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### *Here, there and in-between: South African women and the diasporic condition*

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### Here, There and In-Between: South African Women and the Diasporic Condition

#### Marion Arnold

They hang suspended in space - two small dolls - clipped and threaded to a rope. They hang between large plants, a black *Aeonium* 'Zwartkop' from Africa and a white iris from Europe. The black woman doll, wearing a red dress and green head scarf, holds a blue bag. She bears a grey bundle on her head and a baby is strapped to her back. The white girl doll is devoid of clothes but wears a bonnet, delicately modelled. She is damaged: her head is perfect but her legs are broken and she has no arms. Below these female figures two black and white guinea fowl confront one another, their distinctive red heads engaged in dialogue above a small, crocheted white mat. Two other *hanga*<sup>1</sup> turn their backs on the argument. The bottom of this painting (Fig. 1) – for I am describing painted realities - is filled with an embroidered cloth patterned with brightly coloured, stylised pigs, crocodiles and words.

The words spell out 'Portrait of a Woman from Africa'. But there are two female forms – a girl-child and an adult woman – so which is the woman *from* Africa? Does 'portrait' refer to the painted likeness of the white girl, who will become a woman, or to the black mother, or is the painting a 'portrait' of a woman artist 'from Africa'? The title suggests that verbal language complicates visual meaning. We cannot presume that all Africans are black, especially in the south of this immense continent. African history is characterised by myriad peoples and virtually unceasing, seemingly endless migrations; people are always from somewhere and are going to

somewhere else, through choice or compulsion. They are here, then there, or are in-between.

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In the West the term the 'African Diaspora' has become synonymous with the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its consequences within the Americas and Caribbean. This is only one African diaspora but it is the one which is best known, due largely to African-American scholars. Living in a country richly endowed with universities, departments of African Studies and academic publishers, they have the resources to research, write and circulate their history. To a lesser extent black Britons also explore an African diaspora characterised firstly by the westward passage of people to the Caribbean, and then by the twentieth-century entry of Jamaican Commonwealth citizens into Britain, commencing with the arrival of the Empire Windrush in June 1948.

Africa is a huge continent<sup>2</sup>. In addition to experiencing significant diaporas out of its land mass, it has known innumerable internal migrations, which are not linked by common heritage, racial descent or shared meanings of terminology such as nation, migration, immigrant, emigrant, and diaspora. The historical settlement of peoples in West and Central Africa was very different to the migrations within the Eastern and Southern regions, which continued well into the nineteenth century and the age of colonialism, serving to complicate ideas about race, tribe, ethnicity and ultimately, nation.<sup>3</sup>

Since the diasporas of Southern Africa, and their manifestations within visual culture, have received relatively little critical academic attention outside of the region<sup>4</sup>, this study focuses on diaspora within historical and contemporary South African society, and specifically on the ways in which the diasporic condition has affected South African women. While the original meaning of diaspora defines the process as one of *enforced* dispersal, I will consider the intersection of individual and

social circumstances which suggest that choice (personal agency) and compulsion (imposed action) cannot be neatly separated when investigating the reasons generating dispersal or relocation.<sup>5</sup> Although diaspora is a historically verifiable movement of people, I suggest that the *diasporic condition* is the experience and subsequent narration of processes of disruption, dispersal, relocation and adaptation to new experiences of place and domicile. It is, therefore, shaped by individual and collective memory (consciousness of past places, behaviours and cultures) and current lived experience (actual interaction with physical space and place). Being within the diasporic condition, aware of both 'here' and 'there', compels acknowledgement of both past and present in order to predicate a future based on the potential to reconcile identities determined by ethnicity, gender, religion, language and generation.

Modern South Africa, originating as a British dominion created by the Act of Union in 1910, is uniquely positioned to demonstrate that diasporas are not homogenised packages of causes and predictable effects but are historically, geographically and culturally specific. South Africa's population is comprised of white settlers, predominantly of Dutch, British, and French Huguenot ancestry, nine major black groups,<sup>6</sup> a mixed race 'Coloured' group, and Asian people, mainly of Indian ancestry. There is a plethora of origin and dispersal narratives, inflected by geography, power struggles, and ideology, and these are articulated in eleven official South African languages. Multiple versions of the contested past are ever present in many guises.

The borders of many modern African nation states are not defined by the natural boundaries of physical geography or by settlements of different ethnic/linguistic groups, but were the results of nineteenth-century imperialism and political mapping. At the 1884-5 Berlin Conference the great European powers divided the African continent into spheres of influence established by arbitrarily drawn borders. Ethnic groups were artificially divided and political and cultural realities were

positioned in opposition to one another. South Africa was not part of this dispensation; the concept of 'nation', equally fraught, was different and had a long, complex origin. Indeed, the modern Republic of South Africa generates all the difficulties of identifying the constituents of a 'nation'.<sup>7</sup>

### Settlement histories.

The original inhabitants of southern Africa were nomadic hunter-gatherers, the San (still commonly called the Bushmen) who were partially displaced by the pastoralist Khoekhoen (popularly called 'Hottentots' by European colonists). While Negroid, Bantu-speaking peoples moved southwards down Africa's east coast, the southern tip of the continent, sparsely populated only by the Khoesan, was settled by Europeans - the Dutch, who established a garden at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. Their eyes on the lucrative spice trade in the Far East, the Dutch wanted access to fresh fruit and vegetables for their sailors and Jan van Riebeeck was charged by the VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*) with establishing a base at the Cape. The settlement became a Dutch colony in 1679 and, during the Napoleonic wars, from 1795-1802 the Cape Colony was occupied by the British.

The second British occupation of the Cape in 1806 was permanent and it created lasting friction between Dutch and English settlers. Ultimately this contributed to the epic white diaspora, the Great Trek, which began in the 1830s. Disgruntled with British rule at least 12,000 Voortrekker Boers and their servants moved out of the Cape Colony to the African hinterland, encountering the Xhosa on the eastern frontier and the militant Zulu further north, and fighting battles which were subsequently mythologized in Afrikaner history. They also fought the peoples whom the strong Zulu kingdom had dispersed in the *Mfecane* (the crushing or scattering)<sup>8</sup>. This nineteenth century southern African diasporic displacement of black groups, fomented by the powerful Zulu king, Shaka, made land claims difficult to substantiate;

no single ethnic group could demonstrate permanent, stable settlement of particular regions north of the Cape Colony.

One of the results of the *Mfecane* was to increase the supply of slaves to traders operating from Indian Ocean ports. This diasporic slave trade out of eastern Africa, especially from the ports in modern Tanzania, fed the South American and Indian Ocean slave markets and brought African slaves to Cape Town during the Dutch administration to join other slaves who had originated in Angola<sup>9</sup>. The Cape slave community was constituted of black Africans and Malays from Indonesia and thus the colony was the final place of domicile of different diasporas whose people contributed to the mixed race, Afrikaans-speakers - the 'Coloureds' (originally the Cape Coloureds) of modern South Africa.<sup>10</sup>

Under British administration the Cape Colony was populated mainly by English and Dutch settlers, mixed race slaves/freed slaves and a small population of indigenous Khoesan. Bantu-speaking Xhosa, moving through and settling in the Eastern Cape, were fighting frontier wars with the British. The balance between the different racial groups altered in the 1820s and 1830s. The British government actively promoted emigration to the Cape and a scheme to populate the newly proclaimed Albany district in the Eastern Cape saw the arrival of over 4000 Britons in the first half of 1820. In the mid-1830s the Dutch *boers* (farmers) began The Great Trek and moved north to found independent Boer republics. The earliest was the short-lived Republic of Natalia; the two that endured were the South African Republic (or Transvaal, recognised by Britain in 1852) and Orange Free State (recognised in 1854).

In 1842 Britain gained additional territory - Natal. A few traders and hunters had settled at Port Natal in 1824, maintaining a working relationship with the Zulu under Shaka. The Voortrekkers established the Republic of Natalia in 1839, it submitted to the British three years later and the formal annexation of Natal to the Cape was proclaimed in 1845. The regional population – British, Voortrekker, Zulu,

and people displaced by the *Mfecane* – was in flux and the issue of settlement and land ownership under British administration was contentious and complex. The racial mix of Natal was enriched by the arrival of another immigrant group – Hindu Indians who began arriving as indentured labour in 1860. Contracted as agricultural workers, they could get free passage back to India after ten years, but those who completed their contracts could choose to remain and provision was made to allocate land to them. Indian immigration increased; by the end of the nineteenth century about 100,000 Indians were settled in Natal including Muslim traders, and the young lawyer, Mahatma Gandhi.

The Second South African (Anglo-Boer) War (1899-1902) resulted in the defeat of the Boers and surrender of their independence. In 1910 the four British colonies south of the Limpopo river were subsumed into the Union of South Africa, an expedient move to create a 'nation' constituted of provinces subject to both provincial and centralised government and forged from fractious and diverse regional identities with separate histories of migration and settlement, contradictory political agendas, a wide range of cultures and different ethnic populations. The new Union of South Africa was a British dominion until 1961 when it severed ties with the United Kingdom and declared itself a republic. It withdrew from the Commonwealth of Nations to which it was readmitted only after the 1994 democratic elections.

The final chapter of twentieth-century South African history in which diaspora plays a significant role occurs under the Afrikaner Nationalist government which ruled the country as a white minority regime from 1948-1994. A key component of Nationalist ideology was apartheid – racial separation,<sup>11</sup> and its implementation led to the forced removal of peoples deemed to have a 'homeland' other than the place where they currently resided. Re-zoning legislation also resulted in the forced removals of established urban Black and Coloured communities, notably those of Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town, to areas on city peripheries. In effect this social engineering attempted to consolidate white economic

power, ensure that the white population farmed the most productive land, and disempower urban black people. Hendrik Verwoerd's 'separate development' policies caused wholesale disruption of cohesive communities and urban-rural resettlement compelled black people to re-establish their lives in remote Bantustans (homelands) that were literally foreign but were conceived by white legislators to have been places of historic origin. Eventually the Nationalists conferred 'self-government' and subsequently 'independence' on their patchwork of homelands.<sup>12</sup>

An adjunct of apartheid legislation and illiberal Nationalist government was a diaspora out of Africa in the late twentieth century as people - black, white and coloured - who opposed apartheid left South Africa by choice or to avoid arrest for their political activities.<sup>13</sup> This dispersal saw South Africans seeking refuge in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and African countries. For some this was exile during which they pursued the liberation struggle until they returned in 1994; for others it was permanent relocation. For all who left South Africa, the diasporic condition was a reality.

This brief outline of settlement patterns within South Africa indicates that migration and movement are characteristic of the region. The concept of diaspora has been and still is a reality for much of the population, being part of collective memory, apartheid history and contemporary experience. Within South Africa all ethnic groups can claim ancestral diasporic identity (coming from somewhere) and many have personal experiences of dispersal (being forced to go somewhere else).

### Diaspora, Apartheid and Visual Culture

Diaspora entails movement. Bodies move from familiar spaces to new, unfamiliar realities; a sense of belonging is replaced by an awareness of being foreign or different. But the spirit and imagination have the capacity to construct and occupy a mental space between past and present for far longer than the body which must adapt and locate shelter, food, water, the bus route etc. in the here-and-now. While

external, strategic processes of adjustment and survival occur, and feelings of loss and alienation are processed, individuals may also exist in the space in-between where they are cognisant of an immediate reality and, simultaneously, are suffused by memories. Thus observed images of the here-and-now (the look of the street where one lives or the appearance of the corner shop owner) jostle with visual memory flashes of 'home'. 'There' and 'here' intermingle as a stream of consciousness in the inner eye.

Homi Bhabha's useful theory of social hybridisation as a negotiation of cultural identity in the face of encounters with difference emphasises not what can be determined – two cultures, two places – but what is amorphous, which he identifies as 'the in-between' or 'the third space'.<sup>14</sup> The use of space as a trope, helpful when discussing cultural acclimatisation, is almost self-evident with reference to visual art, which is characterised by and situated in space. Moreover, to be a visual artist is to know that meaningful art is invariably produced by hybridisation – fusions of influences, recontextualised appropriations, combinations of old and new - these things make art. The challenges for the diasporian artist become: how do I use my personal circumstances positively to facilitate the development of a hybrid artistic identity which reconciles past and present, heals divided consciousness and fuses memory with new experiences? How do I *represent* my relationship with places of domicile and different cultures, and express my ideas and perceptions visually and spatially? These issues can be discussed with reference to representations of South African women and work by South African women within art and visual culture.

After the Nationalist government assumed power in South Africa in 1948, racial classification resulted in duplicated facilities, unequal in quality ('white' beaches were sandy; 'non-white' beaches were rocky and sometimes polluted), or denial of resources for Black and Coloured people if the White government considered them to be inappropriate. Coloured and Black children received inferior educations to those provided for Whites and 'art' (as opposed to 'craft') tuition was available only to White

children at government schools. Separate tertiary education denied Black students opportunities to study art until a Department of Fine Art was established at Fort Hare University in 1971. For much of the twentieth century South African art was defined as painting, sculpture and printmaking produced by White artists and the small minority of Black artists who had been educated at mission schools and through non-governmental initiatives.<sup>15</sup>

During the late 1970s, when legitimate channels of political action were banned, art imagery became increasingly politicised; cultural work by artists and writers, often using strategies of encoded or metaphorical expression, commented on the racist ideology underpinning apartheid. Since the phenomenon and practice of racism were intimately related to historical settlement patterns and forced removals it is possible to discern a critique on diaspora within South African visual culture.

#### Women and the Diasporic Condition under Apartheid

When the Nationalist party came to power in 1948, part of apartheid ideology was the 'different but equal' mantra, but the absurdity of this utterance is nowhere better demonstrated than when considering the socio-cultural position of women. Whatever their racial classification, women were subject to patriarchal discrimination by men. So dominant was the issue of race within South African politics that gender issues were marginalised in public debates and feminism was, to its detriment, invariably positioned in opposition to nationalism. This was accepted by many women including conservative Afrikaners who supported apartheid, and black women working within struggle politics.<sup>16</sup>

Opportunities to unite women through interracial contact became increasingly difficult once apartheid legislation took effect. Interaction functioned most effectively within the trade union movement and ineffectually in the cultural arena. Here, white women, belonging to the privileged ruling minority, had access to art tuition while coloured and black women had almost no opportunities to engage with the western-

oriented South African artworld. Moreover, their production of traditional artefacts, such as ceramics, basketry and beadwork, was not considered to be 'art'. Within this framework of inequality it is possible to locate evidence in visual art of the power of collective memory originating in historic migrations, and politically engaged visual statements about identity under apartheid. Such art speaks of the condition of being 'here, there and in-between'.

In the history of White South Africa, the Great Trek (1835-54) assumed mythic status within Afrikaner memory. This movement of thousands of voortrekkers was a classic diaspora because the trekkers claimed that British rule and conflict with the Xhosa had made their lives in the Cape Colony intolerable, compelling them to leave their homes to seek new territory in the hinterland where they could establish self government. The Great Trek narrative, which shaped Afrikaner identity, emphasized courage and resilience; it told tales of wagons and oxen moving over difficult terrain, of heroic male leadership and battles won by god-fearing people who triumphed over fierce, heathen warriors<sup>17</sup>. The stories were laced with the conviction that the British were perfidious, the Blacks were uncivilised, and the trekkers were righteous people who had a god-given right to land and nationhood in Africa.

The centenary of the Great Trek was celebrated in 1938 with a re-enactment of the historic migration. Wagons, with men, women and children in nineteenth-century dress criss-crossed South Africa, and were accorded a tumultuous and emotional reception by Afrikaners countrywide. The final celebrations were held at Monument Hill on the outskirts of Pretoria on 16<sup>th</sup> December, the Day of the Vow, and the cornerstone for the Voortrekker Monument was laid. Inaugurated in 1949, the authoritarian Monument was designed to symbolise Afrikaner nationhood and memorialise Great Trek history. Sixty-four synthetic-granite ox wagons, circling the cubic Monument, form a symbolic *laager* acknowledging the battle of Blood River and the covenant with God, which was believed to have granted victory over the Zulu. Marble reliefs in the Hall of Heroes tell the story of the Great Trek, foregrounding the

male protagonists. At the Monument entrance, a large stature of a Voortrekker mother and children by Anton van Wouw (1862-1945) depicts the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation). With one exception, Laurika Postma (1903-1987), the architect and sculptors associated with the Monument artworks were men. After considerable debate, women were permitted to execute a narrative frieze of tapestries designed by artist W.H. Coetzer.<sup>18</sup> Installed in the Monument basement in 1961, the tapestries were removed from this unsuitable space in 1966 and sent to the Voortrekker Museum and, in 2000, they were they reinstalled inside the Monument in the room containing Piet Retief's cenotaph.

So successful was the 1938 re-enactment of the Great Trek that it generated a replica to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Trek in 1988. Fifty years had made a huge difference to the politics of remembrance. The centenary celebrations were held before the Nationalists came to power; in 1988 they had governed for forty years, implemented apartheid and ensured that their job reservation policy provided Afrikaners with employment. However, South Africa was a pariah in the world: cultural, sporting and economic sanctions had been imposed; the Black Nationalist and Communist parties were banned and their leaders were imprisoned or in exile; the army was fighting a guerrilla war and emergency regulations were in place to contend with internal unrest. The country was also experiencing economic stagnation, high unemployment and record inflation. Pressure to initiate reforms was increasing but the government also faced the problem of Afrikaner extremism. Schisms within the ranks of the *volk* emerged openly in the early 1980s when right wing Nationalists, distrustful of what they considered to be the reformist inclinations of P.W. Botha, broke away from the Nationalist Party.<sup>19</sup> By 1988, as Grundlingh and Sapire (1991:293) observe, the government knew a reform programme 'required the support of English speakers and "moderate" black groups, precisely those historically portrayed as "enemies" in traditional "Great Trek" representations. Because of the need to reach new audiences, it was no longer possible to beat the ethnic drum'.<sup>20</sup>

Eric Hobsbawm notes that 'invented tradition' is invoked more frequently when a society feels threatened by change<sup>21</sup> and in 1988 Afrikaners had either to adapt to changed circumstances and acknowledge the need for socio-political reform, or re-commit themselves to values inherited from the past, which were believed to offer a moral compass and definition of White nationhood. The nature and objectives of the historic diaspora were contested and the Trek re-enactment was used selectively by different Afrikaner factions to support different versions of trekker identity, namely forward-looking adaptability or backward-looking reassurance. Divisions within Afrikanerdom were not overcome and there were two rival versions of the Trek, each with their own memorabilia, rhetoric and interpretations of the past but using the same symbolism – wagons and 'traditional' dress. Documentary photographs of the 1988 Great Trek<sup>22</sup> re-enactment render a complex political commentary on the ways in which the historic white diaspora was used as the origin of political myth and 'invented tradition', and simultaneously reveal the politics of 1988.

Photojournalist Louise Gubb's<sup>23</sup> colour photograph of the Great Trek re-enactment (Fig. 2) is captioned, '*December 1988. Traditionally attired Afrikaner women have their hair done at a portable salon while celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Great Trek*'. The exclusive focus on women is unusual in the Trek imagery of art and popular culture. Even when idealised as *volksmoeders*, women are invariably portrayed supporting male enterprise but here we have an all female situation juxtaposing past and present. Women, participating in the staged Trek in period costumes, utilise the services of a modern hairdresser equipped with a hand-held electric hairdryer (left foreground) and surrounded by innumerable commercial hair products in plastic containers.

The attention devoted to hair is significant on several levels. Dominating the centre space, the older woman is having her hair set on rollers, a procedure which will create disciplined waves appropriate for middle-aged femininity but this luxury, unknown to her pioneer forebears, will be hidden under the object that dominates the

photograph literally and symbolically – the traditional white *kappie* (bonnet). The central focus of the image, it is reiterated on the heads of the younger seated women, already fully costumed for their performances on the trek wagons. The *kappie* was practical. Made of white fabric it reflected heat and protected the face but it also enforced tunnel vision and this, metaphorically, gave Afrikaner women a narrow perspective on life.

The photo's spatial structure sustains the dialogue between 'here' (the modern world, and 'there' (the evidence of the past and its enduring hold on collective identity). Mediating between past and present, the mirror offers the space for reflection: the hairdresser and her client confront themselves – the hairdresser works with modern professionalism but her client has committed herself to affirming historical values that must be given physical presence. A tent, functioning as a temporary dressing room for the forthcoming performance, is where the women contrive their appearances as trekkers, relinquishing personal identity to assume the *volksmoeder* stereotype. Although the collision between modern and 'authentic' historical femininity is acted out in the hair salon, this setting renders a deeply ironic comment on Afrikaner identity and their commitment to racial classification.

The Population Registration Act of 1950 required South Africans to be registered as White, Black, or Coloured. When there was doubt – an abandoned baby for instance, or an application for reclassification – the pencil test decided the issue. Negroid peoples have tightly curled hair; Caucasians tend to have straight or loosely waved hair. If a pencil was stuck into hair and it fell out, it 'proved' that the person was White; if it was retained in *kroes hare* (frizzy hair) the person was 'non-white'. Many white Afrikaners held family secrets of ancestors who had children with slaves and some families were constituted of both White and Coloured members. Both Whites and Coloureds spoke Afrikaans but Whites *were* white – according to official evidence - and had to preserve their appearances. The 1950 legislation (amended), stated that a white person was 'a person who in appearance obviously is

a White person ...'.<sup>24</sup> So, here in the hair salon in 1988 bigger issues than vanity are at stake; appearance matters, hair signifies.<sup>25</sup>

Louise Gubb's photograph, through its formal orchestration of colour, the stark, symbolic white *kappies*, the mirror and the chair frames containing the white women, was for a series produced for an illustrated feature article in the *Telegraph* but this particular document can be read as a nuanced, layered critique on the conflicted nature of Afrikaner female identity. Three women have elected to commemorate their diasporic heritage which, in 1988, could not be divorced from the political present of a society under stress. They exist in a provisional space, erected for temporary activity, and in a space in-between the romance of the past and the reality of the present. This is the moment in-between, a time to reflect. The future was to reformulate South African politics: two years later Nelson Mandela walked to freedom. Six years later democratic elections ended long years of apartheid oppression and made an iconic black man the President of the 'new' South Africa.

While White Afrikaners looked to their nineteenth-century migrations to offer the bedrock of their collective identity, the Nationalist government used this same migratory history to control the movements and opportunities of Black and Coloured South Africans in the mid twentieth-century. The declaration of 'historic' homelands in rural South Africa and the proclamation of separate residential areas for different races in urban centres subjected many South Africans to the trauma of forced removals. As artists began to realise that the visual arts offered opportunities for political activism, forced removals, dislocation, and nostalgia for the past occasioned by experiences of loss, emerged as expressive subjects and realist commentary. As previously indicated, Black and Coloured people had limited opportunities to study art and amongst those who completed a formal training course there were very few women. Bongiwe (Bongi) Dhlomo (b. 1956) is one such artist.<sup>26</sup>

She studied at Rorke's Drift, the common usage name of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa's Art and Craft Centre. Started in 1961 by

Swedish printmaker, Peder Gowenius, and based at Rorke's Drift in KwaZulu-Natal from 1963, the Centre was the only residential art and craft school for Blacks in South Africa. The Art School itself was established in 1968 (weaving and ceramics were taught as 'crafts') and about fifty students graduated before the 'fine art' school closed in 1982.

Dhlomo, from a rural, Christian, Zulu background, applied to Rorke's Drift because her job as a typist/clerk lacked challenges and promotion prospects and she had become aware of the emotional power of visual imagery. In conversation with Michael Godby (Godby 2004: 62) she recalled,

On Sunday, June 20, 1976, I bought the *Sunday Times* newspaper ... . On this day I bought the newspaper specifically to catch up on the news of the unfolding students' upheavals in Soweto, Johannesburg. As I opened the newspaper I remember very vividly the shock I experienced from the images spread over more than four pages - all the images were black and white and very graphic in their depiction of what had happened on the 16th of June and the three days thereafter.

Dhlomo was clear on why she wanted to be an artist, telling Brenda Atkinson (1999:118), 'The photographs of the Soweto uprisings had influenced my thinking about images: I wanted to be part of that community that captured history. I believed capturing the same history in images to be as important as writing books, to make sure these events are never forgotten'.

Studying at Rorkes Drift from 1978-9, Dhlomo was exposed to images by the first generation of printmakers (all men) such as John Muafangejo (1943-1987) Azaria Mbatha (b. 1941) Dan Rakgoathe (1907-2004) and Vuminkosi Zulu (1943-1996), who had helped to establish the national and international reputation of the Centre. Although the sixties printmakers had favoured religious imagery (which

sometimes referred obliquely to the present), the politicised artists of the late seventies – such as Dhlomo, Kay Hassan, Pat Mautloa, and Sam Nhlengethwa – located their narratives within the arena of daily events. Recalling her student days in a 2002 interview with Hobbs and Rankin (2003), Dhlomo testified to the increasing politicisation of the student body, and commented on enthusiasm for the Black Consciousness Movement and its charismatic leader, Steve Biko (killed in detention in 1977). By the time she graduated from Rorke's Drift, Bongzi Dhlomo saw herself as a representational artist whose objective was to document history and, in the early 1980s, she produced a body of linocut prints on the theme of forced removals.

These images, a raw and explicit comment on diasporic upheaval, deal directly with a situation which was common throughout South Africa during apartheid. Trained as a printmaker, concerned with telling the stories of her time, committed to the liberation struggle, and attracted by the stark clarity of black and white images (in documentary photographs as well as prints), Dhlomo used a simplified realism with symbolic overtones to structure her message - intense pictorial space. This space probes the experience in-between the familiar and the new, the space of the diasporic condition. Dhlomo does not represent a direct autobiographical experience of diaspora but, working as a politicised black artist, she was painfully aware of the situations inflicted on her community. The descriptive titles of *Removals I-VII* sustain her visual reportage: *The Past .... The Future; Bulldoze the Blackspot; Resettlement; Against our will; From here ... where To?; Aftermath; People are living here.*

In *Aftermath* (1983) (Fig. 3) Dhlomo portrays the havoc wrought by bulldozers which demolished an informal settlement and wrecked communal living. In the aftermath people will be relocated. A man, two women and a child dominate the foreground, pushing into a dark space between what was, and what will be. This black region divides the presence of home (a few belongings) from the absence of home (demolished shacks). As they are depicted from the rear, we do not engage directly with the figures' anguish. We see what they see, sharing their roles as

witnesses of a broken cultural landscape. 'Things' become eloquent: pieces of corrugated metal sheeting that formed shelters; the aggressive bulldozer on the left; remnants of domestic life in the foreground. A pot, kettle, small cupboard, boxes and a black bundle salvaged from the demolitions constitute the only neatly organised element in the picture. Broadly delineated, with an economic use of detail, this image does not portray sensationalised drama but offers testimony of destruction. The physicality of relief printmaking and surface violation by tools that cut and gouge allow Dhlomo's energised lines to transmit emotion and interpret pain and loss in a starkly tonal manner. The work and the series embody the ways in which black and white dominated all South African lives.

Although the *Removals* series was not directly autobiographical, another print draws on an incident that touched Dhlomo's life: *Cemetery Unrest - Premature Resurrection* (1983). When exhibited at The Art Centre, Durban, in 1983 the print bore the caption: 'dedicated to the artist's late father, who up to his death in 1979 was against people being uprooted in the Bergville area. The cemetery that was uprooted in 1981 is in an area where he was Minister – most of the people were buried by him'.<sup>27</sup>

Dhlomo, grieving for her father, pays tribute to him and the people he served; her print makes a poignant comment on the unfeeling State. Executed on an irregularly shaped format symbolising the damage inherent in the depicted incident, the pictorial structure is filled with flat silhouettes and busy, patterned shapes. Resurrection, imagined so often within Western religious imagery, becomes a bizarre South African reality peopled by white soldiers in camouflage holding weapons, black people as witnesses, bones, skeletons and open and closed coffins. The 'unrest' of the title refers to the dead whose eternal peace has been disturbed, not the living, immobile under a watchful military gaze.

The significance of Dhlomo's *Removals* series lies in her subject matter, the time of production - the early eighties - and the reception accorded to her political

images. Her work was shown in 1982 at the Botswana National Museum and Art Gallery during the Gaborone conference, 'Art Towards Social Development and Change in South Africa', and it generated a passionately argued paper by Thami Mnye, who was to be killed in 1985 during a cross-border raid by the South African Defence Force into Botswana.<sup>28</sup> Mnye appealed for collective, community-based cultural activism to create art which would empower and inform communities.

The rupture of lives caused by the forced removals of the apartheid era made 'home' a provisional place. Art helped to define the presence of absence and offered a space for remembrance and contemplation. Amongst women artists who interpreted forced removals are Peggy Delpont, a University of Cape Town lecturer, who executed a large mural in District Six in 1984-5, and a collective of former District Six residents, who made an appliqué commemorating their former home in 1992.<sup>29</sup>

### Post-apartheid South Africa and Diaspora

South Africa's Coloured people, whose very existence was born of diaspora, understand the oppressions and challenges of hybridisation. Their ancestors, from here, there and everywhere, moved south across Africa or arrived at the Cape after long ocean voyages, bringing their languages, cultural memories, oral histories and artefacts. As racial classification was made mandatory under apartheid, some Coloureds accessed family genealogies to determine if they might claim white identity. Others referred to themselves as black and made commitments to resistance politics.

In 1994 South Africa elected a black government after universal suffrage elections. While the post-apartheid era brought political freedom to all South African citizens it conferred a particularly precious freedom on artists – the liberation of imagination. Throughout the eighties, artists endured pressure to make didactic or propagandistic 'struggle art'. In the post-apartheid era they could choose their

subjects and materials, escape the confines of didacticism and engage with the aesthetic concerns and strategies of art practice. Not all artists made the transition to creative freedom with ease or had the confidence to loosen the shackles of South African politics or political correctness. One woman artist who did so with assurance and now has an international profile is Cape-based artist, Berni Searle (b.1964).<sup>30</sup>

Searle's heritage is 'Coloured'. She has used this to play with and play on the connotations of being Coloured, and to examine her own diasporic extended family as well as the Coloured community and its relationship to South African history. In so doing she transforms heritage into art images inflected by postcolonial theory but resolutely visual and transformative in their concerns.

Having trained as a sculptor Searle learnt how to use space and materials to articulate both form and content, but she made her reputation working with installation and lens-based media. Her photographic projects, digital prints and videos require collaboration with photographers (notably Jean Brundrit) and filmmaker, Alberto Iannuzzi. Conceptually, Searle's work benefitted from postgraduate studies of contemporary art theory, particularly the writings of British cultural theorist, Stuart Hall, and his articulation of black Britons' responses to Caribbean diasporic experience. Searle, coming to maturity as an artist in the post-apartheid era, was well positioned to put the past in perspective and to engage with global as well as local concerns. Her work deals eloquently with issues pertinent to global diaspora - loss, concepts of home, being here and there and, significantly, it uses art as a space for creative action and meditation, and for investigating what we see as well as what we know.

One of Searle's important early photographic series originates in local politics, being based on the artist's identity as Coloured. According to the Population Registration Act 1950 (amended) the coloured category has seven sub-categories: Cape Coloured, Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, Other Asiatic and Other Coloured.<sup>31</sup> *Red, Yellow, Brown* (1998) from the *Colour Me* series (1998-2000) features Searle's

motionless, recumbent, naked body covered on three different occasions with coloured, fragrant spices: red paprika, yellow turmeric, and dark brown cloves (on a visual level there is little to differentiate Seale's use of spice from the powdered pigments used by British artist Anish Kapoor). Searle (in Bester 2003) comments,

... I presented myself for observation. I include the number of the exposure along the edges of the prints, drawing attention to the ethnographic role of photography in justifying perceived differences between people, particularly in relation to the racialised and gendered body. The idea of a specimen for inspection is reinforced by the enclosed box of spices below the image of the body, the colours of which don't entirely correspond with the colours of the spice sprinkled over the body (even though its the same substance). I have also incorporated colour test charts at the bottom of each image that are slightly out of focus and as such are not to be relied on.

Searle's 'coloured' body, transformed by coloured spices, turns stigma into a celebration of one of the diasporic strands of Coloured community identity – the Malays from the Far East, renowned for their spicy cooking, now considered thoroughly South African. In its use of spices the work also evokes fragrance and flavour, food as nourishment and as a component of social ritual.<sup>32</sup>

This is emphasised in *Traces* (1999), another configuration of the *Colour Me* series, which alludes to acts of tracing/defining and residues. Three large digital prints of the artist's spice-covered body, photographed from above, confront three images with only the traced imprint of the body discernible in the coloured spice powders.<sup>33</sup> Below the latter are three scales filled with spices but the dials on the scales are fixed and fail to register the spices' weights. The *Colour Me* spice images relate to personal and community identity: one of Searle's maternal great-grandfathers was a cook from Mauritius and another came from Saudi Arabia (the

history of East Africa acknowledges the role of Saudi Arabian traders from medieval times).<sup>34</sup> Seale's representations of presence and absence refer to historical knowledge and gaps in memory, to three-dimensional volumes signifying the realities of people and flat shapes which suggest two-dimensionality of stereotypes.

The communicative power of Searle's works originates in the primacy she accords to the senses. Sight and touch dominate. When she is the subject her eyes are open – she looks, and looks back at the viewer as in *Untitled* (1998) (Fig. 4) from the *Colour Me* series; when she is the object her body feels the powder that masks its sexuality, concealing eroticism. Although she can smell the spices, her mouth is closed and she neither tastes the spices nor indicates that she is a speaking subject controlling the act of interpretation. That is for the viewer.

The *Colour Me* series does more than refer to South Africa's obsession with race and skin colour. It manifests the liberating power of colour within life and art. The rock artists of Europe and Africa used earth pigments not unlike Searle's spice palette to create their images. Their configurations and Searle's representations of the body are not executed tonally in black and white but in colour. *Colour me*, says Searle in her title, using a verb. Her use of the personal pronoun is also important. She places herself in all her works, functioning as 'still life' or object in *Colour Me* and the *Discoloured* series (1999-2000)<sup>35</sup>, and as participant in her video projections, although she is no more a performance artist than was Ana Mendieta or is Cindy Sherman. Searle's female body is at the service of Searle the creative artist.

This body was used poetically in a significant double projection video installation dealing directly with journeying in ways that speak of African diasporas and the twenty-first-century diasporic condition. *Home and Away* (2003),<sup>36</sup> framed in elegantly orchestrated sequences of rhythmic colour and form, was produced during a residency in 2002 at the Montenmedio Arte Contemporaneo Foundation, situated in Vejer, at the southern tip of Spain. The film was shot in the Strait of Gibraltar, which has seen innumerable arrivals and departures of people moving East and West, and

between Europe and Africa. Today that ocean witnesses journeys by desperate economic migrants, fleeing Africa for Europe.

Searle located ways of affirming her regional identity on the toe of Africa where the sea is a constant presence because, at the northern tip of the vast African continent, she encountered the same relational histories of land, water and people. What she knew as a South African resident of Cape Town could be translated into a meditation on the human condition of journeying from choice or compulsion. The Mediterranean, an area of multicultural contact and trade was used to conceptualise a filmic narrative: Searle, dressed in a red skirt with white overlay, piped with polystyrene to make it float, drifts in blue water. One projection features the body moving in and out of the frame, the fabric creating abstract, rhythmic, coloured patterns, while the other projection presents the wide sky, distant coast, and ocean. Visually the imagery is seductively beautiful.

The lyrical quality is enhanced by words whispered in English. The verbs, 'to love, to fear, to leave' are conjugated: 'I love, you love ...' but when 'I fear' is voiced, black dye is released, darkening the water and signifying the dangers of its depths and the risks of sea passages. The ocean becomes the space of displacement, between here and there, and the video ends as the boat on which the camera has been mounted speeds off, replacing intimacy with panoramic emptiness.<sup>37</sup>

Diaspora touched and still touches South African lives in different ways. Historical migrations and conflicts were co-opted by twentieth-century geopolitics to keep enmity and uncertainty alive and well. Louise Gubb's Great Trek re-enactment photographs recorded the way memories of a historical white diaspora were manipulated for political display, while Bongiwe Dhlomo's interpretations of contemporary, diasporic forced removals refer directly to the racial power struggles between a black majority and white minority in apartheid South Africa. In the post-apartheid era Searle chooses to work with ideas that transcend the regional and national issues characterising South African life. Her concepts originate in her own

experiences as a South African woman but she is primarily an artist who, knowing the pain and loss generated by diaspora, dispersal, and resettlement examines not the particularity of specific events but the passage of time and the evocation of places in the spaces of art. Redolent with suggestion, her still and moving images put history in a space where it can be accessed but has lost the ferocious power with which it once controlled South African life and influenced art.

There is a future after diaspora; every journey has an end. The new political dispensation in South Africa required artists to place art and politics in a new relationship in order to give a future to South African art. Bongiwe Dhlomo, discussing these issues (Godby 2004: 65), observed that her politicised images of the eighties might assume a different imperative after ten years of democracy – ‘if the same work is seen by people during the ten years of democracy celebrations [in 2004], it should be able to communicate something else to them, like, "Never, never, never again ...". She then added, ‘I know that we fought and won the war but as an artist I am now faced with the many battles that confront me in South Africa. The role of the artist has not changed: The circumstances have altered. The tools are still the same but the call is to utilise our art as a building block for reconstruction’.

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And what about the two dolls suspended in space in *Portrait of a Woman from Africa*? Now in England, they are both from Africa, although in the nineteenth or early twentieth century the broken white-paste doll journeyed from Britain to Africa, and was excavated from a mole hill on Rondebosch Common, Cape Town, by an energetic Jack Russell terrier. Both dolls subsequently went to England with the artist. The painting is a representation of plants and objects, including small black and white dolls, and portrays the artist who was – I was – reluctant to abandon everything which had been had collected after decades in Africa.

Born in England, I lived my childhood and young adulthood in a place that no longer exists, Salisbury in Rhodesia (now Harare in Zimbabwe). I migrated. A university post took me to Pretoria in South Africa. Then I relocated to the mother city – Cape Town. From there the ocean drew me over water, back to the northern climes of my ancestors, where the culture and heritage was familiar but the landscape was new and strange. My migrations, undertaken by choice weighed against circumstance, produced experiences of the diasporic condition.

If you are from 'there' and live 'here' then the space in-between is filled with memories colliding with new realities. For artists this can be productive territory. As an outsider or onlooker you notice things, see sharply, observe what others take for granted. And, looking back through the lens of memory, you negotiate with the past so that it becomes a resonant presence not a belligerent bully. Then past and present, here and there, can meet the imagination in the space in-between.

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Fig. 1 Marion Arnold, *Portrait of a Woman from Africa*, 2006, watercolour, 57 x 76 cms. Private collection.



Fig. 2 Louise Gubb, *December 1988*. Traditionally attired Afrikaaner women have their hair done at a portable salon while celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Great Trek, 1988. Colour photograph.



Fig. 3 Bongji Dhlomo *Removals V1, Aftermath*, linocut on paper, 19.4 x 25.7 cms. sgn.d br. bongjiwe - 82 bl. ed. 1/35, Durban Art Gallery, South Africa.



Fig. 4 Berni Searle, *Untitled (red)* from *Colour Me* series, 1998. Handprinted colour photograph, 42 x 50 cm.



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<sup>1</sup> *Hanga* is Shona for the Helmuted Guinea fowl found throughout Zimbabwe. In the 1970s rural Zimbabwean women started to model and paint guinea fowl for sale at the roadside.

<sup>2</sup> Africa occupies about 20 per cent of the earth's total land area. In 2006 the population was estimated to be about 885 million, roughly 20 per cent of the world's population. About a thousand languages are spoken in Africa.

<sup>3</sup> Just as West and Central African peoples constitute the focus of slave trade studies so West and Central African art features prominently in American-dominated research, leading to the erroneous assumption that the peoples of Eastern and Southern Africa produced little 'art' and had impoverished material cultures. See the discussion in my Introduction in M. Arnold (ed.) *Art in Eastern Africa*, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> I attribute this to two reasons. American scholars are, understandably, interested in their own origins rather than African political and cultural history *per se*. But there is another reason for the neglect of South African diasporas - politics. During the apartheid era, the cultural boycott of South Africa inhibited the free circulation of knowledge. Whilst western academics considered that they were making an effective moral protest against the apartheid regime by severing contact with South African academics and denying them access to conferences and publication opportunities, they also limited their own knowledge of what was happening within South African cultural politics. As a result they had scant understanding of the role that cultural activism played within South Africa where it became an effective component of resistance politics. When South Africa was readmitted to the global community in 1994 the West evinced interest in post-apartheid art and culture rather than in the complex multi-faceted stories of earlier South African cultural activities.

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<sup>5</sup> I deviate from Gilroy who, in advancing a definition of diaspora, proposes that ‘the word connotes *flight following the threat of violence* [Gilroy’s emphasis] rather than freely chosen experiences of displacement’, P. Gilroy, ‘Diaspora and the Detours of Identity’, in K. Woodward (ed.), *Identity and Difference* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 318.

<sup>6</sup> The nine major black groups are Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Venda, Sotho, Ndebele, Tsonga, Swazi and Pedi.

<sup>7</sup> South Africa admirably demonstrates the characteristics of a nation as the ‘imagined community’ articulated by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition 1991. Under apartheid, only imagination could have yielded the bizarre patchwork of so-called independent states located within the boundaries of the South African state which supposedly demonstrated the ‘separate but equal’ concept within apartheid ideology.

<sup>8</sup> The Zulu term is interesting since it is virtually the same as the origin Greek meaning of diaspora – a scattering. Davenport and Saunders (2000: 13) note that ‘The Sotho equivalent, [of *Mfecane*] *Lifaqane* (pronounced *Difaqane*) conveys the notion of forced removal’. The origins of the *Mfecane* are complex but it was essentially a power struggle between various African kingdoms from which the Zulu king, Shaka, emerged as the dominant protagonist.

<sup>9</sup> The British banned the slave trade in 1807 and emancipated slaves in 1834. Only in 1873 did the British force the Sultan of Zanzibar to close the slave markets on the island and mainland although slavery remained legal within his empire.

<sup>10</sup> The slave population rose from 14,641 in 1783 to 36,278 in 1834, the year when emancipation was enacted (Davenport and Saunders, 2000: 25). Afrikaans is not a language derived exclusively from Dutch. Having many origins, slaves communicated in a shared tongue; fusions of their Dutch masters’ language and their own native languages resulted in Afrikaans, officially recognised as ‘Afrikaans’ in 1925 and

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spoken by White and Coloured South Africans, but resisted under apartheid by Black South Africans who considered it 'the language of oppression'.

<sup>11</sup> Apartheid was constructed of legislation that determined territorial segregation, political representation and urban living. It built on earlier 'native policy', including the 1913 Land Act which deprived Africans of the right to own land outside of designated reserves that constituted only about thirteen per cent of the land. The blatantly racist legislation of apartheid includes The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), the Population Registration Act (1950) and the Group Areas Act (1950). The population was registered as African, White, and Coloured.

<sup>12</sup> By 1984 Gazankulu, Kangwane, Kwa Ndelbele, KwaZulu, Lebowa, Qwaqwa, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana, Transkei and Venda were 'self-governing'.

<sup>13</sup> After the Sharpeville shootings of 1960 and the Soweto uprising in 1976 emigration from South Africa increased notably.

<sup>14</sup> See *The Location of Culture*, 1994, especially pp. 1-9 for the theory of hybridisation and 'the in-between', and 'The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha' in J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Rorke's Drift (KwaZulu-Natal) and Polly Street (Johannesburg, Guateng) were established to teach art to Africans and became well-known for the students and work produced. See Rankin and Hobbs (2003) on Rorke's Drift and Rankin (1996) on Polly Street.

<sup>16</sup> For an exposition of the relationship between nationalism and feminism see Hassim (2006). Hassim (2006: 32) notes, 'The dominant position within the ANC until the late 1980s was that the emancipation of women was secondary to and contingent upon national liberation'. For the historical engagement of women with resistance to apartheid see Arnold 2005:4-9.

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<sup>17</sup> On 16 December 1838, 470 Voortrekkers confronted 10,000 Zulus at Blood River. 3000 Zulus were killed and only three trekkers were injured. The victory was attributed to the power of God and the Day of the Covenant was celebrated as a public holiday in South Africa under Nationalist rule.

<sup>18</sup> For the debate around the tapestries and a comprehensive analysis of the visual articulation of the *volksmoeder* see Van der Watt (2005: 94-110).

<sup>19</sup> See Davenport and Saunders 2000 for the formation of breakaway Afrikaner parties such as the Conservative Party, the *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (AWB), *Aksie Eie Toekoms* and Blanke Bevrydigings Beweging (White Liberation Movement).

<sup>20</sup> In my discussion of the 1988 Trek I am indebted to Grundlingh and Sapire (1991) for their insightful analysis of the re-enactments and the politics of the day.

<sup>21</sup> See particularly pp.4-5 in Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983.

<sup>22</sup> The *Vrye Weekblad* newspaper sponsored an exhibition of Trek photographs by Gideon Mendel entitled *Beloofde Land* at the Market Galleries, Johannesburg.

<sup>23</sup> Louise Gubb has worked as a photojournalist for three decades, covering South Africa's turbulent struggle for democracy and the Mandela presidency while working for prominent international news magazines including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Stern Paris* and *Match*. Her photographs have been featured in several books and exhibited internationally. In 2002 she was Assignment Editor and one of a hundred photographers for *Day in the Life of Africa* photobook produced to benefit HIV/Aids in Africa.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Boonzaier and Sharp (1988: 101).

<sup>25</sup> The significance of hair in the Coloured community became the subject of performance works by Tracey Rose. In *Span II* (1997) she sat naked in a glass case, shorn of all body hair, preoccupied with knotting a mass of dark hair. For discussion on *Span I and Span II* see Coombes 2004: 254-259.

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<sup>26</sup> Dhlomo completed a one-year National Secretarial course in 1975, worked as a typist/clerk in 1976, and studied at Rorke's Drift from 1978-9, graduating with a Fine Art Diploma. She has held many administrative and curatorial positions: Federated Union of Black artists gallery FUBA, the African Institute for Contemporary Art, the Alexandra Multi-Arts Factory, Thupelo project, and was the administrator of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2nd Johannesburg Biennales. She is married to artist Pat Mautloa. She is also known as Bongiwe Dhlomo-Mautloa; I have chosen to use the shorter version of her name under which she made the prints I discuss.

<sup>27</sup> *Cemetery Unrest: Premature Resurrection* is reproduced in Ann Oosthuizen (ed.) *Sometimes When it Rains. Writings by South African Women*. (London and New York: Pandora, 1987), p.146. It was one of 10 linocut prints which Dhlomo supplied for the text.

<sup>28</sup> Mynele's paper was published posthumously: T. Mnyele, 'Thoughts on Bongiwe and the Role of Revolutionary Art', in A. Olifant and I. Vladislavic (eds), *The Years of Staffrider* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988).

<sup>29</sup> Peggy Delmont *The District Six Mural*, Holy Cross Centre, Cape Town, 1984-85. Acrylic and PVA on plastered masonry walls, 850 x 785 cm illustrated in Alexander and Cohen (1990, plate 113, p.137). F. February, Y. February and F. Mathews, *District Six, Where We Lived* (Fabric, Collection: South African National Gallery, 1992), illustrated in Arnold (2006), Colour plate 26.

<sup>30</sup> Bernadette (Berni) Searle studied at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, completing a Masters degree in 1995. She received the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Art in 2003, and has won a number of international prizes and awards. She has exhibited on many group shows within South Africa and

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internationally. For a full listing of exhibitions see *Berni Searle Approach* (2006) and [michaelstevenson.com](http://michaelstevenson.com)

<sup>31</sup> See Martin West in Boonzaier and Sharp (1988: 100-110) for the extraordinary convolutions of the legislation. West includes a table of Reclassifications for 1986. Some members of Berni Searle's extended family were classified as Whites.

<sup>32</sup> Searle's references to food inform her video *Snow White* (2001) where she is covered with off-white pea flour that falls from above and is then used to make dough, and *A Matter of Time* (2003) where she attempts to walk on glass covered with olive oil.

<sup>33</sup> Searle observes (in Bester 2003), 'I think it's important to note that most of my works are not exhibited as photographs, but as digital prints of the photographic images which have been scanned and printed on different media such as backlit paper, vellum or transparencies. So while the work draws on the photographic image, it also moves away from the medium at some point. But when I have the photographs taken, the photographer is capturing a subject who has had some say in how she wants to be portrayed and what she is doing while the photograph is being taken. I'm also in a position to determine the way in which the work is presented. Once it is in the public arena though, I have to relinquish control!'

<sup>34</sup> Searle also has British and German European ancestry.

<sup>35</sup> In the *Discoloured* series Searle used Egyptian black henna to stain parts of her body, such as her hand in *Lifeline* (1999). The henna resembles bruising and indicates the body's vulnerability. See Coombes 2003, for discussion on these works and [www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/searle/works/works.htm](http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/searle/works/works.htm) for reproductions of these and other works by Searle and see *Berni Seale Approach*, plate 32.

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<sup>36</sup> *Home and Away* was first shown in 2003 when Searle was the Standard Bank Young Artist Award Winner for Visual Art and her exhibition travelled throughout South Africa. Related to the video are 2 series of prints, *Waiting* and *By Night*.

<sup>37</sup> Water continues to feature prominently in Searle's works, *Alabama* (2007) a 2 screen video projection that explores the landscape of Cape Town as a vantage point for viewing the Atlantic Ocean which brought the Confederate raiding ship, the *Alabama*, to Cape Town in the early 1860s. The well-known Afrikaans folk song, *Daar Kom die Alabama* (Here Comes the *Alabama* ) provides the sound track for a wistful conflation of American and Cape histories, connected by slave ownership. See Garb 2008 for an account of this work.