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INTIMACY, QUEERNESS, RACE

'What do we see when we look at ourselves?' asked South African visual activist/artist Zanele Muholi in her 2006 photographic collection Only Half the Picture. *The question, a deeply challenging introspection, required black women in particular to reflect on the ways in which history has made us not look at ourselves, but be looked at. The images Muholi presented were viewed as both troubling and liberating. This article, using a queer framework, is concerned with recoding the ways in which black women's bodies and female sexuality have been represented in post-colonial contexts. Using Zanele Muholi's photography, the article opens possibilities for claiming an erotic position for the black female's 'queer' body. This is further complicated by racial dynamics. The article argues that such representations work against painful colonial histories of black female torture while also desexualizing the black female.*

Keywords queerness; female sexuality; representation; Zanele Muholi; photography; interraciality; gaze

'What do we see when we look at ourselves?' asked visual activist/artist Zanele Muholi[1] in her first published photographic collection *Only Half the Picture* (Muholi 2006). The question, a deeply challenging introspection, required black women in particular to reflect on the ways in which history has made us not look at ourselves, but be looked at. Many black, white, male and female viewers remain troubled by what and how they saw black female (same sex) sexuality represented, as Muholi captured in her 17-minute documentary *Enraged by a Picture* (2006). Discomfort, anger and disgust still loom over people's responses to Muholi's images. In August 2009, the then South African Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana, walked out of the *Innovative Women* art exhibition she was to open after a quick and disturbed glance at artist Nandipha Mntambo[2]'s work as well as Zanele Muholi's photographs. She deemed the artists' work, among other things, as 'immoral, offensive' and suggested they were pornographic because she saw black (she was not sure if the bodies were male or female) nude bodies. In addition, because there were 'children as young as three years old in the room', she felt that the images of black naked bodies, 'presumably involved in sexual acts', were not suitable for family viewing (Pillay 2010).

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The minister's assertions have been heavily criticized by artists, art critics, writers, feminists and lesbian activists alike. Many noted how she missed looking and seeing what the artists at the exhibition had invited her to see. In fact, she did see something. In particular, she singled out Nandipha Mntambo's *Self Rape, The Rape of Europa* (2009) as 'pornographic' and as 'trivializing the scourge of rape' in South Africa. Xingwana's concern about the levels of rape in the country is real and appreciated, but in relation to art, her misreading of Mntambo's work, which in actual fact does not depict a rape, suggests the ways in which the minister's gaze and self-looking is narrowed and clouded by histories of the violation of black female bodies. On seeing two black female bodies together and undressed, she could only imagine pain, violation, torture and a version of pornography. She is unable to see, or rejects the capacity in herself to see, in the images pleasure, joy, beauty, intimacy and eroticism, which are at play between two female bodies.

It is this other way of seeing with which this essay engages. Without undermining the manner in which the black female body has been positioned and viewed as a site of numerous struggles in post-colonial African discourse, there exist other ways in which the black body can be seen beyond its colonial constraints and constructs. The violent ways in which the black female body has been made a target for 'colonial scientific pornography' (Coly 2010, p. 653) in the past cannot be forgotten. The horrendous treatment and exhibition of Sara Baartman's body for 'scientific' investigations is a constant reminder of the torture and violation of black female bodies. Sara Baartman was disrobed, examined and dissected because of her 'curious' black female body and genitalia. When the white men were done with her body, she was sewn up 'and prepared in such a way as to allow one to see the nature of her labia' (Abrahams 1997, p. 44 citing Cuvier in Gilman 1985). Her black female body became the object of study for white subjects. This treatment and humiliation reinforced black women's lack and 'absence of subjectivity' (Phillips 2011, p. 104).

Given such horrific details of the objectification of the black female body, it is no surprise that post-colonial narratives of African womanhood have tended to cover the body of the black female and thus 'desexualize and decorporealise African womanhood' (Coly 2010, p. 654). This has contributed to the rare depiction of the nude black female body that challenges colonial histories. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (2011) offers a critical reading of the way female nudity has been viewed in conservative, contemporary Nigeria. She argues that in a recent bill proposing to prohibit and punish public nudity in Nigeria, the nude or partially clothed female body is positioned to represent society's moral decay and ungovernable sexuality. Such a bill asserts that it is nude female bodies that entice and elicit sexual misdemeanours or violence. In order to curb such social ills, the female body has to be fully clothed or veiled to eliminate erotic desire and unwarranted sexual advances. In this way, the female body's agency is stripped away for the preserve of male agency. Only the male gaze is privy to the nude female body, where it is once again 'open to

manipulation and violation' (Bakare-Yusuf 2011, p. 123). Once it is in the public realm, her sexualized body is controlled and policed in different disciplinary efforts.

Against this backdrop are art works by a Cameroonian artist Angèle Etoundi Essamba and South African artists Tracey Rose, Ingrid Masondo, Berni Searle, Nandipha Mntambo and Zanele Muholi to name a few, who offer portraits of black female nudes, amongst other things. Writing on Essamba's portraits, Coly (2010, p. 658) argues:

> Essamba disrobes the black female body in order to unclothe it of its colonial costume as well as its masculine heterosexual postcolonial costume. Disrobing, an act of coming out is about rejecting the colonial discursive body and expressing the postcolonial African body.

The artist reveals the beauty of the black female body. She thus claims a space in the 'aesthetic and artistic category of the nude'.

Like Essamba, many of the works produced by the artists mentioned earlier speak of a new language and offer a discourse on pleasure, beauty, the erotic and the aesthetic black female body. Coupled with this are the ways in which Muholi's work in particular exposes numerous tensions at the intersection between race, gender and sexuality. In this essay I pay particular attention to one of Muholi's 2009 photographs, *Caitlin and I*, a triptych in which Muholi's black body is seen layered with Caitlin's white body. The image, which narrows the gap between the viewer and the viewed (suggesting that the viewer and the viewed could be the same person), arrests the viewer's gaze and demands that the viewer pauses to ponder Muholi's earlier question about what we see when we look at ourselves. The image invites a challenging introspection on the question of interracial queer sexuality particularly for the African continent.

Female interracial desire

Caitlin and I (2009)[3] is a colour photograph of two naked bodies resting on a white rumpled sheet, back to back and on top of each other. It is printed in three panels of 33 × 49.5 cm each. The first is a face to shoulder fragment, the second depicts the breast to the upper thigh and the third shows the pairs' legs. The pair faces the camera and the viewer. The woman at the bottom is on her stomach. Her face rests on her folded arms with her long dreadlocks falling to the floor. On her shoulders and upper back, the top woman's head rests. Her brown hair falls onto the shoulders of the woman lying underneath and mingles with her dreadlocks. Their bodies mould into each other. The bare breasts and pubic hair of the woman lying on top are exposed. Her arm hangs lazily to the floor with her right hand half open and her relaxed legs slightly open. The legs of the woman below are loosely crossed.

The photograph is taken against a white background, a common feature of many of the artist's previous photographs. This allows for a sharp exposure of the pairs' skin, its tones and markings. In the photograph, the artist is resting on her stomach while supporting and carrying the weight of *Caitlin* who rests on top of her. Their bodies fit perfectly into each other's curves, creating a flow and continuity between them. It is the white woman's breasts and pubic hair that are exposed. *Zanele*'s silhouette, covered mostly by *Caitlin*'s, is strikingly visible if you trace *Caitlin*'s body. The arch of *Caitlin*'s back fits neatly into *Zanele*'s buttocks. The viewer cannot look at either body in isolation. The two are joined solidly one against the other. *Caitlin*'s body, cushioned against *Zanele*'s back, tells of total trust and surrender. She takes comfort in her own body and that which she rests upon. She lies on top of *Zanele* without apparent fear and by implication consenting to what is to come and that which has passed.

This image is undoubtedly intimate, not because of the nude bodies, but because of what lies behind them. *Cailtlin*'s lazy body, in ways described above, suggests immediately an intimately sexual moment. The photograph offers the viewer that still moment after sex. Their bodies are positioned to intimate a moment after sex or the thought of 'after-ness' of sex. In their volume, *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*, Halley and Parker (2011, p. 4) ask, 'What happens after sex?' As the book cover of their collection suggests that it may be a cigarette that is lit and smoked in this moment or a moment to ponder on the delights and troubles of sex. Michael Moon (2011, p. 55), writing in this collection, begins his essay with a quote that captures this moment 'after great sex, a formal feeling comes'. *Caitlin and I* intimates to this moment, a feeling of peacefulness, surrender and, perhaps, satisfaction.

Gazing at the viewer with open eyes and meeting the viewer's gaze, the pair forces the viewer to look at them. Their stern gaze within this moment is both an erotic language and an equation that says, 'You can look, but you are not needed here', suggesting a moment of completeness and adequacy. With their gaze, they are breaking down the gaze of the viewer, undoing conventional ways of viewing. This controlled gaze works towards dismantling the pornographic and colonialist lens that exploit the (black) female body. Muholi dares her viewers to open themselves to this kind of alternative gaze. Unlike many genres of pornography, which convey desirability and accessibility, this photograph may be desirable, but the pairs' gaze makes it inaccessible. Their bodies cannot be possessed by the viewer. It is *Zanele* and *Caitlin* who control the viewer. This strategy 'secures a distance between viewer and viewed'. At the same time, it narrows that distance by asking the viewer to imagine or to look at themselves in that situation or that moment. Resisting the objectification of the female body from 'visual intercourse' Muholi transforms her to a 'subject of discourse' (Coly 2010, p. 657, 661).

In the first instance, Muholi works against a desexualization of (black) female bodies. By positioning the two female bodies as erotic beings, and in what I suggest to be an 'after sex' moment or an erotically intimate encounter,

she claims publicly the sexualized nature of the (black) female body. Moreover, she positions the female body in relation to another female body, foreclosing the opportunity for male intervention. Here she asserts a subversive sexuality not invested in reproduction (Reid and Walker 2005, p. 187). As in her previous provocative works, she enters into a dangerous ground, particularly in African discourses on sexuality, asserting female intimacy and sexuality that is self-sustaining and self-sufficient. This could cause moral panic for many conservatives.

The image moves beyond popular debates about whether same-sex sexuality is acceptable or tolerable as has been suggested by the assertion that homosexuality is unAfrican (Hoad 1999). Rather, it represents an image of 'queer desire' (Peele 2007, p. 2). As a viewer, one is asked to lay claim to feelings and desires evoked by this image. This is the ambivalent, uncomfortable and sometimes exoticized territory that one enters when answering Muholi's earlier question 'what do we see when we look at ourselves?' The question invites us to see ourselves represented in these images. Black queers have often felt that they, and their desires and stories, are invisible to society. Or, as Pumla Gqola (2006, p. 83) argues, black lesbians in South Africa, particularly, have been 'highly visible manifestations of the undesirable'. Forms of violation have acted to remove them from society and from history. In this image, however, the black female 'queer' body holds a powerful position within the discourse of desire. It both satisfies the yearning to see oneself represented as well as to speak from that position of power.

Looking at this photograph forces me to reveal the ways in which I am affected by it. It asks me to lay bare my own 'intimate self in a public sphere' as much as it evokes the public life of intimacy (Thomas 2010, p. 427). *Caitlin and I* (2009) is an erotically captivating photograph, and it elicits aesthetic visual pleasure. It compels you to look and want to be in that moment. Just by looking at this image, I am awakened to my own queerness and queer desires. It asks me to look at my intimate private self publicly. This is the arresting visual power of this triptych (Harris and Harris 1998). It offers what seems to be an uninhibited exposure which involves opening oneself up to vulnerabilities and accepting the numerous risks attached to making personal feelings public (McGregor and Nuttall 2007). Writing from such a position calls for public 'outness', to out oneself not only in the academy but also socially. This could cause rejection and isolation especially in the current landscape where women's sexualities tend to be under surveillance (McFadden 2003). Black women in particular are 'vulnerable to having expressions of sexuality monitored' (Stobie 2007, p. 9). This ambivalence not just makes black women resistant to write about female sexualities but forces us to write in heteronormative ways which further widen the public and private divide. As the image shows, the divide is only a construct that begs for a disentanglement so as to allow us to reimagine the private not into public but into what Gabeba Baderoon (2010, p. 3) terms 'an intimate normality'.

Caitlin and I, 2009. © Zanele Muholi, Michael Stevenson Gallery

Queer looking, in black and white

It is almost impossible to imagine this photograph being taken in apartheid South Africa, where interracial female same-sex intimacies remain undocumented. Even in post-apartheid South Africa, the land of the new political freedoms and the sexually liberated, representations of interracial same-sex sexuality are rare, unless depicting (white) gay male desire. It is almost as if apartheid South Africa's racial profiling and careful planning cannot be done away with. The modern apartheid state ensured that blackness remained as distant from whiteness as possible. No racial mixing would be tolerated unless controlled by various laws and policies restricting access and mobility of mostly black people. Policies such as the 1927 Immorality Act, the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, the Immorality Act of 1957 and the amended 1969 Immorality Act prohibited sexual mixing between different race groups as well as homosexual acts (Hoad *et al.* 2005). This illustrates the ways in which apartheid ensured that the most intimate parts of the lives of its subjects would be regulated and directed (Bennett 2011). Policing of racial mixing was extended to what black people could and could not access. Posel (2010, p. 170) notes that how black people (those outside white communities) were duly punished for 'racial mimicry' if they exhibited forms of sophistication, 'luxury' and affluence. This included consuming certain foodstuffs, being spotted having particular vehicles and clothing items. These were the preserve of the whites and white communities.

Post-apartheid South Africa presents a different picture. Affluence and consumption are widely sought after by all racial groups. Racial mixing or 'likeness' and same-sex mixing, which were prohibitions of the apartheid order, now symbolize freedom and a democratic state. Contemporary South Africa, including its policies and laws, promotes and celebrates these new acquisitions and diversities. However, same-sex sexuality, even along racial lines, is still considered a 'new' or foreign phenomenon, unAfrican, a Western import (Hoad 1999), or put simply, copying white people's behaviour. Such claims exist also beyond African borders. Writing about depictions of interracial desire in films and other artistic genres in contemporary African-American culture, Dunning (2009, p. 3, 9) notes and challenges how black gay identity and queerness locate the black gay or queer persons outside black

community. The popular claims that to be 'black and gay is to betray the race and to be less authentically black' and to 'collude with whiteness' are problematic and have contributed to black queer persons feeling isolated from their communities. Rather than queerness that is 'Western' or not black, it is such claims that connect 'queer identity to that which is outside' (Dunning 2009). The irrational claim that black queerness colludes with whiteness not only works against interracial intimacy but also constructs same-sex couples and intimacy as monoracial (Steinbugler 2005). It pretends to reflect the power relations between queerness and race while it actually masks power dynamics within blackness itself by shifting the attention to queer identity's association with whiteness. Claims that have positioned homosexuality as imports from the West and thus distancing black African experience from homosexuality are merely facades. Muholi's work, as illustrated earlier, closes that gap by forcing us to see interraciality and queer experiences or intimacy as intertwined. To use Johnson's (2001, p. 19) words, Muholi's work, which I offer as a critical 'quare'[4] reading of sexuality and race, is a radical survival strategy in the post-apartheid order. It speaks of the realities of our material bodies and their own 'practice of everyday life' (Johnson 2001, p. 26). It is the interventionist mode of 'quare' studies that is at play in Muholi's work.

Topdeck

It appears that black queer signifying is deeply vested in the theme of interracial desire. Dunning (2009) observes this theme in various works by queer writers and artists such as James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Marlone Riggs to name a few. Zanele Muholi's work enables a conversation with these works, from a specifically South African vantage point. Her earlier photographic series, *Massa and Mina(h)* (2008), which is a depiction of her mother's 42 years of domestic service to the same white family, offers a 'queer' or rather 'quare' reading of interracial same-sex intimacy. In this series Muholi deploys her own black female queer body to make gestures about this long-term relationship. She writes in her artist statement:

> I turn my own black body into a subject of art. I use performativity to deal with the still racialized issues of female domesticity-black women doing house work for white families.
>
> (Muholi 2009)

In this series, Muholi uses her own intimate partner as her co-model. The use of her partner exposes what artistic curator Gabi Ngcobo (2010) calls an 'intense lover-power-dynamic', intimating a complex interplay between same-sex intimacy and interracial desire. Ngcobo reminds us of the photograph's

location within a specific moment in South African racial history. This is a history that is engaged with the notion of interraciality, its meanings and the power relations between racial identities. In this series, Muholi 'signals a strategy around interracial (queer) desire' (Dunning 2009, p. 5). In the photograph, *Caitlin and I* (2009), this becomes more explicit. *Caitlin and I* could only be a photograph depicting the post-apartheid South African moment. In another moment, the two women could never be as close, intimate or even nude together. It is only the post-apartheid moment that allows this scene and permits the public imagination of an intimate sexual encounter between the two female bodies.

Of the *Massa and Mina(h)* series, Ngcobo is convinced of an 'emerging love affair' between the black maid and the white madam which intensifies with each image. It is, however, controlled by the dress codes, and in the maid's case, it is a blue uniform, which marks each woman's role. The uniform in this series acts as a way of maintaining the visual aesthetics of this contentious relationship. Hlonipha Mokoena (2010) argues that the maid's uniform (in the way it is packaged, folded, ironed, dressed and coordinated), in this series and also generally, veils black female exploitation in contemporary South Africa.

Similar to Muholi's sexualization strategy of the (black) female body is the way in which she simultaneously racially undresses the two bodies. This image conjures up the coding alluded to by the term 'topdeck'. For chocolate and candy enthusiasts, this would be a reminder of a Cadbury chocolate bar with a layer of white chocolate topping darker chocolate underneath. Among black South African's local lingua, as in parts of North America (although the meanings differed), the naming of this chocolate became appropriated for racial talk. Two interracial people seen intimately together could be called at one time in South Africa 'topdeck'. This is the material and symbolic racial mixing to which topdeck alludes to in this essay. Similar other candy sweets or cookies such as Oreo or Eminem are used derogatorily to make reference to racial differences and dynamics. In the USA, as Stadler suggests, topdeck is used to refer to 'someone who looks white but acts black' (Stadler 2011, p. 153). In South Africa, certain fruits have been used to refer to such aspects of identity. Coconut, for example, is used to refer to a black person who acts white, or more specifically, brown on the outside and 'culturally' white inside.

Stadler's (2011, p. 154) use of topdeck to symbolize a 'wigger' (a wannabe negro/white nigger), which she sees as a (white) person who is black underneath due to the appropriation or internalization of black culture', is a very North American metaphor used in the context of *8 Mile*, a film featuring white hip hop star Eminem. In this film, Eminem reappropriates facets of being black (sharing a common hip hop culture and class history or representations with many black artists) as a way of fitting in to attain popularity, fame and fortune. Such a use of topdeck is not of interest in this essay. Stadler's deployment of this metaphor puts emphasis on the white person for whom fame, fortune and acceptance in black culture is key to personal success.

Rather than such a focus, which forecloses the opportunity to see the black body, I use topdeck for its racial, gendered and sexual materiality to speak and theorize from 'bottom to top and top to bottom' (pun intended!), following Johnson's intervention (2001, p. 19).

As in Muholi's *Massa and Mina(h)* series, as I have shown earlier, where black female positions in white society have been ones that are supposed to support and promote white women's position (or as some black feminists have argued that white women's success is at the back and the sweat of black women's labour), black bodies remain in the background and almost invisible until needed. However, in *Caitlin and I* (2009) Muholi reveals the ways in which the black female body has been 'hidden' or in the background and 'overdressed'. Her nude body lays on the floor in an intimate gesture, exposing the white woman's body on top. This is a subversive act that undresses and shows the white female body's breasts and pubic hair, instead of the black female body. As in the series *Massa and Mina(h)*, Muholi subverts the power relations between the black female and the white female. She positions the white body as vulnerable and exposed, showing her breasts, pubic hair and allowing her to seem fragile and surrendering on top of the black body. Muholi's material and symbolic representation of the intersection between interraciality and 'queer desire' is a radical strategy that weakens and disrupts hegemonic power relations. In *Caitlin and I*, she disrobes the black female body simultaneously with the white female body, which she leaves exposed. This acts as a way of rewriting the painful colonial histories on black female bodies.

Similar notions are articulated by young black 'queer' South Africans[5] who referred, in the course of interviews conducted for my doctoral research, to their relationships with white women. One interviewee is Yomo (pseudonym), a 22-year-old black masculine lesbian from Johannesburg. Reference to this interview material is important for this essay as it surfaces the materiality of everyday lives of black queer persons in South Africa. In this material, Yomo alludes to a complicated power-dynamic at play in her intimate relationships with white female lovers as she states:

> I've learnt my lessons. I can't handle white women because they cry about everything [laugh]. They do! Black women are so much stronger. If I'm up to nonsense – a black woman's going to tell me, but a white chick's just going to cry. I know this is a generalization, but I just can't stand it. They're just an emotional mop – in my experience. Or maybe I've just been dating the wrong white girls . . . I liked white girls, black girls, coloured girls etc. I still don't mind really (dating girls from other races), but I've kind of realized that I want to spend the rest of my life with somebody like me – a black girl.
>
> (Yomo, 22 years old, Johannesburg)

Yomo's association with her white female lovers with emotional 'weakness' and inability to challenge her when she is up to 'nonsense' or wrongdoing offers a radical imagining of racial power relations. She asserts that black women are 'stronger', while white women are 'weak' and are 'emotional mops'. Yomo's assertions can be seen in the way in which Muholi chooses to position the black female body, and not the white female body, at the bottom. In Yomo's literal sense, this would mark the 'strength' of the black female and her ability to carry the white body. At the same time, this erotic equation can be complicated, seen in the way in which Yomo states, 'I can't handle white women'.

Conclusion

Muholi is widely celebrated for constructing a visual 'archive that insists on the specificity of lesbian lives' (Thomas 2010, p. 421). Over her short career, her representation of her subject matter has shifted. Looking at her current work, one notes the way in which she has moved away from her narrow earlier conceptualization of black lesbian subjectivity. Her performance series on *Massa and Mina(h)* described earlier and *Caitlin and I* (2009) both suggest a move towards constructing a different lesbian and queer subject. In all these works, she draws on her personal experiences and complicates race with queerness. Muholi's autobiographical stance is a 'liberatory strategy' and undoubtedly necessarily radical (Harris and Harris 1998, p. 249). In these works, she shows how the black queer experience is fused with the white body. In one way, she responds to E. Patrick Johnson's (2001, p. 19) call for black queers to 'explore our own inner conflicts around our choices of sexual partners across racial lines'.

Caitlin and I offers many opportunities, among them is the ability to examine the ways in which our society and its viewers are structured. This is seen in the way in which Muholi chose to offer this image in fragments, almost teaching and dictating to the viewer how the photograph is to be seen or consumed. This is one of the many ways in which the viewer's gaze is controlled. This form of fragmentation 'breaks down the photographic subject for the viewer'. The viewer is then transformed into a 'student', forced to learn anew the ways of viewing the female body (Coly 2010, p. 661) and female sexuality. At the same time, the fragmentation could be speaking to the ways in which female bodies have been violated, humiliated, tortured and fragmented.

Muholi's photograph foregrounds the gains of claiming a queer intimate space in what has been deemed a private/public and black/white divide (Harris and Harris 1998). In one way, she forces the viewer to feel and see their own desires in her photographs while also opening the space to expose one's private

intimacies in public. Like her images, she asks of the viewer to be 'real' and engage with the everydayness of life. As a reader of her work, I am asked to consider what else is available for a black 'queer' subject, and perhaps other subjects too. In her recent work, Muholi assembles a range of black lesbian and 'queer' subjectivities, whose earlier narratives were of violation and victimhood. In this image, Muholi changes the representation of the black female 'queer' subject from that of being victim, murdered and rendered invisible to one claiming desire, intimacy and an erotic position. She recodes the black female body by recentring her in the erotic equation, working against the desexualization of the black queer female and challenging the normative ways in which desire has been heterosexualized (Bakare-Yusuf 2011).

In a world that perpetually silences the black queer subject, these narratives and, in particular, Muholi's work are an aesthetically visually important contribution to visual culture (Dunning 2009) and mostly to narratives of claiming black female sexual agency. The image of two female bodies against each other intimates to the possibility of a future without fear, threat but intimacy and desire. It makes imaginable, visible and speakable interracial 'queer' desire, while simultaneously opening a renegotiating and unfixing of hegemonic blackness (Gust and John 2007, p. 31).

Muholi's work is profoundly political in the current South African and African landscape. Her ability to transform an artistic image from a visual object to a tool that speaks, works, challenges and liberates is a necessary strategy in the current-day South African politics. Muholi's rich visual archive is not limited to black queer politics, but has wider traction on identity politics and visual aesthetics. It offers us the scope and opportunity to theorize and re-theorize identity politics and consciousness. I conclude this essay amidst a highly contentious satirical painting by artist Brett Murray (2011) depicting President Jacob Zuma, with his genitals exposed (*The Spear* 2011). Many South Africans have been 'held hostage' by the political manoeuvring that suggests a false divide between art, satire and politics. Art is not without politics. Muholi's photographs and her artistic work generally strongly assert this position. Her art not only exposes identity politics to scrutiny but also portrays art for political imagination. Muholi's visual work intelligibly offers us a powerful position from which to look and see ourselves as subjects with the agency to transform and create political and social change.

Notes

1 Zanele Muholi is a black South African visual activist who has exhibited locally and internationally and received numerous awards for her photographs depicting black lesbian (and queer) lives.

2 Nandipha Mntambo is an international award-winning black South African artist from Swaziland whose celebrated use of cowhide, as she states in her artist

statement for the 2007 exhibition *Ingabisa*, is 'a means to subvert expected associations with corporeal presence, femininity, sexuality and vulnerability'.

3 The image fascinates for a number of reasons. In the first instance is the way in which Muholi positions herself in relation to the white body, in one way engaging with the interracial discourse in which she is intimately involved. At the same time, the use of her own body in these images suggests towards an autobiographical shift in Muholi's work, where she explores issues around race, sexuality and gender. It is undoubted that her work is both biographical and symbolic. Prior to this theme, which she first explored in 2008 with the series Massa and Mina(h), using her own body and her white partner to pay tribute to her mother's long-term domestic service to a white woman and her family, Muholi's work has featured either her alone or contained portraits of other black lesbian (gay and queer) people around her.

4 E.Patrick Johnson (2001) proposes an alternative to queer theory because of its lack and limitiations in the reading of racialised (black) communities. He criticises queer (theory) for posing a "false unifying umbrella which all queers of all races, ethnicities and classes are shared under. Rather than showing differences and diversities, queer 'erases our differences'. He therefore proposes 'quare' theory and studies, an 'interventionist disciplinary project which addresses the concerns and needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people across issues of race, gender, class and other subject positions' (p. 9).

5 This is based on a series of interviews with black 'queer' female persons in Johannesburg on their sexual, racial, cultural, class and gendered life histories. The study was conducted between 2007 and 2010 and aspects of interracial desire and intimacy have been extracted from those interviews.

Notes on Contributor

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