, 2008a:4). 'Living educational theories' is accompanied by a 'living theories methodology'. Whitehead (ibid:9) stresses that the living theories methodology "includes the unique contribution of an individual's methodological inventiveness in the creation of a living theory, rather than referring to some overarching set of principles to which each individual's methodology has to conform". Whitehead continues to say that in order for a living theories methodology to be distinct, it requires the 'I' to be included, at times as a "living contradiction" or by addressing a contradiction within the process.

I have carefully considered the various methods to provide me with specific knowledge, context and direction. Whitehead (2008d:4) provides a clear differentiation and explanation by saying that "a methodology is not only a collection of the methods used in the research. It is distinguished by a philosophical understanding of the principles that organize the 'how' of the enquiry. A methodology explains how the enquiry was carried out in the generation of a living theory". Whitehead (2008a:9) differentiates between methodology and method by simply stating that a methodology is the motivation as underpinned by a theoretical framework for selecting specific methods to conduct the inquiry, whereas methods are the singular procedures employed such as a focus group, an interview or "action reflection cycles" (ibid:9). Being termed *living theories methodology* suggested the continuous adjustment in the methods employed to ensure critical reflection (Schön 1983), evidence building and the development and assessment of my 'living standards of judgement' (Whitehead 2008c:1) in order to improve my practice, hence suggesting that a living theory is generative.

During my study and as the process progressed, I implemented a variety of methods that provided me with a range of perspectives, possibilities, ideas and insights. Knowing which route to take was borne from the action/reflection cycles suggesting a new direction. Whitehead (2009:7-8) suggests that the actions we take as part of our methodology can even involve taking risks. He further suggests that these risks are “influenced by our unique biographies and social context” (ibid:7) and that these risks could include both a sense of vulnerability and resilience. I will explain how these “risks” in my process included experimentation and even at times ‘following my gut’. Whitehead (2008a:10) mentions that the methodology, as much as the theory, “emerges in the course of the inquiry”. What has been critical to my journey of awareness has been the symbiotic relationship between my creative process and the research inquiry. What I have learned from my research was expressed in my practice. What I did in my practice often suggested new clues or concerns for my research inquiry.

I will provide you with an overview of how my action/reflection cycles developed, it will explain the methods employed as well as the insights and knowledge gained and concerns that rose from this process. I explored my social-political and personal history and context by employing autoethnographic methodologies. This allowed for critical observation and awareness by engaging with my community, family and family friends. Pithouse (as cited by Pithouse et al 2009:17) explains that the research process or inquiry “occurs within and in response to wider contexts (professional, social, political, economic etc)”.

I also employed visual methodologies and narrative inquiry to create a contextual and rich narrative through storytelling and by exploring visual and scribal text. This process allowed me to find meaning in the “particulars” (Pinnegar and Daynes 2007:7) and contributed to the development of my living theory. The development of my living theory was through the emergence of my “embodied knowledge” (Whitehead 2008d:6) and my beliefs and values that provided a framework for the improvement of my practice and my personal self.

## Living Theories Methodology: Embodied Knowledge

In various personal communications with Joan Conolly and applied in workshop notes (2010), she maintains that a journey of awareness

... work[s] on the assumption that people already know much of what they need to know, but that they often are unaware that they know what they know, and that they become aware of what they know and how to use what they know by reflecting critically on their practice and from interacting with others.

This statement points out that the searching for this knowledge that I was unaware of, but what I in fact already knew, was made possible through the employment of various 're-search' methodologies. In other words, conducting a journey towards awareness allowed me to become aware of the knowledge embodied in my being.

Pert (1997) suggests that our body and its molecular structure has the ability to store emotions and memories, whereas the conventional common belief is that our heads (brain) act as the storage space for memories and emotions. Pert (ibid:187) states that "intelligence is located not only in the brain but in cells that are distributed throughout the body". O'Connor (2009: 46) argues that our "indigenous knowledge" and "ancestral memories are in our blood". Jansen (2009:170) refers to this as "knowledge in our blood".

Pert (1997:143) argues that it is a 'bodymind' relation stating that "using neuropeptides as the cue, our bodymind retrieves or represses emotions and behaviours", meaning that our brain is in fact body and mind. Pert (ibid) explains:

...memories are stored not only in the brain, but in a *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 the skin. The decision about what becomes a thought rising to consciousness and what remains an undigested thought pattern buried at a

deeper level in the body is mediated by the receptors. I'd say that the fact that memory is encoded or stored at the receptor level means that memory processes are emotion-driven and unconscious (but, like other receptor-mediated processes, can sometimes be made conscious).

According to Jousse (2006:19), for us to know what is real, is to intently observe it. Jousse reminds us that "among all beings, only the human being can become conscious" (ibid:18). Jousse states that we "want to know everything in relation to everything else, because living man is an integrated living whole" (ibid:23). He further argues that if "we want an understanding of the anthropological whole" (ibid:24) then "we should at least begin by acknowledging that we do not know what we are, and are not" (ibid:25) and that "we want to be shaped and formed into thinking and acting beings" (ibid:71). He further reminds us that "we know now that the human being is a complexus of gestes<sup>2</sup> of which we need to become aware through the observation of the coming-into-play of each and every one of its aspects" (ibid:70).

It is this search towards and bringing into consciousness of my 'embodied knowledge' that Whitehead (2008d:6) refers to. Through the application of a living theories methodology, I was able to become aware of my embodied knowledge. This required critical awareness and reflection by following action/reflection cycles (McNiff, 1988; 2002; 2009) framed within an auto/ethnographic study by employing visual methodologies and narrative inquiry. As Whitehead (2008d:6) states:

In producing their living educational theory individuals must recognise the value of their embodied knowledge. Embodied knowledge is expressed in practice. It is the knowledge in what we are doing. Embodied knowledge also evolves in enquiries of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'. To judge the validity of claims to embodied knowledge we need new living standards of judgement in research.

I will illustrate further in my study my understanding of how this embodiment of my knowledge, the viscera and subconscious has been and is being "ex-pressed" (Jousse

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<sup>2</sup> Geste according to Jousse (2005:203) is "any action by the human being as a bio-psychological or psycho-physiological whole in re-action to actions played into him/her by the universe".

2005:20) in my artwork. I will also illustrate the value the expression of my embodied knowledge produced.

### **Living Educational Theory: Generating Values and a Living Theory for Educational Influence**

Whitehead (1985; 1989; 2008a; b; c; d), has identified an understanding that we can each develop our own living theory which gives meaning and value to our lives and work by employing critical reflective methods that focus on the improvement of practice, and simultaneously develops 'living standards of judgement' (ibid 2008c:1) by which we can critique our own practice. Whitehead (1989:5-6) defines a 'living educational theory' as "value-laden". He argues that our values and the negotiation of our values are "embodied in our practice", and that our explanations of these values provide an understanding for the actions we take. He further states that these values materialize through our practice and that if we are focused on unpacking the emergence of these values, that we can then articulate their meaning. Whitehead (ibid:1) points out that the "gradual emergence of our values" occurs while applying the action/reflection cycles of inquiry. Whitehead (ibid:5) further points out the importance of visual aid as a means of capturing these values, such as video recording a presentation, or creating artworks that embody these values.

He emphasises that what is most important is to create a platform for discussion where colleagues discuss their values. 'Living educational theories' is described as an active and 'living' theory, the content of which shifts and develops through conversations with those involved in the process. The conversations form the key in the development of the theory, as through these conversations the "question and answer" process occurs, clarifying the values that underpin the practice (Whitehead 1989:7). My living theory developed through conversations with my mother, family members, members of the community as well as fellow artists and researchers. Understanding my practice and its development, transformation and improvement occurred predominantly through conversations held with members of what I would like to refer to as 'the trusted circle of

critical friends'<sup>3</sup>. This group met regularly to discuss our process, methodologies, practical work and would critically engage with the materials allowing for further questions to emerge or for different perspectives to be shared. These conversations allowed for critical reflection and provided a platform that allowed me to articulate my values that underpinned my practice and actions. Being able to articulate my values, also allowed me to reflect on these values and to improve on expressing and evidencing them.

The values, referred to by Whitehead (2008c:1) as “living standards of judgement” provide continuous guidance to the practice. “They express the life-affirming energy of individuals, cultures and the cosmos, with values and understandings that is claimed carry hope for the future of humanity” (ibid:1). I found that the development and emergence of my values was progressive and emerged systematically through action/reflection cycles. I also found that my values were interchangeable between the values of my practice and the values I based my life decisions on. My values became the guidelines for my artist self and my personal self and these values formed the basis of my journey of awareness and my living theory. I will refer to the development and emergence of my “living standards of judgement” in the chapters following.

Whitehead (2008a:14) argues that the core difference between living educational theories and traditional theories is that traditional theories cannot generate suitable explanations for the educational influences for the unique learning that occurs within a self study. He continues to say that living educational theories provide us with the “opportunity to produce accounts of our influences in a way that focuses attention on the worthwhileness of our lives in terms of *the values and understandings we use to give meaning to our existence*” (emphasis added) (ibid:14). Whitehead (2008a:2) further defines ‘living educational theories’ as a process that explains “the educational influences of individuals in their own learning in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations in which we live and work”.

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<sup>3</sup> This ‘trusted circle of critical friends’ consisted of Masters and PhD students conducting self-studies at the Durban University of Technology, under the supervision of Professor Joan Conolly. The self-study group formed part of the Transformative Education/al Studies (sic).

Whitehead (2008a:6) provides guidance in how living educational theories provide validity in the research process suggesting that the researcher should develop 'standards of judgement', that the research process should be systematic (such as following the action/reflection cycles), that the "claims to knowledge as educational knowledge should be shown and justified" and that evidence should be produced that illustrates the critical engagement of the problem or concern. My 'living standards of judgement' shifted and evolved throughout the process, Moira Laidlaw (Whitehead 2008a:8) echoes this as she realised that the 'standards of judgement' are equally dynamic as the living educational theory, hence calling it 'living' standards of judgement. My 'living educational theory' assisted me in providing explanations of my process while trying to make sense of it. Whitehead (1989:2-4) states that a 'living educational theory' generates "valid descriptions and explanations for the educational development of individuals". Whitehead (2008d:4) emphasizes that 'living educational theories' as action research requires from researchers to make their work public so that others can evaluate their claims and validity through conversation.

Making my work public for critical engagement and validation was done in various ways, including presenting and discussing my work at academic seminars<sup>4</sup> throughout the process. It also included conversations with my mentor, presentations to my Honours students at Vega the School of Brand Leadership<sup>5</sup> in Durban as well as other more informal discussions with the 'trusted circle of critical friends'. I also created a blog<sup>6</sup> that displayed some of my work, my thought processes and ideas that allowed for public engagement. The final point of making my work public and allowing for validation and conversations was my solo exhibition at *artSPACE durban* gallery which included the display of my artwork, providing a catalogue which told my story through poetry and photographs of my artworks (Annexure C), a walkabout that allowed the public to ask me questions and to provide their input and an interview with an art critic (Annexure A).

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<sup>4</sup> This included a seminar on Self-Study and its transformative potential held in August 2010 at the Durban University of Technology in Durban, as well as a seminar on Action Research held in September 2010 at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth.

<sup>5</sup> Vega is a trading division of the Independent Institute of Education and offers BA Degrees and BA Honours Degrees in Branding ([www.vegaschool.com](http://www.vegaschool.com)).

<sup>6</sup> [www.narethapretorius.wordpress.com](http://www.narethapretorius.wordpress.com)

## Action/Reflection Cycles

I have already explained how action/reflection cycles form the core method of a living theory methodology. This section will provide an overview of the definition, purpose and context of action research and an explanation of how I implemented the methodology in my study.

McNiff (2002:6) defines action research as follows:

Action research is an enquiry conducted by the self into the self. You, a practitioner, think about your own life and work, and this involves you asking yourself why you do the things that you do, and why you are the way that you are. When you produce your research report, it shows how you have carried out a systematic investigation into your own behaviour, and the reasons for that behaviour. The report shows the process you have gone through in order to achieve a better understanding of yourself, so that you can continue developing yourself and your work.

Whitehead (2008c:110-112) suggests that through asking good questions, doing research and answering these questions one can generate knowledge and by that also improve on one's practice. Whitehead (ibid:111) further suggests that with "expression, clarification, evolution and legitimation of living standards of judgment", one manages to answer this and other related questions with validity, and that when these questions emerge, that they are then structured and answered through action/reflection cycles.

Conducting action/reflection cycles, provided a systematic process of inquiry as well as generating knowledge. McNiff (2002:11) echoes this by stating that when conducting action research, that "two processes are at work: your systematic actions as you work your way through these steps, and your learning. Your actions embody your learning, and your learning is informed by your reflections on your actions". I will illustrate the action/reflection process followed as well as illustrate the learning that took place.

While I was doing my practice, I was challenged to identify my values and beliefs. When I had identified my values and beliefs, I had to reflect on my values and beliefs and examine how I could apply them in practice. This reflective process identified the values and beliefs that underpinned my artist self and my personal self. It assisted me in understanding my self and my practice better, allowing me new direction, transformation and improvement. The action/reflection cycles often resulted in confronting or discovering concerns, contradictions or “living contradictions” (Whitehead 2008a:9), it also provided moments of clarity and affirmation of my values and beliefs. The contradictions or concerns required the use of imagination to foresee possible solutions to the concern and that the solutions were borne out of the action/reflection cycles. It is through these cycles of reflection that the values emerged systematically, which Whitehead (2008a:12) refers to as “embodied expression in practice” or otherwise referred to as “embodied knowledge”, suggesting that the values emerge from the self and are expressed through one’s practice. Whitehead goes on to say that although our values can emerge through our practice, it is not necessarily the way in which the affirmation of values occurs. As Whitehead (ibid:12) explains:

While a living theory methodology from a dialectical perspective can embrace contradictions and use action reflection cycles to clarify the meanings of values in the course of their emergence in practice, the nucleus of contradictions does not permit the expression of the life-affirming energy and values of inclusionality. These are not grounded in contradiction but experienced in affirmation. These affirmations of energy with values in a living theory methodology need an inclusional perspective to include them in explanations of educational influence.

I will further in my study illustrate the emergence, validation and explanation of my “life-affirming energy and values” (ibid:12) as experienced throughout my action/reflection process.

McNiff (2002:9) suggests that action research and applying reflective practice increases your awareness “and your readiness to be self critical will probably have an influence

on the people you are working with". She argues that this influence on others can contribute to the evolution of knowledge, that a shift in understanding can occur leading to transformation of the self and others. Employing action research allowed for the transformation of my practice, my self as person and my self as an artist, and I will further illustrate how it also allowed for the transformation of my mother as well as the potential transformation of others.

### **My Action/Reflection Cycles**

With reference to the work of Whitehead (1985; 2008c), McNiff (2002; 2009) and Brown (1994), and by looking at the various structures suggested by the authors to conduct action reflection cycles, I have developed an adapted version that describes the action research process I followed:

- What is my concern?
- Can I imagine the solution?
- What action can I put in place that is directed at the concern and solution?
- Take action.
- Reflect on the action by asking questions, such as "What happened?" and "Why did I do it?"
- What does it tell me about my theory?
- What does it tell me about my practice?
- What remains unresolved?

The last question starts a new cycle of inquiry as it identifies a new concern that requires further critical reflection.

My action/reflection process was not linear. It formulated rather in spirals where significant discoveries would only at a later stage make sense and connect with a previous cycle, and there were also times when a discovery was so clear that the action

and direction that needed to follow was equally clear. McNiff (2002:12) concurs by saying that action/reflection cycles occur in a “zig-zag” or spiral fashion. The nature of my reflection cycles was that of returning to a point discovered in a previous cycle for further in-depth inquiry, usually something that was overlooked or deemed unimportant during the previous cycle. The reason for overlooking the point could have been due to a lack of understanding or a lack of the needed context to make sense of its importance or relevance. Keeping a journal enabled me to keep track of all points of concern that required more inquiry, the knowledge and insights gained during the process and in order to make connections between all these aspects. The journal also assisted me in finding patterns that emerged during the process, in the conversations and observations, and in the record which I kept of my emotional responses and state of being. The journal took various forms; I had a book in which I would write on a regular basis recording and reflecting on my thoughts, I also kept a visual diary to formulate ideas for my artwork, I also wrote a (digital) biography capturing and reflecting on my life story and I did “morning pages” (Cameron 2002: 9) by writing three pages of free-flow thinking. In order to make connections, I reflected on a continuous basis on the various entries, to see whether any pattern would emerge or whether I could highlight an emerging concern. Making the connections were often done by drawing mind-maps, write a short paragraph as a journal entry or by expressing my thoughts in my artwork.

De Lange and Grossi (2009:198) cite Cole and Promislow (2008) stating that there are no specific “models and maps” one should follow when practicing an arts-based research project, and that such endeavours are totally “idiosyncratic”, “especially with regards to process, form and representation”. Kirk (2009:118) shares her reflexive research process by confirming that a journal and field notes “serve as the critical, practical tool of reflexivity”. During my reflective process, describing a cycle included elements of inconsistency and even the feeling of being disconnected, yet it also provided a form of progress and development. The journal provided a holistic view of all that was experienced and explored, and it illustrated that everything was at the end connected, and that the journal provided meaning and guidance for further exploration. The journal was a tool that did not only serve as recordkeeping, but as a tool for critical reflection, making connections and unpacking each and every aspect of the process. It

allowed me to revisit ideas and concerns, in order to re-connect with my frame of reference as it was at that time. It illustrated a transformation in thinking, understanding and the transformation of my beliefs and values. Kirk (2009) echoes this notion of disconnection and re-connection by saying that “these continuities and discontinuities, the smooth linkages and the dissonances between periphery and center, between self and other, and between theory and practice, become sources of insights and a springboard for further investigation” (ibid:118).

Although my process has in reality been sporadic, I will present it here in a more linear fashion for ease of reference, order and understanding. I will indicate areas where connections were made between different cycles or moments where I experienced a sense of disconnection, and I will also indicate where a connection was made later in the process.

The sections which follow will take you through the action/reflection cycles of my journey of awareness. Each section will be structured based on my action/reflection cycles as mentioned on page 30. Each cycle addresses my concerns, critical questions, the research process, the creative process, where applicable the artwork created, the insights gained and what was left unresolved for further inquiry.

### **Auto/Ethnography: Situating the Self in a Social, Political and Cultural Context**

In order to create the context for my journey of awareness I explored my social, political and cultural ethnography by investigating my direct and extended family and the Afrikaner community I grew up in. The aim of my study has been to gain a better understanding of my practice as an artist. To develop this understanding required a better understanding of my life story and my social context and its relation to my art practice and sense of self. Grossi (2007:74) echoes the significance of meaning-making by stating that autoethnography is a study that allows the researcher to understand their “social reality and society” to “make meaning of their world”.

Ellis (2004:26) states that “ethnography is first and foremost a perspective”. She cites Sigman (1998) who sees ethnography as a “framework for thinking about the world” and that our perspective “reflects a way of viewing the world – holistically and naturalistically – and a way of being in the world as an involved participant” (ibid:26). Ellis further states that “autoethnography is not about fixing a problem” (ibid:296) but that “it’s about gaining insight into who you and others are and finding a way to be in the world that works for you” (ibid: 296). I agree with Ellis that my self-study was about gaining insights, but I do however believe that my self-study was about ‘fixing a problem’, a personal problem of wanting to understand where I had come from, who I was in the world, and who I am becoming.

De Lange and Grossi (2009:189) describe autoethnography as “a combination of the story of one’s own life and ethnography, the study of a particular social group. ‘Auto’ refers to self, ‘ethno’ refers to the culture or social group and ‘graphy’ – the art of writing”. Ellis (2004:32) supports this definition by describing ethnography as follows:

*Ethno* means people or culture; *graphy* means writing or describing. *Ethnography* then means writing about or describing people and culture, using firsthand observation and participation in a setting or situation. The term refers both to the process of doing a study and to the written product (...) similar to ethnography, autoethnography refers to the process as well as what is produced from the process (ibid:26).

Reed-Danahay (1997:9) echoes this stating that “autoethnography is defined as a form of self-narrative that places the self within social context” by placing her life story within “a story of the social context in which it occurs”. The notion of ‘auto’ related to ‘ethnography’ also refers to the personal relationships between members of the ethnic group, such as family members. My ethnographic study focused on engaging with my ethnic group, a white Afrikaner Calvinist community, situated in the northern area of Gauteng, just outside Pretoria. The aim was to critically engage with the broader social and cultural framework, looking at the cultural practice and traditions. I also focused on the more intimate and direct family or domestic structures exploring the traditions and gender roles within this framework. Having conversations with my mother and other

family members as well as members of the community formed a significant part of my autoethnographic study. Ellis (2004:26) states that “ethnographic fieldwork includes everything you do to gather information in a setting, especially hanging around, making conversation, and asking questions... and other information gathering”.

Methods for gathering information included revisiting my place of birth, staying with my mother, observing behaviour and social interaction, having conversations and participating in various activities such as attending Bible study and revisiting our church. I lived and experienced Apartheid for twenty years as a child and young adult. I revisited my childhood milieu over a period of three years and started this journey at the age of thirty four years, fourteen years after the first democratic elections and thirteen years after the death of my father, the Calvinistic Afrikaner patriarch.

I believe that through developing my autoethnographic narrative I was able to generate self-knowledge and awareness. De Lange and Grossi (2009:188) echo this stating that “autoethnographic work is presented as a personal narrative, the genre does more than simply tell a story, as it offers valuable insights”.

Stories are the way humans make sense of their worlds. Stories are essential to human understanding and are not unique to autoethnography. Stories are the focus of Homeric literature, oral traditions, narrative analysis, and fairy tales.

Given their importance, I argue that stories should be both a subject and a method of social science research (Ellis 2004:32).

My autoethnographic inquiry was dominated by two core methods: narrative inquiry and visual methodologies. These two methods allowed for critical inquiry through the use of stories and conversations (or narratives) and the analyses of visual and scribal texts. These two methods often intersected with each other. The two sections following will define and describe these methods.

## **Narrative Inquiry: Exploring our Stories**

As mentioned in earlier, my self-study involved exploring my own life story, as well as the stories of my mother, my family and extended family members, and the stories from my community. The method involved both casual and uninterrupted conversations which allowed the stories to flow. These conversations were conducted in our personal and social environments while engaging in day to day activities. These included sitting around the dinner table, driving in the car, visiting friends, revisiting and walking through spaces such as the house I grew up in, or the church we used to attend as well as rites of passage events such as attending a family member's funeral, birthday parties, weddings and christenings.

Catalysts for these stories' emergence varied from looking at our photo albums to sharing a memory of someone who passed away or to sharing memories of our past times together. It also included recalling specific events as we moved through the spaces, or drove along familiar roads, which constituted our personal and family history. Employing narrative inquiry was a combination of story telling through conversations as well as the telling of my story through biographical text, poetry and prose as well as writing in my journal. Further to this, in conducting a solo exhibition allowed for me to construct my personal, social, research and creative narrative.

Pavlish (2007:29) echoes the varied use of methods by referring to the work of Riessman (1993) saying that "there is no one method" to narrative inquiry, and that its essence is rooted in "time, place, and personal experience" (ibid:29). Influenced by the work of Dewey (1934) and relating to the notion of learning through experience, Clandinin and Huber (2002:162-163) identified specific characteristics of narrative inquiry stating that these

... terms are personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along the third.

My study related to these 'terms' by exploring and engaging in my personal and social interaction with my ethnic or cultural group, revisiting and reflecting on the past, analysing the present and by considering what this meant for my future. This provided me with a three-dimensional narrative (Clandinin and Huber 2002) or as Smuts (1927) refers to the creation of the 'whole' as "holism" by creating, developing and considering the 'parts' that form and inform the 'whole'. To understand the 'whole' I needed to focus on the 'parts', as Pinnegar and Daynes (2007:7) suggests that the focus in developing this three-dimensional narrative is by moving from the "general and universal toward the local and specific". They further draw on the work of Geertz (1983) by recognising that "capturing the particular and local rather than insisting on the development and validity of a 'grand narrative' of a culture is a worthy goal" (ibid: 7). Dlamini (2009) echoes the importance and rich potential of the personal story by highlighting that the particulars can present significant and nuanced insights and dimensions more so than what the "master narrative" (ibid:19) can present. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007:30) argue that "what distinguishes narrative inquirers is their understanding that understanding the complexity of the individual, local, and particular provides a surer basis for our relationships and interactions with other humans". They cite Geertz (1983) which suggests that "local knowledge forms the most important basis for understanding human culture and personal interaction" (ibid: 30).

My self-study aimed at understanding my practice as much as understanding my life, my beliefs and my values. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007:30) argue that narrative inquirers have a "desire to understand rather than control and predict the human world", and that when the researcher, like me, focuses "on the particular, it signals their understanding of the value of a particular experience, in a particular setting, involving particular people" (ibid: 21). This focus on particulars included close inspection of memorabilia, family photographs and spaces such as our church building. Further to this, I will illustrate in the following chapters the close inspection of particulars such as the notion of etiquette and social conduct within the Afrikaner Calvinistic context, looking closely at specific particulars as experienced and observed during my study.

Clandinin and Huber (2002:161-162) conclude by referring to the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1995; 1988; 1999) by stating that “identity is a storied life composition, a story to live by. Stories to live by are shaped in places and lived in places. They live in actions, in relationships with others, in language, including silences, in gaps and vacancies, in continuities and discontinuities”. It was this exploration of my and others’ life stories that enabled me to better understand the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of my identity.

### **Visual Methodologies: Exploring our Memories and Looking for Visual Clues**

Visual methodologies is a research method employing the use of visual material as a means of collecting data and the visual material can vary from photographs, visual arts, moving images to name a few (De Lange, Mitchell and Stuart 2007:2). Visual methodologies are used “to enhance their [researchers] understanding of the human condition” (ibid:2) and to “make meaning of their world” (Grossi 2007:74). When I started my self-study, I collected all forms of memorabilia and stored them in a container. These included photographs, slides, old bibles and psalm books, poetry books, telegrams and letters, certificates, identification documents and other official documents. I also visited my family and digitally scanned in all the family photographs they had in their collections, along with descriptions of the time, place and the people who featured in the photographs. As I collected the photographs, I was often given the details of the people and events in the photographs, which I then noted in my journal. I also had a vast collection of photographic slides which I selected and collated into sections, such as my baby photographs, my childhood photographs taken at our home, my grandparents, my parents, family group photographs, our holidays, images of rites of passage such as funerals, birthday parties and my first day at school to name a few. In total I gathered and looked at over 250 visual artefacts or ‘texts’. These photographs and memorabilia painted a holistic picture of my life, and provided me with a platform

for inquiring into the “fragmented memories” (Grossi 2007:73) that serve as “parts of the whole” (ibid:73).

I selected the most appropriate visual material for inquiry by relying on it being significant and “to enhance clarity and improve meaning making” (ibid:75). The selection process included whether the material “sets the scene” (ibid:78) by providing historical, social and cultural context to the narrative and whether it provoked emotion (ibid: 82) and assisted “in memory recall” (ibid:83) and whether it was significant and relevant to the research question (ibid:77) “How do I improve my understanding of my practice?”. The selection of visual material and ‘text’ will be discussed in the chapters to follow, illustrating the need to revisit material in order to address the “fragmented memories” (ibid:73) and to build on the “whole” (Smuts 1927) of the Self.

Grossi (2007:74) links visual methodologies with autoethnography by saying that visual methodologies ‘complement’ autoethnography by providing “the form, the witness and the images to enhance the inquiry and the knowing”, and by doing that, it collates the “visual and the verbal into a compelling whole”.

Using visual methodologies and narrative inquiry provided me with a platform for inquiry to build and enrich my self-knowledge and in creating my social and cultural context. Employing action/reflection cycles allowed for critical reflection and engagement in the materials and context, providing direction and continuous improvement.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, a living theory provides insights that guide the practitioner to improve their practice. These insights assist not only in the transformation of one’s practice, but the potential transformation of the self, others and of the community (McNiff 2002:9). This educational influence happens through various forms, such as the creation of artwork, having conversations and making the work public. I will provide an overview of my educational influence in the chapters that follow where I will guide the reader through

my research and creative process. The chapters to follow are structured in an action/reflection format demonstrating the action/reflection cycles.

### **3 SWEET MEMORIES: CHILDHOOD NOSTALGIA AND LONGING FOR TIMES GONE BY**

With the loss of my father and the 'loss' of my national identity, came the emotional longing for the past. My emotions were overwhelmed with a sense of nostalgia. Dlamini (2009:16-18) refers to Boym's (2001) theories of nostalgia by referring to two types of nostalgia; restorative and reflective nostalgia. Boym (ibid) argues that "the irony about nostalgia is that, for all its fixation with the past, it is essentially about the present" and that "it is about present anxieties refracted through the prism of the past" (ibid:16). Dlamini (2009:18) cites Boym to better understand the different perspectives of nostalgia: "reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalises space. Restorative nostalgia takes itself dead seriously". Dlamini continues to say that "reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, can be ironic and humorous. It reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical thinking" (ibid:18). Dlamini then posed a very important question that is relevant to my inquiry: "What is it about the present that makes me cherish shattered fragments of memory?" (ibid:18). My journey of awareness was a process of exploring these 'shattered fragments of memories' aiming at creating a meaningful 'whole' (Smuts 1927) of my artist and personal self.

#### **Exploring Nostalgia: Remembering my Ancestors**

My initial concern was to answer these questions: "What was it about the past that intrigued me?" "What was it that I wanted to remember?" "Why do I feel nostalgic about

it?” To answer my questions I started my journey by exploring my immediate environment by looking at memorabilia such as family photographs and personal belongings from my parents and grandparents I had inherited. These memorabilia included letters, poetry books, old family bibles, newspaper clippings and significant objects.

From the many photographs I looked at, the photographs of my parents and their families stood out the most. I found two photographs - one with my mother with her parents sitting around the kitchen table drinking tea, and the other of my father with his siblings and his parents standing on their veranda, dressed in their church wear. My immediate reaction was to capture the two families on canvas in an act of remembering and archiving my ancestors. The creative process of creating the work involved tracing the images onto canvas using a graphite pencil. This required that I recreate the physical features of each individual. It also required paying close attention to detail, as the images were quite small. As I drew the figures, and especially as I moved my pencil over my father's face and body I realised that I was 're-creating' him. It felt as if I was bringing him back to life, and although not alive, he became embodied in my artwork. I remembered him as I recreated his 'being'. As I created these portraits, the notion of trace became apparent, with trace as an act of creating “evidence or an indication of the former presence or existence of something; a vestige” (The Free Dictionary by Farlex 2009). I have referred to this notion of trace in an academic journal article stating:

The act of tracing the image of my deceased father and his family (with only my aunt still alive) became a therapeutic and meaningful act of recreation, leaving a trace of remembrance behind. It illustrates the exploration of identity by interpreting family photographs through the act of tracing and by attaching personal association and meaning, with reference to own memories and experiences, and creating a new memory by doing so. This act and concept of tracing is significant considering that with the death of an individual, we lose the memories as well (Pretorius 2008:45).

Schön (1983) refers to this form of knowing and realisation while in the act of making as 'knowing-in-action', and that as we create we have the ability to reflect while creating, referred to as "reflection-in-action". Intuitive knowledge is imbedded in our actions while creating, and it is through awareness and reflection that this knowledge becomes apparent. Schön (1983:49) states that "our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action." 'Re-creating' those that have passed away was therapeutic as the act of tracing allowed for me to leave a trace of their existence and it allowed for me to leave their legacy behind.



Figure 1: Pretorius family portrait (father's family)



Figure 2: Myburgh family portrait (mother's family)

To complete the composition of each family portrait, I included scribal words that embodied my memories as well as my personal and emotional connection with each family portrait. It was important to me to find scribal words that 'belonged' to them, in other words scribal words that they created. I realised that this quality of authenticity was the first "living standard of judgement" (Whitehead 2008a:8) that I developed for my practical work. The scribal words or visual images used in my work had to be from my own collection of memorabilia, giving it a quality of being authentic and that the work was done with integrity. To answer this I searched through all forms of scribal text in my box of memorabilia. In my grandmother's bible I found the obituary she placed in the local newspaper announcing my grandfather's passing. The words that I found to be the most meaningful, and that

related to my desire to capture and memorialise my memories and my ancestors, were her personal and final message to my grandfather:

*“Onverwags sag en stil van my weggeneem,  
my geliefde eggenoot Willie.  
Soete herinneringe sal altyd voortleef”*

This translates as:

*“Suddenly, silently and gently removed from me,  
my loving husband, Willie.  
Sweet memories will live for eternity”.*

With the death of my father, and many other family members such as my grandparents and my uncle, I realised the significant loss of knowledge, memories, stories and experiences with the death of each individual. Jousse (2001:16) states appropriately that “memory is the whole of man and the whole of man is memory”. It is with the death of my father and ancestors, that I have developed the need to know more about my past, and the desire to capture my knowledge and experience so that it can be passed on to my children and their children to come. Dealing with the abstract notion of death sat close to my emotional experience, and the words selected for my father’s family portrait came from a poem he wrote as a young man between 1958 and 1959, words that embodied the painful experience of losing a loved one, but also capturing the potential physical and painful process of dying.

*“Weg is die lewe,  
wat, verdrewe  
deur pyn, die liggaam verlaat...”*

This translates as:

“Gone is life,  
driven by pain  
out of the body”,

Placing the words on the canvas again became an act of tracing, re-creating and imitating my father's handwriting, re-enacting possible thoughts and emotions that once existed when he composed the poem. It was also a therapeutic act of reliving the sadness and the emotional pain as experienced when I lost my father.

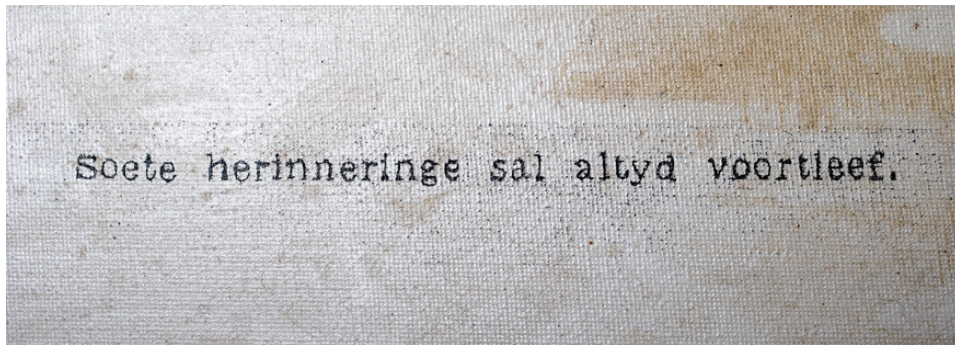


Figure 3: 'Text' from my mother's family portrait

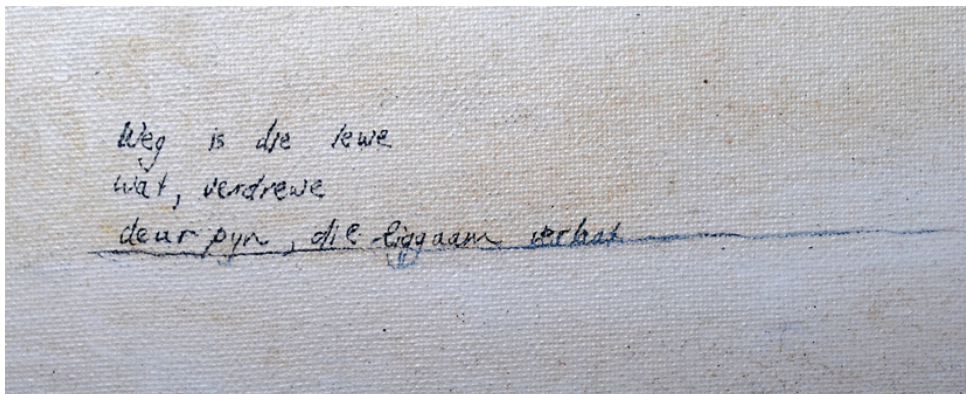


Figure 4: 'Text' from my father's family portrait

After completing these family portraits, I felt that they I had not honoured my parents as individuals, but that I had rather celebrated their lineage and origins. I

also felt that the portraits had not allowed me to explore my parents as I remembered them. I thus wanted to capture my parents as individuals. It is important to note, that the titles for these works only emerged much later in the process, when the holistic narrative started to take shape.

## **Exploring Nostalgia: Remembering my Parents and my Childhood**

My aim was to provide my parents and my siblings each with their own platform of existence and of remembrance. By creating artworks for them allowed me to remember them while being in my parents' care and the memories that I shared with my siblings while growing up in Transvaal<sup>7</sup>. Although my mother and my three brothers were still alive, I felt that it was equally important to celebrate and remember my family, to stay true to my aim of one day passing their legacy on to my children. The notion of legacy was the second "living standard of judgement" (Whitehead 2008a:8). I became aware of the potential of my art to archive memories and to act as a medium of telling my and my ancestors' stories. This was an insight that became increasingly prominent later in the process.

Going through the family photographs allowed me to remember the things we did as a family. I recalled the house we lived in. I imagined the space and what it used to feel like being in the space. Grossi (ibid:75) argues that visuals play a vital role in "meaning-making" and developing "understanding", and that this contributes to building "knowledge". She further argues that visual material such as photographs act as a means to recall memories that may "have lain dormant" and that contribute and enrich the explanation of the researcher's personal and lived experience. I recalled the smell of my mother baking pancakes on a Saturday afternoon, the sound of my mother's sewing machine making me church dresses while competing with the noise of my father and brother watching the rugby match on a cold winter day. I recalled our camping

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<sup>7</sup> Transvaal was renamed Gauteng after the 1994 Democratic elections.

holidays and the smell of the campfire with my father making us a 'potjie'<sup>8</sup>, sitting on my father's lap watching the flames flickering. I remembered the sound of my father's tractor and the smell of the dust as my father ploughed the fields, the sound of our laughter as we children swam in the stream and the silence of a Sunday afternoon after my mother had treated us with her signature Sunday lunch. My memories of our upbringing were filled with sweet nostalgia, of an age of innocence and being protected by our parents from the outside world, my memories were stories of contentment and "cohesion", safety and "stability" (Jansen 2009:147-148).

Dlamini (2009:19-23) highlights the contradiction of using the word nostalgia along with references to the Apartheid era, a political era perceived and understood by the public as problematic. He however provides an explanation of how this is possible by stating that the fond memories of a happy childhood are the remembering of the nuances and personal experiences of what he refers to as the "master narrative", and that our personal stories are much richer and provide greater insight to that of the "master narrative". Dlamini further suggests that these memories are driven by the senses: "smell, hearing, taste, touch and sight" (ibid:22). Dlamini argues that these nostalgic memories are not without the political challenges of that time, but although framed within a problematic past it does not mean that these cannot be fond memories.

In remembering my childhood and my parents, I wanted to capture the 'sweetness' of the innocence and the beauty of my childhood and the feeling of safety and contentment. I decided to make a portrait of my father and of my mother, and to select a photograph of when they were younger, representing them as young adults entering a life of adulthood and parenthood. I found photographs of my mother in her graduation outfit and an image of my father as a student. To complement their characters, I included scenes of their hobbies. Through composing these portraits I became aware of their roles within our family structure, exploring what they did in their roles as a father and as a mother. Connecting with Grossi (2007), Allnutt, Mitchell and Stuart (2007:91) suggest that an element of curating of the images must occur to develop the analytical process of "relooking" (ibid:91). My father, the man of the house was the one working outdoors, farming, doing carpentry, building and maintaining our house. My mother, the

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<sup>8</sup> A South African colloquial term for a stew made in a cast iron pot.

nurturer of our household, was the one cooking, preserving the fruit and vegetables my father farmed. She was the one cleaning the house, sewing our clothes and buying the groceries. I also realised that although these domestic gendered roles existed that both my parents were well educated and from an educational point of view were on relatively equal grounds. I also realised that although this was so, they were not seen as equal within professional and community circles. Jansen (2009:71) explains how the strict and “clear lines of authority” within the Afrikaner families ensured that the Afrikaner values were implemented and followed by their children. The fathers were seen as the “head of the household” and the mothers as nurturers and the “emotional center” of their family and that the woman was “to be obedient to her husband” (ibid:71). These portraits aimed at capturing qualities of domesticity and a feeling of parental protection and love, as well as suggesting their gendered roles.

The notion of trace continued and I followed a similar technique with the family portraits. However, instead of just finding suitable words I wanted to find a photograph or image that would encapsulate the nurturing aspect of their parenthood. I reflected on my memory recall as I revisited all of the photographs and what stood out the most were the memories of my mother sewing and my father ‘playing’ with his tractor on our smallholding. The portrait of my mother suggested a ‘halo’ as done by using the pattern and shape of a paper doily. This was the first appearance of the doily in my work, which later became a prominent symbol and metaphor. Here the ‘halo’ suggested the notion of the holy ‘mother’, such as Mother Theresa or the Madonna. Reflecting back, I realised that my father’s portrait was done with lighter washes. This resulted into a faded image, as if suggesting his passing and lack of physical presence.



Figure 5: Portraits of my parents

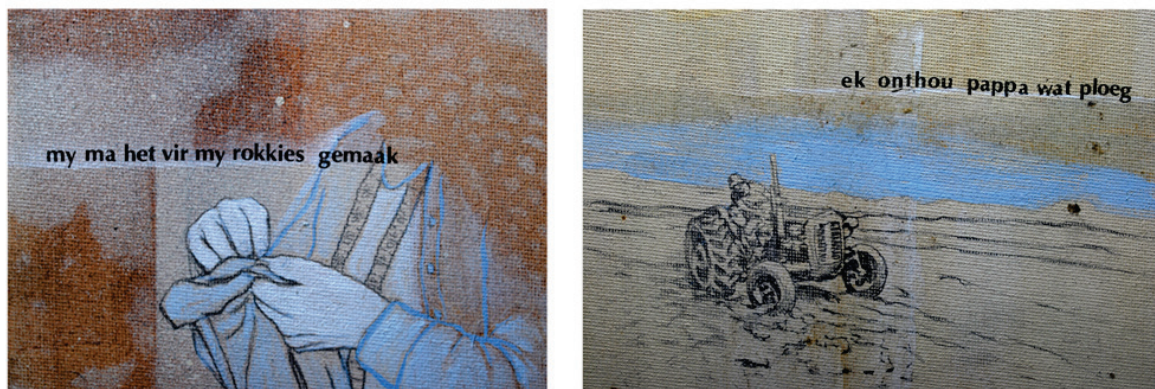


Figure 6: Detail of my parent's portraits

Although I felt pleased with the results of the paintings, I did feel the need to explore other mediums. I wanted to do this so that I could challenge and develop my practice as an artist. Doing the paintings seemed to be a safe way of creating. It was a medium I had worked in for years. It was also the medium I majored in while studying Fine Art at the University of Pretoria.

I then started to experiment with other mediums that could expand the possibilities of creative expression and articulation. At first I experimented with drawing, which I will refer to in the following chapter, and this was followed by playing with the idea that I wanted to use objects in my art. I also wanted to experiment with etching and carving techniques as used in printmaking, one of the mediums I enjoyed working in.

Through the influence of Bronwen Vaughn-Evans, a Durban based artist, I discovered a medium called jesmonite. Jesmonite comes in powder form, which is mixed with water to form a thick liquid that is poured into a silicone mould. Once the jesmonite has set, it is taken out of the mould and the end result is a cast. I used this technique to create rectangular blocks of jesmonite casts to create the series of work that embodied the memories of my siblings and our childhood.

The jesmonite block served as my 'canvas'. I experimented with engraving techniques using a sharp etching tool to engrave the figures into the block.



Figure 7: Detail of engraving process and technique (from the childhood series)



Figure 8: Detail from the completed engraving (from the childhood series)

This etching technique has reference to the old masters such as Rembrandt (Janson and Janson 1997:585) and Goya (ibid:673). It provides a quality of 'mark making' that requires the artist to think carefully about where to apply the various kinds of lines, as well as the quality of the line varying from sensitive light lines to harsh deep lines. The work is limited to one colour, similar to that of printmaking, as on lino and etching, presenting an interesting challenge for shading and tonal values. I deliberately used a sepia like colour palette for the work to resemble old photographs. The notion of trace continued but was taken one step further by the notion of engraving: to engrave something has a sense of permanency. Engraving is representative of remembering

something; to be “permanently fixed in (one’s memory or mind)” (Soanes and Stevenson 2004:473)

I wanted to portray myself with my three brothers, providing each ‘brother and sister couple’ with their own platform strengthening the notion of our relationships as siblings. The portraits that worked in pairs were juxtaposed with significant family memories, such as our family vacations, stopping for a picnic under a tree and our memories of growing up on our smallholding.



Figure 9: The complete childhood series



Figure 10: Example of the landscapes - "Vryheid" (Freedom)

Three themes emerged as I carefully selected each photograph for the portraits. I looked at our dress code noticing the concept of rites of passage emerging. This included our school wear as we each celebrated and posed proudly for our first day entering our school career, with a name label on our chests introducing us to our teachers and peers. Then there was our church wear - my brother in his neat 'safari' suite and myself in my favourite church dress made by my mother. And there were also our play outfits in which we experienced freedom and comfort as children, attending birthday parties and going on holiday, playing outside and getting dirty. Although we all had posed for the photographs, presenting a sense of formality, and although the notion of uniform and conformity emerged as a theme, they still represented a sense of innocence.

At that point, although I enjoyed making these works, and although I had become aware of some social themes emerging, I still felt that I was too focused on the nostalgic aspect of my personal history. My life story lacked context, and I needed to explore this with more depth and critique.

Bullock (2009) argues that stories of the self should be based on a problem that is being inquired, that the problem being "framed and reframed through reflection-in-action is often the catalyst for self-study, the *result* of self-study should be a different way of understanding" (ibid: 279), Bullock emphasises that the focus is not the story but "the result of self-study" that "is knowledge-in-action constructed through reflection-in-action" (ibid:279). I realised that I had not responded to a critical question and research problem: "What was my childhood really about?" I had at this point not yet developed an understanding of the social context that shaped my identity as I had only explored the 'sweet' memories of my seemingly innocent childhood. I was concerned as I felt that I did not know enough about my childhood and my heritage. To address this concern, I decided to conduct a personal ethnographic enquiry.

## **Developing Critical Awareness: Discovering the Three Dark Churches**

### **Revisiting my Place of Birth**

This chapter focuses on my auto-ethnographic exploration and experience, which included revisiting my place of birth, staying with my mother for a couple of weeks, and revisiting my father's place of birth, revisiting the house I grew up in, visiting friends of the family as well as revisiting the church I used to attend as a child and young adult. My aim was to find out more about my upbringing, about our shared memories, to listen to stories of my parent's upbringing and to re-experience the places I grew up in. I also wanted to critically observe the behaviours, gestures, conversations and emotions of my family, extended family and community members while moving through these spaces and engaging in these conversations.

Key to my method was observation, participation and conversation. Fischer and Goblirsch (2006:28) provide us with an understanding of the construction of the self through biographical narration (interaction and dialogue) by analyzing the individual's lived life, the experienced life and the presented life by contextualizing it as a social construction of the self. Biographical narration consist of small talk on an everyday basis and discussions with our friends and family about our lives; allowing us to reconstruct our biographical memories and experiences through interaction and in the form of telling our stories (narration and dialogue). Having conversations with our family or parents provides us with the preservation of our autobiographical memories, allowing us to preserve our memories over time. Biographical narrations are accounts of experiences important to the person's development and to self-understanding (ibid:29).

Critical to the conversations held with my mother during this process, was the nature of how these conversations were conducted, but they also, at times, 'just happened'. Although I was unsure exactly what it was I was looking for, I knew that whatever was being said, whatever was being experienced should be analysed. I also knew that the

format of these conversations were not that of an interview, but rather of conversations between daughter and mother.

My mother was aware that I was there for my studies, and that everything that we did would contribute to my study. She was keen to show me family photographs and to tell me about the people and places in the photographs. Allnutt, Mitchell and Stuart (2007:91) refer to this as “familial looking”. These photographs allowed us to share memories and stories of our lived experiences. They allowed us to talk about events in our lives and to clarify what had happened in the past. O’Connor (2009:46) argues that “family photographs, memorabilia and other familiar signifiers” have the potential to “stir old memories”. O’Connor stresses the importance “family and culture plays in the development of one’s identity” (ibid:46), and that these memories and experiences provide us with knowledge of our lives and identity. According to O’Connor these memories can only be fully understood through a reflective and critical inquiry, “through a process of reflection that involves acquiring knowledge from memory” (ibid:53). Allnutt, Mitchell and Stuart (2007) address the use of family albums or photographs for visual inquiry where they draw on the work of Hirsch (1997; 1999) saying that “this interweaving of public and private mythologies” (Allnutt, Mitchell and Stuart 2007:90) provides a “new view of one’s own place in these mythologies” (ibid:90) by using these visuals as a means of social and personal inquiry. They further state that “family photographs are not only about family, but about the social, cultural and institutional gazes that every family is part of” (ibid:91). These “institutional gazes” become evident later in the chapter.

My mother and I travelled together to search and explore my father’s place of birth, searching for my grandparents’ house, gaining access to the property, discovering my great grandfather and great grandmother’s graves, and learning about the area and its history. This was complemented by visiting family friends, a close friend of my father and a cousin far removed. They told us stories of what it was like growing up in the area in their youth. They spoke about customs within the Reformed Church community and how the family was involved in the church and politics. As Fischer and Goblirsch (2006:30-31) argue, narrative biographical interviews permit biographical self-presentation where the individual can present their family and experienced life as

narrative or story, provoking the recalling of past events, and this form of interview provides the interviewer with a historical background of their biographical data, which can then be contextualized by cross referencing it with a socio-historical events.

Staying with my mother and her then husband, allowed me to participate and observe their rituals, traditions, manners and conversations. I also noted the gendered roles within their relationship, noticing behaviour and conduct. Sitting around a table sharing a meal, allowed me to listen to how we would recall what happened during the day, how my mother would explain to her husband what we had done and what we had discovered, which allowed me to reflect on my own experience and interpretation of the event. I would write in my journal every night recalling and reflecting on everything (Kirk 2009), making comments on the things that stood out the most, and the things that left me with more questions than answers.

Closer to the end of the week, we travelled to my place of birth, east of Pretoria, an area of small holdings, dirt roads, farm animals and fields. I looked forward to the trip as I had not been there for over eight years, and had stopped visiting the place a short while after my father passed away when I had moved to live in Kwa-Zulu Natal. I was inspired by seeing again the landscape and the dry fields that used to be our 'playground', the barren and desolate landscapes framed by wire fences and the thunder storms unique to that area.

Some of the most valuable and significant conversations between my mother and me happened on this trip. Emotive and emotional stories would flow while I was driving, or we were walking through familiar spaces. My mother told me our family history while moving through our old home. She recalled significant events of our childhood and spoke about my father's passing in our house. I did not have to ask or say anything. The space provided adequate signifiers to maintain the flow of the narrative.

Up to this point, I was still not resolved with what I had found. I still felt that there were significant pieces missing in my understanding of my origins. I felt sad when we visited our old home. I knew that I was learning about my personal history and about my family's background, but it was not enough. I could sense that there was more to learn.

## Revisiting the Reformed Church

Everything was about to change. After visiting our house, we drove to the Reformed Church we had attended for over twenty years. As we entered the space, my entire body reacted. My tummy turned. I felt uncomfortable. I felt overwhelmed with deep seated emotions. As Pert (1997:143) suggests, my “encoded” or “stored” memories were brought into consciousness through an intense emotive and visceral experience. My “embodied knowledge” (Whitehead 2008d:6) emerged through this experience. I could have left to avoid the unpleasantness of the experience. Instead, I carefully walked through the church. I observed and documented the space while being simultaneously acutely aware of my emotions and state of being. I looked at how the space was designed. I observed its sheer volume, the way the church pews were ordered, the area designated to the elders facing the congregation, the position of the minister’s podium addressing his people, the secluded area designated to the mothers and their noisy children, and the row we as a family used to sit in right in the front, strategically placed so to ensure that we would focus on the service. I recalled the various families belonging to the congregation - all prominent Afrikaner surnames. I recalled attending catechism each Sunday. I recalled the ‘susters’<sup>9</sup> baking biscuits in the kitchen for fundraising events and I recalled the ‘susters’ serving tea after the service, while the children would play outside and the ‘broeders’<sup>10</sup> would meet and deliberate. Delport (2005:209) refers to the work of Nussbaum (2001), discussing neo-Stoic theory by suggesting that

...the connection between the object and the self is the particular thought or belief the self has about the object. The thought thus serves as a connecting cable communicating particularities regarding the object to the self. Without this cognitive action (the thought), there will be no emotion. Should this thought assess that the object is insignificant or irrelevant, the object will be discarded, with no subsequent emotion. However, should the thought recognise the object as

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Susters’ is a term used that refers to the women within the church community, meaning sisters.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Broeders’ is a term used that refers to the men within the church community, meaning brothers.

significant to the self, it will make a particular judgement that will relate the self to the object in a very specific way. In this sense, the thought can also be seen as a judgement or a belief.

It was this immediate reactive judgement, the visceral experience that I explored and systematically thought through and unpacked during my journey of awareness



Figure 11: The interior of the Reformed Church

I further noticed books on display in the community hall dating back to the 1980s. These books advised women to groom according to etiquette, to conduct in a polite and feminine manner, and to live in a prescribed way.



Figure 12: Books from the community hall at the Reformed Church

I could not imagine myself – the self that I had become - attending a church that would promote such conservative behaviour and beliefs, and I felt out of place. I took some of the books home to study closer, which became valuable resources further in my study.

### The Emergence of the Three Dark Churches

Returning home from my fieldwork, I needed to express (Jousse 2005:20) my experience. I had an urge to visually create works using the monumental stature of the church. I intuitively wanted to express my experience of revisiting a place of significance. O'Connor (2009:46) argues that we tend to neglect these embodied memories by being occupied by modern life, and that we are 'reminded' of these memories through music, our 'mother tongue' (first language), family photographs, memorabilia and other familiar signifiers that "stir old memories". The church acted as a signifier that reminded me of deep seated emotions and memories. Bringing these feelings to the fore needed a platform for expression and articulation. Creating artworks allowed for my memories, emotions and embodied knowledge to become tangible. Making it tangible later allowed for reflection and analyses of what I created.

I created three large gicleé<sup>11</sup> prints composed of gothic churches placed in a desolate and dark landscape with dramatic clouds in the sky.

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<sup>11</sup> Gicleé prints are inkjet prints done on fine art paper.

I scanned in a paper doily and placed it at the bottom of each image, with the idea of drawing an image inside it. I then started drawing over these prints with compressed charcoal and colour pastels, influenced by the work of Diane Victor (Rankin and von Veh 2008) a South African based artist and my mentor while I studied fine art at the University of Pretoria between 1994 and 1997. The work became dramatic. The movements of my hands and fingers became equally dramatic and emotive. The mark making became expressive and through “reflection-in-action” (Schön 1983) I realised that as I created, my emotions became intensified. My mood was dark. I felt sad and I was deeply upset. This emotive response was evident in my mark making, my ‘geste’ (Jousse 2006:171) and visual aesthetic. Schön (1983: 68) explains that reflection-in-action is when “the practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique”, and that the practitioner “carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation”. Jousse (2006:171) describes “geste” as an “action executed” that happens “in reaction to actions played into him/her by the universe”, with the universe being our environment such as our social and cultural framework. These “gestes” are the replaying of “mimemes” (or memories) “ex-pressed” (2005:20). He believes that our “geste” is informed by “mimemes” (Jousse 2005: 21; 2006:175). “Mimeme” is the knowledge stored in us, knowledge embodied through actions played into us and that are “held in memory and ready for replay” (2006:175). He further states that these “mimemes” or “mimic interaction has become internalized and the Real is no longer before us, but in us” (ibid:175).

The making of these ‘experimental’ and intuitive images was an embodiment (Whitehead 2008) of my reaction to revisiting the church. Although I was still unsure why I felt the way that I did, it became evident that it was a visceral experience and that I had to explore the meaning of my response to the church. The composition was a balance of being dramatic while being still, a desolate landscape, although the tea cup, doily and church building suggested the cultured involvement and presence of humans. The doily and teacup was a visual element that did not happen through much rational thinking, but rather ‘appeared’ in my work intuitively and instinctively.

I finally recognised in myself that this was a ‘force’ or ‘passion’, an “urge of certitude” that impelled me into action - what Davis-Floyd and Arvidson (1997:7&21) refer to as “intuition”, stating that “this sort of knowing is fundamental to the functioning of awareness and occurs in all of us all the time”.



Figure 13: Detail of the expressive mark making from the three church drawings



Figure 14: The three church drawings

Post creating the work, I allowed for “reflection-on-action” (Schön 1983). Schön suggests that “reflection-on-action” is when the practitioner steps back and reflects on the work created, analysing it more critically by applying rational thought to the actions.

Smith (1994:150) echoes this by stating that “as we think and act, questions arise that cannot be answered in the present”, he suggests that “the space afforded by recording, supervision and conversation with our peers allows us to approach these. Reflection requires space in the present and the promise of space in the future” (ibid:150). Day, Calderhead and Denicolo (1993:16) argue that reflection allows for heightening awareness and that it increases ones “repertoire of concepts that can be used in analysis and evaluation”.

After discussing the work with my peers, and spending time reflecting on my actions, I asked myself questions such as: “What is the significance of my (re)action?”, “What sense can I make of it?” “What does my reaction mean?” and “Why the doily and teacup?”

### **Reacting, Reflecting and Realising: Finding Direction**

The visit to the church and the making of the three church drawings was a combination of action/reflection and reaction/reflection and intuition. The fieldwork consisted of carefully considered activities, each with the purpose of finding information and ‘clues’. The making of the artworks was an emotive reaction, but even although it was an intuitive reaction, I still see that it fits within an action/reflection cycle, as I realised - on reflection – that I knew intuitively that my explorative experience had to be followed by ex-pressing my understanding and experience in my artwork thus completing the cycle. This phase and mode of expression allowed a new cycle of inquiry to start.

Through these action/reflection cycles I have developed an understanding of two core living standards of judgement. Whitehead (2008c:1) suggests that these standards of judgement provide continuous guidance throughout the process. My standards are values intersecting my life values expressed in the way that I conduct my life and my artist’s values expressed in my artworks. These standards included authenticity; I believe authenticity has a sense of ‘realness’ to it. For example, the ‘realness’ in the source of the imagery or concepts used in my art related directly to my life, they were

photographs taken from our private collection and not taken from a 'foreign' source, the concepts had personal meaning and related to my life history and lived experiences. The second standard was the notion of my art as a means of leaving a legacy behind. I realised that I had become aware of these two significant values providing me with direction and guiding me towards the next action. I had also become aware of the significance of the church, and that I had to explore its meaning and relevance to my journey of awareness. This form of "reflection-for-action" is defined by Wright (2008:16) and inspired by the work of Dewey (1933) as "a focused, persistent, critical reflection aimed at accomplishing a goal". I realised that my next goal was to better understand the Afrikaner Calvinist and Reformed Church environment that I grew up in.

#### **4 MAKING CONNECTIONS: A WOMAN'S PLACE IN AN AFRIKANER CALVINISTIC PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM**

Having a focused goal in mind, I revisited my collection of memorabilia with a new 'lens' (Pithouse, Mitchell and Moletsane 2009:3), knowing that I was looking for signals and clues that would tell me more about my Afrikaner Calvinistic upbringing. I wanted to know more about the culture, traditions and beliefs of this context and I wanted to remember my past and the memories I had of this time in my life.

##### **The Church Council: The Decision Makers**

I found a photograph that encapsulated my personal history and that echoed the emotional response I had experienced during my church visit (Grossi 2007:77-82). The photograph was of our Reformed Church's council taken during the eighties, when I

was about ten years old. The men were all dressed in their formal church suits, posing in an orderly and formal fashion, sitting and standing neatly in rows looking sternly at the camera. What I saw was a collection of conservative white men that ruled our church, our families, our schools and our community. In some cases these men regulated our Apartheid society, as some of the men were Afrikaner Broederbond members. The Afrikaner Broederbond was an organisation originally governed by white Afrikaner men, recruited based on their credentials, such as belonging to one of the Afrikaner churches; their aim was to put strategies in place that would promote and strengthen the Afrikaners.

Numerous support organisations were established to broaden Afrikaner interests. These included the FAK<sup>12</sup>, Voortrekkers and economic institutions such as the Reddingsdaadbond, Volkskas, Dagbreekpers and the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut. An important strategy is that of gaining control of school committees, school boards, church councils and boards of directors in order to achieve its aims (O'Malley, n.d.).

The photograph of the Church Council as a visual text provided me with a sense of reality. It helped me to set the scene as well as providing a social, cultural and historical context (Grossi 2007:77). The clothing and style referred to the nineteen eighties, and the building in the background was my school where the Church Council often held meetings. This specific image contributed significantly to the narrative and it “proved a point” (ibid:80): I saw in it the epitome of the Apartheid regime captured in one image: conservative white men that regulated a patriarchal system, with my father sitting in the front row.

As I looked at this photograph, I asked myself “Where did I fit into this picture?” In other words, where did I fit into this ‘text’? The notion of the Self as ‘text’ or the Self represented in ‘text’ as part of a self-study methodology is discussed by Pithouse, Mitchell and Moletsane (2009). The authors refer to autoethnographic studies in which the Self becomes the ‘text’ or the subject that like any ‘text’ can be ‘read’, analysed and

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<sup>12</sup> FAK stands for the “Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings”

studied. This method allows for “new ways of thinking about the self as a text” by “positioning the self” (ibid:12) within this ‘text’ and that this allows for contextualisation. This exploration, expression, articulation and representation of the self as ‘text’ can be through writing, “oral and performance texts” (ibid:13), through visual arts and other forms of expression. They further suggest that the notion of finding and positioning the self in ‘text’ can take the form of various self-representation ‘texts’ including “visual media such as photography” (ibid:13), as well as artworks, scribal text and others. This provides an alternative way of exploring the self in ‘text’ by asking the question: “Where am I in this text?” and by “looking at the significance of life documents of the self and identity (photographs, letters, memos) in self-study” (ibid:13).

### **The ‘Chosen People’: Afrikaner Ideology in the Reformed Church**

The photograph of the Church Council reconnected with my visceral experience of visiting our church and acted as a tool for memory recall. Seeing the men - the ‘broeders’ - and especially my father, in the picture reminded me of what it was like attending church. I recalled sitting quietly next to my mother and listening to the complex messages delivered from the minister’s pulpit. I recalled attending catechism listening to equally complex messages. I was indoctrinated through church and school into thinking that we, the Afrikaners, were the ‘chosen people’ (die ‘*Uitverkore Volk*’). Calvinism is a religious doctrine stemming from John Calvin (his original French name was Jean Cauvin, and in Afrikaans he is called Johannes Calvyn. Calvinism posits that God has chosen his believers as well as those that will be saved; Afrikaner Calvinism believes that God has chosen the Afrikaners as the ‘chosen people’. The messages I heard in church and school were of us conquering all battles and that we were a strong and enduring nation protected by God. The problem with this ‘promise’ was that I was never sure of what that meant for the ‘other people’. I understood ‘the other’ to be excluded, separate and different from us; however, never did I fully understand that this was strategically constructed through Apartheid. Apartheid was never mentioned in our

church or in schools; it was rather phrased in a 'positive' manner by positioning us, the white Afrikaners, as the chosen people. Understanding the 'workings' of Apartheid was silenced, even the Afrikaner Broederbond was treated and managed in a 'silent' manner, with the decisions treated as confidential even as 'secret'. Adults in my community treated Apartheid with denial, condoning the promotion of 'our nation' (*ons volk*) by raising children in ignorance. This left me confused not knowing how I related to 'the other'. Jansen (2009:45-46) provides an explanation of how leading figures such as political, religious, literary, sports or educational figures, provided narratives that encouraged this 'myth' of the chosen people "on which the memories and identity of the Afrikaner are built". Jansen (2009:46) states that

Knowledge of the past is embedded in rich and emotional narratives of the rise of Afrikaans as a language of science, a medium of teaching, a vehicle for learning the mother tongue, a powerful form for communicating the cultural, aesthetic, spiritual, romantic, economic, and political ideals of a chosen people.

Jansen (2009:72) argues that the Afrikaner churches reinforced a "theological justification for Apartheid" by praying for the Afrikaner soldiers fighting against the "black terrorists and shielding the Afrikaners from godless atheism" (ibid:72). The message was clear: Afrikaans churchgoers had no reason to question "racial order" or even racial conflict. The Afrikaner churches became a vehicle not only to spread the word of God, but the "Apartheid politics and policies" (Jansen 2009:73). The white Afrikaners, as the chosen people, were compared to the children of Israel being lead to the 'land flowing with milk and honey'. Jansen (2009:73) refers to this and explains how this message proclaimed that we were "struggling through the wilderness of oppression and being led by God to the promised land" and that "knowledge of a glorious past of struggle and achievement against the odds, a knowledge of a troubling present that still threatens families and faith, and an absent knowledge about the horrors of Apartheid". I believe this message was directed to the Afrikaner children, to put the onus on the children to believe in South Africa as their promised land and to work towards the goal of

standing together as a nation (of Afrikaners). This would have ensured that we conquer the 'threat' that the 'blacks' presented, promising a strong economy for our future. Jansen (2009:85) argues that the knowledge passed on to the Afrikaner children

...was knowledge of black people as terrorists and Communists and of white people as Christian and civilized. It presented black people as a threat to the very existence of white people. Through this mix of activities, children again gained knowledge of fear, the distrust of difference, the defence of privilege, and the acceptance of military-type authoritarian as normative in school and society.

I realize how this message established a belief system in me that I was superior to 'the other', that I belonged to a united group of people and that I should listen, follow and respect my elders and other 'authority figures' in all aspects. My 'belonging' to the Afrikaners was reinforced through the participation from a young age in various Afrikaner cultural practices. This included the 'Voortrekkers'<sup>13</sup> and cultural and educational outings called 'Veldskool' (the literal translation means field schools, schools outdoors, 'wilderness schools' as they are sometimes called in English). During the day, we were trained in survival skills by making use of our natural environment, and at night we would gather around a campfire listening to traditional stories and singing traditional songs. Other events included attending gatherings that celebrated the history and victories of the Afrikaners such as 'Gelofte Dag'<sup>14</sup> – the Day of the Vow, the vow being that Afrikaners would annually celebrate 'our' promise to God for a victory against the Zulus in an historic battle in 1838, by *honouring and treating the day as a Sabbath day*.

I further attended catechism, a form of Sunday school in the Reformed Church, reinforcing these beliefs from a young age up to the end of my high school days. As a teenager, I realised that these messages did not make much sense, but I knew no other way of believing and thinking, and as an obedient child I was not in a position to question any of it. Brink (as cited in Jansen 2009:46) refers to these

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<sup>13</sup> An Afrikaner youth organisation, similar to the scouts, promoting Afrikaner ideology (Giliomee 2004:352)

<sup>14</sup> Day of the Covenant celebrating the battle of Bloodriver against the Zulus in 1838 (Giliomee 2004:486)

as “processes of silencing”. Lambley as cited in Jansen (2009:70) argues that this phenomenon of the inheritance and reinforcement of this knowledge and “Afrikaner values” was achieved through “every level of society”; such as through their schools, their parents, their churches as well as through media and Afrikaans literature. The symbiotic relationship of implementing and promoting the Afrikaner ideology between the state, the schools, the churches and the Afrikaner families became quite clear (ibid:158).

By this point in my journey of awareness, I realised that my social and cultural context related to a patriarchal white Afrikaner system governed by Calvinism. This was promoted and indoctrinated through my church, school and family structure. However, this still did not adequately satisfy my questing and questioning. I still felt that I had to explore further by considering my role as a woman within this framework.

### **The ‘Silent’ Women: Being a Woman in a Conservative Afrikaner Calvinistic Patriarchal System**

To better understand where I as a woman fitted into this social and cultural picture, I asked myself a critical question: “What did it mean, and would it have meant for me, to be a woman in a conservative Afrikaner Calvinistic patriarchal system?”

With further inquiry, I became aware of the positions of the women and men within this social and cultural framework of the Reformed Church and Afrikaner society during Apartheid. I realised that the structure of our church, our family, our community and our society during Apartheid had a lot in common. Jansen (2009:71) pointed out that this included the men as the “head of the household” and women as the caregivers and “emotional center” of the family or community. It also meant that men were seen as the stronger sex, the important decision makers while women were seen as the weaker sex and as subservient and submissive. Equally important, what I realised was the position of children within this context. Jansen (2009:71) elaborates stating that “this authority over the child extends to the broader family and the community at large”. What strikes

me from this form of rigid discipline and reinforcement of values is that it resulted in a culture of conforming and not being permitted to question anything. Jansen (2009:71) describes it as “children are told what to do, and whether it makes sense or not they are required to fall into line”. I resonated with this very strongly as being the way I remembered my ways of being as a child.

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2008; 2009; 2010) capture various studies in gender inequality in an academic journal called ‘Girlhood Studies’. ‘Girlhood Studies’ aim at addressing gender inequality by locating and advocating for girls and young women, with girls and young women “as the focus of research and action so that researchers and activists may engage in feminist work that is not simply about girls, but which is for, with, and by girls” (ibid 2009:4). They also highlight that these studies are conducted in an interdisciplinary and self-reflective fashion which relates to the girls and their girlhood and that “issues of the cultural construction of girlhoods are at the centre of inquiry” (Mitchell, Reid-Walsh and Kirk 2008:ix). Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2010:1) refer to the proverb “children should be seen and not heard” as found in the Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs. The origins of this proverb dates back to the 15th century, where the proverb was directed to girls and young women in an ‘english’ context. It stated that a young girl or woman should be seen and not heard. This notion further developed into a social conduct and belief, Mitchell & Reid-Walsh state “that girls and young women should be quiet and demure changed from being a piece of commonplace knowledge to being a written precept in the 17th century when manuals of prescriptive behaviour began to be written for a gender-specific audience” (ibid:1). The authors point to a Puritan manual published in 1612, and directed at guiding young couples where it states that the men were to socialise and develop a network with fellow men, and that his wife should be quiet, reserved and seen but not be heard. This kind of social conduct in a Protestant English and American context promoting women to be ‘silent’ became a common subject in other forms of manuals, which were directed at guiding women in their behaviour and their conduct as they entered the “marriage market” (ibid:1). They state that these manuals were “connected specifically to social class and economic status and it was promoted by conduct book writers such as the Reverend James Fordyce in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) and by Dr John

Gregory in his *Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774)" (ibid:1). These manuals suggested that women needed to physically and socially conduct themselves in a modest manner, as their behaviour and actions were reflections of their beliefs, and that their actions could be questioned through social scrutiny. This notion of 'silent women' became the norm during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in English and American, and within most patriarchal societies. This exact notion was evident in my own 'girlhood study'; as seen in the books displayed in our church which remained the norm in recent and contemporary times and as noticed in the marriage sacrament of the Reformed Church.

It was this notion of 'silent' women, along with a significant life changing event and rite of passage that encouraged me to have a closer look at the sacraments as practiced by the Reformed Church. When I got married, my husband and I explored different options for what our promise to each other would consist of and what our ceremony would entail. I specifically paid close attention to the marriage sacrament of the Reformed Church (Die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika n.d.). Here I noticed and was disappointed to see that the gender inequalities and the notion of 'silent women', as developed between the 15th and 20th century in English and American contexts continued to be implemented and promoted in this 'contemporary' yet conservative Afrikaner sacrament. I cross referenced the sacrament as displayed on the Reformed Church of South Africa's webpage, with the sacrament found in my old psalm book dating back to 1976. It was interesting to see that in over thirty years nothing had changed. The sacrament read<sup>15</sup>: "man, you know that God employed you as the head of your wife, so that you can wisely guide her, to the best of your ability, educate, comfort and protect her as much as the head guides the body" (N.G. Kerk-Uitgewers 1976:153). The sacrament further referred to the woman as the "weaker sex" (ibid:153). The sacrament asked the woman to be "obedient" and in return "he would rule over her" (ibid:153). The argument used was that Adam was created before Eve, and that Eve was appointed as his help (ibid:152-153). The woman's role in the sacrament is described as "helpful" and to "give the right attention to your family and household. To live discreetly and honestly... so that you set an example of virtuousness" (ibid:152-153).

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<sup>15</sup> The marriage sacrament is written in Afrikaans, I have translated it trying to stay true to its original meaning.

Reflecting on the sacrament, the experience of getting married and ‘becoming’ a wife, and later ‘becoming’ a mother, highlighted the roles that women played within the Afrikaner Calvinistic churches, families, communities and larger society. I realised that these roles seemed to work in a cycle of identities, carrying over from generation to generation. What made it significant to the Afrikaner community, and with specific reference to my own lived experience and personal history, were the ‘descriptions’ and ‘prescriptions’ as governed by the church and cultural framework. I realised how I and all the women in the Reformed Church were deliberately moulded into silent unthinking unquestioning obedience to the will of men.

From this realisation, I created a series of artworks titled “Die Mooi Fasade” (The Beautiful Facade). The series related to the notion of etiquette by using decorative ceramic serving plates, stacked on top of each other, with the artwork placed in the centre. This was done in the same way as when one would set a table in a formal manner according to etiquette prescriptions. The artworks were small round jesmonite ‘tiles’ of churches carved into the tile, they were colourful and seemingly cheerful little churches. The churches and plates became metaphors for the various roles women assumed within this community: the obedient daughters, the innocent brides, the subservient wives, the nurturing mothers, the exemplary homemakers and the charitable sisters. The work commented on the seemingly beautiful facade of the church as a building, but then reflected on the ‘not so beautiful’ dogma, indoctrination and regulations of the church as an institution promoting gender inequality. The title of each plate provided the roles women assumed. The work suggested the continuation or cycle of these identities starting with the daughters, moving into adulthood and the social or community roles that were/ are expected from them to becoming a mother and passing the tradition on to their own daughters.



Figure 15: The series '*Die Mooi Fasade*' (The Beautiful Facade)

It was this engagement with the 'prescribed' roles that indicated the "living contradictions" (Whitehead 2008a:9) and conflict within my life of 'becoming' an identity, such as 'becoming' a wife or mother. Going through this process allowed me to reflect on my values and beliefs and what I found to be important for my present state of being, and that of my future role as guide to my child in a new direction that I believed in. In so doing, I developed and realised another "living standard of judgement" (Whitehead 2008a:8); I am no longer an Afrikaner Calvinist as I do not believe or follow their belief system and sacraments. I do not believe in the prescribed gender roles and do not believe that I should pass them on to the generation which follows mine. These beliefs and values, and "embodied knowledge" (Whitehead, 2008d:6) were expressed in my artwork which acted as an expression of my "living standards of judgements" (ibid 2008a:8). My artwork also served as a representation of my experience (Eisner 1993) as well as serving as a social commentary tool with potential for social transformation and engagement. Eisner (1993) challenges the notion of 'traditional' forms of representing research suggesting that we should embrace different forms of

representation to move from communicating an “impression” to a form of “expression” (ibid:6).

Complementing the artworks, I wrote poetry that encapsulated the concept, context, meaning and relevance of the work. The poetry allowed me to express my experiences and the message of the work by referring to the subtle nuances and subtexts of the traditions, behaviour and culture (refer to Annexure C). Utilising the different forms of creative expression allowed me to express and articulate the meaning of the work and my insights gained from my research in a medium that I felt comfortable with, affirming Eisner’s theories of representation (Eisner 1988; 1993; 1997).

From this work, I realised that I had created a focus. I wanted to further explore the role and identity of women within my community. It required me to revisit my collection of memorabilia and again put on a new ‘lens’ for my inquiry. My next goal was set on connecting the notion of etiquette, gender roles and women within the Afrikaner Calvinistic community to my lived experience and memories.

### **Drag/Gedrag (Dress/Manner): Discovering a Mode of Fashion and a Code of Conduct**

Connecting with a previous cycle, I revisited the books that I had found at our church. I also looked closely at photographs of the women in my collection of memorabilia. Here I found various images of my mother, aunts, grandmothers and several group photographs from my mother’s student days dating back to the 1960s. A “pattern” emerged when I studied these visuals (Phelan as cited by Grossi 2007:74); I noticed that the dress code or mode of fashion was specific and that the physical poses were significant. This was partially due to a specific fashion trend of that era, but also a representation of the behaviour and traditions of that time. What stood out the most, and in relation to the notion of etiquette, was the grooming and deportment. I saw women that were neatly groomed, in some cases to perfection, beautifully dressed in lace dresses, satin gloves, and court shoes, decorated with brooches and church hats,

with their hands neatly folded and their feet together. Those seated on chairs crossed their legs neatly at the ankles, their hands folded on their laps with some holding a handkerchief and in some cases with their heads tilted down, looking demurely at the camera.



Figure 16: Collection of photographs indicating the women's dress code and deportment

Considering the notion of the '*volksmoeder*', van der Watt (1996) argues that the identity and understanding of the '*volksmoeder*' has shifted throughout the years. It transformed from strong and enduring women during the Great Trek (1838) to "a more useful image of the silent, suffering, defenseless and passive women who patiently endured the anguish of concentration camps" (ibid:2). Van der Watt continues to argue that "gaining control over Afrikaner women has been revealed to be an important hidden agenda underlying the *volksmoeder* discourse" (ibid:5). She refers to the work of McClintock (1993) who stated that

...the icon of the *volksmoeder* is paradoxical. On the one hand, it recognises the power of (white) motherhood; on the other hand, it is a retrospective iconography of gender containment, containing women's mutinous powers within an iconography of domestic service.

Van der Watt further states that this notion and understanding of the '*volksmoeder*' became "a prescriptive model which dictated to women how they should behave in order to be true Afrikaners" (ibid:6) and that by "praising the Afrikaner woman as '*Vrou en Moeder*' (Woman/Wife and Mother) proved to be a cunning way of suppressing her without being too obvious about it - she is contained in the domestic sphere" (ibid:6).

Paying attention to the "particulars" (Pinnegar and Daynes 2007:7) assisted me in developing my three-dimensional narrative by looking at the "local and specific" (ibid:7). It provided me with a historical view of my ancestors, and it allowed for further conversations to emerge reflecting on my and my family's history within the Afrikaner Calvinistic community. Pinnegar and Daynes (ibid:29) state that

...as researchers, narrative inquirers embrace the power of the particular for understanding experience and using findings from research to inform themselves in specific places at specific times (ibid: 24), narrative inquirers embrace the metaphoric quality of language and the connectedness and coherence of the extended discourse of the story entwined with exposition, argumentation, and description (ibid:29). What fundamentally distinguishes the narrative turn from "scientific" objectivity is understanding that knowing other people and their interactions is always a relational process that ultimately involves caring for, curiosity, interest, passion, and change.

Looking at the photographs I asked myself: "Who are these women?" "What are they doing in these photographs?" and "Why are they doing it?"

The concept of '*Drag/Gedrag*' (Dress/Manner) emerged. This concept addressed the relationship between the way Afrikaner women dressed and the way Afrikaner women conducted themselves. In this case the notion of being well mannered, of personifying the required etiquette, translated into being well groomed and well dressed. The 'exterior' of these women was a direct representation of their belief system and values. Their appearance spoke of their social and cultural framework: smart, neat, groomed, cultured, conforming to etiquette and the social and cultural prescriptions of the group

and the time. Their appearance reflected the images in the books found in our church, and to the marriage sacrament prescribing this behaviour and roles in the liturgy.

### **The Doilies: Creating a Cultural Framework**

It was through this work that the doily as a symbol re-appeared. The doily re-appeared with a specific focus and with a conscious rationale as my concept became more focused and my intended message became clearer. The medium and craft of my work became equally focused. The doilies served as a metaphor and as a 'canvas' - a surface to work on. In the church drawings, the doilies had also served as a 'canvas' where I drew the teacups on them, however, at this point the doilies became three-dimensional 'canvases' allowing them as objects to take on a new function. Reflecting on the work (Schön 1983) and as discussed in a conversation with an art critic and reviewer (see chapter 10) illustrated how my living theory developed (Whitehead 1989:7) and how refined ideas emerged. I realised that the doilies had shifted from their original function and adopted a new function. The pack of mass produced paper doilies suggested the move away from older traditions of making doilies by hand, to a contemporary age of mass produced doilies, diluting the essence of etiquette. The jesmonite casts of doilies took on a new form of being 'mass' produced, they were now casts that could be reproduced and multiplied, suggesting the notion of reproducing tradition and culture. The women represented by these mass produced doilies were mass reproductions of Afrikaner Calvinistic traditions, and although each doily represented an individual, it also represented a conformed prescribed sense of aesthetics, manners and social conduct. The doilies represented a sense of 'softness' as well as an element of 'hardness', relating back to the paradox of the '*volksmoeder*'. The doilies appear both feminine and refined, although their medium was/is hard and inflexible, yet fragile.



Figure 17: Three works from the doily series

During the process of making the doilies, I became aware of the evolution of my “living standards of judgement” (Whitehead 2008a:8). I became quite ‘obsessed’ with the work having to be authentic (such as using only photographs and images that ‘belonged’ to me). At this point, this obsession with authenticity translated into the medium having to be authentic as well. For example, I deliberately wanted to work with paper doilies as they had a specific meaning, and I wanted to use a pack of doilies to stay true to the intention and concept of ‘mass production’. I realised that the concept and meaning of the work had to translate into the use of the medium and the way it was crafted. I first made the casts using a complete pack of paper doilies but this changed when I took the cast out of the mould and I knew that it ‘just wasn’t right’. It was through a discussion with my ‘trusted circle of critical friends’ that I pointed out my concern that the doilies were not refined enough. To create a refined look required the doilies to be sanded smoothly, resulting in losing the detail of the embossing on the paper doily. I knew that I had to find a new way of creating the pack of doilies, and it was here that my “living standards of judgement” (ibid:8) shifted and evolved through experiencing a “living contradiction” (ibid:9). Although I wanted my work to be authentic and done with integrity by trying to stay as close as possible to the ‘original’, I also realised that the outcome of the product was equally if not more important than the

making of it. For example, to accomplish a refined look and staying true to the notion of etiquette and finely detailed doilies, I had to use a wooden block that I laser profiled into the shape of the doily, providing a base which, once made into a cast, suggested a pack of doilies. The original doilies were glued on top of the wooden block and the end result was more refined. I had to 'let go' of an element of authenticity and integrity (original pack of doilies) to achieve an outcome that would speak to and strengthen the concept of the work by not using the original pack of doilies, but rather craft it to represent the concept of refinement.



Figure 18: Comparing detail of the original doily (left) with the reworked doily (right)

Further to the redoing of the doilies, I also changed the images drawn onto the doilies. I at first drew sections of the women, with the aim to point out specific behaviour or deportment. Through “reflection-on-action” (Schön 1983) I realised that I had created yet another contradiction (Whitehead 2008a:9). I drew figures without their torsos or in some cases without their heads. I did this to focus on a specific area wanting to emphasize the behaviour or deportment, such as their crossed legs or folded hands. These images were supposed to address the identity of these women and the particulars, such as the church hats they were wearing. As I felt that the images did not

address the latter, I decided to redo all the doilies by drawing the complete figures with greater detail, using refined mark making and finer lines. This was done on the new doilies, which resulted in a more refined image of the women.



Figure 19: Original doily – without complete detail of figure



Figure 20: Complete portrait – with detail of full figure

From this process, I also realised that the “particulars” (Pinnegar and Daynes 2007:7) enriched my “master narrative” (Dlamini 2009:19). It provided details drawn from my personal narrative that contributed to the richness of my larger social narrative. These particulars provided me with the social context of my personal history. It also allowed me to develop a clear focus for my journey of awareness. I had become aware of the gender roles within my community and history as well as the social and cultural prescriptions and regulations as governed by the church and other social structures.

To conclude, these gender roles, with a focus on the women within this cultural framework, were governed by guidelines that directed women in how they should conduct themselves and how they should behave within their family, their community and their society. I realised that there were two forms of guidelines:

The Formal Expectations and Guidelines: These were institutionalised guidelines that were guided by some form of policy and regulation such as the Marriage Sacrament, where the man (husband) is institutionalised as the head (of the household) and the wife as being obedient and subservient to her husband.

The Informal Expectations and Guidelines: These are guidelines that are not formally structured in a policy or guideline document, and are not governed by a specific institution, but rather defined by cultural traditions, rituals and the knowledge, social conformity and etiquette passed from one generation to the next.

This provided me with a clear understanding of the influences – overt and covert - that directed this behaviour. However, I wanted to know more about the particulars, especially the behaviour, actions and participation of the women within my community.

### **Making Sense: The Meaning of Being a Woman within a Calvinistic Afrikaner Community**

After discussions with my mentor and my ‘trusted circle of critical friends’, I realised that I had to unpack and explore the notion of tea serving – suggested by the tea cups and doilies - further. I asked myself questions like: “What was my first memory of tea serving?” “What can I remember of tea serving?” and “What was the significance of tea serving?”.

### **Etiquette: The Women Serving**

I realised that I had significant knowledge of serving etiquette. As a child I was groomed to set a table in a specific way, to behave at the dinner table in a specific way, and to serve tea in a specific way. I learned this from my mother and from a subject attended in school called Home Economics, but I realised that I also learned it from my father.

My father enjoyed inviting large numbers of guests to our house, where my mother would prepare a three-course meal, and the children would set the table and serve the guests as per clear instructions from my father. I also recalled assisting my mother in social community functions setting tables for the guests, decorating the flowers, folding the dozens of napkins and neatly aligning the dozens of teaspoons with the ears of the teacups. I recalled the minister and the elder doing their quarterly home visits (*'huis besoek'*) where my mother would serve us all tea with the teacups and sweet snacks neatly packed on our special serving tray and tea set, used exclusively for guests, and with such visits hosted in our living room, a space also exclusively used for when guests visited us. I also recalled the 'susters' preparing and setting large volumes of teacups, saucers and teaspoons ready for the congregation to enjoy their tea and coffee after ceremonies held in the church.

Jousse (2006:54) suggests that the meaning of "metaphors" (such as rituals and traditional knowledge) is many times lost through formal systems or institutions of indoctrination, such as the church. He warns that we tend to just repeat these rituals and practices without understanding their meanings, and so ritual becomes empty routine. He suggests that to re-discover and "resuscitate" (ibid:55) the deeper meaning and value of these metaphors, is through studying the "geste" (ibid:54-56).

Jousse explains that unpacking the meaning of these "metaphors" is through questioning the meaning of our words and practices. He states that one should develop an understanding of "the nature of the geste, and its operation in this whole formidable human machinery" (ibid:54). He further suggests that the understanding of these "metaphors" occurs through replay; replaying of movements, of visuals, sounds and other forms of expression, this "range of opportunities of awareness will allow you to incarnate in yourself holistically the entire (...) mechanism of all your intussusceptions of the 'real'" (ibid:70).

With close inspection in replaying these memories, it became evident that serving etiquette was significant, and that the people that featured in these memories were women - serving. This varied from serving their guests, their family, their community and their congregation. I also realised that I used to be one of these women, and I

asked the same critical question I asked myself before: “What did it mean, and would it have meant for me, to be a woman in a conservative Afrikaner Calvinistic patriarchal system?”

I realised that I would have been encouraged to be a ‘suster’ in the church, serving tea every Sunday to the congregation. I would have been confronted by having to conform to a conservative belief system that I no longer agreed with.

### **Finding a Metaphor: The Teaspoons**

Considering the significance of conformation and tradition was what encouraged me to explore tea serving and etiquette as an overarching concept. I experimented with teaspoons as objects as I found them to be petite and feminine objects. They were also objects significant to tea serving. They were / are also an object with a long history relating to class and etiquette. I collected teaspoons from various antique stores as well as from my own collection. I used those which stood out aesthetically to create casts of teaspoons set in a block of clay. At first I wanted to celebrate the beauty of their form and detail.

But the moment I had made all of them, I realised that I had created a new ‘text’ that I could analyse, and I started looking at them as ‘new’ objects. The teaspoons transformed from their original artefact state into a newly created three-dimensional art object. I realised that I had created an object that could provide new meaning and that could be used as a metaphor in art. Pillay and Govinden (2007:102) explain metaphors in art as follows: “The power of the metaphor lies in its potential to deepen understanding of the meaning of experience, which in turn re-defines reality. In art, metaphor urges one to look beyond the literal, to generate associations and to tap new and deeper levels of meaning”. The teaspoons could now be reproduced and I was now able to make lots of teaspoons, strengthening the metaphor of conformation and the repetition of tradition. However, I realised that I had created yet another contradiction (Whitehead, 2008a:9) as the teaspoons I had created were uneven, they

were different sizes and were not conforming to the neatness of Afrikaner Calvinist etiquette as I wanted to portray it.

My “living standards of judgement” (Whitehead 2008a:8) reminded me that my work had to be as authentic as possible, that it required integrity in the concept and crafting of the work, but further to this, I realised I had developed additional criteria for my work. Influenced by the criteria for self-study as explained by Conolly et al (2009:95), my “living standards of judgement” transformed and they now required from my work to be authentic, relevant, significant, appropriate and sufficient as follows:

- The medium, craft, concept and message must be authentic by presenting and relating to a sense of ‘realness’ representing my ‘truth’ as closely as possible.
- The medium, crafting, aesthetic and presentation must represent and be in line with the concept of the work ensuring that it is appropriate and relevant.
- The concept in turn must hold personal significance and meaning and have social relevance.
- My work is seen as sufficient when I believe it delivers the message clearly.
- The meaning of the work must relate to my research findings and through that ensure that it is done with integrity.
- The work must provide a narrative or tell a story.
- And the narrative or story must be thought-provoking and should contribute to a greater social/political/critical dialogue.

Considering the above, I knew that I had to redo the teaspoons. They had to all be the same size so that they could be reproduced and perfectly aligned with each other creating a neat regimented pattern.

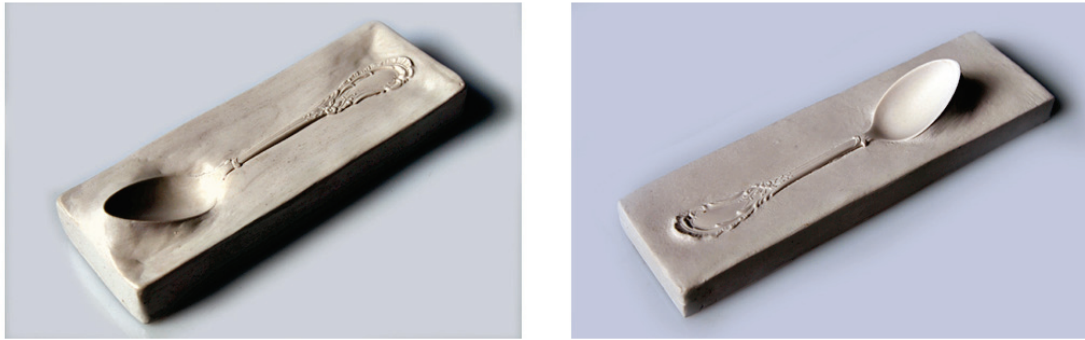


Figure 21: Comparing an original teaspoon (left) with a reworked teaspoon (right)

I knew that I wanted to comment on the traditions of tea serving, traditions that have been passed on through the decades from one generation to another. I also knew that the work should comment and relate to the notion of conforming, etiquette and serving. I knew that representing this notion of passing on and repeat required the teaspoons to be repeated, and that I needed to find a way to exhibit the collection of teaspoons in a way that would deliver the same message. The latter became a subtext commenting on the church service, the 'susters' serving the congregation (tea) and the congregation serving its community. The concept translated into an installation of wooden serving trays sourced from antique stores and without realising it, a rare find, all dating back a good thirty to forty years, strengthening the relevance and significance. Each tray consisted of a collection of its own teaspoons, duplicated and neatly packed inside the tray, perfectly aligned filling each tray with neat rows of identical refined white teaspoons. Preparing the teaspoons reminded me of setting and preparing for a function. I was surrounded by dozens of teaspoons which I carefully sanded, dusted, cleaned, sealed and packed neatly in their trays. Mixing and pouring the jesmonite was similar to mixing dough. Even packing and carrying the the wooden trays felt like preparing for a function in the church, school or community hall.

The dozens of teaspoons became metaphors for the 'susters' of the community. They also represented the congregations neatly sitting in their church pews, and as there were a series of trays, they suggested the repetition and continuation of traditions throughout the years, decade after decade, and century after century.



Figure 22: Two of the trays from the '*Bedien/Bediening/Bediende*' series

McNiff (2009:310) states that educational research is “a process of making sense of our own personal and professional lives through personal inquiry as we try to realize our values in our practices”. The values and the quality of my practice transformed from a nostalgic journey to a critical, conceptual and considered journey of awareness speaking of specific concepts, experiences and developing an understanding that resulted in work with significant meaning. Weber and Mitchell (as cited by Grossi 2007:84) confirms that “the reason we need and create art has to do with its ability to make us feel alive and to discover what we didn’t know we knew, or to see what we never noticed before, even when it was right in front of our noses”.

At this stage I had created a series of artworks that told my personal story and lived experiences as developed through a systematic action/reflection research process. I had created a living theory by employing inventive living theories methodologies. My narrative reflected on an innocent childhood and it developed into a narrative of critical

self-reflection and contextualisation. And yet, something was missing. I knew that there was one last thing I had to address.

## **Talking About the Unspoken Word: Completing the Story**

### **Confronting a Taboo**

During a discussion with my 'trusted circle of critical friends', I realised that there was one burning issue I had been avoiding. I avoided it for fear of discussing it in public and potentially entering sensitive political territory, a topic that was considered post-Apartheid as a social taboo. Taboo is a term that describes a practice, act or word that is considered socially as "forbidden or disapproved of" and that is "placed under a social prohibition or ban" (The Free Dictionary by Farlex 2009). South Africa is still tender from our Apartheid past, and intended uncontroversial racial discussions can easily result in a heated debate. However, I also knew that the racial discussion I wanted to bring up, had to be dealt with, and that I had to find a way of doing it that would feel 'right'.

I grew up in an Afrikaans and predominantly 'whites only' community, with the only 'blacks' in our community as our servants staying in their servant quarters. In this community and during the days of Apartheid my people would use the word 'kaffir'<sup>16</sup> on a regular basis. As a young child, I became aware of the meaning of the word and decided around the age of ten, that I no longer wanted to use the word. I realised that it was offensive.

Through my current ethnographic studies I became aware of how often and regularly the word is still used in my community. Although post-Apartheid South Africans are no longer 'allowed' to use the word as it has officially been deemed offensive and derogatory, however, it seems that in my community the word has remained a part of

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<sup>16</sup> Kaffir is an offensive term for 'black' people used during Apartheid. It originates from Arabic Muslims during the eighteenth century calling black people from Africa this term, suggesting that they were atheists. Later the term was used for slaves in the Cape (Giliomee 2004:14).

the vocabulary. Hearing the word reminded me of all the objects, situations, idioms and colloquial sayings we used to have that related to the word. To explain: the Coral Tree used to be called the 'Kaffir' tree, relating to its botanical name *Caffra*, but of course it developed racist associations. A fishing rod holder used to be called a '*kaffertjie*' as if it was a small 'black' person holding the rod for the fisherman, just like a servant would. A cast iron pot used to be called the 'Kaffir' pot, possibly because 'black' people used it or possibly because it was black in colour or possibly because of its hardship having to endure extreme heat doing its 'dirty' work for someone else.

Recalling all these memories of how the word was used brought me very close to the racial conflicts and indifferences I experienced as a child. During my childhood, I was 'protected' from 'black' people, 'they' were separate and separated from us. 'They' lived separately from us. 'They' ate out of separate plates and drank out of separate mugs. 'They' were literally and figuratively separate or apart from us. I knew very little about 'black' people when I was little. I do remember a few prominent figures in my life, and they were either our domestic workers or gardeners. I never knew their last names, only the name they introduced themselves by. I did not know their children or their life stories.

### **She's a Part, although Apart**

It was for this reason, that I felt I had to include 'them' into my story. I wanted to include 'them' to complete and even complement the narrative. Staying true to the notion of serving, with women as our caregivers, and staying true to the idea of the act of serving I decided to commemorate the 'potjie' (the three-legged cast iron pot) to represent the 'other' women in my story. The object had significant meaning as it reminded me of our camping holidays cooking with the pot (the same holidays where we used '*kaffertjies*' to hold our fishing rods), and as it was a recognisable object that many people from South Africa would recall.



Figure 23: 'Mina' - the three legged cast iron pot

Further to that, the object became anthropomorphic. It took on human qualities. I named the pot 'Mina'. 'Mina' was our domestic worker that took care of us when we were children, and I haven't seen her since. By giving the pot a name, provided the pot with a human identity and it resolved my internal conflict of finding a way to speak about a social 'taboo'. By naming the pot 'Mina', I was able to relate to 'her', Mina the person. The object transformed from an 'it' to a 'her'. 'She' became part of the gender narrative and part of the other women in my story.

The culmination of the work I created was a carefully curated exhibition titled '*Onthaal Onthul*'. The meaning of the title will be explained later. Although 'Mina' formed part of the exhibition narrative, instead of featuring in the main narrative of the exhibition, she became a subtext. Thus, although a part of the narrative, she was placed apart from the rest, in an area outside of the main gallery, yet adjacent. She was exposed to the elements, in a space that resembled that of a 'shack'<sup>17</sup> with only a bare light bulb hanging above her providing some sense of a shelter. Having 'Mina' as part of my story

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<sup>17</sup> A shack is a temporary structure built from scrap building material such as pieces of wood and roof sheeting. Shacks are commonly found in informal settlements and serve as homes to the people of the area.

was an act of empathy by including her into my story and providing her a space to exist and have a voice. It was also a subtle reminder to the audience and to my self of the racially complex past that I came from delivering a social critique and social comment. It was also a cathartic act of 'forgiving' my self.



Figure 24: 'Mina' in her 'shack' as exhibited in the gallery

Many people missed 'Mina' at the opening event of my exhibition, an act I deliberately wanted to happen, driving the concept of ignorance and being separated. I also deliberately placed 'Mina' at the end of the catalogue, with a message that would have spoken to those who had missed her, and delivering a conceptual message of her

presence in the story. 'Mina' was placed opposite the series of doilies, creating an interesting dialogue between the delicately and well groomed white Afrikaner women entertaining the Dominee, and the black robust woman labouring outside their space. It suggested the relationship between these women, both acting as 'servants' within the narrative, yet one ironically remaining the 'superior' and the other the 'inferior'.

The poem acted as the final and conclusive message for the narrative, hinting at the potential instructions and conversations that might have happened between the white women and 'Mina', bringing the relationship between them alive.



Figure 25: The doilies facing 'Mina'

The poem read like this (refer to Annexure C for the Afrikaans poem):

***She's Apart***

*Finally...*

*She stands apart.*

*Outside.*

*Separate.*

*Away from the others.*

*She is the Other.*

*"Thank you Mina,  
that's all for today."*

## **5 SELF-STUDY FOR SOCIAL ACTION AND TRANSFORMATION: ONTHAAL ONTHUL**

### **Representing my Story: Onthaal Onthul**

Eisner (1993:6) argues that representation is

...the process of transforming the contents of consciousness into a public form so that they can be stabilized, inspected, edited, and shared with others.

Representation is what confers a publicly social dimension to cognition. Since forms of representation differ, the kinds of experiences they made possible also differ. Different kinds of experience lead to different meanings, which, in turn, make different forms of understanding possible.

In relation to Eisner's suggestions of various forms of representing research "into a public form" (ibid:6), I found that representing my experience, my learning, my understanding, my educational influence and my transformation had to happen in various forms that would complement each other, with each form of representation serving its own purpose. To articulate the meaning of my artworks as exhibited at the gallery, I complemented the artworks by writing poetry collated into a catalogue. Creating an artwork is a very different form of expression and articulation to writing poetry or a research paper. Ellis (2004:111) also argues that "we write to find the truths of our experiences" and that "writing is a method of knowing" (ibid: 171). Ellis further refers to the work of Bochner (2001) when she states that "narrative is the way we remember the past, turn life into language, and disclose to ourselves and others the truth of our experiences" (ibid: 126).

The catalogue accompanied the work at the exhibition, but also served as a tool that could transcend the physical and 'stagnant' exhibition space by continuing to 'live' through other platforms, such as being handed out in its printed format, being e-mailed as a digital format or posted on an online medium such as my blog.

Writing poetry allowed me to express my experiences, emotions and beliefs in an artistic and expressive format, capturing nuances and concepts that otherwise might have been lost or misinterpreted if I only exhibited the artworks. I found that using poetry allowed the telling of my story and experiences in a different format of representation, allowing the audience to also experience it in a way they might relate to or respond better to.

De Lange and Grossi (2009:195) put emphasis on the idea that “each arts-based piece should have a definite purpose in the telling of your story”. Each work or series of work that I created contributed to a specific aspect of the narrative. Curating the exhibition was a narrative carefully structured as it required consideration of how I wanted to lead the viewer through my narrative. I created a master narrative titled ‘*Onthaal Onthul*’ which consisted of two main narratives:

1. My ancestors, my parents and my childhood nostalgia, and
2. The larger social context and commentary based on my lived experiences.

As stated in my catalogue (Annexure C):

“‘Onthaal’ means to welcome people. An ‘Onthaal’ can refer to a social occasion where friends, acquaintances or a community gather to celebrate a festive event. ‘Onthaal’ can also refer to a formal function or reception, which is conducted and structured according to strictly prescribed protocols and etiquette.

‘Onthul’ is to reveal something, to point something out, to disclose or to expose something. It can also mean to lay bare one’s heart.

This *Onthaal Onthul* will be simultaneously a commemoration, celebration and a revelation.

*Onthaal Onthul* is based on my lived experience and the perspectives that have grown out of those lived experiences. My *Onthaal Onthul* has been influenced by discussions with my family members, especially my mother. But this exhibition extends beyond my personal social and domestic experiences into the larger socio-cultural fabric which contextualised my childhood and young adulthood.”

Onthaal Onthul served as a means to express my lived experiences, van Maanen (as cited by Grossi 2007:84) says that “there exists a human dialectic between lived life and art: Art interprets life and life interprets art”. Jousse (n.d.) states that “the story of my work in that of my life, the story of my life is that of my work”. Onthaal Onthul was thus a strand of my life story. The ‘guests’ were welcomed by ‘listening’ to my life story by looking at paintings of my ancestors (grandparents) and portraits of my parents. This was followed by looking at a collection of my childhood memories and my siblings. This nostalgic narrative was interrupted by the title of my exhibition, followed by the critical narrative by walking through the rest of the exhibition. This critical narrative was divided into five sections:

1. ‘Drag/Gedrag’ (Dress/Manner) – the series of doilies placed on petite coffee tables, in the centre of the gallery. This was an introduction to the notion of etiquette and with reference to the women.
2. ‘Die Mooi Fasade’ (The Beautiful Facade) – the series of ceramic plates with the colourful churches installed in a neat line on the wall. This introduced the women’s roles within the community, with reference to the marriage sacrament, bringing the Reformed Church into the narrative.
3. ‘Bedien/Bediening/Bediende’ (Serve/Service/Servant) – the series of dozens of teaspoons framed inside the trays. Four wooden trays neatly aligned, commenting on the women serving tea, the church service and being a servant.
4. ‘Voorgesit, Voorgegee en nou Verlate’ (Served, Pretended and now Desolate) – the three dark church drawings. This suggested the end of the narrative.
5. ‘Mina’ - the cast iron pot placed opposite the doilies in an outside section.

Below the order of the exhibition documented in visual form:



Figure 26: Nostalgia section (grandparents, parents and childhood) – and the title on the right



Figure 27: Detail of '*Drag/Gedrag*' as exhibited on the coffee tables (Dress/Manner)



Figure 28: Doily on coffee table



Figure 29: Detail of '*Die Mooi Fasade*' (The Beautiful Facade)



Figure 30: The series '*Bedien/Bediening/Bediende*' (Serve/Service/Servant)



Figure 31: '*Voorgesit, Voorgegee en nou Verlate*' (Served, Pretended and now Desolate)



Figure 32: View of *'Mooi Fasade'*, *'Bedien/Bediening/Bediende'* and *'Voorgesit, Voorgegee en nou Verlate'*



Figure 33: The doilies facing *'Mina'*

Refer to the catalogue (Annexure C) as it contextualises my story along with the artworks displayed.

## **My Journey of Awareness – Social Action and Transformation**

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007:14) state that

...the researcher not only understands that there is a relationship between the humans involved in the inquiry but also who the researcher is and what is researched emerge in the interaction. In this view, the researched and the researcher are seen to exist in time and in a particular context.

They bring with them a history and worldview. They are not static but dynamic, and growth and learning are part of the research process. Both researcher and researched will learn.

Through my journey of awareness I have become aware of my self-knowledge, self-identity and social context. I have developed, transformed and improved my work through the skill of awareness. I have transformed my artist self as well as my personal self by better understanding my beliefs and values that underpin my practice and my life. But what I have found to be equally empowering and rewarding was witnessing the transformation and shift in understanding that occurred in others. Second to my own transformation, was seeing the transformation of my mother. Through our discussions, engagement and reflection she became aware of her own position within the Afrikaner Calvinistic cultural framework.

Delpont (2005:205) argues that “transformation implies transforming elements of the past into new, transformed ones”. Delpont (ibid:205) further states

...that the transformation of a society from one political dispensation to another necessitates two distinct, although intimately connected types of modifications. Externally, the way society is organised and managed should be altered to establish and operationalise the fundamental principles on which the new envisaged society is to be built. But unless these external changes are complemented by personal changes in people’s attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and subsequent behaviour, the external transformations will be inauthentic and

hollow, because they will not truly represent the society's inner soul, and will therefore possibly stand a chance of failure. Social transformation needs to be accepted and assimilated into the very essence of each citizen's personal being. People need to change.

Delpont (ibid:208) further argues that the older generation of Afrikaners find it difficult to change and adapt to the 'new' South African political and social landscape, as they are established in what they believe. This was confirmed in conversations with my mother where she expressed her difficulties with adjusting to the 'new way' of living in South Africa. Delpont states that "emptying an anthology implies abandoning your identity and establishing a new one" which can be "a daunting task when physical and mental energies are waning". Delpont further argues that "social transformation imperatively instigates some kind of personal transformation" (ibid:208), and that this "personal transformation implies adjustments to belief networks at individual level" (ibid:214).

As an adult, significantly younger than my mother, it meant considerable self-inspection and awareness to transform my belief and value system. Considering Delpont's argument, I can only imagine the difficulty my mother experienced going through similar challenges. Post-1994, and after my father's death in 1995, my mother first had the courage to settle in a new community, moving away from her familiar environment and support structure. She then had the courage to leave the Reformed Church, to join the Dutch Reformed Church and to later join a church outside of the three Afrikaner sister churches. And through this journey she also built the courage to divorce her husband at the age of sixty-nine - a brave act - willing to face the possible stigma that might be attached to her status as a divorced woman in the Afrikaans community. In brief, my mom re-structured her identity by moving away from the Afrikaner Calvinistic socio-cultural framework.

Further forms of witnessing my educational influence on others, included sharing my story with my students, influencing them to embark their own self-studies and to improve their practices. It also included making my work public and telling my story through presentations at academic seminars as well as my exhibition and catalogue. I

conducted a walkabout during the exhibition which allowed in-depth discussion and engagement with the work, the research process and creative process.

All of these forms of ‘publication’ allowed for:

- My research and personal story to be told
- My lived experiences to provide insight into, to contribute to and to create awareness of our South African history
- For others to talk about their own experiences by listening or witnessing my story
- Conversations about our shared yet unique pasts
- Transformation of my self as well as that of my mother
- Potential transformation of my community by engaging in the conversation
- Critical social action by delivering critique on a problematic past that promoted gender inequalities

Through these conversations came debate and critical engagement in the subject matter. It allowed people to engage in the conversation without feeling intimidated, as the artworks and the catalogue provided a platform for discussion.

The exhibition also made my story available for critics, such as the interview with an art critic who wrote an online article about the exhibition. Through this interview I was able to provide information on the methodology as well as the context of my story. As the interview was published online, meant that it could reach a wide audience (see Annexure A). O’Connor (2009:43) suggests that we find meaning by telling and narrating our stories. It is through the writing/narrating/telling/presenting of that story that we formulate meaning (ibid:56).

I have discovered new meanings and created knowledge of my identity and the meaning of my creative practice through the telling of my story. I believe that the value of making my work public was the potential transformation of others embarking on a similar journey of awareness, or at least the development of awareness and the sharing of their stories. De Lange, Mitchell and Stuart (2007:3) further suggest that “these approaches also can have a strong therapeutic purpose along with one of social

change". They (ibid:3) argue that although visual methodologies, and I believe for that matter self-study and any form of representation, needs to be

...located in the social and public, we would also argue that there is a need for greater recognition for the role of the visual in working with the personal and the private and indeed for considering how autobiographical work through the visual itself contributes to social change.

I believe that the telling of our stories enrich our history and our understanding thereof. It provides us with direction for where we are going, as Pithouse (as cited by Pithouse, Mitchell and Moletsane 2009:17) says: "this particular research/inquiry is influenced by past experiences and memories and that it will, in turn, affect future experiences".

## **6 CONCLUSION**

My journey of awareness provided me with a platform and process for critical self-reflection and awareness. Through critical self-reflection I was able to contextualise and situate my self within my Afrikaner Calvinistic community and upbringing. My journey of awareness assisted in answering my research question: "How do I improve my understanding of my practice?" My lived experiences informed my practice, it served as my inspiration, and improving the understanding of my practice required an understanding of my social and cultural context and personal history. Through a living theories methodology I was able to develop an understanding of my life story and history, through critical reflection I re-evaluated my values and beliefs and by developing 'living standards of judgement' it allowed for transformation of my art practice by improving its quality and personal and social relevance.

My art practice served as a tool for action and reflection allowing for 'reflection-in-action' as well as 'reflection-on-action' and 'reflection-for-action'. It became a tool for becoming aware of self-knowledge, knowledge generation and the expression of that knowledge. Knowledge generation happened through the making of my art work, as well as engaging in visual text (such as family photographs), scribal text (such as poetry) and through conversations and the telling of my and other's stories. My practice

transformed from nostalgic work to work with personal and social significance and relevance by telling my life story as well as contributing to our life history.

My practice created a platform for public discussion allowing for others to tell their stories, as well as to create awareness of a social concern. My journey of awareness allowed for transformation of the self, as well as the transformation of my mother and the potential transformation of others, such as my past community or those that engaged in my work. My work was made public through various platforms. These included a solo art exhibition, a printed and digital catalogue, and a walkabout during the exhibition that allowed for a question and answer session as well as sharing of stories. It further extended into my blog ([www.narethapretorius.wordpress.co.za](http://www.narethapretorius.wordpress.co.za)) that allowed for international exposure; it also appeared in the news paper (Mail & Guardian, see Annexure B) and as an interview on [www.artthrob.co.za](http://www.artthrob.co.za) (see Annexure A). My exhibition, Onthaal Onthul, allowed for conversations to happen as it allowed for participants and viewers to reflect on their own experiences and life histories. It also exposed the public to self-study methodologies. Having the various platforms even allowed people to respond in their own way, such as emailing me directly instead of having to engage in a public forum. My story gave them the courage to speak about their own concerns and lived experiences. What my self-study is evident of, is its ability to transform, not just the self, but others as well.

My journey of awareness created my living theory, as well as the development and implementation of my “living standards of judgement” (Whitehead 2008c:1). My “living standards of judgement” are values and beliefs that can continue to be implemented and improved on. Although this paper is evidence of a self-study completed, this does not imply that my journey of awareness ends here. Knowing the self and its complexities is a continuous journey of awareness which requires continuous critical reflection, improvement and development to ensure a practice and life enriched by values. My challenge is to continue this action/reflection process in order to improve my practice and to remain aware of my transforming being.

## **7 GLOSSARY OF AFRIKAANS TERMS**

Afrikaner Calvinism – Refers to a dogma following the teachings of Johannes Calvin believing that the white Afrikaners are the chosen people that will be saved by God on the day of reconciliation.

Broeders – A term used in the Afrikaner Churches to describe the men, meaning brothers.

Dominee – Meaning minister or preacher.

Gelofte Dag – Meaning ‘Day of the Vow’, it refers to the battle between the Afrikaners and the Zulus at Bloodriver in 1838. The Afrikaners made a promise to God that they will remember their victory and dedicate the 16<sup>th</sup> December to praising God. The 16<sup>th</sup> December was renamed ‘Day of Reconciliation’ post the 1994 democratic elections by remembering our past and how we have overcome its challenges.

Huisbesoek – Meaning home visit; a custom within the Afrikaner Calvinistic culture where the minister visits a family, often accompanied by an elder or deacon.

Kaffertjies – A term derived from the word Kaffer/Kaffir, referring to young black people. In the context of this study it is a colloquial term used by fishermen to describe a holder used to hold a fishing rod.

Kaffir/Kaffer - Kaffir is an offensive and derogative term used for ‘black’ people during Apartheid. It originates from Arabic Muslims during the eighteenth century calling black people from Africa this term, suggesting that they were atheists. Later the term was used for slaves in the Cape (Giliomee 2004:14).

Potjie – A colloquial term used for a three-legged cast iron pot

Safari Suite – A term used to describe an informal suit made out of khaki material, usually a combination of a square-cut short sleeve collar shirt worn with a pair of 'formal' looking shorts. The safari suit became quite popular during the 1970s and was typically worn by conservative white Afrikaner men, typically worn by farmers.

Susters – A term used in the Afrikaner Churches to describe the women, meaning sisters.

Transvaal – A province in the northern regions of South Africa that was renamed Gauteng post the 1994 democratic elections.

Uitverkore Volk – Meaning the chosen people or chosen nation. The term refers to the preaching of the Reformed Church suggesting that the white Afrikaners are the chosen people that will be saved by God.

Veldskool – Meaning field schools, schools outdoors or 'wilderness schools' as they are sometimes called in English. These outings promoted Afrikaner ideology during Apartheid and provided survival skills to the youth.

Volksmoeder – A term used to describe the Afrikaner women that endured the Great Trek in 1838, a term that literally means 'mother of the nation'.

Voortrekkers – An Afrikaans youth organisation that promoted Afrikaner ideology, similar to the scouts.

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## **Annexure A: Artthrob Interview by Robyn Cook**

Cook, R. 2011. Interview with Naretha Pretorius. Available WWW:

<http://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/Interview-with-Naretha-Pretorius.aspx> (Accessed 29 July 2011).

### **Interview with Naretha Pretorius**

Robyn Cook speaks to Naretha Pretorius about her current show at artSpace Durban, 'Onthaal Onthul'.

Robyn Cook: Hi Naretha. Thanks for taking the time out to chat to me. Perhaps as a starting point to this conversation you could take us through the title of the show, 'Onthaal Onthul', 'onthaal' means 'formal reception', and 'onthul' means to 'reveal', - the words seem to be playing a tug of war with each other?

Naretha Pretorius: They do in some way, 'onthaal' can be an informal gathering of friends, however this 'onthaal' refers to the more formal function governed by etiquette. The main text of the exhibition is focused on notions of etiquette; good manners, good serving etiquette, social conduct and so forth. The subtext is the 'reveal' of gender inequalities within this context, framed specifically in the Afrikaner Calvinist context where the behaviour of women were strictly prescribed, thus with the notion of 'serving' and 'service' emerging. 'Onthaal Onthul' is a personal celebration and commemoration as well as a social critique on my personal history, lived experience and social context.

RC: I was struck by the methodological approach to your work. On the surface it appears very much a 'revealing' a sort of intimate portrait of your past growing up in an 'Afrikaans Calvinist' community. However, when we were chatting earlier about the process of auto-ethnography, the work seems a less subjective and more critical narrative? Do you agree?

NP: Like any ethnography, an auto-ethnography requires critical engagement with the ethnic group being studied, which requires a form of objectivity (distance) as well as subjectivity (own experience). My family and my community along with myself became the ethnic group, and it was through critical observation, participation, awareness and engagement with the self and 'the other' that I became aware of the beliefs, values, behaviour and social conduct that underpinned the Afrikaner Calvinistic culture. The challenge with any form of self-study, is to remove yourself from what you know, in order to re-think and re-construct your understanding, but at the same time it requires an intense investigation and moving very close to what you (possibly already) know. My study can be described as a 'journey of awareness' as the main aim is to develop an awareness of what you already know, but did not know that you knew it. With awareness, comes transformation and understanding. It was this 'new found' understanding that I exhibited and wanted to open for public debate and engagement. It is thus a personal and intimate process, but the outcome is made for public engagement, challenging the level of personal intent vs social concern and contribution. The personal narrative thus becomes part of a social narrative, contributing to our knowledge of the socio-political 'master' narrative.

RC: 'Ethnography' as a scientific study of the 'other' is often treated with a degree of scepticism in terms of its ethical positioning. Is there a degree of objectification within the process of auto-ethnography?

NP: I believe that objectification can only really happen if you did not critically engage in the study, and if you did not conduct it with absolute honesty. I believe that auto-ethnography has a sense of authenticity to it, and a level of integrity to the research, if done 'correctly'. De Lange and Grossi state that the self in a self-study becomes the 'researcher, the research and as the researched', Marcel Jousse complements this notion by saying that the self becomes a 'laboratory of awareness'. In a self-study you are the 'subject' and your own socio-political and cultural framework becomes the ethnography, and if a self-study is done with honesty, then it is done 'correctly'. It is this level of honesty that produces authentic research and through critical self-awareness and reflection that it is done with integrity. To ensure your work is done 'correctly', also

means that you should be willing to make your work public, to allow for public engagement and to be scrutinised. An auto-ethnography requires critical analyses and in many ways scientific analyses such as action research and other systematic methodologies for analyses. Different from ethnography, auto-ethnography means that you are also an insider, and thus rely on your lived experience as well as listening, observing and participating in the cultural activities, but this time with a researcher lens on. Doing this kind of research, takes courage, as you have to be honest, and to be honest can sometimes be quite painful and revealing. Self-study requires a level of inclusionality and all of this avoids it from becoming objectified.

RC: What I found very interesting about your show was that it appears as a definite process. There is a literal shift in medium, as well as a subtler thematic shift from a 'sweet' nostalgia to a darker shadow of the same reminiscence. Did you set out to work this way?

NP: Yes, a good observation Robyn! I deliberately wanted to illustrate the shift and relationship between the bittersweet memories and the progress from nostalgia to revelation. The medium moves from 'sweet' to 'considerate', as much as the narrative does the same. The exhibition starts with childhood nostalgia, longing for times gone by, remembering my family and those that have passed away. The medium for this was equally 'innocent' and unchallenged. This narrative is interrupted by the title 'Onthaal Onthul' and invites the audience into the critical narrative and the formal structure of what an 'onthaal' entails: doilies, teaspoons, teacups all neatly aligned and perfectly placed and presented, revealing a cultural framework that was governed by strict conservative beliefs. There is a sense of perfection, neatness, and repetition that conveys conformation and tradition. The work becomes more conceptual with more complex messages and subtexts than what the childhood section was, it moved from being reminiscent to work delivering commentary. The 'darker shadow' delivers critical comments on power relations such as gender inequality and racial inequalities within institutional or social structures (such as the church and marriage).

RC: The materiality of your sculptural work seems to subvert the original function of some of the objects depicted, so doilies become rock hard, silver teaspoons beautiful

but functionless and so on. The objects become almost a twisted alter-ego of their initial purpose?

NP: I wanted to point out the frivolousness of the objects especially within an etiquette framework, yet I wanted to move away from its original function, and provide it with a new one. The doily series refer to packs of mass produced paper doilies, here they become a new product of mass production; casts of doilies that can be reproduced. Although the image engraved into it remains unique, like the individual, the doily on the other hand creates the cultural framework of tradition, indoctrination and conformation, thus a product of mass production. The dress code and social conduct as portrayed in these doilies, suggest the imprint of tradition and social conform. The teaspoons are also casts that are reproduced, they are in this case pointing out how we duplicate or replicate tradition. There are dozens of teaspoons neatly fitting within a wooden box (tray) and the wooden box (trays) are themselves repeated, suggesting a sense of tradition passed on from one generation to another. Although as an object beautiful, they are just a replica of the one next to it. The work plays with the idea of serve/service/servant/servitude and comments on the role of the women within their families, community, congregation and Afrikaner Calvinistic society.

RC: I thought the positioning of the show was quite interesting with Welcome Danca's 'The History of Umkhonto we Sizwe: Told Through Artistic Expression' opposite your space. Was this a deliberate curatorial decision? How do you think the works played off of each other?

NP: It was coincidental and not a planned conversation. I think it was a good coincidence; it presents two very different narratives with a similar intention of self-reflection and social commentary.

**1 Comments** | [Add a Comment](#)

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**Bonnie Kaplan**

Hi Naretha, Your exhibition to me was a celebration like a wedding. It was the celebration of the union between your past present and future. It left me feeling privileged and spiritual about being allowed into such an intimate space. I feel awe inspired by your journey through your art. I also found it very fascinating that Welcome Danca had his exhibition at the same time as yours. Significant. I have spoken to Welcome and he comes from a really good point of view as an artist. I admire him too. This experience in sharing your journey with you will have a very special place in my life. Bonnie

## Annexure B: Mail&Guardian Newspaper Exposure

Sudheim, A. 2011. If there is one thing you do this week... Visual Art. *Mail & Guardian*, June 24: 11

*Mail & Guardian*

# Entertainment

## If there's one thing you do this week ...

### Visual art

■ Artist Naretha Pretorius engages in a deconstruction of her identity in her solo exhibition **Onthaal Onthul**. Interrogating the various forces that have shaped her, the artist is primarily concerned with history, geography, language, culture and, most importantly, memory. Having grown up and lived in Pretoria for more than 20 years, a large chunk of the forces that formed Pretorius's sensibilities took place in the context of an archetypal white Afrikaans family environment. *Onthaal* means "formal reception" and *onthul* means "to reveal", so we are invited to see Pretorius reveal herself – figuratively speaking, of course. Her life is on a slide under a microscope and we see a subtle dialectic at play: the role of model parents is as much circumspect as it is sentimental and, enamoured as she is with a seemingly idyllic youth, Pretorius's work is lined with a darkness that brushes ominously at the soft-focused fringes.

>>artSPACE durban, 3 Millar Road, off Umgeni Road. Opens Monday June 27 at 6.30pm. Tel: 031 312 0793. Visit [www.artspace-durban.com](http://www.artspace-durban.com).



Naretha Pretorius's exhibition *Onthaal Onthul* interrogates the various forces that have shaped her at artSPACE durban on June 27

### Our Lives of Deckadence

■ Our Lives of Deckadence is an exciting exhibition of photography, art and film that showcases skate-board culture in South Africa. An initiative of Working Class, Verb and Revolution, the show is a collection of work celebrating a love for skateboarding by some of South Africa's biggest underground talents, including Gavin Scott, Craig Scott, Darren Jacoby, Tyrone Bradley, Sam Clark, Brett Shaw, Richard Hart, Skullboy, Tokyo-Go-Go, Christian Mugnai, Bruce Mackay, Warwick Kay, Bryce Louw, Dos, Paul Senyol, Jean de Wet and other Verb artists.

>>Gallery 415, 415 Umgeni Road. Visit [www.gallery415.co.za](http://www.gallery415.co.za).



Durban rock-electronica band Rise turn in a rare live performance of their strikingly unique blend of music at Mojos on June 24

will be kept thoroughly entertained by the zany antics of the two wolves, an over-protective mother and Little Red Riding Hood's adventures on the way to grandma's house.

>>Catalina Theatre, Wilson's Wharf. June 29 to July 6, shows at 11am daily. Tickets R40 or R55 including a boat trip around the harbour. Tel: 031 305 6889.

■ Following requests of "more of the same" after the sold-out success of their musical tribute to Queen, Mzansi Productions has created **Divas of Music and Dance**, a brand-new show. The song-and-dance spectacular features the music made famous by such legends as Tina Turner, Shania Twain, Celine Dion, Rihanna, Mariah Carey and Edith Piaf, and choreography is by highly

Figure 34: Mail & Guardian - full article

## Visual art

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Naretha Pretorius's exhibition *Onthaal Onthul* at artSPACE durban on June 27



Figure 35: Detail of Mail & Guardian Article

## **Annexure C: Onthaal Onthul Catalogue**

The catalogue was presented as a book at the exhibition. For the purpose of this dissertation, the catalogue was inserted and presented as part of the paper for ease of reference.