



Tracing the Passion of a Black Christ

*Critical reflections on the iconographic revision and symbolic redeployment of
the Stations of the Cross and Passion cycle by South African artists
Sydney Kumalo, Sokhaya Charles Nkosi and Azaria Mbatha*

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Abstract

In this research I consider ways in which black South African artists working during and after apartheid have both revised and symbolically redeployed the Stations of the Cross – and more broadly, the iconographic tradition of the Passion cycle. In so doing, I demonstrate the strategic application of Christ's episodic sufferings as a means of both analogously chronicling situations of historical trauma, as well as articulating more aspirant narratives of political resistance, self-liberation and reconciliation.

Concentrating initially on church-commissioned projects realised in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I trace the reinterpretation (or 'Africanisation') of the Stations of the Cross by artists such as Bernard Gcwensa, Ruben Xulu and Sydney Kumalo. Noting the emergence of a black Christ and a localised Passion, I emphasise the complex cultural and political implications of this iconographic transformation – arguing that its hybrid realisation undermined the cultural bias of a European-styled Christianity, and the racial hierarchies of colonialism and apartheid. Following this, considered in more detail are the secular reimaginings of Sokhaya Charles Nkosi's *Crucifixion* (1976) and Azaria Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* (1995) – as series wherein the episodes of Christ's Passion are consciously and symbolically redeployed. In the case of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, I show as covertly documented in a black Christ's sufferings the incarceration and torture of political activists in apartheid South Africa. On a more ideological level, I demonstrate also, as embodied in the series, the aspirant directives of Black Consciousness and Black Theology. Turning to Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, I present its visual narrative as analogously envisioning, as well as critically rethinking, the mutually embedded traumas of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Significant to my analysis is the future vision of reconciliation posited by Mbatha, and the extent to which it both reflects and challenges that maintained within the 'transformative' programme of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Demonstrated in my evaluation of these appropriative projects is the way in which a traditionally European iconographic tradition is critically redeployed – in chronicling situations of historical trauma, as well as in the envisioning of alternative futures. As such, I hope to afford a more nuanced and challenging appreciation of these reimagined Passion narratives, as significant projects of cultural and postcolonial memory. In keeping with this, I advance in conclusion a 'rethinking of pilgrimage'. Recalling the culture of participative witness associated with devotional programmes like the Stations of the Cross, I propose that in the case of both Nkosi's *Crucifixion* and Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, extended to viewers is a certain *imperative*: to imaginatively revisit, and rethink within the present, traumatic histories of black suffering and resistance.

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Introduction

Erected in 1867 to service the multiracial community of District Six, Cape Town, St Mark's Anglican Church stands today in the rezoned area of Zonnebloem. Surrounded by the campus buildings of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, its seemingly incongruous presence – and the fact that it continues to draw its congregation from as far as Kuils River, Mitchell's Plain and even Strandfontein – bears testimony to a history of traumatic social dislocation. Motivated by the racial and geographical designations of the Group Areas Act (1950), between 1969 and 1984 over forty thousand people were forcibly removed from District Six – most of them relocated to peripheral 'coloured' areas. Whilst most churches in the area were similarly relocated – some of them stone for stone – the congregation of St Mark's refused. Returning a two-million-rand compensation fee issued by the government, they opted rather to 'carry on as before' – commuting in on Sundays from their designated areas.¹

Gathered before the church on Holy Wednesday, 2014, a small group embarked on what was intended as both a commemorative walk and spiritual exercise – a 'Stations of the Cross in the City'. Led by Reverend Michael Weeder, we made our way to the city's Grand Parade, stopping en-route to pray and reflect at fourteen historically significant waypoints – amongst them the previous locations of the 'Seven Steps', Vernon Terrace, the Judicia store and the City Slum Mission. Instructed in this by a devotional leaflet, to each stopping place (or 'station') was assigned a meditation on one of the fourteen episodes traditionally associated with the narrative of Christ's Passion. Relevant to each site, these episodes were in turn related to injustices suffered by individuals and communities in the racially determined contexts of apartheid, colonialism and slavery. Retracing in this way the footsteps of Christ – not through the streets of Jerusalem, but those of Zonnebloem (or rather District Six) – the personal as well as sociological implications of the exercise were clear: to relate empathically to Christ in the context of his Passion was by extension to identify with the dehumanising experience of those oppressed within these situations of historical trauma.

In keeping with this kind of metonymic and social application of Christ's sufferings, considered in this research is the reinterpretation and symbolic redeployment of the Stations of the Cross – and more broadly the iconographic tradition of the Passion cycle – by black

¹ For an historical overview of St Mark's Anglican Church, see 'St. Mark's District Six'. Available: <http://www.smd6.co.za/history.html> [2014, November 3].

² A number of these are referenced in Frieda Harmsen's 1989 reflective survey of the Stations of the Cross in South Africa.

³ For an analysis of Matsose and Mkhoba's works, see Xakaza. 2011. Christianity as a Site of Struggles. An interpretation of the use of biblical sources in South African art:60. For Mnyele's untitled Crucifixion diptych, see Seidman. 2007:48.

⁴ Relevant texts by these and other authors are reflected in the Bibliography of this research.

⁵ Affectively achieved in this meditative re-enactment is something of the spiritual imperative outlined by St Peter:

South African artists during and after apartheid. Tracing these developments in both sacred and secular art contexts, my analysis in this regard concentrates primarily on the radical reimaginings of Sokhaya Charles Nkosi's *Crucifixion* series (1976), and Azaria Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* (1995). Reflecting on these visual narratives and the social and political conditions of their production, I demonstrate as strategic their respective invocations of Christ's episodic sufferings: in analogously chronicling situations of historical trauma, as well as in articulating more aspirant narratives (or counter-narratives) of political resistance, self-liberation and reconciliation. In so doing, I hope to afford a more nuanced and challenging appreciation of these reimagined Passion narratives as significant projects of cultural memory. In keeping with this idea, I advance in conclusion a 'rethinking of pilgrimage'. Recalling the culture of participative witness associated with devotional programmes such as the Stations of the Cross, I propose that in the case of both Nkosi's *Crucifixion* and Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, extended to the viewer is a certain *imperative*: to imaginatively revisit and rethink within the present, traumatic histories of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

Undertaking this research, I have by necessity limited the works referenced to those I believe to be most relevant to my analysis – emphasising church-commissioned projects realised in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as well as the more secular revisions of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* and Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*. Consequently, not included in this paper are a number of significant renditions of the Stations of the Cross, such as those produced by artists like Rosina Qwalana, Frans Hodi and Michael Mosala.² Also, given my focus on narrative representations of Christ's Passion, excluded from these observations are a number of important but non-sequential images, wherein both black and white South African artists have reimagined the Crucifixion and other Passion episodes in ways critical of apartheid and related human abuses. To mention a few: Thami Mnyele's untitled Crucifixion diptych (1976), Jacob Matsose's *Forgiveness* (1978), Trevor Mkhoba's *The naked truth* (1983), and Sam Nhlengethwa's *The Other Side of the Crucifixion* (1990).³

Adding to what I feel to be a critical field of study – namely, the diverse application of Christian motifs within South African and other African art contexts – I have benefitted from the existing research of art historians like Juliette Leeb-du Toit, Mduduzi Xakaza, Dina Cormick, Frieda Harmsen, Philippa Hobbs, Elizabeth Rankin, Karen von Veh, Nicholas Bridger and Martin Ott.⁴ In this regard, texts particularly worth noting are Frieda Harmsen's

² A number of these are referenced in Frieda Harmsen's 1989 reflective survey of the Stations of the Cross in South Africa.

³ For an analysis of Matsose and Mkhoba's works, see Xakaza. 2011. Christianity as a Site of Struggles. An interpretation of the use of biblical sources in South African art:60. For Mnyele's untitled Crucifixion diptych, see Seidman. 2007:48.

⁴ Relevant texts by these and other authors are reflected in the Bibliography of this research.

reflective survey, *The Way to Easter – Stations of the Cross in South Africa* (1989), Juliette Leeb-du Toit's PhD thesis, *Contextualizing the use of biblically derived and metaphysical imagery in the work of black artists from KwaZulu-Natal: c1930–2002* (2003), and Mduduzi Xakaza's essay, 'Christianity as a site of struggles – an interpretation of the use of biblical sources in South African art' (2011). Of especial relevance, presented in the latter is as Xakaza explains:

[A] critical evaluation of how artists, mostly black, attempted to reclaim the proclaimed universality of Christianity, insuring that its message was relevant to the oppressed majority, as well as reflecting on the ways in which artists used the language of Christianity to comment on the unjust political and economic orders of apartheid (Xakaza, 2011:61).

Concentrating on narrative representations of Christ's Passion realised by black South African artists during and after apartheid, and the kinds of engaged witness I believe they demand, my objective in what follows is to both critically apply and, where possible, extend this important line of enquiry.

Research outline

Introducing and contextualising the objectives of this research, outlined in Chapter One is the historical emergence and religious significance of the Stations of the Cross – as both an iconographic programme and liturgical practice.

As a 'pilgrimage in miniature', I introduce the primarily Catholic devotional exercise of the Stations of the Cross as an imaginative and affective retracing of Christ's bearing of the cross from Pilate's House to Calvary. In this regard, the genealogy of the tradition is demonstrated in the long-established practice of venerating in Jerusalem the stations that mark the *Via Dolorosa*, as well as in derived practices of simulated pilgrimage formulated in Europe in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. As a visual programme – whereby the episodes of Christ's Passion are pictorially registered in a sequence of fourteen stations – I then situate the tradition within the broader context of western devotional art, with an emphasis on the narrative tradition of the Passion cycle. Noted in this essentially sacred context is the given functionality of the image; as a means of exciting devotion, and of facilitating for viewers a reimagining (or 'reactualisation') of Christ's Passion. In addition to this religious operation, considered also is the regular application in this history of Christ's episodic sufferings to specific socio-political situations. Institutionalised in the early eighteenth-century, and codifying in many respects these various traditions, I note in conclusion the ubiquitous spread of the Stations of the Cross, in the wake of Catholic missionary activity and the general advance of colonialism.

Having noted its introduction to Catholic Church and mission contexts in Africa, I trace in Chapter Two the commissioned reinterpretation (or ‘Africanisation’) of the Stations of the Cross by black artists in South Africa. In doing so, I reflect on the personal narratives and underlying politics involved in these complex cultural transactions.

As necessary to this project I establish first a certain historical and theoretical framework, situating my analysis within the broader history and cultural encounter of colonialism and missions, and the introduction to Africa of a distinctly European-styled Christianity. In this context, I observe how in following versions of the Stations of the Cross imported from Europe, black Christian devotees were required to retrace, internalise and ultimately model the divine example of a decidedly white saviour. With reference to Hans Belting, I note this situation as demonstrating a problematic form of ‘image transfer’ and ‘mental colonisation’. Addressing this imposed cultural bias, I then observe in the first half of the twentieth-century a certain socio-theological turn – marked by the decolonising agendas of African Theology and the broader project of Inculturation. In this regard I trace the resultant commissioning of black African artists, whose mandate it was to creatively realise more culturally relevant (or ‘indigenous’) Christian iconographies. Referencing as example mission-based art initiatives in Nigeria, Malawi and what was then Rhodesia, I focus in particular on church commissioned projects realised in South Africa, and specifically in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Referencing versions of the Stations of the Cross produced by artists like Bernard Gcwensa and Ruben Xulu, I note within the context of apartheid South Africa the figurative emergence of a black Christ and a localised Passion. Observing this iconographic shift, I acknowledge the significant role played by liberal white patrons in the commissioning of these artists – and in that regard, their promulgation of certain primitivist tropes, associated with notions of indigeneity and Africanness. I argue, however, that these reductive generalisations were complicated ultimately in the diverse approaches and resistances demonstrated by the artists themselves, in actively negotiating the commissions they received. As exemplary in this regard I forward the case of Sydney Kumalo, whose modernist renderings of the Stations of the Cross embody a secular and distinctly cross-cultural approach to the project of ‘Africanisation’.

Noting these developments, I emphasise the political implications of these diverse iconographic revisions – not only in relation to a colonial history of cultural imposition, but more immediately the racialised context of apartheid South Africa. In this regard, I argue that in reaffirming the universality of Christ’s person and Passion, black artists in South Africa asserted by extension the corresponding value and equality of black identities. In consequence I propose that as functional liturgical programmes, these reinterpreted Stations

of the Cross presented for participants a means not only of retracing the narrative of Christ's Passion, but also of countering in some measure the engrained cultural bias of a European-styled Christianity.

Considered in Chapter Three is the more explicitly political gesture of Sokhaya Charles Nkosi's linocut series, *Crucifixion* (1976). Formulated in response to the intensifying atmosphere of political unrest that followed the traumatic events of the 1976 Soweto Uprising, I introduce the series as an essentially secular and socially historicised reworking of the Passion drama. By way of both visual and contextual analysis, I demonstrate the episodic tribulations of Nkosi's black Christ as chronicling, in a veiled religious idiom, what Njabulo Ndebele describes as the 'violent science' of apartheid. In so doing, I note the imaginative manner in which Nkosi makes visual not just the pervading violence of apartheid as a bio-politics, but more particularly the 'unseen' violence of incarcerations and torture enacted by apartheid security forces in the late 1970s. As significant to this visual chronicling, I reflect also on the particular agency of the series as printed media – situating it within a broader tradition of social critique in the graphic arts.

On a more ideological level, and with reference to the artist's own reflections, I forward the figure of Nkosi's incarcerated Christ as embodying in his blackness, as well as in the ultimately victorious narrative of his suffering, the self-realisation and political emancipation advocated within both Black Consciousness and Black Theology. Emphasised here is the immediate application of Christ's person and Passion to the social experience and political aspirations of black people in apartheid South Africa. As such, I argue that Nkosi's *Crucifixion* marks a significant departure from the forms of iconographic reinterpretation considered in Chapter Two. In conclusion, I propose that in chronicling experiences of historical trauma, and embodying the lived ideologies of a liberation struggle, Nkosi's *Crucifixion* makes possible for viewers imaginative and affective opportunities for bearing witness.

Moving from the political crisis of 1976 to the particular post-colonial/post-apartheid moment of 1995, I reflect in Chapter Four on Azaria Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* (1995). As a conscious invocation of the Stations of the Cross, I forward the work as an imaginative exercise of historical revision – or rather what Barnor Hesse describes as 'postcolonial memory'. Demonstrated in this regard, and as critical to the project of social, political and racial reconciliation envisioned in the series, is a fundamental rethinking of African histories.

Situating the project within the artist's distinctive oeuvre, I note as central his longstanding reinterpretation of biblical themes. Contextualising Mbatha's engagement in this regard, I emphasise the complex trajectory of his personal and artistic development: from the religio-

cultural dynamic of his *Kholwa* upbringing, to his influential involvement with the ELC Art and Craft Centre, Rorke's Drift, and his interaction in the early 1960s with students at the Lutheran Theological College at Mapumulo. Wary, however, of the limited and essentially 'ethnic' frame in which Mbatha's work has been regularly cast, I stress the significance of his relocation to Sweden in 1969, and his experience there as an artist in exile. Furthering this contextual analysis, I situate his *Stations of the Cross for Africa* within a certain iconographic and semiotic genealogy, tracing over a thirty-year period his particular treatment of the figure of Christ. Emphasised and noted in relation to the artist's shifting reflections on the political situation in South Africa, is Christ's regular signification as a universal arbiter of reconciliation. Thus located, I concentrate on the sixteen images that together constitute Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*. By way of extensive visual analysis, its episodic stations are presented as an allegorical retelling of African histories, reconstituting in the episodes of Christ's suffering the mutually embedded traumas of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Subjacent to this dehumanising narrative of racial subjugation is demonstrated also a counter narrative of embodied resistance. A kind of 'oppositional humanism', registered in the self-willed passage of Mbatha's African Christ, as well as in the mutual identification of his followers.

Posed in the concluding stations of the series is a universal vision of reconciliation – granting to the antecedent episodes of Christ's suffering and death a kind of socio-historical and ideological *telos*. Reflecting on this, I note as central not only to the conceptual narrative of the series itself, but also to the broader political project of Mbatha's visual practice, the ethical imperative of reconciliation. Conscious of the particular socio-political moment of the work's inception, I consider the extent to which the particular vision of reconciliation posited in the series both reflects and challenges that advanced within the 'transformative' context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Following these reflections, I argue in closing that intrinsic to Mbatha's strategic appropriation of the Stations of the Cross is a certain implied *action* – forwarding as he does a future vision of reconciliation, predicated on the ritual and essentially postcolonial practice of revisiting African histories.

Tracing as it were the Passion of a black Christ, my objective in the following chapters is to demonstrate ways in which both during and after apartheid black artists have negotiated, reinterpreted and symbolically redeployed the narrative of Christ's suffering. In doing so, I argue that when co-opted and politicised the Passion becomes a potent visual metaphor, as a means of making black suffering felt and positioned as central to histories of colonialism and apartheid. Concentrating on the appropriative gestures of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* and Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, I demonstrate? their application to specific socio-political experiences – situating them as significant documents of cultural memory and

historical revision. Affirming as current their agency in this regard, I argue in conclusion that in their respective visual programmes, viewers are afforded meaningful opportunities to imaginatively revisit and critically rethink narratives of black suffering and resistance, and their immediate bearing on the so-called democracy of a contemporary and socially stratified South African experience.

Chapter One: A Pilgrimage in Miniature

A genealogy of the programme and practice of the Stations of the Cross

O Jesus, our adorable Savior, behold us prostrate at Thy feet, imploring Thy mercy for ourselves, and for the souls of all the faithful departed. Vouchsafe to apply to us the infinite merits of Thy passion, on which we are now about to meditate. Grant that while we trace this path of sighs and tears, our hearts may be so touched with contrition and repentance, that we may be ready to embrace with joy all the crosses, sufferings, and humiliations of this our life and pilgrimage.

Richard Challoner, from his *Stations of the Cross* (c.1758) (cited in Counsell, 2004:309).

As a means of both introducing and contextualising the sacred as well as secular projects considered in this research – and as I propose, the participative forms of witness they encourage – presented in this chapter is a basic genealogy of the Stations of the Cross. Emphasised in this regard is the programme's roots in medieval and essentially European traditions of simulated pilgrimage and devotional art.

I. Via Crucis – The Way of the Cross

Lining the inside walls of churches, chapels and cloisters, or erected in gardens or other outdoor environments, the Stations of the Cross (*Via Crucis*) is a devotional and traditionally Catholic programme, tracing in fourteen stations the episodes of Christ's Passion: from his condemnation before Pilate, to his death on the cross and subsequent entombment. Although officially marked by a numbered sequence of small wooden crosses, the stations themselves are usually accompanied by illustrative panels – visual cues, or *aides-mémoire*, variously realised in painting, relief or mosaic (Murray & Murray, 1998:805; Harmsen, 1989:14). Meditating upon these, adherents perform a kind of affective reimagining – participating as it were in the divine work of Christ's redemptive suffering.⁵ Colum Hourihane observes:

The reenactment of the Passion narrative through movement along fourteen different stations was [and is] seen as an aid for the worshipper to participate more fully in the physical reenactment of [Christ's] suffering (Hourihane, 2009:308).

Noted in his seminal study, *The Stations of the Cross: an account of their history and devotional purpose* (1914), Herbert Thurston observes three requisites to the 'proper' practise of the Stations of the Cross. The first of these being a sincere meditation on the

⁵ Affectively achieved in this meditative re-enactment is something of the spiritual imperative outlined by St Peter: "but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:13a) – as well as Christ's own injunction: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

events of Christ's passion; the second, that in so doing the participant moves from station to station; and the third, that all fourteen stations be visited without interruption (Thurston, 1914:175). Thus performed – usually on Friday afternoons and over the Lenten season – the meditative practice of the Stations of the Cross constitutes as Carmen Acevedo Butcher observes, “a prayerful path that helps spiritual seekers put on Christ’s sandals as they move slowly from station to station, reflecting on his life” (Acevedo Butcher, 2013:55).

Although formalised itself in the early eighteenth-century, the devotional programme of the Stations of the Cross is rooted historically in medieval traditions of affective piety – and of pilgrimage in particular. Motivated by the writings of Saint Anselm (1033-1109) and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Christian devotion shifted in Europe over the course of the 11th and 12th centuries toward a more affective and empathic appreciation of Christ’s Passion.⁶ In this regard Anthony Spearling observes:

The new devotion was more *Christocentric* and more *affective* than that of earlier Christianity: that is, it centred in God’s human nature and in the powerful feelings of love and pity aroused in men and women by his bodily sufferings. There was a longing to share imaginatively in the life of the Holy Family but above all in the experience of Jesus in his Passion (Spearling, 1998:xiv).

Seeking to so ‘share’ in the experience of Christ, pilgrims from Europe travelled *en masse* to Jerusalem – venerating there the principle sites of Christ’s Passion, as marked by stations along the stretches of road commonly known as the *Via Dolorosa* (or Way of Suffering).⁷ Journeying to the Holy Land was, however, both an expensive and dangerous undertaking – beyond the material means of most (Morris, 2002:141). Consequently, in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance domestic simulations of the Jerusalem stations were formulated in Europe, facilitating for those unable to travel an accessible means of sharing in the experience (Thurston, 1914:7). Of these, best known perhaps are the ‘Seven Falls of Christ’ – a sequence of sculpted stations commissioned by the returning pilgrim Martin Ketzel and erected in the streets of Nuremberg (Murray & Murray, 1998). Completed in about 1490, these sequential bas-relief stations were carved by the sculptor Adam Krafft, and spaced according to measurements paced out in Jerusalem by Ketzel himself. By following these stations, devotees could retrace ‘pace for pace’ Christ’s bearing of the cross from Pilate’s house to Calvary, aided in their reimagining by the “intense emotional dramas” of Krafft’s realistic renderings (see plates 1 & 2) (Schleif, 2012). More virtual still, similar opportunities were afforded in the form of textual programmes of imaginary (or ‘mental’) pilgrimage. For example, Jan Pascha published in 1563 his *Gheestelyck Pelgrimage* – a three hundred and

⁶ For an account of this shift – sometimes called the ‘Anselmian Revolution’ – see Viladesau. 2006, *The Beauty of the Cross. The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts - from the Catacombs to the Eve of the Renaissance*.

⁷ For an in-depth account of the *Via Dolorosa*, and its historical relation to the Stations of the Cross, see Thurston. 1914, *The Stations of the Cross. An Account of their History and Devotional Purpose*.

sixty-five day ‘pilgrimage in spirit’ to the Holy Land, culminating in a meditative sequence of Passion stations (Thurston, 1914:84). Elevating pilgrimage to a ‘contemplative mystic ideal’, emphasised in these mimetic and textual programmes was, as Kathryne Beebe observes, the inward, essentially spiritual movement of the practice (Beebe, 2008:60). Emphasising the relational and Christological objective of this ‘movement’, Dee Dyas explains, “the aim of the true pilgrim was not in the final analysis to see Jerusalem but to see Jesus” (cited in Acevedo Butcher, 2013:58).

Introduced as a ‘pilgrimage in miniature’, the liturgical practice of the Stations of the Cross codified in many respects these earlier traditions – similarly enabling an imaginative and affective revisiting of the Passion drama (Thurston, 1914:2). Originally limited to Franciscan contexts, its programme was extended in 1731 to all Catholic churches – an institutionalisation realised first in Europe and then beyond: its ubiquitous spread following in the wake of Catholic missionary activity and the concomitant spread of colonialism (Murray & Murray, 1998:805). Thus formalised, official installations of the Stations of the Cross – be they in Europe, the Americas, Asia or Africa – conform in general to the same episodic format. Fixed by Saint Leonard of Porto Maurizio (1676-1751),⁸ the stational sequence of the programme is as follows:

1. Jesus is condemned to death
2. Jesus takes up the cross
3. Jesus falls the first time
4. Jesus meets his mother
5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross
6. Veronica wipes Jesus' face
7. Jesus falls the second time
8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies upon the cross
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross
14. Jesus is entombed

Of these various episodes (or stations), only eight are in fact scripturally based, whereas stations three, four, six, nine and thirteen are apocryphal in nature – episodes born of the antecedent and essentially medieval traditions which originally informed St Leonard’s formulation.⁹ Singular amongst these is the episode of Christ’s meeting with Veronica (station six). Popularised in the fifteenth-century, and marked thereafter as an official station

⁸ Erecting in his lifetime over five hundred versions, it was Saint Leonard of Porto Maurizio who first advocated the programme and practice of the Stations of the Cross to Popes Clement XII and Benedict XIV (McBrien, 1995:1222).

⁹ In an attempt to redress these apocryphal elaborations, Pope John Paul II introduced in 1991 an alternative ‘scriptural’ sequence of stations, practised thereafter in the Colosseum on Good Fridays (Champlin, 1994). Nevertheless, it is the traditional stations of Saint Leonard that are for the most part associated with the Stations of the Cross, and represented in almost every Catholic church and chapel.

of the *Via Dolorosa*, recalled in the episode is the compassionate gesture of Saint Veronica, who was said to have wiped with her veil the sweating and bleeding face of Christ. Bearing as it was believed a miraculous imprint of Christ's visage the veil itself (also known as the *vernicle* or *sudarium*) was held in Rome, as a relic and object of pilgrimage in its own right¹⁰ (Van Os, 1994:42). Acknowledging the somewhat questionable historicity of such stations, Thurston emphasises rather their fundamentally *symbolic* and *facilitative* character, noting:

[W]e venerate them for what they symbolize and for that which they help to bring nearer to us, but we are comparatively indifferent at such times to questions of history or fact. It is sufficient for us that they possess a certain relative truth (Thurston, 1914:138).

In this respect, he goes on to assert that very often those instances, "which are from an historical point of view most open to question", are also, "among the most helpful to piety" (Thurston, 1914:139). In this sense the value or 'truth' of the Stations of the Cross is founded not so much on its historic (or even scriptural) authenticity, as on its spiritual efficacy as a devotional programme. This is not, however, to imply that in its narrative formulation the Stations of the Cross is not a work of history, which of course it is – but rather that it operates within the more generous latitudes of what Greg Dening describes as history's *poetics* (Dening, 1996:35-6).¹¹ In this sense it is what one might call a devotional history, an account creatively augmented not so as to distort the 'facts', but quite oppositely to make a certain, fundamental fact *more real*. The idea being: in the imaginative re-enactment of the Stations of the Cross, to engender an empathic and transformative encounter with the spiritual (rather than purely historical) reality of Christ's suffering. John Ford observes:

The via crucis is not simply a historical representation but a *religious* representation – a spiritual activity, a dramatized prayer, which helps the participants *experience* the crucifixion of Jesus as a salvific event that gives significance and purpose to their lives. (Ford, 2010:2, my emphasis)

There is in this sense a distinctly sacramental aspect to the Stations of the Cross, constituting as it does for engaged participants a meaningful, even life-altering religious experience¹² (Ford, 2010:3). Significant in this regard is the idea of *anamnesis* – a term generally associated with forms of conscious and experiential recollection, and of which Frank Senn observes:

¹⁰ Rather than referring to an actual person, it is believed in fact that both the name and apocryphal character of 'Veronica' derive from the Latin and Greek compound *vera-icon*, meaning 'true image' – a term referring originally to the object (or relic) itself (Van Os, 1994:42).

¹¹ Dening posits a 'poetic' for histories (within a broader notion of 'History', as encompassing memory as well as 'all the other ways of knowing a past'), wherein modes of making the past knowable – be it ballad, folklore, anecdote, myth – are differentiated (and made sense of) by their respective 'poetics' (Dening, 1996:35–36).

¹² Ford notes: "Thus, the celebration of the stations of the cross has a "sacramental" aspect in the sense that they are a visible sign of a divine event of grace; divine redemption is both manifested by and realized through the death of Jesus. By celebrating the stations of the cross, the mystery of salvation confronts the contemporary human situation in spite of the fact – as well as because of the fact – that the human condition is filled with sin and suffering" (Ford, 2010:3).

This Greek word [*anamnesis*] is practically untranslatable in English. ‘Memorial,’ ‘commemoration,’ ‘remembrance’ all suggest a recollection of the past, whereas *anamnesis* means making present an object or person from the past. Sometimes the term ‘reactualization’ has been used to indicate the force of *anamnesis* (Senn, 1990:45).

In Catholic theology, *anamnesis* is applied especially in the context of the Eucharist’s celebration – as in the ritual partaking of bread and wine the redemptive agency of Christ’s bodily sacrifice is made physically present.¹³ The idea, however, extends to other liturgical practices too, as noted in the Catholic Catechism: “Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but *actualizes* them, makes them *present*” (1995:287, my emphasis). As a papally-sanctioned liturgical programme, the Stations of the Cross is in this sense to be understood as facilitating something more than the ritual commemoration of an historical drama, as in its meditative re-enactment the redemptive agency (or spiritual reality) of the Passion is ‘made present’, or ‘reactualised’.

Usually conducted by a priest or spiritual director of some sort, participative involvement in the Stations of the Cross is often, but not as a rule, facilitated by scriptural prompts and directed prayers outlined in missals or in other devotional texts. Traditionally, these sequential devotions are precluded by an ‘Act of Contrition’ – a prayer (as with that included in the first part of this chapter) wherein the participant acknowledges their needfulness of God’s grace, achieved in the redemptive action of Christ’s death on the cross. ‘Walking the Stations’ is then an essentially penitential journey, premised on the participant’s self-acknowledged complicity in the necessary violence of Christ’s Passion. Illustrating this, in his influential meditations on the Stations of the Cross, Cardinal Newman (1801-1890) implicates himself in the condemnation and subsequent execution of Christ:

[Station I] Jesus is condemned to death. His death-warrant is signed, and who signed it but I, when I committed my first mortal sins? ... these it was that were Thy death-warrant, O Lord. The Innocent suffered for the guilty. Those sins of mine were the voices which cried out, "Let Him be crucified" (Newman, 2007).

For the involved participant this confessional tenor is, however, counter-balanced by the absolving promise of the Passion narrative itself – centred as it is on the propitiatory work of Christ’s sacrifice.¹⁴ Underwriting as it were this absolving promise, were the spiritual indulgences¹⁵ (and so divine clemency) granted to the ‘proper’ exercise of the Stations of the

¹³ Instituting the sacrament of communion, Jesus said: “do this in remembrance [or *anamnesis*] of me” (Luke 22:19). In Catholic liturgy, this application of *anamnesis* (as something more than a commemorative act) is clear in this extract from the Eucharistic prayer D (as featured in the Common Book of Prayer): “Father, we now celebrate this *reactualization* of our redemption. Making *present again* Christ’s death[...]" (cited in Anamnesis Q&A, 2015:2).

¹⁴ In this regard, St John affirms: “and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin ... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7&9).

¹⁵ Exonerating awards historically granted by the Catholic Church, spiritual indulgences promise to beneficiaries a measure of remission from sin’s temporal punishment. Whilst the eternal punishment for sin is remitted only in the redemptive work of Christ (and effected in the sacraments of baptism, communion and penance), it was taught

Cross by Pope Clement XII (1652-1740) (Thurston, 1914:172). As a 'pilgrimage in miniature', central then to the religious and essentially anamnestic dynamic of the Stations of the Cross is an engaged and spiritually rewarding *encounter*, as the iconic history and transformative work of Christ's Passion is rendered both present and personal.

II. The Passion cycle in devotional art

Although essentially a devotional practice, the Stations of the Cross is more generally understood as an iconographic tradition, a visual tableaux illustrating in fourteen panels (or stations) the episodes of Christ's Passion. As such, and given the emphasis of this research on artistic representations, it is, I believe, worth briefly situating this visual aspect of the programme within a broader art historical context – and in respect particularly to the iconographic tradition of the Passion cycle.

As with its practise, the iconographic programme of the Stations of the Cross is rooted in a cultural history of affective and Christocentric spirituality. Reflecting on the religious milieu of Europe in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, and the intense cultural production it fostered, James Marrow observes:

The desire of pious men and women to approach the divine through intimate knowledge and empathic experience of Christ's humanity and Passion led to profound developments in religious literature and art: content and style underwent evolutionary changes mirroring the humanized and emotional religiosity of the period (Marrow, 1979:1).

In addition to the kinds of simulated pilgrimage already discussed, these developments included a spectacular outpouring of devotional literature, the advent and popularisation of the Passion play, and the visual tradition of the devotional image, or *andachstbilder* (Van Os, 1994; Marrow, 1979). Generally centred on the humanity of Christ and the sufferings of his Passion, these images were intended to evoke in the viewer a powerful and empathic sense of personal identification. Engendering as Viladesau notes: "appreciation of the suffering of Christ, awareness of and sorrow for the sin that caused it, appropriation of the salvation it effected, and imitation of the virtues it exemplified" (Viladesau, 2006:127). Significant developments in this regard were the iconic motifs of the *Pietà* and Man of Sorrows,¹⁶ as well as the indexical tradition of the *Arma Christi*, wherein visual representations of the weapons and tools associated with Christ's Passion re-emphasised the bodily violence of the event

that to satisfy divine justice, the temporal consequences of sin demanded expiation, in the present life or in purgatory. Indulgences present a means of discharging this debt, with partial indulgences cancelling a given period of puratorial punishment, and plenary indulgences negating the demand entirely. See Kent, 1910, "Indulgences" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7.

¹⁶ Presented in this thirteenth-century iconic tradition is the figure of Christ, standing in an open sepulcher, and bearing the five wounds of his crucifixion (Hall, 1979:197).

(Sturgis, 2000:158) (see plates 3–4).¹⁷ Extending this preoccupation, Passion iconography became increasingly explicit over the course of the 15th and 16th centuries, rendering visual the theological premise of Christ's body as the definitive site of both human suffering and redemption¹⁸ (Finaldi, 2000:106; Marrow, 1979:168). Completed in 1515, exemplifying this visual embodiment of suffering and redemption is the oft-cited example of Matthias Grünewald's Isenheim altarpiece (plates 5-6). Graphic in its representation of the Crucifixion event, of particular significance are the tiny lacerations and pocks that cover Christ's body – given that the piece was painted especially for the monastery of Saint Anthony, which tended to victims of plague and painful skin diseases like ergotism (or 'Saint Anthony's Fire') (Viladesau, 2008:72-76). Projected upon the body of Christ was then a situation of contemporary suffering – displaying as Gabriele Finaldi observes, "his ability to partake fully in our humanity" (Finaldi, 2000:112). Thus, for all of its violence, the image was for those suffering under such maladies a source of personal comfort; equating their experience with that of Christ's, and further to that, reaffirming in the redemptive promise of the Crucifixion itself the future alleviation of their temporal struggles. In this regard, Viladesau notes:

He [Christ] is thus a sign of hope for those who look on this image in the hospital context of the Isenheim altar. Not merely hope for physical healing...but hope for eternal life rising out of suffering and death (Viladesau, 2008:76).

Of particular significance to the iconographic development of the Stations of the Cross was, however, the manner in which this general accentuation of the humanity of Christ was simultaneously developed in the narrative context and polymorphous tradition of the Passion cycle.¹⁹ Reflecting on cycles produced in Italy in the Early Renaissance, Jules Lubbock situates the tradition (as one episodic rather than iconic) within the broader art historical context of the *historia* – images depicting stories, doctrines and allegories. In this respect he notes its roots in the aesthetic theology of Saint Gregory (c.540–604), wherein images are understood as a form of visual text – equivalent in their veracity to written accounts of such biblical events as Christ's Passion (Lubbock, 2006:7).²⁰ Acknowledging the didacticism of

¹⁷ Demonstrated later in this study, such 'instruments' as shackles and chains take on new significance in the politically inflected Passion cycles of both Sokhaya Charles Nkosi and Azaria Mbatha.

¹⁸ Theologically, Viladesau observes how according to St Thomas Aquinas, the sufferings of Christ were *total* – as in the travail of his Passion (and in bearing the sins of all people) he experienced every kind of human pain, and to a degree exceeding that of any other individual (Viladesau, 2006:97). Based on this premise, and the devotional fervour of the time, graphic representations of Christ's sufferings were creatively augmented over the course of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. For an account of these developments see, Marrow. 1979, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative*.

¹⁹ Not limited to the fourteen episodes of the Stations of the Cross (which were, as noted already, formalised only in the early eighteenth-century), Hourihane observes how, "Passion cycles have varied throughout time ... with different episodes predominating at various times and places" (Hourihane, 2009:227).

²⁰ In this regard, Lubbock observes that the image (as *historia*), "is not a mere reminder of a written text, nor an illustration, it is a text in its own right, a witness to the events or a statement of doctrine just as much as the visual record" (Lubbock, 2006:7).

Passion cycles in this regard, Finaldi observes their amenability also to participative forms of devotional practise, related to those of actual and simulated pilgrimage²¹ (Finaldi, 2000:134).

Making explicit this participative directive is the bas-relief cycle of Giovanni Pisano's Pisa Pulpit (or *Pisa Passion*) (1302-10), the episodes of which, by way of oblique and over-the-shoulder viewpoints, situate the viewer in the 'live-action' drama of the Passion (Lubbock, 2006:138-9). As Lubbock observes, insinuated in this 'participatory involvement' is a measure of complicity in the ethical encounter of Christ's public humiliation. He notes:

In the Betrayal, the Mocking and the Flagellation, Giovanni positions us so that we are compelled to face the moral dilemma of how we might have responded had we been present. Giovanni enables us to understand what it is like to betray someone or how we might behave watching a prisoner being tortured (Lubbock, 2006:139).

More direct still is the case of Albrecht Dürer's *Small Passion* (1509-1511) – a series of thirty-seven graphic images, and one of three Passion cycles produced by the artist in printed form²² (see plates 7-10). Emphasising a kind of shared culpability in the events of Christ's Passion, accompanying the images are devotional texts. Exploited in these is the theological notion of the 'perpetual Passion' – which is to say, the idea that Christ's sufferings are reanimated continually by the ongoing sins of humanity (Sturgis, 2000:141). Thus imbricated, imaginative involvement (or participation) in the visual narrative of such cycles involved for viewers a kind of complex and dialogical relation of guilt and gratitude, complicity and beneficence. In this regard, Finaldi observes:

On the one hand the image denounces the viewer as the perpetrator of crimes against divinity, on the other, Christ's pathetic state appeals directly to our sense of pity and compassion. The mix of emotions that well up in the devout upon looking at such an image, a blend of guilt and gratitude, sorrow and sympathy, is a very powerful combination (Finaldi, 2000:105).

Having noted in these examples the kind of empathic and ethically engaged spectatorship associated with the narrative tradition of the Passion cycle, worth acknowledging also is, I believe, what one might call its political register. By which I mean the extent to which such representations have historically both reflected and embodied contemporary social and political agendas. More secular than sacred, this register is particularly relevant to the case of this study – considering as I do in the chapters following the political implications

²¹ This kind of imaginative and affective participation in Christ's Passion was promulgated also in influential devotional texts like the fourteenth-century *Meditationes vitae Christi*, wherein the author (pseudo-Bonaventure) encourages the devotee to, "make himself a witness, with his ears as well as his eyes, and act as if he himself is present at all the narrative events" (cited in Van Os, 1994:165).

²² Whilst the *Small Passion* is a woodcut sequence, Dürer was a significant proponent of engraving also – as in his *Engraved Passion* (1507-12). With reference to both Dürer and Lucas Cranach, and their influential use of printmaking techniques, Viladesau notes the introduction through print of new contexts for religious art, outside the confines of church buildings and contexts (Viladesau, 2008:209).

associated with the visual as well as ideological reinterpretation of Christ's Passion by black South African artists.

Implicit in the biblical narrative of Christ's Passion is, one might say, a certain fundamental politics: Christ is the champion and liberator of the oppressed, is betrayed by his own people (as the Jewish authorities incite the mob), and unjustly condemned and executed by the occupying Romans. Consequently, how the various participants in the narrative are depicted – be it Christ or his persecutors – demonstrates a certain associated politics, especially when contemporised or when ethnic or racial identities are assigned to particular characters. In this regard, and from as early as the Middle Ages, Hourihane observes the anti-Semitic overtones evident in numerous depictions of Christ's accusers, as well as of Pontius Pilate²³ (Hourihane, 2009:228). Similarly, Paul Kaplan points to instances of pejorative typecasting in sacred Western art, wherein Christ's persecutors are represented as black – citing as an example Giotto di Bondone's *The Flagellation of Christ* (c. 1305), in which Christ suffers at the hand of a stereotypically figured black male²⁴ (Kaplan, 2010:7). By contrast, caricatured in the sculpted Passion episodes of Antonio Lisboa (half African himself), are the white colonial authorities of eighteenth-century Brazil, reflecting in the geopolitics of that context as Julien Bell relates, "a gathering national self-consciousness" (Bell, 2010:193).²⁵

Particularly well-known for its symbolic application of Christ's judgement and Passion to a localised situation of social disorder is the early example of Duccio di Buoninsegna's *Maestà* (1308–11). Commissioned for the Siena Cathedral, presented on the reverse of this double-sided altarpiece is a remarkable sequence of forty-three scenes, tracing the events of Christ's ministry and Passion. Given that at the time Siena was plagued by civil unrest and its government preoccupied with the administration of justice, of particular significance is the special focus granted in this dramatic visual programme to the episodes of Christ's trial (to which eleven scenes are designated). Celebrated throughout this juridical sequence is the notable example of Christ – whose model demonstration of civic duty is contrasted against the wavering of Saint Peter, and the corruption of both Herod and Pilate (Lubbock, 2006:37). In this regard, Lubbock observes:

[Duccio] used the biblical account to offer his own reflections upon the nature of human rights and true justice, its independence and impartiality symbolised by clear boundaries between judge, accused and plaintiffs but, more important, dependent upon the ideal of divine justice for its standards and the courage to maintain those standards against the blackmail of mob rule and violence (Lubbock, 2006:36).

²³ Although Roman, Hourihane observes how on account of his collusion in Christ's condemnation, Pilate was regularly and derogatively figured as Jewish (Hourihane, 2009:233).

²⁴ Kaplan points also to less derogatory medieval and Renaissance presentations, wherein black people are figured as Egyptians, Ethiopians, saints and Magi (Kaplan, 2010:1-30).

²⁵ See also Bailey. 2005, *Art of Colonial Latin America*:308.

Promoted as such, in the social application of Duccio's *Maestà*, as well as in the more devotional aspect of such cycles as Dürer's *Small Passion*, is the example of Christ and the sufferings of his Passion as an ideal model for human emulation. For the viewer then, implied in this sense is something more than an imaginary and empathic participation in Christ's Passion, but an embodiment also of its virtues. A becoming; consciously played out in the individual's life, and by extension the socio-political context of their experience. In this regard, Jill Bennett observes,

This is exactly how Christian imagery traditionally operates, the spectacle of crucifixion promoting an *imitatio Christi* or practice of bodily mortification that in turn will yield its own enlightenment ... the spectator is 'touched' by the image and, through a process of contagion, induced to become the image²⁶ (Bennett, 2005:39).

Extending this tradition, imagery in the context of the Stations of the Cross similarly invokes in its representation of Christ's sufferings as a model for human emulation, both a form of affective encounter, and of embodied response (*imitatio*). Emerging in the wake of the Counter-Reformation, and formalising to a degree the otherwise polymorphous formulations of the Passion cycle, facilitated as such in its visual tableaux is an imaginative but also practically instructive revisiting of the Passion.

Following its codification and Papal sanction in the early eighteenth-century, one of the first visual renditions of the Stations of the Cross was produced by Giandomenico Tiepolo (son of the more famous Giovanni Battista Tiepolo), who between 1747 and 1749 produced a lavishly painted sequence for the Chiesa di San Polo in Venice (see plates 11-14). In keeping with the graphic tradition and earlier Passion cycles of Dürer and Lucas Cranach, he also produced a derivative series of fourteen etchings, intended for private rather than public reflection – its fourteen episodes accompanied by meditative texts and scriptural references.²⁷ Subsequently, over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, numerous (mostly European) artists reworked the tradition in media as diverse as painting, relief and mosaic. In the twentieth-century more modernist renditions were undertaken by artists like Maurice Denis, Henri Matisse, Tsugouhara Foujita and, in a somewhat more secular context, Barnett Newman.²⁸ Outside of Europe, the Stations of the Cross was popularised and made

²⁶ Similarly, of such imagery Susan Sontag observes, "these are surely intended to move and excite, and to instruct and exemplify" (Sontag, 2004:36, my emphasis).

²⁷ Booklet versions of the Stations of the Cross, intended for private recitation, were acknowledged in the early nineteenth-century as equivalent in their spiritual efficacy to the more concrete programmes traditionally installed in churches, chapels and other locations. Consequently, and emphasising the internal journeying of 'pilgrimage in spirit', Pope Gregory XVI granted to a version published in 1834 the same indulgences traditionally accorded to the physical practice of 'walking the Stations' (Thurston, 1914:174).

²⁸ Unlike those of Denis, Matisse and Foujita, Newman's sequence was never intended for liturgical use. Rather, as a distinctly modernist (and secular) undertaking, his *Stations of the Cross* (1958-66) presents an abstract and essentially existential reflection on the 'overwhelming question' of Christ's utterance on the cross: *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* (My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?) (Matthew 27:46) (Newman, 1966). See Alloway.

ubiquitous in the coterminous contexts of colonial expansion and Catholic missionary activity.²⁹ Following the subsequent commissioning of ‘indigenous’ artists in Africa, the Far East and elsewhere, artists from outside of Europe and the mainstream of western art history gave visual expression to its visual programme – transforming what was an essentially western, or European, tradition. Considered as such in the chapter following is the iconographic revision (or ‘Africanisation’) of the Stations of the Cross by black artists in South Africa, and the political implications of those cultural transactions in relation to the racialised contexts of colonialism and apartheid.

1966, "The Stations of the Cross and the Subjects of the Artist" in Barnett Newman, *The Stations of the Cross: lema sabachtani*.

²⁹ Nicholas Bridger observes how, buoyed by a swell of Romanticism, and the general advance of colonialism, missionary activity became fashionable again in Catholic circles. In this regard he notes how the competitiveness of rival colonial powers could hardly have exceeded that of Catholic and Protestant missionaries (Bridger, 2012:13–14).

Chapter Two: An African Way

Colonialism, missions and the ‘Africanisation’ of the Stations of the Cross

You may, and you must, have an African Christianity. Indeed, you possess human values and characteristic forms of culture which can rise up to perfection such as to find in Christianity, and for Christianity, a true superior fullness, and prove to be capable of a richness of expression all its own, and genuinely African.

Pope Paul VI, to the Symposium of African Bishops, Kampala, July 1969 (Pope Paul VI, 1969).

In her reflective survey of the Stations of the Cross in South Africa, *The Road to Easter* (1989), Frieda Harmsen recounts an anecdote shared with her by Father Heinz Kuckertz. It was in the mid-1970s, and charged with the iconographic programme of the soon to be consecrated Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in Makwane, Qwa Qwa,³⁰ Father Kuckertz approached the sculptor Duke Ketye (1943–2002), commissioning him to produce an original rendition of the Stations of the Cross. Accepting the commission, Ketye inquired as to whether he should approach the project in a traditional sense, or according to his own conception. When asked what he meant by a ‘traditional’ Stations of the Cross, Ketye answered: “Like those in the white man’s churches” (cited in Harmsen, 1989:12). Given that in commissioning a black artist Father Kuckertz hoped to facilitate a more ‘African’ expression, Ketye was encouraged to pursue his own vision. The result was remarkable – with Ketye grouping the fourteen, traditionally separate episodes of the programme into a series of multi-narrative conglomerates, each linked by a decorative painted motif.³¹ In this way, grouped in the last of these complex, bas-relief panels are the traditional episodes of the Crucifixion, Christ’s descent from the cross, and his burial in the tomb (see plate 15). Disrupting the clean linearity of traditional renditions, captured in Ketye’s Stations of the Cross is something of the confused and urgent drama of the Passion events. Significant also, is the extent to which the narrative itself is localised, with Ketye figuring Christ as black, and referencing in visual cues and in the sharp undulation of the panels themselves the mountainous topography of QwaQwa. Reflecting on this re-contextualisation and application of Christ’s Passion to a distinctly African social context, Harmsen reflects:

[Ketye’s Stations of the Cross] makes a universal statement which none the less [sic] does not deny the identity of people or place. It recounts an historical event that occurred two thousand years ago in a distant land, but it has to do with the

³⁰ A project of Apartheid social engineering, QwaQwa was established as a ‘self-governing’ Bantustan in 1974. In 1994 it was reabsorbed into South Africa as part of the Free State province.

³¹ In this unique rendering, stations 1-3 are conjoined in a single multi-narrative panel, as are stations 4-6, 9-11 and 12-14. Only the 7th and 8th stations are figured independently, one on each side of the altar. For a detailed description of Duke Ketye’s Stations of the Cross for the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in Makwane, Qwa Qwa (1976), see Harmsen. 1989. *The Way to Easter: Stations of the Cross in South Africa*:10,12 & 31.

people of Africa, some of whom are destined to live in QwaQwa (Harmsen, 1989:12).

Working in the mid-1970s Ketye was, however, by no means the first black artist in South Africa to question or reappraise the hegemonic ‘whiteness’ of Christian visuality. In 1929, Ernest Mancoba had already produced his *African Madonna* (or *Bantu Madonna*), almost certainly the first representation in South Africa of Christ’s mother as black. Also, from as early as the 1950s artists like Bernard Gcwensa, Ruben Xulu and Sydney Kumalo had variously reinterpreted such iconographic traditions as the Stations of the Cross. Having outlined already the historic formulation of the Stations of the Cross, considered in this chapter is both its introduction to Africa, in the context of colonialism and missions, and its subsequent reinterpretation or ‘Africanisation’³² by black, church commissioned artists. Concentrating on versions produced in South Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the political implications and complex social dynamics of this iconographic transformation are emphasised.

I. Colonialism, missions and the problematic of a European-styled Christianity

The history of Christian missionary activity in Africa is inseparable from that of colonialism, imbricated as they are in a common historical paradigm.³³ Jean and John Comaroff observe:

[T]he study of Christianity in Africa is more than just an exercise in the analysis of political change. It is part and parcel of the historical anthropology of colonialism and consciousness, culture and power; of an anthropology concerned at once with the colonizer and the colonized [...] (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991:1).³⁴

Following the Berlin Conference of 1884, and in the subsequent ‘scramble for Africa’, the African continent was sub-divided and systematically colonised by the major European powers, to the extent that by 1914 ninety percent of Africa was under western rule.³⁵ Enacted over a period wherein European political philosophy was increasingly defensive of universalism and equality, the institutionalised human domination of colonialism was, ironically, legitimised (or sanitised) on the grounds of its self-proclaimed ‘civilizing mission’ (Kohn, 2014:1). Central to this as Margaret Kohn observes was the idea that, “a temporary

³² I retain such terms as ‘Africanisation’ and ‘indigenisation’ within scare quotes so as to acknowledge their contested status – associated as they are with reductive notions of Africa and Africanness.

³³ In keeping I think with this application (of the term ‘historical paradigm’), Lize van Robbroeck notes how, for Michel Foucault, “the set of received ideas, beliefs, prejudices and discourses that one inherits from one’s parents, peers, teachers, religious leaders and role models, belongs to a particular historical *paradigm* – and is ineluctably tied to an entire way of seeing that is particular to a given time and place” (Van Robbroeck, 2011:79). Similarly, Viladesau explains the notion (with reference to Hans Küng) as encompassing, “fundamental ways of thinking that are common within an era, despite differences of theory and particular subjects” (Viladesau, 2008:6).

³⁴ In a similar vein, Ntongela Masilela notes: “The violent entrance of European modernity into African history through imperialism, capitalism and colonialism made the question of modernity an unavoidable historical issue ... whereas the making of modernity in European history was a violent process of secularisation ... in African history it was a violent process of proselytising and conversion into Christianity: in one experience [that of Europe], modernity is a secular eventuation, in the other [that of Africa], it is inseparable from acculturation and religiosity” (Masilela, 2006:31).

³⁵ For an in-depth historical account see Pakenham. 1992. *The Scramble for Africa*.

period of political dependence or tutelage was necessary in order for “uncivilized” societies to advance to the point where they were capable of sustaining liberal institutions and self-government” (Kohn, 2014:1). In this sense, ‘civilisation’ was established as a kind of precondition for human equality, and so – or at least in theory – held out as the benign objective of the colonial project.³⁶ Thus for Rudyard Kipling, poet laureate of British imperialism, colonising the ‘uncivilised’ was a moral imperative – the ‘White Man’s Burden’:

Take up the White Man's burden –
Send forth the best ye breed –
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild –
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

– from *The White Man's Burden* (Kipling, 1899)

In this regard, Anthony Bogues explains colonialism as essentially premised on a hierarchical schema of human difference, with those colonised figured always in relation to a western ideal of ‘civilised’ humanity, and thus as backward and essentially primitive.³⁷ As such, the full humanity of the colonised was effectively denied, and correspondingly the ‘civilising’ violence of colonialism sanctioned (Bogues, 2012:35). In a similar vein, Salah Hassan points to the ‘colonial primitivist’ trajectory of colonialism in Africa – which as a form of social evolution³⁸ elaborated complex, racialised hierarchies of African peoples and cultures, and on that basis justified their social, political and economic subjugation (Hassan, 2010:453). As central to the episteme of colonialism in Africa was then, as Valentin-Yves Mudimbe observes, a certain “pervasive evolutionary assumption” – predicated on the African’s need as ‘primitive’ and ‘backward’ for cultural and spiritual regeneration³⁹ (Mudimbe, 1988:49).

Responding to David Livingston’s call for the ‘three C’s’ – *Christianity, commerce and civilization* – early missionaries to Sub-Saharan Africa shared for the most part in this anthropological (or *colonial primitivist*) perspective, holding Christianity and western culture

³⁶ Margaret Kohn notes: “According to this logic, civilized societies like Great Britain are acting in the interest of less-developed peoples by governing them. Imperialism, from this perspective, is not primarily a form of political domination and economic exploitation but rather a paternalistic practice of government that exports “civilization” (e.g. modernization) in order to foster the improvement of native peoples” (Kohn, 2014:1).

³⁷ Bogues cites the Japanese scholar Nishitani Osamu, who notes: “Since Columbus, Westerners have viewed novel varieties of people as children incapable of understanding Western thought/culture ... these are primitives or if they can [understand over time] they are immature people ... in this manner, the difference between self and other is captured in terms of backwardness” (cited in Bogues, 2010:35).

³⁸ In this regard, Anita Nettleton points to an *evolutionary* model introduced by Darwin’s influential hypothesis, *The Descent of Man* (1871) (Nettleton, 2011:141).

³⁹ Emphasising the underlying religious premise of colonialism – as a project of spiritual renewal – Albert Nolan confirms: “Despite their barbaric methods and attitudes, the colonisers firmly believed that what they were bringing to this part of the world [South Africa] was ‘civilisation’ and the basis of this ‘civilisation’ was the message of Jesus Christ” (Nolan, 1988:1).

as synonymous (Xakaza, 2011; Leeb-du Toit, 1993). Jon Kirby explains: “Proper European civilization was Christianity, and the only way to bring about conversion was to establish this [European] cultural framework … Indeed anything else was unthinkable” (cited in Bridger, 2012:17). Adjoined then to Christian conversion was a requisite process of acculturation,⁴⁰ whereby was fostered the social ideal of a Christian colonial subject – as one, “practiced in the ways of European culture, straddling in various measures the divide between Black and White worlds, but recognisably ‘western’ in orientation and lifestyle”⁴¹ (Keegan, 2004:xxx). Consequently, as Comaroff and Comaroff assert, in advocating this form of cultural conversion, missionaries were amongst the most active cultural agents of imperialism, and complicit in the systematic erosion of indigenous African cultures⁴² (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991:6). Correspondingly, as lamented by South African poet Es’kia Mphahlele, for those colonised – and so ‘converted’ – the cultural transaction of this colonial Christianity signalled at once the reification of European ‘civilization’, and for him at least, “the conquest of the black mind” (cited in Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991:4).

With respect to the visual, the historic application of this religio-cultural transaction was particularly evident in Catholic mission contexts. Contrary to the rather aniconic outlook of their Protestant counterparts, Catholic missionaries actively deployed images (and the visual in general) in their propagating of the faith. As such, mission stations and churches were repositories of imported, devotional iconography, and in mission schools, imagery played a significant part in both teaching and religious instruction (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:7–9). In this way, extended in these mission contexts was, as Dina Cormick observes, “a long tradition of using visual representations to imprint upon the minds of the believers the message of Christianity” (Cormick, 1993:8). In fact, as noted in Chapter One, images had from as early as the Middle Ages (and even before) played a central role in Catholic spirituality – as didactic tools and aids to devotion. In the context of colonialism, however, the application of what was a distinctly Eurocentric visuality, had certain underlying and essentially political implications. Attesting to this, Gauvin Bailey notes how in South America images of the Virgin

⁴⁰ Given this cultural imperative, the Comaroffs question the academic usefulness of the word ‘conversion’ to describe, “the highly variable, usually gradual, often implicit, and demonstrably syncretic manner in which social identities, cultural styles, and ritual practices of African peoples were transformed by the evangelical encounter” (Peterson, 2011:231).

⁴¹ In this regard, Bogues cites Horace Russell’s designation of the “Christian Black”, as a kind of formulaic, moral stereotype: “modeled in part on an imaginary Victorian male respectability” (Bogues, 2010:82). Relatedly, in the context of colonial politics, Homi Bhabha introduces the idea of *colonial mimicry* – as the colonial ideal of formulating a reformed and acceptable ‘Other’ – “*a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite*”. The subject is in this sense, for Bhabha, a kind of ‘mimic man’ – Anglicised but by no means English (Bhabha, 1994:85).

⁴² In this regard, and although wary of what he feels to be polarising views, wherein nineteenth-century missionaries in South Africa are cast either as ‘defenders of the indigenous’ (as in cases like Johannes Van der Kemp, John Philip and Bishop Colenso) or the ‘handmaidens of colonialism’, John de Gruchy summarises missionary complicity in two broadly applicable faults – namely: their general insensitivity to indigenous cultures, and their regular cooperation in the social, political and economic programme of colonial expansion (De Gruchy, 1979:179).

were in the 16th century equally associated with Catholic religiosity and the imperial politics of the Spanish conquest. As he observes, when Hernán Cortés first sailed for Mexico, he did so with a shipload of religious iconography, granting to the project of Spanish colonialism a distinctly Catholic cultural dynamic (Bailey, 2005:11). Perpetuating this kind of cultural imposition, Nicholas Bridger explains how later in Africa, Catholic missionaries introduced and disseminated a highly romanticised and distinctly European Christian iconography – noting how in the socio-political context of the time a blonde and blue-eyed Christ, “could easily be (mis)interpreted as a partner in the imperial power system” (Bridger, 2012:5). Similarly, Cormick observes:

The European missionaries who brought the gospel into Africa also brought in their own crucifixes. They told the newly baptized African Christians that the European-featured Christ on the Cross and the alabaster-complexioned Madonna in the chapel represented the Saviour of the world and his mother. To the black people of Africa it was clear that the Christian God was a white man (Cormick, 1993:8).

Attendant to the introduction of this essentially European iconography was a corresponding iconoclasm, directed against the cultural traditions and art forms of indigenous communities (Sarpong, 2003:59). Of this Olu Oguibe explains:

Art practice in traditional idioms was condemned as idolatory and violently combatted, with tons of art objects seized and destroyed in bonfires. Converts were warned in damning language of the harsh and irrevocable consequences of either creating or keeping indigenous art forms (Oguibe, 2004:49).⁴³

In relinquishing these cultural and visual traditions, to be internalised rather was the image of the ‘blonde and blue-eyed’ Christian God – and modeled, the correspondingly Eurocentric (or ‘civilised’) lifestyle advocated by his emissaries.

Helpful in both naming and thinking through these complex religious and cultural operations is, I believe, Hans Belting’s analysis of ‘image transfer’. Turning to the example of the cultural imposition of Spanish imperialism, he notes how in Mexico the living bodies of colonised subjects underwent a kind of internal aesthetic transformation – as Aztec imagery was denied, and a foreign iconography imposed.⁴⁴ Applicable to the forms of cultural conversion described above, this process amounts, as Belting observes, to a form of ‘mental colonisation’ – a project complete, “only when the imported images also had taken possession of the mental images of the others” (Belting, 2005:318-19). In this regard I would argue that the Stations of the Cross presents something of a case study, as versions

⁴³ Bridger similarly notes: “In general, and especially before World War II, nearly all mission-related churches required their neophytes to renounce almost all contact with their traditional systems of worship and related practices, including their art” (Bridger, 2012:17).

⁴⁴ In his text *Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology* (2005), Belting presents an image theory of: image, medium and body. For Belting, the body is the ‘living media’ of the image, as images ‘happen’ via ‘transmission’ (medium) and ‘perception’ (body). Thus, in his description of ‘mental colonization’ he notes how “living bodies became involved in that image transfer” (Belting, 2005:318).

imported from Europe and erected in mission churches throughout Africa represented in their illustrated stations the redemptive sufferings of a distinctly European (or white) Christ. As such, tacitly reinforced in the devotional practise of black devotees – required as they were to retrace, internalise and model this ‘divine’ example – were the cultural and ultimately *racial* presumptions of a European-styled Christianity.⁴⁵

II. Inculturation, and the critical re-evaluation of Catholic visuality in Africa

The cultural bias associated with this European-styled Christianity underwent, however, a process of theoretical and practical revision in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Catholic Church in particular began to re-evaluate the iconoclasm and ethnocentrism of its missionary activities – and, correspondingly, the Eurocentrism of its own material culture (Bridger, 2012:17). Tracing this reflexive shift, Adrian Hastings notes how missionaries informed by new anthropological perspectives became increasingly open to non-European cultural forms, often collecting indigenous works of art and craft – objects their nineteenth-century forebears would most certainly have denounced⁴⁶ (Hastings, 1989:25). It was only in the 1940s and 1950s, however, that a more distinct theological and sociological response to the Christianity-culture problematic (in Africa and elsewhere) was initiated within official Catholic circles. Variously termed *Adaptation*, *Indigenisation* or *Contextualisation*, central to this theological turn was the idea that Christian faith ought to be encouraged *within* the context of local (non-western) cultures, rather than at their expense (Bridger, 2012; Mudimbe, 1988). As an evolving discourse, this adaptive and more contextual approach was developed and popularised in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), and in 1975 officially termed *Inculturation* (or the Theology of Inculturation)⁴⁷ (Ott, 2000:25). Anton Quack explains:

Inculturation can be defined as the dynamic relationship between Christian faith and culture. It refers to the insertion and adjustment of Christian life within a given culture. It is a process of critical reciprocal effort resulting in the mutual adaptation of Christian life to the culture encountered by it (cited in Ott, 2000:25).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ As noted in Chapter One, Bennett explains the traditional function of Catholic imagery as inciting a form of *imitatio* – whereby in conforming to the divine model of Christ (or of the saints) the viewer effectively ‘becomes the image’ (Bennett, 2005:39). This is particularly true of the Stations of the Cross, wherein the objective of participants is both to identify empathically with Christ in his sufferings, and to model thereafter his ideal example.

⁴⁶ In South Africa for example, Leeb-du Toit recalls how, “despite their attitude to some Zulu cultural practices, the missionaries [of Mariannhill] became avid collectors of Zulu material culture, particularly in the early twentieth-century when interest in ethnography and anthropology escalated” (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:9).

⁴⁷ As an official term and theological tradition, ‘Inculturation’ is capitalised throughout this research paper, as are other theological positions like African Theology and Black Theology. For an analysis of the pre-history and development of Inculturation, see Chapter One of Ott, M. 2000. *African Theology in Images*.

⁴⁸ Similarly, in 1978, Father Pedro Arupe (General of the Society of Jesus) described Inculturation as “The incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no

An early proponent of this more culturally attuned Christianity was Archbishop Celso Constantini (1877–1958), who served as an apostolic delegate in China, and later became secretary of *Propaganda Fide*, the Vatican's ministry for missions. Declaring that, "Foreign feeling and Europeanism must stop at the threshold of our churches" (cited in Bridger, 2012:19), Constantini criticised the foreign imperialistic spirit of Catholic missions, promoting instead a new cultural pluralism. Emphasising in this the role of the creative arts, Constantini published in 1940 the most comprehensive history to date of non-European Christian art, and was instrumental in organising the Vatican's international *Exhibition of the Art of the Missionlands*. Hoping to encourage the development of 'indigenous' Christian arts in Africa and Asia, the exhibition was scheduled for 1940, but was delayed until 1950 by World War II and the death of Pope Pius XI (Bridger, 2012:19). The exhibition itself, celebrating as it did the work of largely non-western artists, conferred on the liturgical arts of Africa and the 'Missionlands' (and in general the project of Inculturation) a kind of Papal blessing – issuing, as Leeb-du Toit notes, "a tacit directive to continue the process of acculturation in Catholic third-world endeavours"⁴⁹ (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:10). In addition, official pronouncements released by Pope Pius XII over the course of the 1950s emphasised further the necessary revision of Catholic Eurocentrism. Consequently, as Mudimbe observes: "Official policies shifted from the initial step of adaptation, one that insisted on the Africanization of some external aspects (music, hymns, etc), to an examination of the content of Christianity in an African setting" (Mudimbe, 1988:56).

Related to these developments – which for Bridger represent, "early theoretical steps in the decolonization process of the institutional Catholic Church in Africa" (Bridger, 2012:19) – and coincident with the rise of African Nationalism was the emergence in the 1950s of African Theology. Following a discussion in Rome held by a group of African and Haitian priests, and championed later by theologians like John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu and Gabriel Setiloane, stressed within African Theology was the appropriate application and value of traditional African beliefs, rituals, history, and culture to Christian faith and practice (Simmons, 2004). In this sense, it constituted as Mokgethi Motlhabi observes:

[A] union of the African socio-cultural context or African heritage, on the one hand, and the Christian socio-historical tradition – which includes both the Christian Gospel and the Christian theological tradition – on the other (Motlhabi, 2008:31).

more than a superficial adaptation) but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation'" (cited in IMBISA Secretariat, 1993).

⁴⁹ This somewhat enlarged position on liturgical arts was ratified in the Second Vatican Council, which states: "The art of our own times from every race and country shall also be given free scope in the Church, provided it bring to the task the reverence and honour due to the sacred buildings and rites" (cited in Ott, 2000:135).

As with Inculturation, the objective in African Theology was to disentangle the Christian message from a European cultural framework – relating it rather as Hastings notes to, “what was really integral in African culture” (Hastings, 1989:27). As part of a wider ‘African cultural Renaissance’, a new and assertive, essentially anti-colonial notion of ‘Africanity’ was reflected – a concept promoted by amongst others the Négritude poet and politician Léopold Senghor (1906–2001).⁵⁰ Initiated in the 1930s, and influential in promoting the Francophone African Independence Movement, Négritude was an artistic and literary movement, calling for the rediscovery of African thought and values (Lemke, 1998:7). Central to its project and political philosophy was as co-founder Leon Damas explains: “the rehabilitation of the black man, the affirmation of his equality before the white world, [and] the affirmation of the African personality” (cited in Rive, 1975:62).⁵¹ Extending these concerns, but with a distinctly theological and ecclesial application, advocated within African Theology was both a positive reclamation of African cultural identity, and a corresponding process of institutional and mental decolonisation. Exorcised in this sense was the European God of colonial ‘civilisation’, and affirmed in his stead the empowering notion of a black and essentially *African* Christ. Tracing this shift toward, “négritude, blackness, African culture and experience”, Mudimbe observes a fundamental redefinition of ‘Christianisation’ in Africa – one premised on cultural autonomy and the ideal of, “accomplishing in Christ a spiritual heritage authentically African” (Mudimbe, 1988:60).

With respect to the material culture of Catholicism in Africa, one of the earliest and best-known attempts at addressing these new theological imperatives was the Oye-Ekiti Workshop in Nigeria. Founded in 1947 by the Irish missionary, Father Kevin Carroll (1920–93), and represented in the aforementioned *Art of the Missionlands* exhibition in Rome, the workshop actively encouraged the kind of cultural pluralism and ‘indigenisation’ preached by Constantini and others.⁵² In the spirit of the Yoruba apprenticeship system, artists worked under the tutelage of master-sculptor Bandele of Osi (1910–1995), producing liturgical ornaments and sculptures for use in local mission churches. In doing so they gave visual form to Biblical theatics, but in traditional Ekiti carving styles (Kasfir, 1999:35). Although the workshop itself was closed in 1954, owing to a lack of financial and institutional support, over the following decades Carroll continued to promote his vision for an indigenised Nigerian

⁵⁰ Senghor defined ‘Africanity’ as those cultural values he considered both ‘permanent’, and common to all African people (Rabaka, 2014:65).

⁵¹ In this sense, Négritude aimed to reinforce amongst blacks in different parts of the world a kind of ‘African consciousness’ – premised on the idea of a shared, or underlying, cultural identity, or ‘Africanity’. According to the Dictionary of Race and Ethnic Relations: “This sums up the Négritude effort: to upgrade black people not so much through overt political means, but through instilling them with a sense of history and culture compounded of the distinctive qualities deriving from Africa; a new pride and dignity in being black and being African” (Cashmore, 1994:232).

⁵² For a full account of the Oye-Ekiti Workshop, see Bridger. 2012. *Africanizing Christian Art. Kevin Carroll and Yoruba Christian Art in Nigeria.*

Christian art, working with dozens of artists from Yorubaland and the Middle Belt in Nigeria (Bridger, 2012:80). Most well-known of these was Lamidi Olonade Fakeye (1925–2009), who joined Oye-Ekiti in 1948, and went on to pursue a distinguished career as an internationally recognised artist. Although a Muslim himself, Fakeye worked with equal enthusiasm on both Christian and traditional Yoruba commissions.⁵³ Amongst other liturgical projects, he produced in the 1950s at least two renditions of the Stations of the Cross – one for St. Matthew's Catholic Church in Ondo, and the other for the newly built Catholic Cathedral in Ibadan (Ojo, 2009). In contrast to the overt Europeanism of versions erected throughout Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in both cases the traditional episodes of the programme are formally and contextually reinterpreted. Rendered in the dense but highly detailed style advocated by Bandele, presented as such are the episodic tribulations of an African Christ, as envisioned within a distinctly Yoruba social and cultural context (see plates 16–17). Effected in this sense was, one might say, a kind of iconographic decolonisation – as registered in these stations and internalised by those who ritually retraced them was the image and Passion of a black rather than white Christ.

Following the example of Oye-Ekiti, mission-based art initiatives elsewhere in Africa similarly promoted forms of ‘indigenous’ Christian cultural expression. Significant amongst these were the KuNgoni Art Craft Centre in Mua, Malawi, the Benedictine-run programme in Ndande, Tanzania, and the Anglican missions of Serima and Cyrene in what was then Rhodesia (Ott, 2000:77–84). In these cross-cultural missionary endeavours, local artists were entrusted with the ‘Africanisation’ of traditional iconographies like the Stations of the Cross. In keeping with the cultural mandate of Inculturation, and the ‘decolonising’ agendas of African Theology, this process of iconographic revision was generally understood as a means of redressing, in some measure at least, the cultural imposition of Catholicism in Africa, and of motivating instead a more contextually relevant Christian experience (Bridger, 2012; Ott, 2000). Upheld in this sense, but put to new work, was a long-established and essentially Catholic preoccupation with the visual – one premised on the capacity of the image to both inculcate and transform.⁵⁴ In this regard, Martin Ott insists on the unique facility of liturgical works produced by artists of the KuNgoni project in Malawi, not only to reflect but also to engender the spiritual objectives of Inculturation. He notes:

⁵³ Father Carroll encouraged artists at Oye-Ekiti to accept traditional Yoruba commissions, as a means of respecting and preserving Yoruba art forms, culture and religion (Bridger, 2012:43).

⁵⁴ The Catholic emphasis on images as visual aids was reinforced in the Catholic Counter Reformation by amongst others Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) – founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Images were maintained as a useful means to devotion and of instruction (and so to missionary activity). Promoted by the church (following the Council of Trent) images often reinforced doctrinal aspects upheld within Catholicism but denounced by Protestant reformers, such as the Eucharist and the Assumption (of Mary). For an account of these developments see Viladesau. 2008. *The Triumph of the Cross. The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts - from the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.183–281

[T]he image has an extraordinary capability to challenge the observer to participate fully in the process of inculturation. By this is meant that the processing and internalisation of the image is itself a moment of inculturation (Ott, 2000:15).

Motivated then in this process of ‘visual inculturation’ (as Ott describes it), is a kind of counter-operation to Belting’s notion of ‘mental colonisation’. An image-retransfer, whereby in the participative witness of visual programmes like the Stations of the Cross, *internalised* and *processed* is the reimagined icon of a distinctly African Christ. In this regard, George Hagan observes how in Catholic mission contexts, marked in this shift was a certain categorical conversion: from black as evil to black as sacred and good (Hagan, 2003:37). Undermining the normative model of a European-styled Christianity, he notes how instead, the universality of Christ’s person was positively reaffirmed – and by extension the dignity and ‘divinity’ of black African identities.⁵⁵ To this effect he reflects:

In the black crucifix the African is seeking, on the one hand, to incarnate Christ in the God-given [but] despised image and identity of the African, and, on the other, to raise and divinise the African identity⁵⁶ (Hagan, 2003:32).

Reasserting in this way the essential value of African cultures and identity, I would argue that countered in the revised iconographies of these mission-based initiatives, were the racial hierarchies traditionally associated with colonialism. Hierarchies wherein as Achille Mbembe observes, Africans were consigned to a kind of secondary ‘thingness’⁵⁷ (Mbembe, 2001:187). That being said, it is, I believe, necessary also to acknowledge the complex social and cultural exchanges, which brought about this general iconographic transformation. Rather than spontaneous cultural responses, the revisionary programmes of art centres like Oye-Ekiti and KuNgoni were invariably initiated by culturally sympathetic, but nonetheless ‘non-indigenous’, European missionaries. Also worth noting is that whilst the objective of these initiatives was to foster the development of an ‘authentically’ African Christian iconography, it was never to revise the iconography itself. Rather it was to *adapt* it – culturally and aesthetically. Though ‘Africanised’, it remained an essentially Roman Catholic iconography – with an ‘African’ crucifix, ‘African’ Madonna, and an ‘Africanised’ Stations of the Cross. For Archbishop Sarpong, the insufficiency of such adaptation lies in the assumed superiority of the situation or structure being adapted to – which is to say, that what was ‘Africanised’ in these aesthetic reformulations was not a disentangled Christian message, but its established

⁵⁵ Transcending ethnic boundaries, Achille Mbembe acknowledges the universal imperative of Christianity (in its ‘pure’ sense), and its positive affirmation of the “community of humanity” (Mbembe, 2001:219).

⁵⁶ In a similar vein he notes: “this is what the black crucifix invites us to do: convert and perceive the African as Christ-like, in order to give Africans a full sense of the dignity and divinity of the African Personality” (Hagan, 2003:37).

⁵⁷ Mbembe explains how in the context of colonialism, the subjectivity of the colonised was essentially unacknowledged – their status reduced to “things of value”. “From the standpoint of colonialism, the colonized does not truly exist, as person or as a subject ... the colonised belongs to the *universe of immediate things*” (Mbembe, 2001:187).

and essentially western cultural and religious form (Sarpong, 2003:58). Noting within African Theology and the general discourse of Inculcation the emergence of this new criticality, Aylward Shorter observes:

At first, the concept of ‘adaptation’ was hailed on all sides, by African Christians as well as by missionaries ... It was only slowly realized that the concept of adaptation contained within itself the seeds of perpetual western superiority and domination (cited in Mudimbe, 1988:57).

Of course, negotiating these power-relations and the internal dynamics and contradictions of this emerging sociological and theological discourse were the artists themselves. Not without agency, it was they who in the cross-cultural encounters of Oye-Ekiti, KuNgoni and other mission-based art initiatives, contested the hegemonic order of a European-styled Christianity – transforming, if not re-inventing, its iconographies in new hybrid forms and within diverse African cultural contexts.

How black artists in South Africa navigated and extended this iconographic transition is especially pertinent, given the racialised context of apartheid. Tracing this history, considered in the following section is the figurative emergence and implied politics of a black Christ and a localised Passion. In this regard, I focus in particular on the reinterpretation of the Stations of the Cross by church-commissioned artists in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

III. Shifting iconographies in the ecclesial art of South Africa

Initiating in many respects a history in South Africa of Christian iconographic revision was the Anglican mission and training centre of Grace Dieu, where from as early as 1924 black artists were trained and commissioned to produce works of art for use in liturgical contexts. Under the supervision of Sister Pauline (1883-1945), the mission’s carving school gained something of a reputation, attracting both local and international commissions.⁵⁸ Predating, however, the cultural and pluralistic developments of Inculcation, students at the school were trained in a strictly western ecclesial style. Consequently, as Elizabeth Rankin observes, “they learnt to produce carvings in the religious tradition that favoured a skilled naturalism little changed from the late Medieval and Renaissance styles of Europe” (Rankin, 1989:21). In adopting this approach, Sister Pauline and the teachers at Grace Dieu hoped, in celebrating the technical facility of their students, to demonstrate their abilities as equal to those of their European counterparts (Rankin, 1989:20). Despite these well-intentioned objectives, one might argue, however, that in privileging a foreign and in many respects outmoded canon, further entrenched within the essentially colonial context of a mission

⁵⁸ For a more in-depth account of these developments, see Rankin. 1989, *Images of Wood - Aspects of the History of Sculpture in 20th Century South Africa*.

station like Grace Dieu was the assumed pre-eminence of a European visual culture.⁵⁹ That being said, it would be unfair on this account to relegate entirely the accomplishments of its students to a form of colonial mimicry. More appropriate in this regard is, I feel, a position forwarded by Olu Oguibe, for whom the acquisition and exercise of such exclusive western skills by African artists constituted rather a positive (and intrinsically subversive) gesture of appropriation. He notes:

[A]ppropriating and mastering the forbidden language and idioms of European visual expression was transgressive because it broached an even more desperately contested terrain that helped define the purported uniqueness of the white race: namely, the intellect and skill to make art (Oguibe, 2004:50).

Influential amongst those associated with Grace Dieu were the artists Ernest Mancoba (1904-2002) and Job Kekana (1916–1995). Virtuosic wood-carvers, both produced works of liturgical art in keeping with the skilled naturalism advocated by the school. Significantly, however, they introduced in this a measure of ‘Africanisation’ – if not always in technique or style, in subject matter at least. As such, in the iconic instance of Mancoba’s *African Madonna*, the traditionally rendered figure of Mary is nevertheless presented as black (see plate 18). Produced in 1929 for the chapel at Grace Dieu, Mancoba’s sculpture was almost certainly the first in South Africa to present the mother of Christ as a non-European – a gesture made all the more significant by the prejudicial conditions and racial politics of South Africa at the time (Hassan, 2010:467). Similarly, the biblical protagonists of Kekana’s sculptures are regularly figured as black, with notable examples including his *Madonna* (1944), *African Risen Christ* (c. 1950), and *David* (1964). Unlike Kekana, however, Mancoba eventually broke with the traditional realism of his training – a move motivated largely by his exposure in the late 1930s to classical African sculpture (Miles, 1994:24). In this he transitioned as Oguibe observes, “from a concern for the mere liturgical within European traditions to an interest in the mechanics and syntax of African sculpture” (cited in Hassan, 2010:469). Moving to Europe in 1938, Mancoba went on to pursue the distinctly African but also modernist idiom for which he is known today.⁶⁰

Arguably the most influential centre for liturgical arts in the country was that later established at the Catholic mission of Mariannhill, in what was then Natal. Central to its development

⁵⁹ Demonstrating both the mission’s objectives, and its unquestioned endorsement of western modalities, the following was noted in the archives of the Church of the Province of South Africa (c.1940): “The chief aim ... is to show that the African artist has his own means of expression, and that he can submit, without loss of inspiration, to the discipline of technical training. The attitude which regards a carving as good because it was done by an African and not because it is a good piece of work (a very sentimental attitude and very bad for the African) needs to be stamped out; and it will only be done if the African learns the true technique of carving (or of any art) and adds to that his own manner of seeing things” (Dc 5, Archives, Church of the Province) (cited in Rankin, 1989:20).

⁶⁰ In transitioning from the realist and essentially liturgical style of his training to the ‘African modernism’ of his later works, Ntongela Masilela observes how, “Mancoba became not only one of the principle constructors of New African modernity in South Africa but also one of the major African artists who forged the canon of African modernism in painting and sculpture” (Masilela, 2006:37).

were the visionary efforts of Sister Mary Pientia (1914–2001), a German-born artist and missionary sister who began teaching at the mission in the early 1940s. From the start, her approach was twofold: teaching art as a regular examination subject, and promoting amongst her students the development of an ‘indigenous sacred art’ (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:95). To this end, whilst introducing her students to the formal and conceptual traditions of western art, she emphasised in her teaching certain qualities she felt intrinsic to African art (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:95–97). Adopting what she called a ‘mystical approach’, she hoped in so doing to nurture within her students an innate, essentially ‘African’ creative sensibility – advocating what Leeb-du Toit has described as a form of ‘acculturated primitivism’ (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:12). Speaking to this context, Lize van Robbroek notes the somewhat essentialist tendencies of white patrons and interlocutors in South Africa at the time, describing how black artists were generally seen as ‘belonging to Africa’, and their works as embodying a certain intrinsic quality – a “mysterious and elusive Africanness” (Van Robbroeck, 2011:85). This essentially anthropological outlook was, as she explains, rooted in primitivist and modernist preoccupations with ‘otherness’ and ‘vitality’, and underscored by an idealised conception of ‘Africa’.⁶¹

Unlike the situation at Grace Dieu, where the idea was to school students in a strictly western style, Sister Pientia encouraged from her students a more syncretic, authentically ‘African’ expression of Christianity (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:95). Conscious of mission-based art initiatives elsewhere in Africa, and true to the cross-cultural imperatives of Inculturation, her objective was to promote an explicitly Zulu Christian iconography⁶² (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:11–12). Reflecting this objective, early works by students from the mission were submitted in 1950 for inclusion in the Vatican’s *Exhibition of the Art of the Missionlands* – and acclaimed there as a “new, acculturated South African art” (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:12). She subsequently went on to establish at Mariannhill a studio of liturgical arts, and later in the 1950s an art centre at Lumko, in what was then the Transkei (Miles & Rankin, 1992). Opposed to the importation of European religious plaster casts, she accepted commissions for the decoration of local churches, training over the years a number of black artists who assisted her as apprentices. Notable amongst these were Michael Mbebe, Franz Hodi and Duke Ketye – all of whom subsequently undertook, in their individual capacities, the iconographic decoration of churches in Natal, as well as other parts of the country (Cormick, 1993; Leeb-du Toit, 1993).

⁶¹ In this regard she notes: “The idea that the artist fundamentally “belongs” to Africa rests on a romanticised abstraction of the continent, in which this “belonging to Africa” is the key to the black artist’s perceived exotic otherness and difference. Even more significantly, it implies that he [sic] is not really part of the modern nation-state, but is instead a part of the continent, which is rendered as primordial and mysterious” (Van Robbroeck, 2011:85).

⁶² Responding to papal injunctions emphasising the need for missionaries to engage more sensitively and effectively with non-western cultures, Sister Pientia sought to synchronise traditional Zulu culture with the Christian message. Forward thinking in her approach, she was suspended for a period in 1960, her teaching deemed overly syncretic by some of her fellow religious (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:12).

Required of every Catholic church and chapel, newly commissioned versions of the Stations of the Cross were in this way reinterpreted by a generation of artists trained at Mariannhill. In contrast to those of ‘the white man’s churches’, exemplary in this regard was, as noted already, the creatively reimagined and recontextualised version of the Stations of the Cross produced by Ketye for the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in Makwane, Qwa Qwa.

Another development significant to the reinterpretation of Christian (and specifically Catholic) iconography in South Africa was the Good Shepherd Mission at Hlabisa, situated some 250 kilometres northwest of Mariannhill. Under the leadership of Father Edwin Kinch (1918–2003), an American missionary of the Servite Order, promoted at the mission was the active development of an ‘indigenised’ sacred art. Inspired by the progressive approach of Father Carroll and the artists of Oye-Ekiti, Father Kinch encouraged the development of local talent, and over the course of the late 1950s and 1960s commissioned a number of liturgical projects (Leeb-du Toit, 1993). In particular he promoted the sculptors Bernard Gcwensa (1918–85) and Ruben Xulu (1952–85) – both of whom went on to make seminal contributions to the field of sacred art in South Africa (Leeb-du Toit, 1993).

Gcwensa began working at Hlabisa in 1954, where for a number of years he produced carvings for local Servite mission churches. It was in 1959, however, with the construction of the Church of the Good Shepherd at Hlabisa, that he received his first major commission. Over the course of a year, and in a remarkable feat of carving, he produced for the church nine multi-panelled doors, two confessional doors, an imposing three-meter crucifix, a processional cross, sculptures of the Madonna, Saint Joseph and the Good Shepherd, and a Stations of the Cross (Cormick, 1993:34). Distinctive in his treatment of the latter is the manner in which individually sculpted figurines (twenty-seven in total) are clustered in groups, collectively forming the fourteen episodes of the programme (see plates 19–22). In station twelve for example (*Jesus dies*), the carved figures of Mary, the Centurion, and two Roman guards are separately mounted beneath the crucified form of Christ. Departing from the more traditional application of relief sculpture in stations, emphasised in this dramatic use of form is something of the tense relational drama of the Passion event, as well as the isolation of Christ in his suffering. Although realistically rendered, the figures themselves are compressed in proportion, leading Elza Miles and Elizabeth Rankin to suggest the possible influence on Gcwensa of Romanesque sculpture – representations of which Father Kinch may have presented to him as reference material (Miles & Rankin, 1992:40). Another influence, however, may well have been the similarly compressed figures of Fakeye’s early Stations of the Cross (c.1951). As noted already, Father Kinch admired the artistic accomplishments of Oye-Ekiti, and given its coverage in the *Liturgical Arts* journal to which he subscribed, it is possible that Gcwensa was exposed to and even inspired by the work of

Fakeye, as well as that of other Nigerian artists.⁶³ That being said, Gcwensa was largely self-taught, and having mastered his own distinctive visual language continued to work on liturgical art projects, producing over the course of his thirty year career at least twelve variations of the Stations of the Cross.⁶⁴

Thirty-four years his junior, Xulu was apprenticed to Gcwensa in 1959 – arriving at Hlabisa in time to assist on the decoration for the newly completed church. Initiating his training, his very first project was a Stations of the Cross – modelled on Gcwensa's recently carved figures (Cormick, 1993:30). Understandably less refined than the accomplished works of his teacher, the result was still strong, and the version installed in the Ezibayeni Catholic Church in Hluhluwe (see plate 23). Following his apprenticeship, Xulu undertook a number of significant commissions, producing works for mission-based churches in various parts of the country, as well as in Swaziland. Regularly returning to the Stations of the Cross, in the late 1960s he produced a particularly striking version for the Catholic Church of Saint Lucia. Commissioned by Father Kinch, the stations in this instance are creatively worked into a single piece of driftwood, emphasising the narrative flow of Christ's episodic suffering (plate 24). Although exceptionally prolific, Xulu's career was cut tragically short by his untimely death in 1985.⁶⁵

As with Sister Pientia, in encouraging artists like Gcwensa and Xulu, Father Kinch envisioned the emergence in South Africa of an 'indigenous' Christian iconography. Not an artist himself, Father Kinch's role was more that of benefactor and mentor. Creating opportunities and seeking out commissions, he supervised the work of both Gcwensa and Xulu: talking them through appropriate scriptures, introducing them to a variety of visual references, and providing a measure of technical training.⁶⁶ Given his emphasis on fostering a more culturally relevant Christian expression, he sought, however, to adopt as non-interventionist an approach as possible – not wishing to 'tamper', as he put it, with their natural abilities (Harmsen, 1989:9). Well-intentioned, his objective in this was to actively counter, rather than perpetuate, the cultural imposition generally associated with the missionary enterprise in Africa. That being said, and again in keeping with Sister Pientia, his associated emphasis on

⁶³ In addition to articles on Oye-Ekiti, published by Maurice Lavanoux in Liturgical Arts, between 1957 and 1961, Fr Carroll published at least four separate features on artists and projects associated with the workshop (McElroy, 1975:37). Given Fr Kinch's friendship with Maurice Lavanoux, and his interest in liturgical arts, these publications may well have been known to him, and shown at some point to Gcwensa and Xulu.

⁶⁴ For a comprehensive biographical account, and a full catalogue of works produced by Bernard Gcwensa, see Cormick. 1993. *Bernard Gcwensa and Ruben Xulu. Christian artists of Natal.*

⁶⁵ For a comprehensive biographical account, and a full catalogue of works produced by Ruben Xulu, see Cormick. 1993. *Bernard Gcwensa and Ruben Xulu. Christian artists of Natal.* For an analysis and personal reflection on the Stations of the Cross he produced for St Lucia, see Harmsen. 1989, *The way to Easter: stations of the cross in South Africa:* 68-72.

⁶⁶ On a technical level, Gcwensa and Xulu were instructed for a period by the German sculptor Leopold Hafner. According to Fr Kinch, Hafner's input and technical expertise greatly improved the quality of their work – but, apparently, without interfering with their natural abilities (Harmsen, 1989:9).

certain ‘innate’ and essentially ‘African’ qualities betrayed, one might argue, a certain ethnographic and cultural primitivism. This kind of attitude is characterised for Sieglinde Lemke by the romanticisation of non-Western peoples, particularly in regard to supposedly inherent qualities or instincts (Lemke, 1998:9). Speaking directly to the situation of South Africa at the time, Steven Sack similarly acknowledges the regular reiteration by white patrons and culture-brokers of, “a kind of prescriptiveness, and a desire to keep the artist ‘tribal’ and untainted by outside influence [...]” (cited in Oguibe, 2004:54–5).⁶⁷

Revealing to some extent the complexities, even contradictions, inherent in the kind of ‘Africanised’ Christian iconography championed by Sister Pientia, Father Kinch and others, were the individual responses of Gcwensa and Xulu – in particular to the idea of representing Christ as black. Gcwensa, for example, was never comfortable with the notion. Although happy to situate the Passion within a localised cultural situation, and to figure characters like Simon of Cyrene or Saint Stephen as black, Christ is rendered in all of his works with aquiline features, straight hair and a beard. In fact, Cormick relates how when commissioned by the mission’s American patrons to sculpt an African Christ, he flatly refused. Pointing to a traditional (which is to say, western) representation of Christ, he reportedly said, “but that is white, it is not African” (cited in Cormick, 1993:8). In lieu of this rather incriminating observation, in 1956 Father Kinch installed in the church at Ingwavuma a black Christ and Madonna – carved, however, by a Dutch artist. Tellingly, he was obliged before long to remove it – the congregation objecting on the basis that as Cormick relates, “it was a white Christ they had been taught about” (Cormick, 1993:8). Less convinced than Father Kinch of the desirability (or at least practicability) of an ‘Africanised’ iconography, Brother Andy Motsko – another American Servite based at Hlabisa – felt that in the eyes of the congregation the perceived status of Christ was diminished when depicted as black, and that given the option parishioners would invariably opt for European representations⁶⁸ (Cormick, 1993:8). It would seem then that for Gcwensa and others at Hlabisa, the image of a black Christ was incompatible with the already internalised image of their religious experience – that being, the European featured Christ introduced by the nineteenth century missionaries, and celebrated in traditional Catholic iconography. On the other hand, Gcwensa’s seeming

⁶⁷ The commissioning of Gcwensa at Hlabisa, in fact, seems to exemplify this claim. In her book *Bernard Gcwensa and Ruben Xulu, Christian artists of Natal* (1993), Dina Cormick recounts how, having worked at the mission for three years, it was proposed that Gcwensa be sent to an art school in England for further training. When consulted, however, Jack Grossert (at the time the Organiser of Arts and Crafts in Natal for the African Schools of the Natal Education Department) advised against it, believing that the experience would ‘destroy him completely’. Recommended instead, as a more appropriate opportunity, was the decoration, and ‘Africanisation’, of the soon to be built Church of the Good Shepherd.

⁶⁸ This preference, and that Christ’s status should *diminish* in the estimation of a Zulu congregation when represented as black, is indicative one might argue of the kind of inferiority complex described by Franz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* (1952), wherein the colonised subject internalises and accepts the purported superiority of the dominant colonial culture – in this case the European cultural code traditionally associated with Christianity (in the context of colonialism and missions) (Makward, 2007:7).

inflexibility might otherwise be understood as a form of conscious resistance. Refusing the kinds of racial demarcation so endemic to apartheid – as consistently in his work, the applicability of Christ’s person to African social and cultural experiences is registered not in terms of ethnic affinity (or race), but rather in accordance with the universality of his mission, as the “Saviour of the world.”⁶⁹

Unlike Gcwensa, however, Xulu regularly represented Christ as black – be it in versions of the Stations of the Cross or other liturgical works he carved. In example, one might look to the processional crucifix and ascended Christ he carved in the mid-1970s for the Catholic Church of Ukwenyuka Kwenkosi, in Njengabantu (see plates 25–26). That being said, it would seem that in general Xulu’s rendering of Christ as black – or white for that matter – reflected more the objectives of his patrons than any inclination of his own. As Cormick relates, when commissioned on liturgical projects he would routinely ask whether Christ, the Madonna, or whichever other biblical figure was to be represented should be done as an *umlungu* (white) or *muntu* (black). This clarification he demanded not only of Father Kinch, during his tenure at Hlabisa and Saint Lucia, but of later patrons at Seven Oaks and Mariannhill, where he was based from 1975 (Cormick, 1993:8). As such, one might argue that in different ways, both Gcwensa’s intransigence and Xulu’s seeming ambivalence disclosed within this general project of iconographic revision, or ‘Africanisation’, a certain underlying paradox. Namely, that it was an essentially *brokered* undertaking, driven by the sociological and theological agendas (well-meant as they were) of liberal, white and for the most part foreign missionaries. Demonstrated then in the liturgical works of Gcwensa and Xulu is perhaps less a genuinely ‘indigenous’ and ‘authentic’ cultural response to Christianity, as a complex negotiation (and to a degree, subversion) of their patrons’ predetermined vision. Added to this, Leeb du Toit points to the significant commercial value of liturgical projects to rural, mission-based artists like Gcwensa and Xulu – whose skills were as such, in her view at least, “clearly adapted to suit the priorities of their benefactors” (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:10). Further attesting to the complexities and paradoxes of what was envisioned as a more ‘indigenous’ – and so culturally palatable – iconography, is the fact that both Gcwensa and Xulu’s works were poorly received by a number of local congregations and priests⁷⁰ (Cormick, 1993:9).

Having traced in brief something of the religious and cultural transactions that from the late 1950s instigated in South Africa this general process of iconographic revision, made evident I

⁶⁹ Of Christ St John declares: “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14).

⁷⁰ Leeb du Toit notes how in proposing a more ‘indigenous’ iconography, figures like Sister Pientia and Father Kinch believed that, “images so translated would ... be more accessible to the Zulu as being conveyed by one of their own, and would thus more readily instil the Christian message and hopefully encourage conversion” (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:10). In reality, however, Cormick insists that both Gcwensa and Xulu’s works were in many cases treated with a certain disdain, or simply not taken seriously (Cormick, 1993:9).

believe are the underlying power plays and associated politics that invariably attended them. In this respect, I have sought to demonstrate as embedded in the ideological premise and imagined ideal of an ‘indigenous’ and authentically ‘African’ Christian iconography, a certain paternalistic and romanticised primitivism. As such, I would suggest that although motivated by the revisionary (or ‘decolonising’) agendas of Inculturation and African Theology, perpetuated to a degree by well-intentioned individuals like Sister Pientia and Father Kinch was a certain ‘discourse of authenticity’ – described by Oguibe as a kind of late colonial preoccupation with constructing and preserving the ‘authentic native’⁷¹ (Oguibe, 2004:54). Similarly, and I think applicably here, Kwame Appiah observes how even in the case of such radical movements as Pan-Africanism and Négritude, their decolonising objectives were to some extent fettered by the ‘conceptual blinders’ and ‘burdensome legacy’ of colonial ethnocentrism⁷² (Appiah, 1992:5&6). Particularly in South Africa, the ahistorical and nativist conception of ‘Africanness’ advocated in such projects of ‘indigenisation’, played rather conveniently into the hands of apartheid ideology, with its emphasis on racial categorisation and separate development. It was for this reason that later in the 1970s, black theologians like Manas Buthelezi rejected the ethnology of African Theology – with its vocabulary of ‘adaptation’, ‘indigenisation’ and ‘Africanisation’ – in favour of the more engaged politics of Black Theology (a development discussed in the following chapter of this research) (Motlhabi, 2008:8). That being said, I would argue still that in the hierarchical context of apartheid – with its first, second and third-class citizens – the reaffirmation of Christ’s universality within these theological and iconographic revisions was in many respects subversive.

Ultimately, however, and as I have attempted to show, significant within this general transformation were the personal responses of the artist’s themselves. And in that, not only their achievements and creative vision, but also in negotiating this complex religio-cultural transaction, their individual stances of resistance. What Benita Parry might call their ‘modes of refusal’ – by which she means those, “unwritten symbolic and symptomatic practices … in which a rejection or violation of the subject positions assigned by colonialism [are] registered” (Parry, 1994:173). After all, be it in the ‘transgressive’ virtuosity of Mancoba and Kekana, the personal negotiations of Gcwensa and Xulu, or the alternative vision of Ketye’s stations, it was artists who in negotiating the cultural bias of a European iconography defied, complicated, and hybridised the otherwise homogenising trope of ‘Africanisation’.

⁷¹ Oguibe observes: “The European was moving from complete denial of colonial creativity to constructing, and preserving, an *authentic* native … what Fanon describes as the “palatable” Negro, the admired authentic colonial who must be protected from the corrupting influence of civilization (Oguibe, 2004:54).

⁷² Appiah notes how both Pan-Africanism and Négritude (as part of a common anti-colonial discourse) were founded on notions of *racial* solidarity – “contriving Africa in racial terms” (Appiah, 1992:5&6).

Of special distinction in this regard is, I believe, the case of Sydney Kumalo – whose particular engagement with sacred (or liturgical) themes marked in this history an early but significant departure. As such, considered in the following analysis are the successive reinterpretations of the Stations of the Cross he undertook in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

IV. Modernist agendas in Sydney Kumalo's successive reinterpretations of the Stations of the Cross

Exhibiting locally and abroad, by the mid-1980s Sydney Kumalo (1935–1988) was both a professional artist and respected sculptor – associated with the emergence in South Africa of a new modernist idiom⁷³ (Powell, 2006:144). Regarded at that time as a kind of “doyen of South African black art” (De Jager, 1992:29), his influence as both an artist and educator is broadly acknowledged. Before these successes, however, and contributing to his emergence as a professional black artist (in the less than conducive environment of apartheid South Africa), he undertook between 1957 and 1961 a number of church commissioned projects – producing in that time four variations of the Stations of the Cross. Whereas in the liturgical works of Gcwensa and Xulu, Leeb du-Toit observes, “a colonial conservatism based on [a] conventional academic realism which was antagonistic to modernism” (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:10), Kumalo’s renditions of the Stations of the Cross are distinctive – embodying in their formal rendering the modernist agendas of an artist affiliated at the time with the influential (and secular) Polly Street Art Centre in Johannesburg. Although similarly conceived as projects of ‘Africanisation’, I propose that asserting in this way a distinctly modernist and essentially cross-cultural idiom, Kumalo unsettled to a degree the ethnographic constraints generally associated with the projected ideal of an ‘indigenous’ Christian iconography.

It was in 1957 that Kumalo received his first church-commissioned project, and in fact his first professional opportunity as an artist. Completed the year before and dedicated to the patron saint of African missions and inter-racial justice, the Catholic Church of Saint Peter Claver was built to service the all-black community of Seeisoville, a township and segregated adjunct to the agricultural hub of Kroonstad, in what was then the Orange Free State.⁷⁴ With the building complete, Jan van Gemert its architect, and Gerard van Velsen the archbishop

⁷³ Of his success, Ivor Powell notes how Kumalo was feted internationally by the anti-apartheid movement – exhibiting regularly in Europe and the United States. At the same time, he responded to local, governmental commissions and even represented South Africa at the Venice Biennale – leading some to suggest that he, as well as other black artists, may at times have unknowingly participated in covert exercises of Nationalist Party public relations. For more biographical information on Sydney Kumalo, see Powell. 2006, "Sydney Kumalo" in *Revisions. Expanding the Narrative of South African Art*:144.

⁷⁴ Also known as the patron saint of slaves, St Peter Claver (1581–1654) was a Jesuit missionary based in Cartegena (in modern day Columbia). Canonised in 1888, St Peter Claver is recognised for his compassionate work amongst slaves, and for campaigning against the slave trade. See <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-voices/16th-and-17th-century-ignatian-voices/st-peter-claver-sj> [2014, November, 15].

of Kroonstad, wanted a black artist to realise its decoration – and as Elza Miles notes, “in an indigenous African style” (Miles, 2004:49). Seeking an appropriate candidate, they approached the editor of Drum Magazine, who in turn put them in touch with the artist and educator Cecil Skotnes (1926-2009)⁷⁵ (Harmsen, 1996:129). As Recreation Officer at the Polly Street Art Centre Skotnes was a natural go-to-person, facilitating as he did the centre’s popular art programme. Officially an adult education centre and facility for non-European ‘leisure time’ occupation, Polly Street was a hub of creative activity and a meeting place for aspiring black artists.⁷⁶ Kumalo was a regular participant in the art centre’s classes, and it was his name that Skotnes forwarded for the commission⁷⁷ (Miles, 2004:49; Harmsen, 1996:129).

The commission itself included a thirty-six by six-metre mural intended for the ceiling of the church nave, and later a Stations of the Cross, as well as independent sculptures of Christ and Mary. In addition to this, John Hlatywayo (b.1928) – another artist associated with Polly Street – was commissioned to produce a crucifix to be hung over the church’s altar.⁷⁸ Undertaking the project, Kumalo’s activities were, however, closely supervised by Skotnes – their relationship at the time being as Rankin observes very much that of master and apprentice (Rankin, 1996:129). In fact, it would seem that to a large degree Skotnes set the agenda. Submitting a design to Van Gemert for approval, he worked with Kumalo on the first panel of the ceiling – established as a template for Kumalo to follow.⁷⁹ Similarly, when it came to the Stations of the Cross, Skotnes fashioned a demonstration model (signed by him and included as the twelfth station in the final set), and sketched out notes for the remaining thirteen. “[W]ith these guidelines at hand”, Miles observes, “Kumalo was left to improvise” (Miles, 2004:58). Consequently, and in keeping with a certain underlying paradox already observed as implicit in the general project of Catholic iconographic revision in South Africa, the ‘Africanisation’ of Saint Peter Clavers, although realised by Kumalo, was to a large extent the project of liberal white culture-brokers.

⁷⁵ For detailed biographical information on Cecil Skotnes, visit www.cecilskotnes.com

⁷⁶ Rankin relates how for the artist Durandt Sihlali, Polly Street functioned as an important meeting place in the city, where artists could meet, work and exchange ideas. Similarly, Skotnes felt the informal and social atmosphere of the centre to have been closer to that of an artists’ workshop, than an academic school (Rankin, 1996:72).

⁷⁷ According to Harmsen, when first approached by Van Velsen and Van Gemert, Skotnes made no immediate recommendation. It was only after Kumalo visited him shortly after to explain how for financial reasons he would be leaving the centre, that the young artist’s name was forwarded for the commission (Harmsen, 1996:29).

⁷⁸ Cast in concrete, Hlatywayo’s crucifix presented Christ as a black man – but, unlike sculptures by such contemporaries as Gcwensa and Xulu, was rendered in a distinctly modernist style. Whilst visiting the church, it was communicated to me by the resident priest that Hlatywayo’s crucifix was the first representation of a black Christ to be hung over a church altar in South Africa. Whilst the validity of this claim is unverified, the sad irony is that, replaced by a more ‘traditional’ example, Hlatywayo’s crucifix no longer hangs in its original place, but stands in a side chapel of the church.

⁷⁹ For a detailed account of the ceiling’s design – a syncretic fusion of African and occidental iconography – as well as a more in-depth survey of the commission itself, see Miles. 2004, *Polly Street: the story of an art centre*:49-59.

That being said, Skotnes' mentorship of Kumalo was not at all the protective nurturing of a Father Kinch, whose objective it was to foster the 'innate' abilities of indigene artists. Although initially wary of imposing Eurocentric concepts and traditions on his students – lest he accidentally 'destroy' something (Sack, 1988:15) – Skotnes quickly realised the irrelevance of such a concern to the urban and cross-cultural context of Johannesburg (Rankin, 1996:70). Consequently, under Skotnes' direction students at Polly Street, like Kumalo, were exposed to a variety of influences, from classical African sculpture to modern art trends in Europe and America. Drawing from these, they were actively encouraged to develop a personal artistic style.⁸⁰ Rankin confirms: "there was [under Skotnes] no attempt to limit students to African imagery, to prescribe a style or to promote art making that was recognisably 'black'"⁸¹ (Rankin, 1996:70). Also, unlike the situation in mission-based art initiatives like Mariannhill, where the prevailing agenda was to promote an 'indigenous' sacred art, aspiring black artists at Polly Street were from the late 1950s increasingly encouraged to participate both creatively and professionally within the secular context of the contemporary South African art scene (Rankin, 1996:73). In this sense, one might view Skotnes' role in what was Kumalo's very first commission as a natural extension of his teaching activities, and consistent with the objectives of the Polly Street Art Centre in professionally empowering its students. Similarly, it is worth noting that although forwarded by Skotnes for the commission, Kumalo possessed at the time no formal experience in mural painting, or sculpture for that matter – and in general ecclesial decoration was a field foreign to him.⁸² Conscious of this, Skotnes arranged for Kumalo and Hlatywayo to undertake a brief but intensive course in Christian symbolism and church ornament. At the same time, Johannesburg-based gallerist Egon Guenther introduced Kumalo to the ecclesial sculptures of German Expressionist Ernst Barlach (1870–1938) – and given the emphasis of the project, to his significant collection of West African art (Miles, 2004:50-51).

As noted already, and in keeping it would seem with Oguibe's 'discourse of authenticity', Van Velsen and Van Gemert had envisioned the decoration of Saint Peter Clavers in an 'indigenous African style'. Kumalo's stations, however, although 'Africanised' to the extent that Christ, his mother, and other key figures are rendered as black, are distinctly modern in

⁸⁰ In this respect, Kasfir notes that Skotnes' tutelage was far less aggressive than that of other teachers and sponsors similarly engaged in community-based art initiatives in Africa in the late 1950s and 1960s – including Father Kevin Carroll and others like Margaret Trowell, Kenneth Murray and Frank McEwan. As she explains, Skotnes was suspicious of manifestoes (artistic or political), and was as such reluctant to pursue a single set of recommendations for his students (Kasfir, 1999:101–102).

⁸¹ That being said, Nettleton notes that according to some a certain prescriptiveness was nevertheless applied, in promoting amongst students a mode of formalist modernism – or 'Primitivism' (Nettleton, 2011:153). On the other hand, the diversity of work produced by students – from realism to abstraction – demonstrates to an extent its claim to a non-prescriptive approach.

⁸² Whilst it is not clear that Kumalo realised the series chronologically (from first station to last), the later pieces do seem to reflect a refinement in facility, pointing perhaps to the young artist's adjustment to and exploration of an entirely new medium.

style (see plates 27-40). Worked in brick clay, the roughly shaped panels and their expressively moulded figures bear witness not only to the human sufferings of a black Christ, but also on a more formal level, to the diverse influences to which the young artist was exposed.⁸³ This modernist impulse, prefiguring in many respects the more mature idiom of his later work, is particularly evident in the standalone figures of Christ and Mary he sculpted to accompany the sequence – the reduced and angular treatment of which clearly demonstrate his early exposure to expressionist as well as cubist sculpture.⁸⁴

Emphasised in fact by Skotnes and others at Polly Street, was the influence of African and Oceanic sculpture on such early modernist movements as Cubism, Fauvism and German Expressionism (Miles, 2004:49). Understood as ‘Primitivism’, this general appropriation of non-western forms was as Lemke notes, motivated by the assumption that such ‘symbolic amalgamation’ had the capacity to transform and reinvigorate the exhausted tradition of western art (Lemke, 1998:40). In this respect, Anitra Nettleton observes the general predisposition of Skotnes and other teachers at the centre to a formalist tradition of modernist primitivism, and the prevailing influence of that on the early development of Kumalo, as well as contemporaries like Ezrom Legae (Nettleton, 2011:151). That is not to say, however, that it was an imposed agenda – attested to by the variety of expressive styles adopted by students at the centre.⁸⁵ Rather, worth noting I believe is the alternative appeal this kind of modernist primitivism must have held for black artists like Kumalo – affirming as it did in the face of apartheid’s denigrations the idea of a proud and distinctly African cultural heritage, and one credited as a major influence in the formation of modernism.⁸⁶ In this respect for Jack Flam and Daniel Shapiro, the acknowledgement and growing appreciation of African art marked, “the first extra-African awareness of the voice of Africa, and even the awareness that Africa has a voice” (cited in Lemke, 1998:47). Laying claim to this ‘voice’, Kumalo increasingly sought from the late 1950s to actively synthesise traditional African and modernist forms in his sculptures (Nettleton, 2011:151–155). Although not immediately apparent in the more expressionist stations he produced for Saint Peter Clavers, this ‘neo

⁸³ Although demonstrably modern and cross-cultural in aspect, Kumalo’s stations were not necessarily acknowledged as such. In fact, as the subject of a 1962 News/Check arts supplement, they were paternalistically described as works of, “virile, indigenous expression ... crudely and spontaneously modeled in cement” (1962:35).

⁸⁴ Miles observes how reflected in the modernist rendering of these standalone sculptures is something of Barlach’s ‘cubist structure’ and ‘vitalising movement’ (Miles, 2004:58). More emphatically, however, a distinctly cubist influence is clearly felt in the figures of Mary and Christ Kumalo produced the following year for the Church of St Martin de Porres in Orlando West. See Miles. 2004, *Polly Street: the story of an art centre*.

⁸⁵ Durant Sihlali (1935-2004), for example, consciously employed a mode of social realism in his work – documenting in vivid landscapes and social scenes the everyday realities of black people in apartheid South Africa (Miles, 2004:42).

⁸⁶ Nettleton notes how the ‘primitivist’ explorations of black South African artists like Kumalo differed to that of their white counterparts. As significant to this, she observes their privileged claim to a pan-African heritage (whereby their adoption of modernism constituted a kind of *re-appropriation* of African form), as well as a certain ‘nostalgic remembrance’ of pre-colonial sovereignty” (Nettleton, 2011:155).

African' approach is visible already in a crucifix he sculpted the same year (1957).⁸⁷ Evident in the photographic documentation of the work (whereabouts unknown) is the dramatically elongated torso and distended belly of Christ. Acknowledging Kumalo's formal development in this regard, and with reference to *Praying Woman*, a not dissimilar work he produced in 1960, Skotnes observed:

[I]t is obvious that he has been influenced both by European and Central African artists. But he has not been inhibited by his influences – he has taken what he wants from them and discarded the rest. He has developed a highly personal style of work – and like many European artists, is attempting to find an individual expression of essentially African forms (cited in Miles, 2004:79).

Following the success of Saint Peter Clavers, Kumalo was commissioned in 1958 to paint the ceiling of the newly built Church of Saint Martin de Porres in Orlando West, Johannesburg, and to sculpt figures of Christ and Mary, as well as a Stations of the Cross. No longer under Skotnes' supervision, Kumalo set the agenda, completing the project with the assistance of Ephraim Ngatane, Morningstar Motaung, Louis Maqhubela and Ben Arnold – all of whom were associated with Polly Street at the time⁸⁸ (Miles, 2004:64). Rectangular and achieved in pre-cast stone, the sculpted stations he produced are described by Miles as something of a departure from those of Saint Peter Clavers. In particular she notes his reductive treatment of the human form – how in a number of cases the lower limbs of both protagonists and antagonists are erased. A feature emphasising as she proposes the abject situation of Christ, as with a certain tragic ambivalence, "the hand that strips the body naked, stabs it and hammers the nail through its flesh is also the caressing hand that takes the body from the cross and lays it to rest" (Miles, 2004:68). Unappreciated from the start, the stations were unfortunately replaced by a mass-produced set, and moved to Saint Peters Seminary in Hammanskraal.⁸⁹ They were subsequently moved again, and following the amalgamation of the seminaries of Saint Peter and Saint John Vianney in Pretoria, have disappeared without trace.⁹⁰ That Kumalo's works were unpopular with the congregation of Saint Martin de Porres

⁸⁷ Of his 'neo African' style, EJ de Jager observes: "In many respects Kumalo thus innovated a genuine contemporary or modern indigenous South African sculpture. This he attained through his understanding of classic African art, the way in which he absorbed this understanding, integrating and blending it with his own personal consciousness and creativity on the one hand, and the values of western art assimilated by him on the other hand" (De Jager, 1992:110). Although criticised by Van Robbroeck, De Jager's language (and in this case general summation of Kumalo's style) reflects to an extent the primitivist vocabulary adopted by a number of South African modernists at the time – Kumalo included (Nettleton, 2011:115).

⁸⁸ For a full description of the project, including the painted ceiling, Kumalo's unique poker-work crucifix and the figures he sculpted Christ and Mary see Miles. 2004, *Polly Street: the story of an art centre*, Ampersand Foundation, pp. 62-69

⁸⁹ In addition to the replacement of the Stations of the Cross, Miles details the curious reemergence at Saint Martin de Porres of Kumalo's pokerwork crucifix (after it too was removed), as well as the disappearance of the sculptures he produced of Christ and Mary. She also notes the impending destruction of the ceiling mural, on account of the church's proposed expansion (Miles, 2004:69).

⁹⁰ Despite various trips to seminaries, interviews and telephone calls, I have been unable to locate Kumalo's stations, which seem to have gone missing in the transitional period of Saint Peter and Saint John Vianney's amalgamation in 2007. Given this unfortunate situation, Miles' in-depth description of the works (at the time installed at St Peters) is a particularly valuable resource.

– a church situated in Soweto – is telling. Reflecting perhaps, as with the poor reception of works by Gcwensa and Xulu, just how deeply engrained was the essentially European visuality of Catholicism in South Africa at the time.

It is, however, in the Stations of the Cross he produced in 1961 for the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary in Thabong, that Kumalo's 'African modernist' idiom is most clearly evidenced (see plates 41–54). In comparison to the rough expressionism of those in Saint Peter Clavers, the sophistication and cultivated aesthetic of these terracotta bas-relief panels is marked. Against a flat rectangular background, and around the recurrent motif of a simply incised cross (absent only in stations 1, 10 and 14) are figured the geometrically reduced and attenuated figures of Christ, his followers and persecutors. Redolent of classical African sculptural traditions such as those of the Baule (see plate 55), accentuated is the half-crouch of their legs and their elongated torsos. This is particularly evident in the second and sixth stations of the series. Reflected also is the stylistic influence of such African inspired modernists as Marino Marini and Henry Moore, to whose work Kumalo was introduced whilst professionally assisting the well-known sculptor Edoardo Villa (1915–2011)⁹¹ (Powell, 2006; Miles, 2004). Pursuing in this way an African and yet distinctly modernist sculptural idiom, it is clear that in the case of his Stations of the Cross for the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Kumalo moved beyond the 'colonial conservatism' of mission-based artists like Gcwensa and Xulu. Complicating the essentially ethnographic ideal of an 'indigenous' sacred art, Kumalo's modernist rendering (and 'Africanisation') of the Stations of the Cross laid claim, I propose, to a certain contemporaneity. In this respect, Ivor Powell observes:

[Kumalo] succeeded in finding formulas and registers which, while they drew strongly on African sculptural tradition, nevertheless articulately spoke the languages of international modernism, and demanded to be taken seriously as such" (Powell, 2006:144).

Implicit, I believe, in the contemporary and hybridised approach of Kumalo's 'African modernism' was an associated and essentially political cross-culturalism. Noting the shifting polarities of primitivist thinking within colonial discourse – wherein difference was either denigrated or valorised (a situation evidenced in the shifting policies of the missionary enterprise) – Lemke observes in the alternative context of modernist Primitivism a unique fusion of 'black' and 'white' forms. As an intercultural exchange, she notes in this regard how in Primitivist aesthetics the either/or of difference is transcended – constituting as she claims, "[an] implosion of the binary structure of racism" (Lemke, 1998:28). In this regard, I would argue that in re-appropriating the cross-cultural agenda of modernist Primitivism, and in his

⁹¹ Kumalo's longstanding enthusiasm for Moore's work is felt in a number of sculptures and drawings he produced. Notable examples include a series of reclining figures he produced in chalk, pastel and charcoal in the 1970s and 1980s. See Powell. 2006, "Sydney Kumalo" in *Revisions. Expanding the Narrative of South African Art*:145-147.

conscious synthesis of black and white forms, Kumalo disrupted the ‘romantic racism’ associated with essentialist tropes like ‘indigenisation’ and ‘Africanisation’. Furthermore, in doing so – and in what Ruth Simbao describes as a kind of ‘subtle resistance’⁹² – he undermined the more practical racism of apartheid ideology, and the ingrained prejudice of its everyday enactment.

In the particular case of the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, the implied politics of this cross-culturalism extended also to the collaborative and multiracial nature of its decoration. Whilst Kumalo produced its Stations of the Cross, Ben Arnold was commissioned to sculpt the figure of St Michael, and Skotnes painted *The Apocalypse* – an enormous mural, spanning the length of the altar wall (see plate 56). Unlike the master/apprentice situation of Saint Peter Claver, all three worked independently as professional contemporaries – demonstrating something of the empowering agenda of Polly Street. Shortly after the church’s completion, an article published in SA Art News observed: “In their combined effort ... White, Coloured and African men have achieved more, through the medium of art, than many politicians” (1962:9). That being said, it is worth noting that the multiracial dynamic of this interaction played out in the specifically black context of Thabong. When some years later a similar commissioning took place for the decoration of the Cathedral of the Resurrection – located just a few kilometres away in the all-white area of Kroonstad – all of the seven artists commissioned were white.⁹³ A situation pointing it would seem to the structural racism observed by Motlhabi in the Catholic Church at the time – and affirming as Stuart Bate confirms, the ‘mission’ rather than ‘settler’ church as a site of transformation in South Africa (Motlhabi, 2008:6; Bate, 1999:154).

Lastly, significant in the case of Kumalo’s liturgical works is the fact that although commissioned as part of a general project of iconographic revision, driven by the new cultural imperatives of Inculturation, the ‘Africanisation’ of Christian iconography was for him a matter of personal insistence. Unlike the situation with Gcwensa and Xulu, it was for Kumalo of ideological significance that Christ be representable as black. According to gallerist Adeline Pohl, he adamantly refused to acknowledge any church wherein Christ could not be seen as black too (Miles, 2004:64). Insisting in this way on the universality of Christ, he demonstrated I believe a certain fundamental politics – as in the dehumanising context of apartheid South Africa, reaffirmed in the possibility of a black Christ was the

⁹² In her text “Self-identification as resistance. Visual constructions of ‘Africanness’ and ‘blackness’ during apartheid”, Simbao argues for a broader understanding of ‘resistance art’. With respect to the kind of self-identification demonstrated by artists like Kumalo, she notes: “portrayals of ‘Africanness’ (particularly African traditionalism), ‘Pan Africanism’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘blackness’, particularly when produced by black artists, can be read as shrewd challenges to dominant white discourse even though they are sometimes read – across the political spectrum – as regressive” (Simbao, 2011:39).

⁹³ The artists commissioned were: Cecil Skotnes, Zoltan Borbereki, Edoardo Villa, Barbara Greig, Maud Sumner, Elizabeth Sebök and Fred Schimmel. For an account of the project see Harmsen. 1996, "Religious Art" in *Cecil Skotnes*.

essential equality of black identities. In this sense, as with the subversive cross-culturalism of his sculptural idiom, asserted in his numerous representations of Christ was a form of ‘subtle resistance’. Further to this, I would argue that particularly in the case of his Stations of the Cross (or at least those appreciated in Seeisovalle and Thabong) this ‘subtle resistance’ was extended to viewers as well – as one ritually performed in their personal identification with the episodic sufferings of a black rather than white Christ. Thus as Derek Walcott might say, in these small resistances, and in so laying claim to Christ’s person and Passion, a culturally burdened and ‘decaying’ faith was reinvigorated with political belief (Walcott, 1998:45).

Chapter Three: The Cross as an Instrument of Pain

Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, and the politics of a black Christ's Passion

They rode upon
the death chariot
to their Golgotha –
three vagrants
whose papers to be in Caesar's empire
were not in order:

The sun
shriveled their bodies
in the mobile tomb
as airtight as canned fish.

We're hot!
We're thirsty!
We're hungry!

The centurion
touched their tongues
with the tip
of a lance
dipped in apathy:

'Don't cry to me
but to Caesar who
crucifies you.'

A woman came
to wash their faces
she carried a dishcloth
full of bread and tea

We're dying!

The centurion
washed his hands.

Oswald Mtshali, *Ride upon the Death Chariot*, 1971 (Mtshali, 1971)

If there was a certain politics of resistance implicit in the figuring of Christ as black in the liturgical works of artists like Sydney Kumalo, it was made explicit when in 1962 Ronald Harrison (1940–2011) painted his seminal piece, *the Black Christ* (plate 57). Horrified by the violence of the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960, and incensed by the subsequent banning of political parties such as the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-African Congress (PAC), Harrison determined as a wilful act of defiance to paint a 'black' crucifixion. He recalls:

A strange feeling seemed to engulf me as an actual picture started to develop in my mind. I realised that I could depict the suffering of the black people and equate this with the suffering of Christ (Harrison, 2006:25).

What made Harrison's vision inflammatory, however, was not just his rendering of Christ as black, but his bold assignation of key political figures to both Christ and his persecutors. In what Colin Richards describes as a "politico-religious insult", he modelled his Christ on Chief Albert Luthuli (then president of the ANC), and his Roman oppressors on apartheid ideologues Hendrik Verwoerd and John Vorster (Richards, 2011:53). Although championed in Cape Town by Anglican Archbishop Joost de Blank and publically exhibited in Saint Luke's Church, Diep River, the painting was declaimed by the Nationalist government as heretical and subsequently banned. Evading confiscation, the work was smuggled out of the country and under the auspices of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, Christian Action and the International Defence and Aid Fund, toured both the United Kingdom and Europe (Harrison, 2006).

Whilst arguably the first instance in South Africa of such an overt politicisation of the Crucifixion,⁹⁴ a comparable strategy was applied in America some years before, with Prentiss Taylor's 1932 lithograph *Christ in Alabama*. As part of his *Scottsboro Portfolio* (1932), and illustrating Langston Hughes' poem of the same name, the sufferings of a black Christ were similarly applied to a particular historical and political moment – the pervasiveness of racism in the South during the 1930s, and more specifically the spurious case of the Scottsboro Boys⁹⁵ (Ford, 1966). Similarly, black artists in other parts of Africa applied social and political readings to the Crucifixion. For example, one might look to Ethiopian artist Gebre Kristos' *Golgotha* (1963), wherein the Crucifixion of Christ speaks metaphorically to local situations of poverty and oppression (Kasfir, 1999:199). Produced ten years later, and more in keeping with Harrison's direct impersonations, in Tshiumba Kanda-Matulu's *The Historic Death of Lumumba* (1973) the figure of Christ is equated with that of Patrice Lumumba, who as the first Prime Minister of the Congo was controversially executed in 1961. Lying prostrate with his side pierced and Calvary in the background, the assassinated leader is thus established as both martyr and redeemer (see plate 58). In the artist's words: "In my view, Lumumba was the Lord Jesus of Zaire ... because he died for unity" (Kasfir, 1999:25).

Having already traced something of the manner in which in ecclesial contexts black artists in South Africa reinterpreted an essentially European iconography, it is within this more

⁹⁴ Although not a 'Crucifixion' as such, an argument might be made for Albert Adam's important triptych, *South Africa 1958-9 (Deposition)*. Also exhibited in Cape Town, and though less overt in its political application, Adams' representation of the deposition of Christ is generally understood as speaking to the oppression of black people in apartheid South Africa (Miles, 2008:25–29).

⁹⁵ The 'Scottsboro Boys' were nine young black men, falsely accused of raping two white women on board a train near Scottsboro, Alabama in 1931. Convicted and facing execution, the case sparked international demonstrations and succeeded in both highlighting the racism of the American legal system and in overturning the conviction (Kindig, 2015).

explicitly political and secular vein that I consider in this chapter the instance of Sokhaya Charles Nkosi's *Crucifixion* (1976). Produced as a series of thirteen linocut prints, and formulated in response to an intensifying atmosphere of political unrest, analogously redeployed in the work's visual sequence is the narrative drama of Christ's Passion. Consequently, in the visual and contextual analysis that follows, the episodic tribulations of Nkosi's black Christ are demonstrated as documenting, in a veiled religious idiom, the incarceration and torture of political activists in apartheid South Africa. Following this, and on a more ideological level, Christ is shown as embodying in his blackness as well as in the ultimately victorious narrative of his suffering the self-realisation and political emancipation advocated within both Black Consciousness and Black Theology.

I. Sokhaya Charles Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, 1976

1976 was a watershed year in the history of South Africa, revealing as it did the shocking and systematic violence by which apartheid policy was maintained, and yet marking simultaneously an upsurge of political resistance in the country, particularly amongst the youth. Mobilised by the South African Students Movement,⁹⁶ and with the support of the Black Consciousness Movement⁹⁷ (BCM), as many as ten thousand black students gathered in Soweto on June the 16th, in protest of the institution of Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of school instruction. Marching to Orlando Stadium, the students were met by heavily armed police who fired teargas and later live ammunition into the crowd. Riots ensued and by the end of the day over a hundred students had been killed (Bester & Enwezor, 2013). Galvanised into action, students in other townships similarly protested – the language issue detonating a multitude of other grievances (Welsh, 1998:475). Declaring a state of emergency, the state's response was brutal. According to Minister of Justice Jimmy Kruger, the rioting 'natives' were out of control, and as such, "had to be made tame by the gun" (cited in Welsh, 1998:475). As a result, hundreds were arrested and in total more than a thousand lives were lost, mostly on account of police activity. Subsequently, toward the end of the year nine leaders of BCM and the South African Students Organisation (SASO)⁹⁸ were arrested, and on charges of conspiracy sentenced to prison on Robben Island. Internationally, the

⁹⁶ Established in 1972, the *South African Students Movement* (SASM) was an organisation of mainly high school students, formed to represent the interests of students, and to facilitate communication between schools on a regional and national level. See South African History Online, *South African Students Movement* [2015, May 18th] (SAHO, 2015).

⁹⁷ Emerging in the mid-1960s and gaining popularity in the 1970s, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was a grassroots activist movement, urging amongst black workers and the youth a defiant rejection of apartheid. The ideology of Black Consciousness espoused the personal and political liberation of blacks, and was advocated by, amongst others, the political activist and leader Bantu Steve Biko. Black Consciousness, and its theological counterpart Black Theology, are discussed in more detail at a later point in this chapter. See South African History Online, *Black Consciousness Movement* [2015, May 27th] (SAHO, 2015).

⁹⁸ Aligned with the BCM, and birthed from the University Christian Movement (UCM), the South African Students Organisation (SASO) was established in 1968 as the first exclusively black student organisation in South Africa, and with Steve Biko as its first president. See South African History Online, *South African Students Organisation*.

events of 1976 had serious repercussions for the Nationalist government, as photographic imagery of police brutality cemented for many the status of South Africa as a pariah state. More officially, the massacre was condemned by the United Nations Security Council, which publicly called for an end to apartheid. On the home front, the events of 1976 heightened the political awareness and activities of students, and following the exile of those fleeing imprisonment, swelled the ranks of anti-apartheid organisations and liberation movements like *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA)⁹⁹ (Bester & Enwezor, 2013).

As a third year student at the Evangelical Lutheran Art and Craft Centre, Rorke's Drift, Nkosi recalls the effect of those extraordinary circumstances – how following the uprising in Soweto, he and other students would huddle around the school's radio and pore over newspapers, all of them anxious for news: good or bad. Affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran mission at Rorke's Drift, in what was then Natal, the ELC Art and Craft Centre (or simply 'Rorke's Drift') was one of the few places in South Africa where in the late 1970s black men and women could study art. Unlike the situation at Grace Dieu and Mariannhill, where the predominant emphasis was on equipping black artists for the work of ecclesial decoration, the orientation at Rorke's Drift was more secular in nature.¹⁰⁰ Established as an art school in 1968 its curriculum was presented by teachers rather than missionaries, and as a two-year diploma course (with the option of a third year's residence) promoted art as an independent career opportunity (Miles & Rankin, 1992).¹⁰¹ As Nkosi has it, "the atmosphere was attuned to art – it was art and art, all the time" (personal communication 2014, July 3). Consequently, despite its rather isolated setting the school attracted aspiring black artists from across the country, and so facilitated significant cross-cultural encounters and conversations. As Leeb du-Toit observes: "Inter-ethnic activity produced [at Rorke's Drift] an incomparable momentum as urban and rural students blended various perspectives and styles into an unprecedented dynamism" (Leeb du-Toit, 1993:15).

This dynamism, however, extended beyond the 'inter-ethnic' – particularly within the politically charged context of the late 1970s. For example, artist Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa recalls the tense dialogue stimulated within the Rorke's Drift student community by 'the Johannesburg guys', some of whom had been directly involved in the events of June the 16th (Dhlomo, 1999:119). Similarly, in their authoritative account *Rorke's Drift, Empowering Prints* (2003), Philippa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin note from 1976 a radical shift in the

⁹⁹ Based outside of South Africa, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) (which translates as 'Spear of the Nation') and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) were the armed wings of the ANC and PAC respectively.

¹⁰⁰ For a more in-depth survey of the role of missions in art education in South Africa, in which reference is made to other mission-based art initiatives like the Ndaleni Training College, see Miles & Rankin. 1992, "The role of the missions in art education in South Africa" *Africa Insight*.

¹⁰¹ For a detailed account of these developments, and in general the history of the Evangelical Lutheran (ELC) Art and Craft Centre, Rorke's Drift, see Hobbs & Rankin. 2003, *Rorke's Drift. Empowering Prints*.

creative output of the school – reflecting as they observe, “the changing South African situation and the experiences that students brought with them from further afield” (2003:192). For Dhlomo-Mautloa and Monna Mokoena, art centres like Rorke’s Drift (as well as others active within the late 1970s and 1980s) operated in this sense not only as sites of art education and production, but more fundamentally as ‘hives of cultural organisation’ – and as such played a key role in the formulating of critical cultural responses to the injustices of apartheid¹⁰² (Dhlomo-Mautloa & Mokoena, 2004:6).

It was whilst preparing for his final practical assignment at Rorke’s Drift – prescribed as an independently conceived body of work – that Nkosi found himself returning to the narrative of Christ’s Passion. Recognising its latent symbolic power, he co-opted, as it were, the episodic sufferings and abject humiliations endured by Christ – applying them, stage by stage, to the unfolding drama of protests, arrests and incarcerations gripping the country. As he explains: “I wanted to use the cross as an instrument of pain” (personal communication 2014, February 29). The result was his *Crucifixion* (1976), a series of uncompromising graphic works, documenting in a sequence of thirteen episodes the arrest, torture and execution of a distinctly black Christ – and by inference, the experience of similarly persecuted political activists¹⁰³ (see plates 59-71). Turning in this way to an established biblical motif was by no means unusual in the mission-based context and religious milieu of Rorke’s Drift¹⁰⁴ – nor indeed was the idea and visual application of a black Christ. As the first artist officially involved at Rorke’s Drift, Azaria Mbatha had from as early as 1963 figured Christ as black, and in his distinctive application of Biblical themes to local sociocultural situations profoundly influenced a generation of students subsequently involved at the centre (developments discussed in the following chapter of this research). In the case of Nkosi’s *Crucifixion*, however, what shifted was a certain political dynamic, with Christ’s Passion redeployed as a conscious and altogether more radical idiom of socio-political critique. Reflecting on this conscious application, Leeb-du Toit observes the way in which Christ’s suffering becomes, “an articulate vehicle for expressing antipathy to state injustices” (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:18).

Distinctive also in the context of Rorke’s Drift was Nkosi’s treatment of the Passion as narrative. Unlike Mbatha’s earlier rendition of the Passion, Nkosi’s vision was realised as a

¹⁰² In addition to Rorke’s Drift, they list as influential: the Open School, the Bill Ainslee Studios, Funda, and the Community Arts Project (CAP) (Dhlomo-Mautloa & Mokoena, 2004:6).

¹⁰³ Reflecting on this symbolic application, Mduduzi Xakaza observes in the tribulation of Nkosi’s black Christ, “[t]he narrative sequence of a victim, probably a political detainee, in an interior where he is being tortured in different body positions and gestures” (Xakaza, 2011:71).

¹⁰⁴ Whilst secular in its programme, Rorke’s Drift was nevertheless a mission and sustained as such a certain underlying Christian ethic or culture. Leeb du-Toit notes: “While there was never any specific intention to elicit a liturgical bias in the art and craft production at the ELC [Rorke’s Drift], nor any prerequisite religious affiliation for its members, there was nonetheless an underlying religious ethos at the centre” (Leeb-du Toit, 1998:39). No doubt influential, this milieu or ‘ethos’ was, however, by no means solely responsible for the regular application of biblical themes within the works of artists studying at the centre. The diverse and subjective motivations of artists like Azaria Mbatha in this regard are discussed in Chapter Four.

series. Independently titled, each of the thirteen images present a thematically linked Passion episode – together constituting the narrative whole that is *Crucifixion*.¹⁰⁵ In fact, according to Nkosi, there were fourteen images to the original series. When, however, in a Rorke's Drift 'crit-session' he forwarded what would have been its twelfth episode, Jules Van de Vijver (his teacher at the time) dismissed the image, which was subsequently destroyed by the disappointed student, along with its print matrix. When the remaining thirteen images were later presented, as a series minus one, Van de Vijver was mortified, recognising then their corporate significance (Nkosi, personal communication 2014, February 29). This rather unfortunate interaction reflects an equally unfortunate anomaly, in that despite the acknowledged status of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* as an exemplar of cultural resistance in South Africa, it is invariably represented (or misrepresented) in fragment form.¹⁰⁶ From amongst the many publications that reference the work it is only in the rare and all German catalogues of Reverend Hans Blum that all thirteen images of the series are pictured.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, it is an objective of mine to redress in this chapter what I feel to have been, since that very first 'crit-session', a misrepresentation of what is essentially a narrative work. As Nkosi puts it, "the images form a chain" (personal communication 2014, February 29).

This narrative emphasis is, of course, in keeping with the iconographic tradition of the Stations of the Cross. However, although intended as a series of fourteen Passion episodes, Nkosi's *Crucifixion* was by no means conceived as a traditional Stations of the Cross, nor does it conform to the predetermined episodes (or stations) of that programme. That being said, it is almost certain that the tradition informed, to some extent at least, his episodic treatment of the Passion – given that he spent most of his high school years in the distinctly Catholic context of Saint Francis at Mariannhill, where Sister Pientia conducted his first art classes (Nkosi, personal communication 2014, February 29). Also, whilst working on the series his good friend Duke Ketye was already engaged with a Stations of the Cross – which, as previously discussed, he produced that year for the Church of Our Lady of the

¹⁰⁵ Although there has been some confusion to the series' title (in various publications), *Crucifixion* is confirmed by Nkosi as correct (personal communication, 2014, February 29).

¹⁰⁶ For example, referencing the series in her research essay, 'The intersection of Christianity and politics in South African art: A comparative analysis of selected images since 1960, with emphasis on the post-apartheid era' (2012), Karen von Veh shows just a single image, *Premonition of the Hour* (erroneously dated 1970). Adding to the confusion, mention is made of the artist's *Pain on the Cross* series and *Crucifixion* series, whereas only one series was produced, *Crucifixion* (of which the *Pain on the Cross* pentaptych is part). Similarly, in their book *Rorke's Drift – Empowering Prints* (2003), Hobbs and Rankin refer to Nkosi's series, *Pain on the Cross*, but without contextualising the images within the extended narrative of *Crucifixion*. In general, this confusion results, I believe, from the fragmented dissemination of the series itself, which was sold piecemeal (rather than as a series). As a result, collections in South Africa invariably hold only partial selections of the original set. In fact, according to my research, the only consolidated set of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* is held in Germany, in the private collection of Rev Hans Blum.

¹⁰⁷ Based in South Africa and Swaziland between 1966 and 1979, Hans Blum was a German priest in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the first person to purchase the full set of thirteen prints that constitute Nkosi's *Crucifixion*. In his publications, *Passion in Südafrika* (1979) and *Afrikanische Passion, Christliche Kunst aus dem Südlichen Afrika* (2009) Blum features, alongside Nkosi's works, those of a number of black South African artists, all of them exploring Christian themes and iconography.

Assumption in Makwane. However, whilst Ketye's project was commissioned, and essentially one of reinterpretation, the radical departure of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* amounted, I would argue, to nothing less than a total appropriation and radical reworking not only of the Stations of the Cross, but more generally the narrative tradition of the Passion cycle.¹⁰⁸

The visual narrative of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* is divided into three parts, with the first six images of the series grouped and sub-titled as *Crucifixion I*, the following five as *Crucifixion II*, and the final two as *Crucifixion III*.¹⁰⁹ Socially re-contextualised, the visual sequence of *Crucifixion I* traces the public condemnation, scourging and humiliation of Nkosi's black Christ. Accused in *The Tribunal*, the protagonist is subjected in the following episodes of *Torture and Humiliation* and *He endured Pain and Weakness* to the wrath and rejection of a community fractured by fear and distrust. Following these are the thematically linked images of *A Tragic Blow to the Christians* and *Mary and Joseph*. In both the figure of Christ is notably absent, with the emphasis falling, as Nkosi confirms, on communities and families traumatised by the incarceration, even murder, of political activists in apartheid South Africa (personal communication 2014, March 2). Shifting contexts, from the public sphere of the images preceding to the removed and clandestine environs of incarceration and torture, is *Premonition of the Hour*. Concluding the introductory narrative of *Crucifixion I*, registered in the image is Christ's detention – his traumatised body held in a network of barbed wire. Thereafter, chronicling something of this state enacted violence is the visual sequence of *Crucifixion II*, where in the disjunctive sequence of *Pain on the Cross I-V* the Crucifixion itself is extended in scenes of graphic violence and torture. Bringing to a climax these harrowing scenes is the iconic moment of *Submission to Death*, the first and penultimate image of *Crucifixion III*. Looking heavenward, sensed in the desperation of Christ's final appeal is nevertheless a measure of defiance, transcendence even. And then, as the thirteenth and final image of the series, is the closing (but also *opening*) statement of *Resurrection*. Positing a vision of life after death, and in the context of Nkosi's reimagining a future reality of social and political transformation, the image endows the narrative as a whole with an ideological and distinctly political objective. Thus, in his essentially analogic application of the Passion narrative, traced in the harrowing episodes of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* – from *Tribunal* to *Crucifixion* to *Resurrection* – is something of the hardship and pain, as well as aspiration, of black resistance in apartheid South Africa. Reflecting on the series, Karen von Veh observes:

The religious identification of Christ as an innocent sacrificial victim, and the knowledge that he will rise again in power and glory, creates a particularly useful

¹⁰⁸ In its deviation from the uniform narrative of the Stations of the Cross, Nkosi's 'Crucifixion' (1976) operates more officially within the iconographic tradition of the Passion cycle, a tradition wherein the number and nature of Passion episodes is less fixed (Hourihane, 2009:227).

¹⁰⁹ On the prints themselves, the individual title of the work is accompanied by a sub-title: 'Crucifixion I', 'Crucifixion II' or 'Crucifixion III' – denoting the sub-narrative to which it belongs.

metaphor for the suffering of black people and the promise of their redemption and ultimate victory (Von Veh, 2012:9).

Having briefly introduced Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, I consider in the following section the operation of the series as a coded visual document – testifying in the analogous sufferings of a black Christ to the violent extraction and systematic torture of political activists in apartheid South Africa.

II. Chronicling the 'violent science' of apartheid

In his essay 'Memory, metaphor, and the triumph of narrative' (1998), Njabulo Ndebele explains how institutionalised processes of human domination underwrote the informed social habit, or 'normality', of apartheid. Empowered by the white electorate, he notes how the ruling elite gave a 'blank cheque' to the military and police – establishments through which, "the enforcement of apartheid degenerated into a science of torture and death" (Ndebele, 1998:23). Violence was thus integral, routine even, in the maintenance of apartheid's power – sustaining the peaceable normality of whites and defining the everyday reality of blacks.¹¹⁰ Erupting in the public spectacle that was the 1976 Soweto Uprising, this underlying violence was made shockingly apparent to the world, and no doubt many white South Africans as well. Less mediated than the sporadic and 'spectacular' violence enacted by police in this public context was, however, the sustained and essentially covert violence of detentions, interrogations and murder that characterised the 'violent science' of apartheid, and made safe its social habit.¹¹¹ Working within the extended state-of-emergency declared by the government in the wake of 16 June, it was this insidious and in many respects 'invisible' violence to which Nkosi bore witness in the analogous commentary of his *Crucifixion*.

Reflecting on the particular violence of torture, Bogues observes its operation as functioning – by its own political logic (or 'necessity') – outside of the public realm, as human bodies are excluded from the mainstream.¹¹² In keeping with this idea, David Bunn recalls how in the censorial context of apartheid South Africa the violence of detentions, interrogations and

¹¹⁰ In certain situations, Bogues argues that, rather than a *means* to power, violence operates as power. Which is to say that rather than an instrument, violence is established as an integral aspect of the system – becomes, "the singularity of power" (Bogues, 2010:73). His observation is, I feel, particularly relevant to the situation of black people in apartheid South Africa, whose everyday reality was defined and regulated by a sustained structure of violence. In this respect, in 1976 Rev Abel Hendricks remarked of the situation in South Africa: "The White *status quo* has in turn allowed their fear, confusion and ignorance of Black suffering and aspirations to manifest itself in violence, brutality and the detention of those crying out for liberation" (cited in De Gruchy, 1979:175).

¹¹¹ In a statement made at the plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, 26 October 1976, New York, Oliver Tambo remarked: "Since then [June 16th], no less than a thousand of the cream of our people have been shot down in cold blood in the streets of our towns and cities and in far-flung villages. Thousands are held in Vorster's prisons. The systematic murder of the patriots of South Africa continues behind the secrecy of those prison walls" (Tambo, 1976).

¹¹² Bogues observes, "To practice torture, a set of discursive procedures has to be followed, since subjecting bodies to pain requires that they be excluded from the norm" (Bogues, 2010:77).

political murders was effectively, and conscientiously, hidden. Reflecting in particular on the late 1970s, it was as he notes, "an era of apartheid without real archives" (cited in Thomas, 2014:141) – a time in which the realities of state violence were for the most part attested to not by images, as in the mediated spectacle of the Soweto Uprisings, but rather by their *absence*. It was in the absence then of a public visual archive that Nkosi bore witness to the incarceration and torture of political activists – the empathetic and imaginative rendering of his *Crucifixion* constituting a form of visual activism. Based at Rorke's Drift, and so distanced to an extent from these traumatic realities, his chronicling was by necessity derived – drawn principally from the oral circulation of survivor testimonies and stories related by family members and friends.¹¹³ (Nkosi, personal communication 2014, February 29). In contrast then to the 'live situation' witness of photographic documentation, his was a project formulated within what Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas describe as the 'intersubjective relations of testimony' – a social transaction motivated as they observe by a shared imperative to, "bear witness to [an] historical trauma for the sake of collective memory" (Guerin & Hallas, 2007:11). Counter-archival in its response to state censorship, Nkosi's visual chronicling was thus both imaginative, social and born of necessity, making shareable in the analogous sufferings of a black Christ's Passion the testimony of those 'silenced' by the violent enforcement of apartheid.¹¹⁴

Before considering the thematic strategies and coded visual content employed by Nkosi (in this counter-archival practice), it is, I believe, worth briefly reflecting on the particular dynamics of the medium in which his *Crucifixion* was realised, and its resonance within a specific art historical tradition. Which is to say, the significance of the series as a visual document of social critique, rendered in the serial and 'democratic' modality of print.

Unlike the *in-situ* sculptural stations of Kumalo and others, the thirteen Passion episodes of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* are linocut prints. As a form of relief printing, linocut entails the image being worked or 'cut' by the artist into a linoleum tile, which is then top-rolled with ink and manually printed as an edition. Cheap and versatile, the medium was developed in Europe in the 1890s, and was quickly adopted in art education contexts. Its usage, however, was extended in the early twentieth century to fine art – ennnobled as it were by artists of *Die Brücke*,¹¹⁵ as well as influential modernists such as Picasso and Matisse (Cohn, 2009). In the

¹¹³ Nkosi explains his 'witness' to the events chronicled in the *Crucifixion* images as derived largely from stories told by friends who been incarcerated, circulated accounts of raids and police violence, and the trying experiences of his brother. Having studied marine navigation in Southampton, Nkosi's older brother was subjected to interrogation by Special Branch agents on his return to South Africa – and, traumatised by the experience, lived in fear for a period thereafter (Nkosi, personal communication 2014, July 3).

¹¹⁴ With reference to visual projects that similarly testify to situations of violence and trauma, Guerin and Hallas observe the agency of images to facilitate in a phenomenological and inter-subjective context, "specific possibilities to bear witness to historical trauma" (Guerin & Hallas, 2007:4).

¹¹⁵ Established in Dresden in 1905, *Die Brücke* was an artist's collective, and marked the beginning of Expressionism in Germany. The group advocated a new and 'authentic' mode of artistic expression, and counted

context of Rorke's Drift, Nkosi's use of the medium was by no means unusual. In fact, linocut was far and away the most popular means of art production at the school – to the extent that for many the medium has become synonymous with the almost mythical legacy of Rorke's Drift. A somewhat problematic association given that amongst other disciplines, painting, sculpture, and ceramics were offered as part of the school's standard curriculum.¹¹⁶ Further, Hobbs and Rankin observe how following its popularisation at Rorke's Drift, printmaking – and linocut in particular – has been regularly conceived as a 'typical' art form amongst black artists in South Africa¹¹⁷ (Hobbs & Rankin, 1997:14). In this regard one can hardly consider a cheap and flexible medium like linocut 'typical' without acknowledging also the kind of adverse conditions which more often than not recommended its use to black artists in South Africa. Whereas painting and sculpture were relatively expensive modes of art production – and thus less popular, or 'typical' – linocut printing requires little more than linoleum, ink, a roller, some paper and the back of a spoon (its agency in this sense being one of economy).¹¹⁸ The emphasis on printmaking at Rorke's Drift was not, however, motivated entirely by the school's limited resources. Together involved in the original planning and development of its art diploma programme, Swedish artists and educators Peder Gowenius and Ola Granath were committed printmakers themselves – both having studied at the *Konstfackskolan* in Stockholm. Informed by the anti-elitist orientation of that institution in the late 1950s and 1960s, as well as Bauhaus ideals of innovative design and socio-cultural renewal, their enthusiasm for printmaking was underscored by an ideological commitment to the social utility of art (Hobbs & Rankin, 2003:75–76). Gowenius recalls:

While at art school in Stockholm I belonged to a small but steadily growing group of people who questioned the concept of art. What was the use of it all, painting pictures, making sculptures or printing graphic works? In short we despised a culture only for the rich and artists selling only to the highest bidder (cited in Hobbs & Rankin, 2003:xi).

Whilst in many respects practical, it would seem then that the emphasis on printmaking at Rorke's Drift (initiated by Gowenius and Granath, and perpetuated by subsequent teachers like Otto Lundbohm and Van der Vijver) was invested also with a countercultural and distinctly modernist prerogative. Not only was it practical, it was ideological too. Similarly, artists like Nkosi, enthusiastic about the possibilities of the medium – rather than begrudging its limitations – re-affirmed its social utility and as such the essentially political ideal of a

amongst its members the artists Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, and for a period Emile Nolde (Heller, 2009:12).

¹¹⁶ For a more detailed account of the curriculum at Rorke's Drift, see Hobbs & Rankin. 2003, *Rorke's Drift. Empowering Prints*:75.

¹¹⁷ This association of linocut as 'typical' has to a large extent (and somewhat reductively) presumed a kind of natural affinity between black artists and the medium, based on it being a form of carving and its bold decorative qualities (Seidman, 2007:13; Hobbs & Rankin, 2003:8-30).

¹¹⁸ Regarding the 'economy' of linocut printing, Hobbs and Rankin observe that whilst the technique was generally an affordable one, there were times (particularly in the 1950s) when quality linoleum was less available and so relatively more expensive (Hobbs & Rankin, 1997:14).

'people's art'. This is especially relevant in the case of his *Crucifixion*, the objective of which was to chronicle a situation of social and political trauma. Nkosi himself was drawn to the graphic works of Edvard Munch and the German Expressionists, introduced to him by the teachers at Rorke's Drift¹¹⁹ (Nkosi, personal communication 2014, February 29). Stylistically, this is evident in the graphic intensity and emotive quality of images like *Submission to Death*, but more conceptually in the unsparing social witness of his practice at the time. Nkosi's adoption of linocut was coterminous then with his engagement with a certain artistic tradition – a modernism less concerned with 'primitive' forms than contemporary situations. One informed by the graphic and emotive immediacy of Expressionism, the 'democracy' of printmaking as a medium, and the notion of the artist as social critic.

In his seminal survey, *The Indignant Eye – the Artist as Social Critic* (1969), Ralph Shikes picks up on this tradition – tracing not only within the context of modernism but from as early as the 15th century what he considers to be a somewhat neglected narrative, running subjacent to the mainstream of art history.¹²⁰ Content rather than form driven, this is the story of art as radical social critique. Tracing this 'alternative' history – citing examples like Dürer's *Peasant Monument* (1525), Francisco de Goya's *Disasters of War* (1810–1820), the post-war graphics of Otto Dix and George Grosz, the protest prints of Mexican artists like Raul Anguiano and José Clemente Orozco – he notes throughout the particular amenability of printmaking to the art of social critique. This agency of print he attributes to its graphic qualities, the relative affordability of printed works, and most especially the distributable quality of the print multiple. He notes:

It is no accident that social criticism has been expressed largely in prints ... the print is the ideal medium for communicating messages, since multiple copies can reach comparatively wide audiences"¹²¹ (Shikes, 1969:xxiv).

Further, Hobbs and Rankin observe in the co-operative nature of the printmaking studio an emphasis on collaboration and process over 'individual genius' – claiming that, "if prints are a form of social practice, then in times of change they are charged not only with ink, but with resonances that are invariably political" (Hobbs & Rankin, 1997:3). In the 1960s and 1970s, this 'agency' and 'politics' of printmaking played a significant role in America, as artists

¹¹⁹ One of the projects set for the students in Nkosi's class was a reinterpretation of Munch's famous image, *Der Schrei der Natur* (more commonly referred to as 'the Scream') (1893-1895). The print Nkosi produced in response to the image, hangs still in his residence in Soweto. Nkosi also recalls that whilst at Rorke's Drift, he and other students were introduced to a wide range of artistic practices and styles – including more contemporary modernist trends in Europe and America (personal communication 2014, February 29).

¹²⁰ Given that Shikes was writing in 1969, this historical tradition of art as social critique is perhaps today somewhat less neglected than it was.

¹²¹ Similarly, Hobbs and Rankin observe, "Because of their relatively easy duplication and dissemination, and their ready alliance of image and text, prints have long been vehicles of information and ideology" (Hobbs & Rankin, 1997:3).

associated with the Black Arts Movement¹²² actively promoted the social and political agendas of Black Power.¹²³ Similarly, printmaking was central to the community-based practice and populist mission of AfriCOBRA – an African American artist's collective, established in Chicago in 1968 and committed to a politics of self-determination (Childs, 2014:135). The cultural activism of these artistic developments is well captured in the heroic social-realism of Elizabeth Catlett's linocut prints, as well as in the dazzling screen prints of Wadsworth Jarrell, whose 'pop-styled' portraits of radical operatives like Malcolm X and Angela Davis were intended to both enthuse and educate black audiences.¹²⁴

In South Africa, black youth and particularly students associated with SASO were increasingly 'conscientised' by Black Consciousness, a social and political philosophy that emerged in the late 1960s. Strongly advocated throughout the 1970s, and in many ways consistent with the ideological objectives of Black Power in America, Black Consciousness espoused a more radical activism, calling for the self-determined liberation of black people in South Africa (Mokwena & Suttner, 2007). Intrinsic to this new radicalism was a similarly radical cultural imperative: to realise in poetry, music, theatre and the visual arts the social and political aspirations of the movement.¹²⁵ In this spirit, poet Maishe Maponya explained, "I am dealing with the consciousness of my own people. I have my audiences as my people" (cited in Seidman, 2007:50). Similarly, in the visual arts Matsamela Manaka recalls:

African artists ... were made to relate more and more to the socio-political situation with [a] certain degree of political awareness. Unlike some artists who were pre-occupied with the search for an African idiom whose concern, to some extent, was an African style, the Black Consciousness artists were more concerned with the content of their work (Manaka, 2007:17).

As with the Black Arts Movement and associated collectives like AfriCOBRA, black artists in South Africa – engaged in this more content-driven and radically political tradition – regularly turned to print as a mode of visual expression.¹²⁶ In this regard Judy Seidman points to the

¹²² Active in the 1960s and 1970s, members of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) actively promoted through artistic production black social and political awareness and in general a politics of liberation and self-determination. The movement is generally understood as a creative wing of the greater Black Power movement (Childs, 2014:133).

¹²³ Black Power questioned the nonviolent attitude of the Civil Rights Movement, advocating a more forceful activism with regard to social change and the rights of black people in America. Its objectives were rigorously asserted by the Black Panther Party for Self Defence, which advocated black nationalism and an armed struggle for the liberation of blacks in America (Childs, 2014:133).

¹²⁴ For a description of these works, including Catlett's linocut, *Harriet* (1975), see Childs. 2014, "Activism and the Shaping of Black Identities (1964-1988)" in *The Image of the Black in Western Art. The Twentieth Century. Part 2. The Rise of Black Artists*.

¹²⁵ In SASO's May/June newsletter of 1972, Strini Moodely articulated this cultural directive: "Who can speak the heart of the black man, who can sing the rhythm of the black man, who can paint the suffering of the black man and who can act the pain, the desires, the loves and hates of the black experience?" (cited in Mokwena & Suttner, 2007:30).

¹²⁶ With regards to the relation of 'resistance art' in South Africa to traditions of protest elsewhere, Judy Seidman notes: "Any exploration of resistance art [in South Africa] needs to at least flag the presence of, and relation to, the global picture" (Seidman, 2007:15). Artist Sam Nhlengethwa for example (who spent time at Rorke's Drift shortly after Nkosi) recalls: "we were connected to the struggles of the African Americans through people like the

proliferation of graphic imagery that, following the galvanising events of 1976, characterised throughout the 1980s and early 1990s the ‘art of the struggle’, and in particular the emergence of what she describes as the South African poster movement.¹²⁷ Challenging the individualism of ‘art for art’s sake’, artists such as Thami Mnyele (1948–1985)¹²⁸ – himself a former Rorke’s Drift student – considered themselves ‘cultural workers’, and as such valued the social dynamics of printmaking and its unique facility in the reproduction and dissemination of ideas (Seidman, 2007; Hobbs & Rankin, 1997). In this sense, as Hobbs and Rankin observe, printmaking became for a generation of artists working within and against the censorial and generally repressive context of apartheid, a meaningful site of cultural resistance (Hobbs & Rankin, 1997:3).

Given these considerations, I would argue that in the particular context of his *Crucifixion*, Nkosi’s use of linocut is significant. Although the medium was undoubtedly a practical and economic option, his appropriation of its social utility can hardly be denied. It is, I believe, necessary then to situate Nkosi’s conscious use of print as a visual mode of social witness within a somewhat broader art-historical context. Which is to say, in contrast to the isolating ethnocentrism that has regularly assumed of black South African artists a kind of natural affinity toward graphic techniques like linocut.¹²⁹ Rather, in chronicling something of the ‘violent science’ of apartheid, extended within Nkosi’s *Crucifixion* is a longstanding and subversive tradition within the graphic arts. One exercised by artists responding to situations as diverse as the Reformation in Northern Europe, the Peninsula War in Spain, the Mexican Revolution, and the political agenda of Black Power in America. Furthermore, as noted already, the overt politics of works like Nkosi’s *Crucifixion* marked in the context of Rorke’s Drift a decisive shift, reflecting the radical cultural imperative of Black Consciousness (the particular relevance of which I consider in the following section of this chapter). As a seminal project in the emerging tradition of what Seidman describes as “the art of graphic resistance” (Seidman, 2007:51), his *Crucifixion* marks a significant turning point – radicalising as it were the social utility of printmaking in South Africa.

Black Panthers. I read a lot about the Panthers. Even though the material was banned in those days, I got hold of it through friends” (cited in Simbao, 2011:51).

¹²⁷ For an account of the South African poster movement, see Seidman. 2007, *Red on Black: The Story of the South African Poster Movement*.

¹²⁸ Born in 1948, Thami Mnyele studied at Rorke’s Drift, and from 1978 worked as an active member of the Medu Arts Ensemble. In 1985 he was shot and killed by soldiers of the South African Defense Force. Based in Gaborone, Botswana, the Medu Arts Ensemble was formed in 1977 by a group of ‘cultural workers’ who, following the political upheaval of the Soweto Uprising, had fled into exile. As a cultural and political organization, the Medu Arts Ensemble ran units specializing in dance, theatre, music, photography and art (Seidman, 2007:71–75).

¹²⁹ Seidman notes this association with a process of ‘re-tribalisation’, wherein the decorative qualities and simplicity of linocut were deemed especially ‘suitable’ to black artists (Seidman, 2007:13). Similarly, Hobbs and Rankin observe how carving has generally been understood as an indigenous skill, explaining for some the ‘typicality’ of linocut amongst black artists in South Africa (Hobbs & Rankin, 1997:8–30).

Based on these considerations, I would argue that in turning to print Nkosi invested the social document of his *Crucifixion* with a certain political agency, premised on the social dynamic and relative affordability of the print multiple. Of course, as a hand-printed linocut series, produced in two editions of fourteen, the ‘reach’ of Nkosi’s *Crucifixion* was limited. Also, unlike the widely distributed posters later produced by radical collectives like the Medu Art Ensemble – which were pasted on walls and brandished in public contexts – as a collection of ‘fine art’ prints the distribution and display of Nkosi’s series was limited to a relatively rarefied context.¹³⁰ That being said, the agency of the series as a printed multiple is well demonstrated in the case of Reverend Blum. A German missionary and minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Reverend Blum was based in Southern Africa from 1967 to 1979. Enthusiastic about the work of black artists in the country, and particularly their diverse reinterpretations of Biblical themes, he purchased over the years a number of works – most of them prints. Recognising the socio-political significance of *Crucifixion*, he purchased in 1976 all thirteen images of the series – not with the intention of collecting them, as he insists, but of exhibiting them (personal communication 2014, 17 November). Following his return to Germany in 1979 he did just that, presenting the works in a number of exhibitions, two of which were accompanied by self-published catalogues.¹³¹ Consequently, images from the series were exhibited in multiple contexts as a printed edition – bearing witness in South Africa, Germany and later Botswana (as part of the Culture and Resistance Conference in Gaborone, 1982), to the ‘unseen’ and systematic violence of apartheid.

Given that in South Africa it was illegal at the time to in any way promote the political ambitions of banned organisations (be it through visual representation, literature or public performance),¹³² the degree to which artists could blatantly criticise the apartheid system, or make visual the politics of resistance, was limited. Consequently, Nkosi applied to the visual testimony of his *Crucifixion* a measure of encryption – figuring the state-imposed violence of detentions and torture, as well as the emancipatory ambitions of Black Consciousness, within a veiled but symbolically charged religious idiom. In this way the narrative of Christ’s Passion, with its emphasis on suffering and redemption, became for Nkosi a particularly useful metaphor: overt in its insinuation, but sufficiently covert to negotiate the strictures of

¹³⁰ Works like Nkosi’s *Crucifixion* were circulated through cultural agencies like Rorke’s Drift and sympathetic outlets like the African Art Centre in Durban. Seeking to promote the works of its students, Rorke’s Drift regularly organised exhibitions and marketed the work of its students abroad. For example, work by Nkosi was featured in a multimedia exhibition facilitated by the school in Stockholm in 1975. Similarly, under the directorship of Jo Thorpe, the African Art Centre in Durban sought to foster the development of black artists, particularly in Natal (Durban African Arts Centre, 2013).

¹³¹ *Passion in Südafrika* (1979) and Afrikanische Passion. Christliche Kunst aus dem Südlichen Afrika (2009). As noted, these catalogues are to my knowledge the only publications that feature all thirteen images of Nkosi’s *Crucifixion*.

¹³² For an account of apartheid’s regime of censorship, see Merrett. 1994, "Formative Years: 1950-1959" in *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, pp. 21. Also, see Seidman. 2007, *Red on Black: The Story of the South African Poster Movement*, STE Publishers, Johannesburg, pp.16

apartheid censorship (Von Veh, 2012:9). In a coterminous but more literary context, Michael Chapman observes comparative encryptions – or “fugitive attempt[s] to evade censorship” – at work in the socially-engaged output of the Soweto Poets, a number of whom similarly deployed Biblical references in their works¹³³ (Chapman, 1982:19). Demonstrating this covert application, when in the mid-1980s ‘Special Branch’ agents came knocking at Nkosi’s door, quizzing him on his *Crucifixion* series, he could quite justifiably assert: “Sure, it’s just the Stations of the Cross” (personal communication 2014, February 29).¹³⁴.

One might say then that in appropriating the narrative of Christ’s Passion, Nkosi found a means of both concealing and revealing his visual witness or ‘message’. In other words, of showing what in an official sense could not be shown – of articulating the unspeakable.¹³⁵ In this way, made possible in Nkosi’s covert application of an established iconographic tradition, was the visual chronicling of an ‘unseen’ violence – documenting a climate of fear, absence, and more specifically, the ‘science of torture and death’ enacted upon political detainees by apartheid security forces in the late 1970s. In the analysis that follows, and wherever possible with reference to insights supplied by the artist himself, I reflect on the nature and significance of some of these coded references.

In the first three images of Nkosi’s *Crucifixion*, the familiar motifs of Christ’s judgement before Pilate, his scourging, and his bearing of the cross are dramatically re-contextualised. In *The Tribunal* (plate 59), the stripped, bound and vulnerable figure of a distinctly black Christ occupies a space of social fracture. To his left a gathering of women and men wail and lament, whilst to his right an angry mob wielding clubs and *iwisa*¹³⁶ raise their fists in defiant protest, or is it accusation? In *Torture and Humiliation* (plate 60) the protagonist is abused; ‘scourged’ with *sjamboks*¹³⁷ as a female onlooker clutches her head in anguish. Enacting this discipline are the muscular figures of Christ’s persecutors – agents of violence whose own exhaustion and apparent blackness point perhaps to the complexities and collusions of

¹³³ Emerging in the mid-1960s, ‘Soweto Poetry’ (sometimes called ‘Post-Sharpeville Poetry’, ‘Township Poetry’, or even ‘People’s Poetry’) took its impetus from the assertive and radical ideology of Black Consciousness, and so mirrored to a degree what Seidman describes as the ‘graphic art of resistance’. As in Nkosi’s *Crucifixion*, a number of poets made metaphorical (and essentially political) use of Biblical references, and in particular the Passion of Christ. In example, see Oswald Mtshali’s *Ride Upon the Death Chariot* (1971) (Mtshali, 1971:64), and Stanley Motjuwadi’s *White Lies* (Motjuwadi, 1973).

¹³⁴ Motivating the visit was probably the fact that Nkosi’s *Crucifixion* had already been published in Staffrider, and exhibited at the Culture and Resistance Festival in Gaborone – both of them distinctly political forums. Established in 1978, Staffrider was an independent and multiracial literary magazine featuring contributions by writers, graphic artists and photographers. The objective of the publication was, as Ivan Vladislavic recalls, “to reflect and reinforce community mobilisation around culture in the wake of 1976” (Vladislavić, 2008).

¹³⁵ A similar situation is observed by Karen McCarthy Brown, who notes how in Haiti, when under military rule in the early 1990s freedom of speech was curtailed, artists turned to Vodou iconography (especially the image of Our lady of perpetual Help – the patron saint of Haiti, but also understood as an incarnation of the Vodou spirit *Ezili Dantò*) as a covert means of political criticism. She notes, “These apparent acts of simple piety, sent a point to the Haitian people, a point about the need to fight and resist oppression” (McCarthy Brown, 1996:32).

¹³⁶ *Iwisa* is the Zulu word for a lightweight, ball-headed wooden club otherwise known as a ‘knobkerrie’.

¹³⁷ The Afrikaans word *sjambok* refers to a heavy leather whip, traditionally used in South Africa for herding cattle (LaFlaur & Speake, 2002).

apartheid power in the everyday.¹³⁸ In fact – and of some significance I believe – in the course of the series it is at this point alone that the inflictors of Christ's sufferings are actually represented. In later images, where in the context of his detention one might assume the involvement of white interrogators (or torturers), their 'absence' is telling – testifying to the censorial climate in which the images were produced (and the 'invisibility' of the violence to which they attest). Next in sequence is *He Endured Pain and Weakness* (plate 61). Here the abused body of Christ lies prostrate – physically exhausted and ostracised from the community. Condemned, scourged and now socially alienated his figure is one doomed, consigned in the 'bearing of his cross' to a predetermined path of suffering and death.

Drawing on established episodes of the Passion, documented in this opening sequence of violent disavowal is a society in turmoil – recalling the informal tribunals (or 'Kangaroo courts') enacted within black communities at the time. Here suspicion permeates the everyday – a paranoia instilled by the covert penetration of political groups by agents of apartheid. As Nkosi remembers: "Anyone could be accused of being a spy. The accusation may be unfounded even, but somebody dies"¹³⁹ (personal communication 2014, March 2). On the one hand then, reflected in this vigilantism – exacted upon Nkosi's black Christ – is a measure or overflow of black frustration and rage. Something perhaps of that "atmosphere of violence, that violence which is just under the skin", described by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 2001:55). On the other hand, a more insidious and 'unseen' violence is alluded to in the social fracture and confusion of these opening images. A violence whereby black communities were both traumatised and compromised, not only by the sudden extraction of politically engaged individuals by the state's security apparatus, but also by the surreptitious introduction of others as police informers, or *impimpi*.¹⁴⁰ In regard to the latter, and given the nature of Nkosi's series as a visual document of incarceration and torture, it is perhaps worth observing that more than a few *impimpi* were originally activists themselves, and recruited whilst in prison – 'turned' under threat of torture and death (Parks, 1987). One such individual was Vusi Gqoba, who as the national organiser of the Congress

¹³⁸ In the visual sequence of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, bodies are for the most figured in black, with detail highlighted in white. In cases, however, the situation is reversed – a feature attributable to the monochromatic nature of the medium. As such, the allocation of black or white to bodies in the series cannot be taken in every case as a marker of race. That being said, the features of the various characters generally affirm their identities as black, or 'African' – an assignation confirmed by Nkosi, whose objective it was to both recontextualise and 'racialise' the Passion (personal communication 2014, February 29).

¹³⁹ In his 1987 article 'Blacks Caught Between Police and Apartheid Foes' Michael Parks describes how in South Africa suspected police informers were the frequent targets of black retribution – citing over two hundred and fifty cases wherein such individuals were killed (Parks, 1987:1). Of the insecurity and social fracture inspired by the situation, Motlhabi recalls: "Because of these 'sell-outs', as government spies later came to be referred ... the government had succeeded in keeping the black people in line by filling them with fear ... At that time no one could be trusted, not even among blacks themselves [...]" (Motlhabi, 2008:4).

¹⁴⁰ *Impimpi* (also, *mpimpi*) was a slang word, with Zulu and Xhosa roots, used during apartheid with reference to police agents, or 'double agents' (Dictionary Unit for South African English, 2014).

of South African Students (COSAS) was enlisted during his fourth detention without trial. Later he recalled:

I had been beaten and tortured with electric shocks ... I had serious personal problems and I was weak psychologically. They offered to stop torturing me, to provide me with money and to protect me ... I took their offer without knowing the result (cited in Parks, 1987:1).

Although we might assume the innocence of Nkosi's protagonist – as the embodiment of Christ – there is a sense of doubt, or at least the possibility of some collusion, established in these opening images. From the onset his body is presented as a contested and essentially political site – upon it concentrated the violence of both apartheid and its resistance. Rather than superhuman, the figure of Christ is presented as vulnerable, weak – subject to the power-struggles and intrigues of his human situation. This 'de-sublimation' of Christ recalls to some degree a similar shift enacted within the devotional art of Europe in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. One in which as Christian Eckhart observes: "the hierarchy that separates us and a more metaphysical representation of the Son of God has collapsed"¹⁴¹ (Eckart, 2000:39). As such, in the naked and ostracised figure of his black Christ, Nkosi introduces a kind of struggle antihero – bearing witness in the opening scenes of his Passion to what Annie Coombes has described as the, "compromised, complicated texture of living under and fighting against apartheid" (Coombes, 2003:10).

In *A Tragic Blow to the Christians* (plate 62) and *Mary and Joseph* (plate 63), the body of Christ is absent. Emphasised here, as Nkosi explains, is the helplessness and loss felt by parents and communities at the incarceration, even murder, of political leaders and outspoken individuals (personal communication 2014, March 2). Noteworthy is the artist's clear designation of the black community – those most violated by apartheid – as 'the Christians', and his conscious conflation of a black mother and father with the saintly figures of Mary and Joseph. Aligned in this way to the social experience of black people in apartheid South Africa, Christianity itself – rather than a 'system of domination'¹⁴² – is framed (or reclaimed) as a social as well as ontological site of struggle. Mduduzi Xakaza observes:

Christianity, when employed and applied to the terms of the oppressed, becomes a site of struggle, at least at an ideological level, especially when Christ is assumed to be black. His blackness inspires the oppressed to confront the oppressor with a sense of dignity and an unwavering determination to achieve

¹⁴¹ As noted in Chapter One, the thirteenth-century marked a general shift in the spirituality of Europe, characterised by a more affective devotion to the humanity of Christ. The impact on devotional art was immense – particularly in regard to representations of the Passion. Exemplifying this shift are the historiated crosses of Northern Italy, which demonstrate over that period a visible transition from the traditional *Christus Triumphant* (Triumphant Christ) to the more vulnerable and 'mortal' *Christus Patiens* (Suffering Christ) (Derbes, 1996:5).

¹⁴² Reflecting on the theological underpinnings of apartheid (as a form of Christina nationalism), Takatso Mofokeng observes the application of Christianity as an "ideological instrument of oppression and exploitation" (Mofokeng, 1986:122).

victory, seeking to defy the psychological impact of the material dimensions of suffering and death" (Xakaza, 2011:79).

Reflecting on the images, Nkosi recalls: "black people were very much into Christianity, they became more sold to Christianity than the people who came with Christianity" (personal communication 2104, March 2). Further, as he points out, following the banning of political parties like the ANC and PAC, the church itself became increasingly politicised, and as such more outspoken in its opposition to apartheid (cited in Wohl, 2000:34). Nkosi in particular was inspired by the leadership of Manas Buthelezi, a leading proponent of Black Theology in South Africa (personal communication 2104, March 2). Discussed in the following section of this chapter, Black Theology sought to apply Christian truths to the harsh existential realities of black people in the country, as well as to the project of their social and political emancipation. There is then a measure of indictment of the pious religiosity of Nkosi's 'Christians' – their heavenward supplication for social justice by default challenging the Christian nationalism of state apartheid.¹⁴³ In this way, Nkosi negotiated the contending politics of Christianity in South Africa – wherein as Jacques Derrida observed in 1983, apartheid was upheld as well as condemned in the name of Christ¹⁴⁴ (Derrida, 1983:58). Explicitly relating the narrative of Christ's Passion to the experience of those oppressed under apartheid, and in naming them 'the Christians', Nkosi redeployed Christianity itself – as a means of address, and as Xakaza observes, "[of] confronting the oppressors in their own ideological territory and exposing the extent of their hypocrisy" (Xakaza, 2011:79).

Following this introductory sequence, *Premonition of the Hour* (plate 64) marks a general shift in register. Extracted from the community, a traumatised figure is foregrounded – a detainee, enmeshed in barbed wire and identifiable as Christ only by the stigmata marking his hands and feet. Rather than the public environment of previous images, here we are introduced to the removed context of political detention – what Rory Bester describes as, "the hidden spaces of interrogation and torture in apartheid-era South Africa"¹⁴⁵ (Bester, 1999:3). Further visualising this hidden world of violence is the disorientating sequence of *Pain on the Cross I–V* (plates 65–69), a gruelling pentptych in which the crucifixion of Nkosi's black Christ is extended in scenes of shocking cruelty and human debasement. Restricted,

¹⁴³ The Christian nationalism of state apartheid was given theological sanction by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). Drawing on German missionary science and the ultra-reformed neo-Calvinist thinking of theologians like Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), the DRC officially condoned the state's policy of separate development (De Gruchy, 1979:10).

¹⁴⁴ For an in-depth account of the political struggle of the church in South Africa (and in cases its complicity in apartheid), see De Gruchy. 2004, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 25th Anniversary Edition.

¹⁴⁵ In regards to this remove, Bogues observes: "The removal of torture from the public realm creates a whole set of new technologies of punishment ... From being the art of unbearable sensations, punishment has become an economy of suspended rights" (Bogues, 2010:77). In the context of apartheid, the rights of political detainees were suspended by way of the ninety-day detention clause provided for by the General Laws Amendment Act of 1963, as well as similar allowances outlined in the

Terrorism Act of 1967. Sanctioning detentions without trial, enabled by these legislative actions was an environment conducive to interrogation and torture (TRC 2.3.4:197).

dislocated, hung upside-down, his body is subjected to a whole range of torturous technologies: set in stocks, bound in shackles and chains, and later seemingly electrocuted. Physical pain radiates in texture and line from the stigmata in his hands and feet, muscle-spasm is evoked in the nervous stippling of a raised arm or leg – even the space of the body's confinement conjures a sense of physical exhaustion, delirium even. Lending a kind of architecture to this suffering is the cross – Nkosi's 'instrument of pain' – its armature reconfigured in strange and frightening permutations.¹⁴⁶ Fixed in postures of physical agony, the body shifts through sequential states in *Pain on the Cross I* and *II* – images wherein narrative sequence, replication and stasis are confused. In this sequence the sense is that time itself has been derailed, as physical pain and the psychological trauma of isolation deconstruct the victim's world. In fact, according to Elaine Scarry this is the very nature of pain – particularly within the amplified context of torture, wherein as she notes:

[I]n the most literal way possible, the created world of thought and feeling, all the psychological and mental content that constitutes both one's self and one's world, and that gives rise to and is in turn made possible by language, ceases to exist (Scarry, 1985:30).

Evoking something of what Achille Mbembe describes as "the extraordinary density of the suffering peculiar to the procedures of crucifixion" (Mbembe, 2001:220), the images of Nkosi's *Pain on the Cross I-V* make shareable, to some degree, the traumatic experience of black political activists detained and interrogated by apartheid security forces. In this respect, assigning to the black body of Christ an *Arma Christi*¹⁴⁷ of stocks, chains, manacles, even electricity, Nkosi deploys what Scarry would describe as a 'language of agency'. Which is to say that objectified in these implements, or 'weapons', are the felt characteristics of an otherwise inaccessible situation of pain¹⁴⁸ (Scarry, 1985:15–17).

Given the unmediated nature of such violence, Nkosi's *Crucifixion* constitutes in this sense a remarkable visual document – detailing as it does in the coded tribulations of his black Christ's Passion, practices of torture enacted upon political detainees in apartheid South Africa. As outlined in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, following the Terrorism Act of 1967 which authorised the indefinite detention of suspected individuals, scores of detained men and women were subjected to purposive torture. In 1974, some eighty SASO and Black People's Convention activists were detained. Almost all detainees alleged severe torture. Further claims of torture were made in 1976, when over forty people

¹⁴⁶ Of the images, Hobbs and Rankin observe: "the torment is amplified by the dramatic angles from which the artist has portrayed Christ's body. The cross itself is manipulated, often reduced, to place greater emphasis on the pain-racked black body" (Hobbs & Rankin, 2003:186).

¹⁴⁷ Noted in Chapter One, *Arma Christi* (or Instruments of the Passion) refer to the objects and tools collectively associated with the sufferings of Christ's Passion.

¹⁴⁸ In this respect Scarry observes: "in order to express pain one must *both* objectify its felt-characteristics *and* hold steadily visible the referent for those characteristics" (Scarry, 1985:17).

were detained in connection with the trial of Harry Gwala.¹⁴⁹ Recalled by those subjected to such interrogation, the methods of their torture included: deprivation of sleep, forced posture, beatings, blindfolding, electric shocks and being dangled upside down (TRC 2.3.4:200).¹⁵⁰ That all of the above are alluded to in the harrowing sequence of *Pain on the Cross I-V* is testament I believe, to just how extraordinary a feat of visual chronicling is Nkosi's *Crucifixion* – produced as it was in the contemporary moment of 1976. As Bester observes of that censorial climate, so generally lacking was any visual evidence of apartheid torture, that in the later context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, physical re-enactment was at times the only means of providing visual reference for the experience of survivors¹⁵¹ (Bester, 1999:1–12).

Reflecting on the calculated violence of torture itself, David Luban observes:

The self-conscious aim of torture is to turn its victim into someone who is isolated, overwhelmed, terrorized and humiliated ... to strip away from its victims all the qualities of human dignity (cited in Bogues, 2010:76).

In this regard one might say that in bearing witness to the dehumanising experience of detained activists, and in chronicling practices of torture enacted upon them, Nkosi's *Crucifixion* makes visual also a particular form of power. A power at work in the flesh, wherein as Bogues observes, "the body as animated life becomes an object to be seized and mastered" (Bogues, 2010:74). Relatedly, Scarry observes how torture is an intrinsically *political* system of violence – a procedure in which human bodies are stripped of meaning, and then re-inscribed. Converted as she notes, "into a regime's fiction of power" (Scarry, 1985:18). Thus I would argue that in the visual sequence of *Pain on the Cross I-V*, articulated in the objectified body of Christ – in its very degradation – is the gross power of apartheid. Which is to say, its operation in the flesh as a 'science of torture and death'. Extracted from the mainstream, Christ occupies in this sense a kind of ideological state of exception, whilst on his black body is demonstrated the manipulation, marring and total domination that in general characterised the 'exemplary bio-politics' of the apartheid system.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Harry Gwala (1920-1995) was a leading figure in the South African Communist Party (SACP), as well as in the ANC. Gwala served two prison sentences on Robben Island – the first from 1964-1972, and the second – following his detention and torture in 1976 – from 1977-1988 (Nqakula, 1995).

¹⁵⁰ For a detailed account of practices of torture, enacted by apartheid state security forces, see Volume 2, Chapter 3, Part 4 of the *Final Report of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. 1998.

¹⁵¹ In his essay, 'At the edges of apartheid memory', Bester notes how practices of torture in apartheid South Africa went largely undocumented. Testament to this is the manner in which procedures like the 'wet bag' technique were re-enacted in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as a means of making visual the events recollected by victims and perpetrators. In this regard he cites the example of the public re-enactment of Captain Jeffrey Benzie's interrogation of Tony Yengeni (Bester, 1999:1–12).

¹⁵²In Michel Foucault's conception of 'bio-power' human life is transformed, or governed, as 'technologies' of knowledge and power discipline the body. He notes: "the body is ... directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault, 1991:173). Whilst Foucault presents bio-politics as the project whereby governments have sought to rationalise the challenges posed by the physical existence of populations

If the body of Christ, as foregrounded in *Pain on the Cross I–V*, speaks to operations of power as violence in apartheid South Africa, so do the absent bodies of his tormentors. Applicable in this regard, Scarry observes as necessary to sustaining the ‘extraordinary disjunction’ between the experience of torturers and the abjection of their victims, a certain self-motivated (and self-exonerating) remove. In this context she observes:

Power is cautious. It covers itself. It bases itself in another’s pain and prevents all recognition that there is “another” by looped circles that ensure its own solipsism (1985:59).

Reflecting on Nkosi’s *Pain on the Cross I–V*, Xakaza notes how in contrast to the “hyper-visibility of the tortured victim”, the perpetrators’ presence is implied only – evoked in the physical impact of their actions (Xakaza, 2011:71). Emphasised in this ‘absence’ is the covert but also essentially structural nature of the violence itself, anonymously enacted within the ‘hidden spaces’ allowed for in the legislated sanction of detentions without trial. Xakaza further observes: “By rendering the perpetrators faceless, [Nkosi] attributes the source of the violence to a powerful, pervasive system rather than to a specific identifiable group” (Xakaza, 2011:71). As noted earlier, however, this faceless rendering (or non-rendering) of perpetrators may be read also as a gesture of political prudence, a clever negotiation by the artist of the strictures and possible repercussions of state censorship. Even so, I would argue that the caution alone, exercised in such a strategic occlusion, serves only to reaffirm within the tense political climate of South Africa in the late 1970s the very real threat posed by this institutionalised violence.

Another important implication of this absence, I believe, is the extent to which it complicates the shared witness of the viewer. Tracking the abuses suffered by Nkosi’s incarcerated Christ, the viewer is granted a kind of ‘privileged access’, as through a one-sided window. Privy to the exposed and compromised body – helplessly revealed in so many positions of ‘exquisite’ pain – there is an implied and incriminating voyeurism to this witness, as the trauma suffered by the tortured victim is appreciated as a kind of episodic visual spectacle.¹⁵³ Reflecting on this kind of ‘voyeuristic impulse’, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgeois observe its capacity to undermine the larger project of bearing witness to violence – reducing the experience to a “theatre or pornography of violence”¹⁵⁴ (cited in Richards,

(and as the rationale behind the formulation of health policies in Europe since the eighteenth-century) (Macey, 2001:43), Giorgio Agamben asserts the totalitarian state, and facilities like the concentration camps of World War II as “exemplary places of modern biopolitics” (Agamben, 1998:4). In this respect I would consider apartheid another ‘exemplary’ example – given its project of social engineering and human domination.

¹⁵³ This kind of scopophilia is observed by James Polchin with respect to the historic distribution and appreciation in America of photographic images of lynched black bodies – images (and perverse souvenirs) that, as he observes: “turn[ed] human victims into visual objects” (Polchin, 2007:207).

¹⁵⁴ They note: “Focusing exclusively on the physical aspects of torture/terror/violence misses the point and turns the project into a clinical, literary or artistic exercise, which runs the risk of degenerating into a theatre or pornography of violence in which the voyeuristic impulse subverts the larger project of witnessing, critiquing, and

2009:256). In the images of *Pain on the Cross I-V*, the viewer's witness is burdened then with this possibility, wherein looking becomes a form of partaking. In fact, part of what makes the sequence so unsettling, aside from the abject suffering endured by Nkosi's black Christ, is the collusion implied in bearing witness to it. A situation amplified by the fact that in 'looking in', the viewer embodies to some extent the perspective and clinical spectatorship of the absent perpetrator. Such an 'involved' and ethically challenging witness recalls that invoked by the oblique and over-the-shoulder viewpoints of Giovanni Pisano's fourteenth century Pisa Passion. As discussed in Chapter One, by situating the viewer in the crowd, in the moment as it were, Pisano's sculpted episodes compel the viewer to question the implications of their witness, their 'presence'. As Lubbock observes: "to face the moral dilemma of how [they] might have responded had [they] been present ... to understand what it is like to betray someone or how [they] might behave watching a prisoner being tortured (Lubbock, 2006:139). In the socially historicised application of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, this kind of participative witness – traditionally associated with the devotional aspect of Passion iconography – is applied to a more immediate situation of historical trauma, facilitating for the viewer a complex encounter with the 'violent science' of apartheid. In this respect, and I think especially for contemporary South Africans, as viewers we find ourselves troublingly implicated. As Kylie Thomas concedes, although in her case with reference to images recalling the violent death of Steve Biko: "if not complicit, then at least subject to the burden of a history we cannot undo" (Thomas, 2014:143).

Bringing to a close the traumatic sequence of *Pain on the Cross I-V* is the penultimate moment of *Submission to Death* (plate 70), an image of profound humanity recalling that loud cry and last moment in which Christ gives up his spirit.¹⁵⁵ Closely framed, the iconic and outstretched torso of Christ is literally wounded – marked by cuts and gouges, incised with appropriate violence into the linoleum tile from which the image was printed. However, whereas in the torturous episodes of *Pain on the Cross I-V* the black body is dehumanised – stripped of any distinguishing features, reduced as it were to a nameless, faceless receptacle of pain (to a kind of 'thingness' as Mbembe might say¹⁵⁶) – a sense of individual identity is here re-established. Rejecting the abstract terms in which as David Levi-Strauss observes, the suffering black body is regularly framed, the visage of Nkosi's black Christ is given central priority – his suffering and preeminent death established as *particular*.¹⁵⁷ Thus, in re-

writing against violence, injustice, and suffering" (Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgeois cited in Richards, 2009:256).

¹⁵⁵ St Luke describes how in his final moment, Christ cried out in a loud voice, saying: "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:44–46).

¹⁵⁶ See Mbembe. 2001, *On the Postcolony*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp.187

¹⁵⁷ Quoting Fergal Keane, Strauss notes how, "it can become easy to see a black body in almost abstract terms, as part of the huge smudge of eternally miserable blackness that has wormed in and out of the public mind through the decades [...]" (Polchin, 2007:217).

affirming the humanity of the tortured victim – and in stark contrast to the objectification and clinical witness of the images preceding – Nkosi allows for a more personal, empathic identification between viewer and victim. In this vein, Guerin and Hallas observe: “the one who carries the continued memory of suffering also carries the responsibility to do so in a manner that empathises with, rather than violates, the silent victim” (Guerin & Hallas, 2007:15).

There is a sense in which the visual identity of Nkosi’s black Christ undermines at this point the institutionalised violence to which he is subject – a ‘faceless’ and undisclosed violence bent on the systematic erasure of identities. Resisting this insidious iconoclasm, Nkosi grants a human face to a body otherwise objectified, and in confirming its face as that of Christ’s, invests that body’s death with meaning. A measure of agency is thus introduced, remembering, as Mbembe insists, that in his Crucifixion Christ is not only acted upon but also *acts* – submitting himself to death in the active sense of self-sacrifice (Mbembe, 2001:226). As such, even in the final moment of his suffering, in what seems to be his very last breath, the tortured protagonist of Nkosi’s *Submission to Death* demonstrates a measure of transcendence. Sensed in his opened mouth and heavenward gaze is the submission of his life to a power higher than that of his captors. Giving voice as it were to this agency – to this last cry – are the words of Steve Biko, to whom the upturned face of Nkosi’s Christ bears a striking resemblance. Recorded in an interview conducted in 1977 just a few months before his own incarceration, torture and death, he declared: “You are either alive or you are dead, and when you are dead, you can’t care anyway. And your method of death can itself be a politicising thing” (Biko, 2004:173).

Extending this kind of political agency is *Resurrection* (plate 71), the thirteenth and final image of the series. From the bondage of the grave to the ecstasy of new life, Nkosi marks in a liberating arc of black bodies, “the turbulent, metamorphic phase of transformation” (personal communication 2014, February 29). Concluding the series with an image of the Resurrection – with its promise of renewal and new life – is of course significant, granting as it does to the sufferings of Nkosi’s black Christ a certain *telos*, or purposiveness. Of the Resurrection’s impact on the otherwise dehumanising sufferings endured by Christ, Mbembe observes:

Thus, the death of the god does not involve a destructive drive alone ... The binge of suffering to which the crucified Jesus subjected himself, the auditory and visual phantasms he experienced on the cross, *the being absent from the world* he became at the very moment of death, this whole hallucinatory drama can be explained and has value only in and through the salvatory drive that is its impetus and goal (Mbembe, 2001:222).

In the essentially analogic application of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, this 'impetus and goal' has radical socio-political implications. In his *Resurrection*, the emerging body of Christ – raised from a state of total subjugation – extends his right arm, his fist clenched. Well-known as the Black Power salute, and employed by the ANC as a symbol of solidarity and resistance, the gesture recalls the iconic call-and-response of the anti-apartheid movement: *Amandla!* (Power!) – *Ngawethu!* (is ours!).¹⁵⁸ Evoking for Nkosi, "the dawning of freedom in South Africa", the resurrection of his Black Christ posits a future vision of social transformation, empowering the antecedent narrative of his Passion with an ideological and distinctly political objective (personal communication 2014, July 3). A political objective De Gruchy has described as, "the positive message of liberation and renewal" (De Gruchy, 1979:163).

In retracing the episodic sequence of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, it has been my intention to demonstrate the application (or appropriation) of Christ's Passion as a metaphorical device – its narrative and iconography redeployed as a secular idiom of social critique. I have argued in this sense that in the analogous sufferings of a black Christ, Nkosi's *Crucifixion* bears witness to the operation of apartheid as a 'violent science of torture and death' – and more specifically, its exaction upon detained political activists in the late 1970s. Having noted, however, in the future vision and social transformation of *Resurrection* the affirmation of a certain *telos* within Nkosi's visual narrative, my objective in the section following is to consider the ideological operation of Christ's Passion in the series. Which is to say, the extent to which the aspirant politics of a liberation struggle are embodied in the person of Nkosi's black Christ, and the ultimately victorious narrative of his suffering.

III. Ideological embodiments of a black Christ's Passion

Evidenced in the localised application and ideological implications of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* is his expressed sympathy toward the socially engaged positions of Black Theology. Declaiming the theo-political pretensions of apartheid as a form of Christian nationalism, and in the absence of other political voices – following the banning of political parties such as the ANC and PAC – Nkosi recalls how, "men of the robe took it upon themselves to give voice to the struggle" (personal communication, 2014 July 3). It was in interacting with such 'conscientised' priests – as he did during a short spell at the University of Fort Hare a year or so before his enrolment at Rorke's Drift, that Nkosi became acquainted with the radical application of Christianity espoused within Black Theology (personal communication 2104, July 3). First articulated by the American theologian James H. Cone,¹⁵⁹ Black Theology was

¹⁵⁸ Whilst ANC members originally saluted with a raised thumb, pronouncing the slogan, *Muyibuye iAfrica!* (Bring back Africa!), the gesture was ultimately replaced by the more militant raised fist. The salute called forth a call-and-response of: *Amandla!* (Power!) – *Ngawethu!* (is ours!) (Isaacs, 2010).

¹⁵⁹ As a theologian and minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, James H. Cone (b. 1938) is generally regarded as the founder of Black Theology in America. His early texts, *Black Theology & Black Power* (1969) and

embraced and adapted by black theologians in South Africa – encouraged in the 1970s by an initiative of the University Christian Movement¹⁶⁰ (De Gruchy, 1979:154). As a liberation theology,¹⁶¹ Black Theology rejected the overly spiritualised approach to Christianity it observed in more conservative contexts, insisting rather on the practical application of the gospel to the contemporary situation of black people in apartheid South Africa. And more emphatically, to the project of their social and political emancipation¹⁶² (Goba, 1986:60). Motlhabi explains:

The expressed concern of Black Theology was liberation – not only spiritual liberation in the form of traditional, other-worldly ‘salvation’ preached by the church, but also liberation from physical, psychological, socio-political, economic and cultural oppression (Motlhabi, 2008:8).

It was this proactive application of Christianity to the contemporary struggles and aspirations of the black population that marked for Manas Buthelezi¹⁶³ (a leading figure in the movement), the fundamental point of difference between Black Theology and the more established discourse of African Theology. For Buthelezi, the emphasis on cultural integration in African Theology – with its vocabulary of ‘adaptation’, ‘indigenisation’ and ‘Africanisation’ – betrayed an ahistorical and essentially colonial conception of African culture, and with its celebration of ethnic difference played into the hands of apartheid ideology. In contrast to this ‘ethnology’, Buthelezi advocated the ‘anthropological’ approach of Black Theology – centred as it was on the existential realities of the black experience¹⁶⁴ (Motlhabi, 2008:8). One might say then that in Black Theology the decolonising agendas of African Theology, the imperative of which was the inculcation of Christianity within African

A *Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) were influential in the development of Black Theology in South Africa (Union Theological Seminary 2015).

¹⁶⁰ The University Christian Movement (UCM) was founded in 1967 as a radical, multi-racial Christian student movement, and provided the intellectual and institutional basis for the subsequent launch of the black-led South African Students Organisation (SASO) (SAHO, 2015).

¹⁶¹ Liberation Theology arose in the late 1960s, and was first advocated within Roman Catholic contexts in Latin America. As outlined in *Britannica Academic*: “It sought to apply religious faith by aiding the poor and oppressed through involvement in political and civic affairs. It stressed both heightened awareness of the “sinful” socioeconomic structures that caused social inequities and active participation in changing those structures” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015). In Latin America, a strongly Marxist emphasis was applied, whereas in Black Theology (in America and South Africa) the agenda was more in keeping with the ideological objectives of Black Power and Black Consciousness (respectively) (Motlhabi, 2008).

¹⁶² In South Africa, a broad definition of Black Theology was outlined in 1969 by the National Committee of Black Churchmen: ‘Black Theology is a theology of black liberation, it seeks to plumb the Black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the advancement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of blackness. It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people’ (Goba, 1986:60).

¹⁶³ Born in 1935, theologian and minister Manas Buthelezi was one of the foremost advocates of Black Theology in South Africa. In 1977 he was elected as the first Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (ELCSA) Central Diocese – a position he held for twenty years. As noted in the Dictionary of African Christian Biography: “During his term of office many black political organizations, labour unions, and other various organizations not only found refuge in his diocesan centre but also used it as a platform to run workshops in which they formulated and articulated their political programs, visions, and ideologies” (Mashabela, 2004).

¹⁶⁴ Whilst Buthelezi made a case against African Theology, in favour of Black Theology (in his essay ‘A Black Theology of an African Theology?’ 1974), Motlhabi observes how subsequent developments in both have rendered the distinction less absolute (Motlhabi, 2008:9).

cultural contexts, was fundamentally re-evaluated, and politically radicalised. In this way, as a ‘theology of revolution’, it marked as Julian Kunnie observes, a decisive break within the traditionally western paradigm of Christian theology. As he claimed in 1986, “... liberating the mind of the African Christian from all deceptive and illusory concepts imposed upon him or her by the permeation of white colonial Christianity” (Kunnie, 1986:156). This decisive break is clearly illustrated in the practice of a number of black South African artists – individuals who in their conscious revision of Christian theatics gave visual form to this radically subversive ‘theology of revolution’. In this regard, Nkosi’s *Crucifixion* is a case in point.¹⁶⁵ In contrast to the commissioned projects of ‘indigenisation’ achieved by Gcwensa, Xulu and Kumalo – wherein Christ’s Passion was culturally reinterpreted, or ‘Africanised’ – Nkosi’s self-initiated application is related to the immediate experience of black people in apartheid South Africa, and to the revolutionary objective of their political struggle. In this sense, the universality of Christ is particularised, with the liberating narrative of his suffering and death directed toward the specific situation of black suffering in South Africa – and posited in direct opposition to white political hegemony.¹⁶⁶ Thus, in Nkosi’s *Crucifixion* the figure of Christ is identified not only as black, but also as a comrade and brother. Recalled in this depiction is Biko’s conception of Christ as a “fighting God” (Biko, 2004:34), wholly committed in the labour of his Passion to the here-and-now, socio-political emancipation of those oppressed under apartheid.¹⁶⁷.

Granting a radically black imperative to the social application of Christianity in South Africa, Black Theology operated as a kind of spiritual or religious wing to the broader political philosophy of Black Consciousness.¹⁶⁸ As such, the political objectives supported within Black Theology were essentially those advocated within the more secular ‘attitude and way of life’ of Black Consciousness (Boesak, 1977:1). Influenced by radical intellectual movements like Pan-Africanism, the anti-colonial literature of francophone writers like Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, and the contemporaneous politics of Black Power in America, the

¹⁶⁵ Amongst other examples, one might look to an untitled dyptych (drawing) produced by Thami Mnyele for the exhibition ‘A New Day’ (in 1976). The image presents a ‘crucified’ and decapitated black body – manacled and gruesomely skewered by chains, but nonetheless clutching a budding rose (Seidman, 2007:48). As with Nkosi’s *Crucifixion*, the image speaks to the struggles and political aspirations of black political activists in apartheid South Africa. Other examples include: Trevor Makhoba’s *The naked truth* (1983), Nhlanhla Benjamin Nsusha’s *The Son of Man* (1983), and Fikile Magadela’s *Roots* series (date unspecified). For an analysis of these, see Xakaza, M. 2011. Christianity as a Site of Struggles. An interpretation of the use of biblical sources in South African art. In *Visual Century. South African Art in Context. Volume Three: 1973-1992*:60.

¹⁶⁶ On the imperative of Black Theology in South Africa, Biko reflects: “If the white God has been doing the talking all along, at some stage the black God will have to raise His voice and make Himself heard over and above noises from His counterpart” (Biko, 2004:33).

¹⁶⁷ Noting in Nkosi’s depiction of a tortured and suffering black Christ this theo-political register, Leeb du Toit observes: [Christ] is a fellow black, of humble origin, a friend of the poor and oppressed, a brother to all and a potential liberator. Thus rather than being seen as a white passive redeemer of the individual only after death, Christ becomes the revitaliser of black society (Leeb-du Toit, 1993:18).

¹⁶⁸ Takatso Mofokeng notes Black Theology as a ‘project of conscientisation’ launched by the Black Consciousness Movement as a deliberate response to a ‘religious problem’ (Mofokeng, 1986:122). Black Consciousness is to be understood then as the political context of the theology’s emergence in South Africa.

objective of Black Consciousness was as Bonganjalo Goba explains: “to forge and promote the struggle for black liberation in a world of white domination” (Goba, 1986:59). Popularised through the activities and publications of SASO and the Black Peoples Convention (BPC),¹⁶⁹ the movement sought to integrate the programme of black political emancipation in South Africa with one of self-realisation, or ‘conscientisation’. As its most articulate and influential exponent, Biko stressed the need for black men and women to throw off the debilitating psychology imposed on them by colonialism and apartheid, and to collectively effect their own liberation¹⁷⁰ (Biko, 2004:53). Rather than a marker of inferiority, blackness was established as a source of pride – not so much a factor of pigmentation as a state of mind, a kind of ontological site of struggle.¹⁷¹ In his seminal paper, ‘The Definition of Black Consciousness’ (1971), Biko confirms:

Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being (Biko, 2004:52).

On a personal level, Nkosi recalls how in place of a certain “self-imposed denigration”, Black Consciousness affirmed this new and positive ideal of blackness, and as a student at Rorke’s Drift, radically informed his thinking and art practice (personal communication 2014, July 3). Biko in particular was an inspiration to him – had been from his school days at Saint Francis, where just a few forms ahead ‘Steve’ had supervised his homework and impressed him greatly with his commitment to both African history and current affairs. Even then, Nkosi remembers how he would encourage fellow students, saying: “Hey! Have a sense of self-appreciation, self-worth. Do away with these kinds of fears that deprive you of realising the worth in you, and that one day your country will be free” (personal communication 2014, February 29). For Nkosi, these ideas were reinforced later following his introduction in 1969 to Black Consciousness proper,¹⁷² and his subsequent exposure to the more politico-religious dimension of Black Theology. Also, as noted already, Rorke’s Drift itself was a cross-cultural space, and in the late 1970s the mood amongst its students was increasingly political. Such was the context and ideological paradigm within which Nkosi formulated the artistic response that is his *Crucifixion*. As one infused with this ‘attitude and way of life’, I

¹⁶⁹ Founded in 1972, and headed by Biko, the objective of the Black People’s Convention (BPC) was to popularise the ideals of Black Consciousness amongst workers, unions and unemployed youth. Amongst students, the movement was strongly advocated by the all-black student union, SASO (South African Students Organization) (Salau, 2012:447).

¹⁷⁰ An important aspect of Black Consciousness was its insistence that liberation from apartheid come from the black population itself, rather than from the leadership of white liberals (Salau, 2012:446).

¹⁷¹ Goba notes how ‘Blackness’ operates in this sense as an existential category (or ‘ontological concept’), pertaining to “the meaning of being black in the world” (Goba, 1986). Reflecting on this particular mode of existence he cites Alan Boesak’s conception of ‘Blackness’ as, “a reality that embraces the totality of black existence” (cited in Goba, 1986:59).

¹⁷² In 1969 Nkosi enrolled at the Natal University – the same year in which SASO was launched, with Biko as its first president. His involvement in the union was curtailed, however, by an asthma condition, which cut short his university days (personal communication 2014, February 29).

would argue then that the series ought to be considered as much a chronicling of apartheid violence as an aspirant narrative of psychological and political liberation. As such, in the analysis that follows I reflect upon the ideological implications of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* – as rendered in the black body of Christ, the implements (or *Arma Christi*) of his suffering, and the transformative narrative of his Passion.

In Christianity, although individually borne, the sufferings of Christ are collective in nature. According to the Bible, in the humiliation and pain of his Passion Christ took upon himself – which is to say bore in his body – the sins of the whole world.¹⁷³ There is in this sense a metonymic dimension to the body of Christ, as a relatable and universal site of human suffering. As noted, in the situational context of Black Theology, this universality of Christ was directed toward a particular socio-political experience – relating as Biko observes, “the present-day black man to God within the given context of the black man’s suffering and his attempts to get out of it” (Biko, 2004:64). Identification with Christ was thus premised on the coterminous grounds of black suffering and resistance. Consequently, the persecuted figure of Nkosi’s black Christ, whilst chronicling the specifics of a lived experience – that of a political activist detained and tortured by apartheid security forces – operates also in a more paradigmatic sense. As Nkosi reflects: “the human form becomes a cross in itself” (personal communication 2104, July 3). Thus, as a relatable and iconic site of human, and specifically black suffering, the body of Christ is established as a kind of ideological construct. A symbol or embodied sign, calling to mind the common condition and ideological concept of blackness espoused within the political philosophy of Black Consciousness.¹⁷⁴

By extension, the implements and techniques of torture applied to and endured by this body have ideological implications. Subjacent to their coded documentation of actual practices of torture, the manacles, chains and other forms of bondage detailed in the graphic episodes of *Pain on the Cross I–V* speak, in a more collective and emblematic sense, to the everyday trauma of the black experience under apartheid. Or more specifically, to the enslaved social and psychological condition identified by, and transmuted within, the shared ideology of Black Consciousness and Black Theology.¹⁷⁵ As a proactive rather than passive engagement

¹⁷³ “[Christ] bore our sins in His own body on the tree [...]” (1 Peter 2:24). And: “He [Christ] died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

¹⁷⁴ Of the positive epithet of blackness espoused within Black Consciousness, Motlhabi notes (with reference to Biko): “The emphasis, though, was not on their colour, but on their common condition of oppression and disprivilege. Thus blacks were seen as “those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations” (cited in Simbao, 2011:51).

¹⁷⁵ The rhetoric of Black Consciousness is littered with allusions to shackles, chains and other forms of human bondage (Biko, 2004:101–2) – its objective being to overthrow the, “slave mentality concept that a black man is good ONLY if a white man says so [...]” (Molefe Pheto, cited in Seidman, 2007:49). Similarly, in the context of Black Theology, Ananias Mpunzi explains: “Black Theology is a powerful call to freedom for black people, calling us to throw off the shackles and structural bonds that hold us in self-denying conformity and bondage to others” (cited in Kunnie, 1986:158). As such, chains, shackles and the like are common symbolic referents in political

with this collective subjugation, the sufferings of Nkosi's black Christ are in this sense exemplary – modelling the self-liberating imperative of black resistance in South Africa, as outlined by Biko in 1971:

Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude (Biko, 2004:53).

Thus, whilst in the analogous sufferings of his black Christ Nkosi bears witness to the dehumanising operations of apartheid torture, on a more ideological level he asserts in resistance to this violence the aspirant directive of self-realisation and political emancipation advocated by Biko and others. In the lone but paradigmatic ordeal of his incarceration and torture, Christ embodies in this sense the rallying cry of Black Consciousness: 'Black man you are on your own'¹⁷⁶ – his persecuted body a picture of black suffering as well as solidarity. A solidarity premised not so much on cultural affinity or preconceptions of a shared 'Africanness', but rather as Fanon proposed, on the grounds of shared experience and political struggle.¹⁷⁷ Deployed in this way, the Passion presents in the socially-historicised and ideologically charged context of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, a multi-inflected narrative of individual and corporate, psychological and socio-political liberation.

It is Nkosi's reimagining of the Resurrection, however, that most emphatically asserts the ideological agenda, or 'message', of the series. Granted to the otherwise dehumanising sufferings endured by his black Christ is a certain agency and purposiveness – his resurrection opening the way, as Mbembe observes, to a "not yet", to a "remainder to come" (Mbembe, 2001:223). Reflecting on the image, Nkosi recalls: "What I felt then was that *Resurrection* is like the advent of freedom – after being subjected to all forms of subjugation and pain ... one was foretelling that one day we will be free" (personal communication 2104, July 3). Made visual then in *Resurrection* is both an end-goal and new beginning, a moment of radical transformation echoing that envisioned by Biko – who in his seminal text 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity' (1973) concludes:

We have set out on a quest for true humanity, and somewhere on the distant horizon we can see the glittering prize. Let us march forth with courage and

posters associated with the movement in general – an example being *Biko and Solidarity* (1977), produced by an unknown artist for a BPC convention tribute to Biko (Seidman, 2007:59).

¹⁷⁶ The slogan: 'Black man you are on your own' became a kind of rallying cry within SASO, emphasising the prerogative of black liberation to be self-achieved. According to Baruch Hirson, "the slogan was an assertion of the right to independent organisation on the campuses and was also a political statement of more general application" (cited in SAHO, 2015).

¹⁷⁷ In her essay, 'Resistance theory/theorizing resistance, or two cheers for nativism' (1994), Benita Parry notes Fanon's emphatic rejection of the notion (or ideal) of a shared continental African culture (as advocated within Négritude). Emphasising the need to address concrete problems facing specific black populations, he insisted rather on a solidarity forged in political struggle (Parry, 1994:192). These sentiments were advanced and applied to the social and political situation of South Africa by Biko and others associated with Black Consciousness (Mokwena & Suttner, 2007).

determination, drawing strength from our common plight and our brotherhood. In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible – a more human face¹⁷⁸ (Biko, 2004:108).

Embodying the total liberation of this renewed or ‘true’ humanity, it is perhaps significant that the victorious figure of Nkosi’s resurrected Christ celebrates with arms outstretched – a posture mindful of his Crucifixion. Also, borne on his bare torso is the form of a cross, the object of which (though abandoned) still stands in the background. On the one hand, the abject suffering of the episodes preceding are now seemingly inverted, transfigured in victory. On the other hand, these allusions to suffering might serve to remind that such a liberation, or ‘glittering prize’, would be necessarily hard-won – achieved within the punishing crucible of black suffering.

It is, I believe, evident then that in the visual narrative of Nkosi’s *Crucifixion*, Christ embodies and demonstrates in his Passion and Resurrection something of the hardships as well as ideological aspirations of a liberation struggle. Although in many respects exceptional, this kind of strategic deployment of the black body, as an embodied sign – or what Parry describes as a “multi-inflected signifier of oppression and resistance” (Parry, 1994:182) – was nonetheless in keeping with similar strategies employed by other black artists at the time. For example, in the contemporaneous context of the Black Arts Movement in America, Childs observes how,

In the service of the movement and at the hands of a diverse cadre of artists, the image of the black body represented power, embodied nationhood, defined beauty and blackness, and mapped the liberation of black people in America (Childs, 2014:133).

In ‘Silence in my father’s house: memory, nationalism, and narratives of the body’ (1998), Steven Robins reflects on the tendency of ‘body narratives’ to serve ethnic or nationalist agendas. In this regard he cites Jonathan Boyarin, who critically observes the ready application of metaphors of the body to ethnic-nationalist discourses (Robins, 1998:122). For Robins, this appropriative and essentially symbolic recasting of the body betrays a certain totalising practice, turning human bodies into “totalizing narratives of resistance, heroism and nationalism” (Robins, 1998:140). This he describes as a form of symbolic violence, compromising the complex reality of trauma as both personal experience and embodied memory (Robins, 1998:122-4). In the case of Nkosi’s *Crucifixion*, however, the signification of collective suffering and black aspiration in the body of Christ reaffirms, I believe, rather than negates, the complex reality of political struggle as a *lived* experience of physical and

¹⁷⁸ Similarly, Fanon (an inspiration to Biko) looked forward to such a transformative moment – one wherein, at the disappearance of the mentally and politically enslaved ‘colonised man’, a new and radical humanism could emerge. He notes: “After the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonized man. This new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and others. It is prefigured in the objectives and methods of the conflict” (Fanon, 2001:198).

psychological trauma. Significant here is Christ's iconic embodiment of both personal and collective suffering – wherein as both man and metonym his body holds in a necessary tension these binary positions of personal and collective, actual and ideological.¹⁷⁹ As such, I would argue that in Nkosi's appropriation and ideological redeployment of the Passion narrative, the ontological concept of blackness espoused within Black Consciousness (as a shared condition of suffering and resistance) is granted a certain 'realness'. Incarnated as it is within the traumatised black body and embattled psychology of Christ. Thus rendered, in the urgent physicality of incarceration and torture, bondage and forced posture, an otherwise all too easily abstracted narrative of 'resistance, heroism and nationalism' is fixed in necessary relation to individual experience and the traumatic narratives of actual black bodies.

In this way, as a covert means of chronicling the 'unseen' violence of apartheid power, as well as in embodying something of the collective as well as individual experience and aspirant politics of a liberation struggle, Nkosi's *Crucifixion* marks a radical departure from the church commissioned projects considered in Chapter Two. As argued there, working within the general paradigm of Inculturation, black artists revised the iconography of a European-styled Christianity – calling into question the cultural bias and racial hierarchies of colonialism and apartheid. More radical in its application, however, Nkosi's self-initiated and essentially secular redeployment of the Passion is, as I have sought to demonstrate, less concerned with cultural affinity than with the existential realities of black experience and aspiration. As such, I propose that as an exercise of visual chronicling, Nkosi's *Crucifixion* makes possible for those retracing the episodes of his black Christ's suffering, imaginative and affective opportunities for bearing witness. Evoked in this sense, but assigned to a particular situation of historical trauma – as well as to the ideological objectives of Black Consciousness and Black Theology – is something of the affective participation traditionally associated with Passion iconography and devotional programmes like the Stations of the Cross.

The implications and ethical demands implicit in such opportunities are considered in the concluding chapter of this research – wherein with reference to the relocated and politically inflected reimaginings of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* and Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, I propose a rethinking of pilgrimage.

¹⁷⁹ In this sense the body of Christ functions in a way commensurate I believe with that described by Sarah Nuttall, who observes this sort of public/private relation in the iconic person of Nelson Mandela – whose figure becomes for her, "a narrative frame for personal remembrance, an emblem against which to mark private experience" (Nuttall, 1998:77).

Chapter Four: Stations of the Cross for Africa

Azaria Mbatha, and the postcolonial reimagining of African histories

The hand and the pencil sketch the sores of the world. They render one guilty before those who are better, those who are dead, those who are yet unborn. At the same time one is bound to speak about the world. So one plans for the next generation – for the world in which they will live – for a better world than one's own. But if one is ignorant of the past, of how and when things happened, one cannot probe the future.

Azaria Mbatha in *Within Loving Memory of the Century – an Autobiography* (Mbatha, 2005:336).

Held in 1994, South Africa's first democratic elections heralded the country's dramatic emergence from a history of minority rule and legislated racial segregation. Reflecting in many respects the 'dawning of freedom' projected in the *Resurrection* moment and future vision of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, it marked for millions the realisation of a dream, and the triumphant resolution of a long and bitter liberation struggle. More broadly, Chika Okeke describes the event as the culmination of a continental process of self-liberation – situating the country's political transformation as an iconic moment in the historical and socio-political context of decolonisation in Africa. That being said, he notes that for other African states – most of them independent by the 1960s – the utopian dreams attached to political liberation had by the early 1990s long since collapsed beneath the heavy burden of post-colonial realities¹⁸⁰ (Okeke, 2001:34). Nevertheless, in South Africa the mood was euphoric – or at least the rhetoric was, masking as it did the sectarian violence which preceded the elections, and in general the polarised and segregated reality of South African society at the time. Pronounced and later ratified in the country's constitution was the utopic vision and democratic project of the 'new South Africa'. Casting his vote in Inanda, Kwazulu Natal, president-to-be Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (1918–2013) declared:

This is for all South Africans, an unforgettable occasion. It is the realisation of hopes and dreams that we have cherished over decades. The dreams of a South Africa which represents all South Africans. It is the beginning of a new era. We have moved from an era of pessimism, division, limited opportunities, turmoil and conflict. We are starting a new era of hope, reconciliation and nation building (Mandela, 1994).

For Ingrid de Kok, the celebratory narrative of this 'new era' – premised on the joint imperatives of nation-building and reconciliation – addressed the particular situation (or 'compromise') of South Africa's political transformation; as one realised through negotiation

¹⁸⁰ Okeke explains how following the failure of fledgling African democracies in the 1960s (compromised as many of them were by military dictatorships), and the ravages wrought by Cold War politics, "the optimism and ideals of Pan-Africanism, of negritude, and even of Pan-Arabism lost much of their attraction" (Okeke, 2001:34).

and settlement rather than revolution.¹⁸¹ In this sense, the project of nation-building and the associated discourse of reconciliation in South Africa presented the means of both articulating an aspirant national future, and of reconciling with the present a complex and painful past (De Kok, 1998:57). Following the inauguration of Mandela as president, the most visual and arguably controversial expression of this new national rhetoric and project of reconciliation was the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Convened as a result of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995, the TRC was a court-like body aimed at calling to remembrance through the public testimony of victims and perpetrators, racially and politically motivated crimes committed during the apartheid era. Recommending its cause, Minister of Justice Dullah Omar publically announced: "[A] commission is a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation" (cited in Tutu & Watson, 2007:vi). Presided over by Nobel peace prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu (who authored the all-embracing notion of South Africa as 'the Rainbow Nation'), the TRC hearings were broadcast live on national television. Though shocking in their revelations, these Proceedings were as Sandra Young recalls, animated throughout by an implicit faith that in so revisiting the past – in conjuring the horrors of apartheid, and processing them within the reconciliatory context of the commission – a new national self-understanding and collective future would emerge (Young, 2004:145).

Visiting South Africa in 1992 on the first of two fieldwork trips (conducted in lieu of a proposed doctoral thesis on African symbolism,¹⁸²) and after twenty-two years of self-imposed exile in Sweden, Azaria Mbatha (b. 1941) arrived to a country in flux. Embattled as it was by sectarian violence, it was nonetheless still moving inexorably toward political transformation. Just a year after the elections and coincident with the official announcement of the TRC, his second visit was in 1995 – a moment of epochal change marking the symbolic and political emergence of the 'new South Africa'. Significantly, it was at this time that he produced the remarkable series, and in my view *magnum opus*, that is his *Stations of the Cross for Africa* (1995). As a series of sixteen linocut prints, traced within its distinctly

¹⁸¹ According to De Kok. Most South African citizens saw the political transformation of the country as a triumph premised on compromise. In that respect she notes: "For support of the new government and goodwill in general to be sustained, that compromise would have to be experienced as worth it: worth the pain and suffering, worth the capitulation. Since the past had to meet the present through settlement, not revolution, it needed an accompanying rhetoric about how to process the future: and that process was divined as the act of nation building" (De Kok, 1998:57).

¹⁸² Jill Addlestone and others note Mbatha's visits to South Africa in 1992 and 1995 as field-work trips, conducted as research toward a proposed Doctoral thesis on African Symbolism (Jansen, 2007:38; Addlestone, 1998:14). Initiated through the University of Lund in Sweden, the current status of this research is unclear.

postcolonial¹⁸³ narrative are the paradigmatic sufferings of an African Christ, and the ultimate accomplishment (or envisioning) of a reconciled world order.

Reflecting on the graphic sequence of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, I emphasised in Chapter Three his symbolic redeployment of the Passion narrative as a covert means of chronicling operations of torture in apartheid South Africa, as well as of articulating the aspirant politics of Black Consciousness. Moving from the political crisis of 1976 to the particular post-colonial/post-apartheid moment of 1995, I reflect in this chapter on Mbatha's similarly appropriative reworking of the Stations of the Cross. In this respect I present his *Stations of the Cross for Africa* as a critical exercise of postcolonial memory¹⁸⁴ – recommending in its visual programme and as necessary to an envisioned goal of social, political and ultimately *racial* reconciliation, a fundamental rethinking of African histories.

I. To Africanise the whole Bible. Situating Mbatha's creative project

In the introduction to Werner Eichel's publication *Azaria Mbatha – In the Heart of the Tiger* (1986), Mbatha acknowledges the symbolic complexity of his personal visual idiom as posing something of a challenge to the viewer, with the interpretation of his images demanding a measure of study and effort. And critically, as he insists, comparison with other works he has made (Mbatha, 1986:6&7). As such, in responding to the coded visual narrative and hermeneutic challenge of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, I feel it necessary first to introduce and contextualise his longstanding engagement with biblical themes. What he describes as the 'red line' or 'main line' of his creative thinking (Mbatha, 1998:61). In so doing, I reflect on some of the key cultural and socio-political encounters which have over the years informed his syncretic personal philosophy, and the development of what Leeb du-Toit describes as his, "unique yet complex vocabulary" (Leeb-du Toit, 1998:36).

Whilst privileging texts authored by the artist himself, it is worth noting that I am in the contextual and thematic analysis which follows, particularly indebted to research conducted by Leeb-du Toit, Hobbs and Rankin and Brenda Danilowitz. Drawing on these, it is nevertheless my intention in the final analysis of this chapter – solely dedicated to Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* – to address a certain and surprising elision. That being, the scant attention granted the series in any of these texts, despite its distinctive character as

¹⁸³ Distinguishing it from the more historically fixed or chronological idea of the 'post-colonial' – as a situation subsequent to (or 'superseding') colonialism (Chrisman & Williams, 1994:1–5) – my application of the unhyphenated term (postcolonial), speaks rather to forms of discursive enquiry aimed at rethinking the established, essentially western historical narrative of modernity. See Young. 2001. *Postcolonialism - An Historical Introduction*: 1–13.

¹⁸⁴ For Barnot Hesse's reflection on the nature and ethics of 'postcolonial memory', see: Hesse. 2002. *Forgotten like a Bad Dream: Atlantic Slavery and the Ethics of Postcolonial Memory*. In *Relocating Postcolonialism*:143.

Mbatha's only multi-image series, and its prominent inclusion in his retrospective exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery in 1998.¹⁸⁵

It was in 1961 as a patient at the Ceza mission hospital that Mbatha was first introduced to linocut printing, as part of an arts rehabilitation programme run at the time by the Swedish couple Peder and Ulla Gowenius. Something of an epiphany, this early encounter marked for Mbatha the beginning of his visual storytelling. He recalls: "I drew with my soul and I had many theories in mind. I soon discovered that I could retell all those stories through pictures" (cited in Danilowitz, 1998:27). The first story he told was that of Jonah – the prophet who in fleeing from God was swallowed by a whale and then vomited ashore before the gates of Ninevah. Mbatha's account, however, is situated within a distinctly African context: his Ninevah replete with kraal and oxen, and its community presided over by a local, presumably Zulu chief. There was an autobiographical aspect to the image too – with the story of Jonah presenting a metaphor for his own 'flight' to Johannesburg, and on account of a recurrent heart-issue, his ignominious return to Ceza¹⁸⁶ (Mbatha, 1998:57).

Impressed by the talent demonstrated in such early works, the Gowenius' encouraged him to join them at Mapumulo, where they were in the process of establishing an arts and crafts centre – which following its relocation in 1963, evolved into the much celebrated ELC Art and Craft Centre, Rorke's Drift.¹⁸⁷ Joining them at Mapumulo as well as Rorke's Drift, Mbatha undertook a programme of art training – although in a somewhat informal capacity given that the centre's official Diploma course in fine art was only initiated in 1968¹⁸⁸ (Hobbs & Rankin, 2003:59-60). Reflecting on this nascent phase in the artist's development, and the biblical themes to which he was drawn, Leeb-du Toit notes:

¹⁸⁵ As far as I am aware, Leeb-du Toit, Danilowitz and Leigh Jansen are the only authors to have reflected on the Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*. Whilst Leeb du-Toit and Danilowitz spare little more than a sentence or two in their reference to it, Leigh Jansen applies at least a measure of analysis (in her unpublished Master's thesis). For the references in questions, see: Danilowitz. 1998, "Azaria Mbatha's Narrative Strategy: Resolving the Dilemma of a Kholwa Son" in *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition*; Leeb du-Toit, J. 1998, "Contextualising Mbatha's use of Biblical Themes" in *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition* Durban Art Gallery, Durban:45; and Jansen, L. 2007, *Deciphering aspects of Azaria Mbatha's worldview located in specific religious themes and images employed in his work*:113 & 127.

¹⁸⁶ Mbatha explains how his move to Johannesburg contravened his father's will. As such, he took the heart condition that saw him returned to Ceza as a punishment of sorts – in keeping with Jonah's experience n the belly of the whale (Mbatha, 1998:57).

¹⁸⁷ For a full account of the early development of the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre, Rorke's Drift, and Mbatha's involvement therein, see Hobbs & Rankin. 2003, *Rorke's Drift. Empowering Prints*, and Leeb du-Toit, J. 2003, *Contextualizing the use of Biblically derived and metaphysical imagery in the work of black artist's from Kwazulu-Natal: c1930-2002*:168–215

¹⁸⁸ It was in fact largely on account of Mbatha's artistic accomplishments that Gowenius was attracted to the idea of establishing an official art school at the centre. Significant in this respect was Mbatha's winning of the best print award in the 1965 Art South Africa Today exhibition, which was organised by the African Art centre, Durban Art Gallery and the South African Institute for Race Relations. The print in question, *The Revelation of St John* (1964) was subsequently purchased by the South African National Gallery, and shortly after a further two prints were accepted into the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (becoming the first graphic works by an African artist to enter that collection) (Hobbs & Rankin, 2003:59–60).

From the onset the young Mbatha gravitated to religious themes, which derived from a remarkable amalgam of diverse religious influences that were pertinent to the artist – such as his immediate community, his and his family's interest in separatist churches, Zulu cosmogony and especially his family context (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:176).

Noting these diverse religio-cultural influences as significant to Mbatha's practice, Leeb-du Toit addresses a commonly held misconception. Namely, that the religious orientation of his work was principally informed by a prevailing ideological agenda at work within the mission-based context of Rorke's Drift at the time.¹⁸⁹ Mbatha himself refutes any such claim, insisting rather that in his personal reimagining of biblical material it was *he* who influenced Rorke's Drift, spearheading the strong religious aspect evident in the work of a number of students later associated with the centre (Leeb-du Toit, 1998:39). In this respect, and of his own experience at *Sandlwane*¹⁹⁰ (as he calls Rorke's Drift), he reflects:

No one was interested in biblical things in my surroundings – not even a single teacher ever told me or discussed anything (cited in Leeb-du Toit, 2003:175).

And again:

I could get no help from my art teachers, as they had no idea what was fermenting inside me. Or did I ask them for help? Sometimes I wonder if they knew or even read the Bible. The kinds of ideas I had were very deep and they could not have been discussed with others or solved by other people. I, alone, was the only person who could do this. Such ideas were part of my soul (Mbatha, 1998:58).

Confirming this position, Gowenius is noted as having actively sought to steer the artist away from what he felt to be naïve and overtly moralising religious references, encouraging him rather to draw from 'his own experience' (Hobbs & Rankin, 2003:47&173). However, as is clear from the quotations above, Mbatha's approach to biblical themes (even in this early phase) was hardly naïve – or for that matter out of keeping with his experience. Recalling the

¹⁸⁹ Danilowitz observes how given his close relationship with Peder Gowenius, and his early association with the ELC Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift (an institution funded by the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church), writers and art historians have 'conveniently' concluded that Mbatha's predilection toward biblical motifs resulted from his contact with mission education (Danilowitz, 1998:25). With respect to Rorke's Drift, Leeb du-Toit observes that as an essentially secular project, the centre did not seek to elicit a liturgical bias in the art and craft produced by its students – nor were students compelled to attend church services, or to participate in religious or quasi-religious activities (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:174). That being said, she does note that Helge Fosseus – Bishop at the time – did feel that such a centre would, "imbue the Christian theology with a creative element and thus give fuller meaning to the theoretical concepts of ways in which God is to be worshipped" (cited in Leeb-du Toit, 2003:174). Although Lutheran clergy dominated its board, the Centre's teachers were secular individuals (rather than missionaries) – and as Hobbs and Rankin observe (of the Gowenius' in particular), were regularly out of sympathy with the beliefs and goals of the establishment (Hobbs & Rankin, 2003:23). For a more in-depth discussion on the 'underlying religious ethos' of the ELC Art and Craft Centre, Rorke's Drift, see Leeb-du Toit. 2003, *Contextualizing the use of Biblically derived and metaphysical imagery in the work of black artist's from KwaZulu-Natal: c1930–2002*:168-215

¹⁹⁰ The Zulu word *Sandlwane* refers to the field of the Battle of Isandlwana (22 January 1879), near Rorke's Drift. Whilst in the Battle of Rorke's Drift the Zulus were routed by the British, Isandlwana marked a decisive Zulu victory. In his published autobiography, Mbatha reflects at various points on *Sandlwane* (which is to say, the ELC Art and Craft Centre, Rorke's Drift). For these illuminating references, see Mbatha. 2005, *Within Loving Memory of the Century. An Autobiograph*: 37-8, 291-2, 304-10.

hybrid cultural and religious context of his *Kholwa*¹⁹¹ upbringing, he notes how even before he started to draw, his thinking was shaped by the influence of his father, as well as Reverend A.P. Xakaza, an uncle and *Umphathisfunda* (senior pastor) with whom he stayed for a period as a boy (Mbatha, 1998:63). Although highly devout, Mbatha's father was as he puts it, a "strange Lutheran" (Mbatha, 2005:79); wary of the disparities he observed between mission and settler congregations, and sustaining within his Protestantism a measure of cultural syncretism.¹⁹² One wherein, as Leeb-du Toit observes: "Christianity functioned as an extension of already entrenched values and ideals peculiar to traditional [Zulu] practice" (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:177). Mbatha recalls how his father, a talented storyteller, would 'Africanise' biblical events – asserting for example the African identity of Simon of Cyrene, who assisted Christ in the bearing of his cross¹⁹³ (cited in Leeb-du Toit, 2003:178). Under Reverend Xakaza's instruction, Mbatha himself was encouraged to memorise and recount stories from the bible, and whilst living in the churchman's home met a number of travelling evangelists and priests (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:176; Mbatha, 1998:63). Also, following his older brother's break with the Lutheran church and subsequent ordination as a Zionist priest, he developed an interest in the hybridised, religio-cultural traditions practised within African Independent Churches.¹⁹⁴ Unlike the situation in mission church contexts, the prophetic power of dreams was acknowledged within the Zionist Church – constituting in that context as Mbatha observes, "an integrating force of surprising strength" (Mbatha, 2005:31). Although Lutherans themselves, Mbatha recalls that both of his parents were greatly influenced by the 'world of dreams', and that as children he and his siblings were actively encouraged to recount their own – an activity not insignificant to the visionary aspect of his subsequent art practice. Considering himself in possession of a special vision, Mbatha understands his artistic role as being that of a kind of seer – a spokesperson for those who

¹⁹¹ In Zulu the term *Kholwa* (or *amakholwa*) translates as "believer in God", and refers to Zulu converts to Christianity (although Leigh Jansen asserts that the term can also be more broadly applied to westernized Zulus) (Jansen, 2007:25–32, Danilowitz, 1998:25). In her essay, 'Azaria Mbatha's Narrative Strategy: Resolving the Dilemma of a Kholwa Son' (1998), Brenda Danilowitz describes the *Kholwa* social and cultural context as that of: "a new class of Christian African intelligentsia made up of more prosperous landowners and peasants as well as clergy, clerks, interpreters and teachers" (Danilowitz, 1998:25). For Mbatha's own reflections on *Kholwa* history and experience, see Mbatha, 2005, *Within Loving Memory of the Century. An Autobiography*, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Durban, pp.136

¹⁹² Mbatha notes: "Even though my father was a converted Christian he strove not to accept the whole of western civilization. I heard him praying first to our ancestors and then to God. Perhaps he recognized that our ancestors were close to the Christian symbols that he remembered from childhood" (Mbatha, 2005:29).

¹⁹³ As Cyrene was located in modern-day Libya, it has often been assumed that the biblical character of Simon of Cyrene was African, and more specifically black. That being said, given that the port was originally a Greek colony and home to a significant Jewish population, the assertion is speculative (Douglas, 1962:285).

¹⁹⁴ In the early 1900s a number of independent, breakaway churches were established in South Africa. Broadly categorised as Ethiopian or African Independent Churches (AIC), their formulation was largely motivated by the racial hierarchies dominant in traditional denominations and mission structures at the time. Resisting the demonisation of traditional cultural practices by white missionaries, the Zionist Church in particular embraced a syncretic fusion of Christianity and African tradition. In this regard, De Gruchy notes: "considerable emphasis was given to ecstatic utterances, prophecy, dreams, healing, purification rites, and taboos" (De Gruchy, 1979:45).

like him long for a more humane world. People he calls, “the dreamers”¹⁹⁵ (cited in Rosen, 1993:22).

In acknowledging these complex cultural and religious encounters, it is evident that Mbatha’s early engagement with Christian themes was anything but uninformed – and given the opposition he faced from Gowenius, displayed a measure of personal agency and self-identification. In this sense, rather than regressive, or as necessarily assuming a kind of imposed western authorship, the personalised biblical idiom of Mbatha’s early practice gave voice to a complex and hybrid African experience.¹⁹⁶ This hybridity unsettles the discursive parameters of ‘authenticity’ and ‘tradition’, which as Simba observes, have generally prescribed expressions and experiences of ‘Africanness’.¹⁹⁷ In this sense I would argue that demonstrated in Mbatha’s early practice was a self-asserted right to rework and own biblical themes – wresting them as Derek Walcott might say from the hands of merchant and missionary, and in so doing, ‘naming them anew’.¹⁹⁸ It is in this vein I believe that Duncan Brown asserts:

I say anyone who aspires to ‘think in black’ about the African (sub)continent has to learn also to think biblically. The bible is for many African Christians the foundational text of their Africanness – an intratext of self-definition, rather than an intertext of cross-cultural encounter (Brown, 2012:108).

The early 1960s was for Mbatha a period of formal experimentation, as well as of thematic problem solving – of “playing about with my theories” (Mbatha, 1998:59). Thinking through the complex, and as he recalls, ‘confusing’ relation of Christianity to African history, he variously adapted episodes from the bible to culturally specific South African situations (Danilowitz, 1998:28). An early example is his *David and Goliath* (1963), a telling image

¹⁹⁵ Of his artistic practice, Mbatha reflects: “When I pick up my pencil to draw, the pictures are already clear in my mind. I see them as a vision that I merely have to make visible for others ... Sometimes it seems as if it is another who is drawing, and I am merely standing to one side watching” (Mbatha, 1986:6).

¹⁹⁶ ‘Hybrid’ in this sense referring to what Mercer describes as, “the unpredictable potentials brought to life when multiple cultures come into conflict” (Mercer, 2014:225).

¹⁹⁷ With regard to artworks produced by black artists in apartheid South Africa, Simba argues for a less narrowly conceived reading of ‘resistance’. She notes: “I argue that certain portrayals of ‘Africanness’ (particularly African traditionalism), ‘Pan-Africanism’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘blackness’, particularly when produced by black artists, can be read as shrewd challenges to dominant white discourse even though they are sometimes read – across the political spectrum – as regressive” (Simba, 2011:39). In this context, Mbatha’s application of biblical themes can be seen as a legitimate mode of self-identification, and one exercised in resistance to a reductive and essentially ethnographic discourse of ‘authenticity’.

¹⁹⁸ In his famous essay, ‘The Muse of History’ (1974) Walcott notes how the slaves of the new world ‘converted themselves’ – effectively capturing the ‘captors God’. In the cultural forms of this new spirituality, he notes a situation of transformation whereby the ‘Hebraic-European God’ is wrested from ‘merchant and missionary’ and named anew – effectively changing colour (Walcott, 1998:45–48). In the context of Africa, Mbatha asserts a similar position, situating the Christianity of black Africans in resistance to (rather than compliance with) white hegemony. He notes: “[Christianity] did not establish itself because it came with conquering whites, or because it produced good men, or because its evaluation of the human personality accorded largely with *ubuntu* as a way of life. Rather it found acceptance because it imparted valid meaning to blacks in the fabric of white society. In short, it enabled them to be better people in the complexities of life under white oppression” (Mbatha, 2005:35–36).

wherein David is represented as black and the decapitated Goliath as white.¹⁹⁹ Of this socially recontextualised application of a biblical episode he reflects: "For me Biblical stories not only represented stories from the past; they became if not, I would put: the relationship between Christianity and African history is confusing. meaningful comments about the country in which I lived" (Mbatha, 1998:57). By no means overt in his politics, his approach in this sense was still socially engaged – motivated by a genuine desire for a desegregated and politically transformed South Africa (Mbatha, 1998:57). Convinced at the time that Christianity, with its emphasis on brotherly love and humility, could bring about social harmony in South Africa (a perspective with which he was later disappointed). Mbatha set out to 'Africanise' the Bible²⁰⁰ (Mbatha, 1998:59). In so doing, he hoped to make its universal and socially reconciling message more accessible and relevant to his black contemporaries. He recalls:

My aim was to *Africanise* the whole Bible because I discovered that there were many black Christian people who did not question Jesus of Jerusalem being white. It takes time to change one's inner perception and to start seeing in a different way. I read the Bible and I could interpret it as I wished. I found that the Bible was an interesting book to read not only because of the truths it contained, but also because it could be used like cement with which to bind societies together (Mbatha, 1998:59).

Extending this essentially sociological project of 'Africanising' the bible, Mbatha travelled to a number of churches in the early 1960s, responding to commissions and working on large-scale mural paintings.²⁰¹ Gaining something of a reputation in this regard, he recalls being visited at Rorke's Drift by a number of black priests – some of whom expressed surprise at his young age: "They expected a wise man with a white head and a beard like Petrus [Saint Peter]" (cited in Danilowitz, 1998:28). Roughly contemporaneous, there are obvious parallels between Mbatha's artistic activities at this time and the ecclesial art projects of Gcwensa,

¹⁹⁹ Reflecting on the image, Mbatha notes that in so reconfiguring the biblical episode of David and Goliath he was thinking of the implications of such a story "being reversed and happening in South Africa instead" (Mbatha, 1998:59). Whilst he is careful to note that his work at the time was not overtly political (or 'revolutionary'), he nonetheless acknowledges the political implications of his figuring of David and the Israelites as black and Goliath and the Philistines as white (Mbatha, 1998). For Gowenius, who had previously discouraged Mbatha from pursuing religious themes in his work, the image was something of an epiphany, and altered his position on Mbatha's practice in that regard. He recalls: "Azaria Mbatha's linocut *David and Goliath* impressed me and was an important cornerstone in laying the foundations of what was to become the ELC Art and Craft Centre ... It restored my faith in art and made it clear to me that a picture could convey messages forbidden in South Africa at the time" (cited in Hobbs & Rankin, 2003:46).

²⁰⁰ Mbatha recalls: "I thought that if all people were of the Christian religion there would be peace in South Africa. But later I discovered that I was wrong ... because I discovered that in South Africa there are many Christian people who are doing wrong things. I discovered this later, but first I had this strong feeling that religion was the way to be a bridge ... I was disappointed" (Danilowitz, 1998:28).

²⁰¹ In pursuing his objective of 'Africanising the Bible', Mbatha responded to a number of church commissions, largely within the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In addition to a number completed at Rorke's Drift, he is noted as having produced murals for the Bongosizi Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) in Vryheid, the ELC of the Holy Trinity, Vosloorus Parish, and the Esiqhomane Church, near Eshowe (Addleson, 1998:16). Detailed in brief by Leeb du Toit, and noted as demonstrating a considered shift in the rather aniconic culture of the Lutheran Church in South Africa (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:182), these largely undocumented projects warrant further attention and research. Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of this paper to do so.

Xulu and Kumalo. Similarly engaged in the cultural reinterpretation of Christian visual culture, they too addressed the cultural imposition and prevailing ‘whiteness’ of a European-styled Christianity. Like Mbatha, they resituated biblical narratives within African cultural contexts – and in emphasising the universality of Christ, reaffirmed the essential value of black identities.

That being said, despite this measure of overlap, it is important I feel to acknowledge significant points of difference between Mbatha’s independent practice of ‘Africanising the bible’, and the projects of visual inculturation undertaken by these others. Notable in this regard is the self-initiated dynamic of Mbatha’s project of ‘Africanisation’. By contrast, the sacred works of Gcwensa, Xulu and Kumalo were commissioned – and whilst diversely achieved, reflected in many respects the ideological objectives of their patrons. In keeping with the cultural mandate of Inculturation, individuals like Sister Pientia, Father Kinch and Bishop Van Velsen actively commissioned black artists to visually transform and make culturally relevant the iconographic decoration of Catholic mission churches. In doing so they hoped to encourage not only a more ‘authentic’ expression of Christianity, but to further inculcate its teachings within local congregations (Leeb-du Toit, 1998:37). In this sense, as Leeb-du Toit notes: “Primarily, these directives [of Inculturation] were spearheaded by teachers and individual religious and did not emerge as a spontaneous response to Biblical narratives” (Leeb-du Toit, 1998:38). By contrast, Mbatha’s objective “to *Africanise* the whole Bible” (Mbatha, 1998:59) was emphatically self-asserted, and not intrinsically bound to the institutionalised agenda of Inculturation.²⁰²

Significant also as a point of difference is the sociological aspect of Mbatha’s biblical reinterpretations – motivating as they did within the segregated context of apartheid, an ideal of social equality, premised on the universality he perceived as central to Christianity, and its direct applicability to contemporary situations. In this respect, and as Leeb-du Toit and others confirm, he pre-empted the situational and politically engaged application of Christianity emphasised some years later within the context of Black Theology (Leeb-du Toit, 1998:39). Influential in this regard was the dialogue he sustained whilst based at Rorke’s Drift with black seminarians studying at the Lutheran Theological College (LTC) at Mapumulo.²⁰³

²⁰² Differentiating his practice from that of artists like Gcwensa and Xulu, Leeb-du Toit situates Mbatha’s syncretic biblical adaptations within an alternative tradition of visual inculturation – one more closely aligned with the culturally adaptation of the AICs than the cultural directives of mainline denominations. She notes: “Ironically, cultural analogy, absorption and adaptation had, in fact, become the central distinction between the official churches and the breakaway indigenous (or ‘African’) churches. The latter had elected to respond more freely to Biblical teachings and drew selectively on those that found the greatest proximity to their own cultural values, practice and belief systems” (Leeb-du Toit, 1998:38). As noted, in the early 1960s Mbatha did respond to a number of liturgical projects, commissioned by ELC – a mainstream rather than independent denomination. It seems clear enough, however, that these commissions came about largely in response to the work he was already doing – reaffirming rather than instigating his personal project of ‘Africanisation’.

²⁰³ Mbatha specifies in his autobiography that whilst a student at Rorke’s Drift (1962-64), he stayed at the Mapumulo Theological College (Mbatha, 2005:293), and recalls that when in 1963 the Gowenius’ moved the art

Sharing for a time their living quarters, Mbatha recalls how, “their arguments on theological questions deepened my artistic vision by giving me new ideas and a deeper insight” (cited in Leeb-du Toit, 1998:39). In turn, he relates how they were amazed at his own syncretic and socially relevant adaptations of the bible – his project of ‘Africanisation’ resonating with their own theological agendas (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:196). Disenchanted with the abstract spiritualism and structural inequality they observed in mainstream Lutheranism, LTC students agitated for a more culturally relevant and socially engaged understanding of Christianity. Ideas reinforced some years later when in 1972 the college hosted a series of consultations, influential to the articulation of Black Theology in South Africa.²⁰⁴ Reflecting on these radical stirrings, Mbatha recounts:

The theological students went so far as to say that the faith of South African Christians was timid and fearful before the challenges of industrial conflict. The church had emasculated the gospel, reducing it to the level of an insurance policy, a mere warranty that people would enter heaven. The servants of the church saw their religion as a comfort to all, but it was an opiate rather than a tonic, a lullaby instead of a clarion call. The gospel, as they professed it, said nothing about a fair wage for the underpaid, or about the filthy slums where they lived. It shrank from condemning the confiscation of land that had left thousands of God’s children homeless (Mbatha, 2005:299).

Predating the radical expressions of Black Theology, Mbatha’s project of ‘Africanisation’ was, in this formative phase of his artistic development, nevertheless engaged in a socially informed, here-and-now application of Christianity. Reconfiguring biblical narratives, and emphasising their social relevance to the situation of black people in apartheid South Africa, he made visual in many respects the alternative theologies and general questioning that led to these later developments. Initiating, alongside his ‘excellent companions’ at the LTC, “a search for the African God who would answer African prayers” (Mbatha, 2005:293).

II. Figurations of Christ, and the *imperative of reconciliation* in Mbatha’s oeuvre

It is unsurprising perhaps that within his self-proclaimed project of ‘Africanising the bible’, the visual marker most telling of Mbatha’s thinking – his ‘playing about’ with theory – is that of Christ. From his early experiments in Ceza, Mapumulo and Rorke’s Drift, to works produced over three decades later as an artist living in self-imposed exile, the figure of Christ

and craft centre from Mapumulo to Rorke’s Drift, it was at the behest of the theological college – its teachers purportedly claiming that the predominantly female contingent of the centre was a distraction to the college’s male seminarians (Mbatha, 2005:300). However, Leeb-du Toit notes the Lutheran Theological College (LTC) as being established only in 1965 – two years after the ELC Art and Craft Centre’s establishment in Rorke’s Drift (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:194). In that case, it may be that Mbatha’s initial interaction with the theological students at Mapumulo (pre 1965) predicated the college’s official inauguration as the LTC. One way or another, the interaction took place and was significant to the formulation of Mbatha’s biblical idiom.

²⁰⁴ Leeb du-Toit notes that from its inception the LTC was mandated to instigate dialogue between churches and institutions, and across racial and cultural divides (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:194). In 1972, the LTC hosted a series of consultations, titled: ‘Relevant Theology for Africa’ – a dialogue significant to the articulation in South Africa of Black Theology, and its positions on the relation of Christianity to cultural and political realities in the context of apartheid (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:196).

constitutes a (if not *the*) central motif in his oeuvre. Evolving through various iconographic and semiotic formulations, Christ functions increasingly as a signifier of social, cultural and political reconciliation. Reflecting on Mbatha's development in this regard is, I believe, helpful in situating the engaged reimagining of his *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, wherein an African Christ negotiates the social and political traumas of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

Although eager from the start to adapt biblical narratives to his own personal and cultural experience, Mbatha's approach to the figure of Christ was somewhat tentative at first. Given the situation of apartheid in South Africa and the colonial legacy of the missionary enterprise, he recalls how in the early 1960s, "one did not question the image of God and of Christ as being white"²⁰⁵ (Mbatha, 1998:58). Consequently, in *Jesus Carrying the Cross* (1962), Christ is figured as white – as are his followers and the soldiers who, with swords raised, urge him onward in the bearing of his cross.²⁰⁶ Similarly in his *Creation* (1963), whilst the scene is set within a seemingly African context and features a number of black angels, the central bearded figure of the Creator is white. Reflecting on these early visualisations, Mbatha recalls: "Representing God as being white was not acceptance of what was going on in South Africa; it somehow represented confusion for me" (Mbatha, 1998:56). Negotiating this 'confusion', he produced in the following year a number of images that fundamentally challenged what Hazel Friedman describes as a "normatively white Christ"²⁰⁷ (Friedman, 2011:33). A striking example is his image *The Flight* (1963) (see plate 72). Reimaging the biblical account of the holy family's flight from Bethlehem to Egypt, the infant form of Christ is presented in the image as black – rested on the knee of his Zulu mother, who wears a traditional *isicolo* headdress.²⁰⁸ Warned by an angel, Mary and Joseph flee with the future redeemer, escaping the white troops of Herod. Reflecting on a later rendition of the same theme – *Flight into Egypt* (1965) – Leeb-du Toit notes its particular pertinence to the experience of black South Africans, many of whom were forcibly relocated by apartheid land policies in the 1960s. Reflecting on this direct association of Christ to the experience of black people in apartheid South Africa, she observes the visual operation of an 'African

²⁰⁵ Of course, as noted in the previous chapter, Ronald Harrison had produced in 1961 his inflammatory image *The Black Christ* – which in so uncertain terms threw the idea of a 'white' Christ into question. Earlier still, a photographic image taken by Margaret Bourke-White in 1950 shows a piece of graffiti outside the Johannesburg City Hall, reading: "God is Black" (Bester & Enwezor, 2013:28). That being said, it is evident I think that Mbatha is speaking here in a more general sense, and to his own experience and context, wherein the idea and image of a European-styled Christ was normative.

²⁰⁶ To view this image as well as others referenced in this chapter but not necessary accompanied with image plates, see *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition*. J. Leeb-du Toit, Ed. Durban: Durban Art Gallery.

²⁰⁷ Reflecting on this shift, Gowenius recalls actively challenging Mbatha on his early representation of Christ as white (in *Christ Carrying the Cross*) – insisting that if he were black he would represent Christ as black too: "in order to symbolize the suffering of black people at white hands" (cited in Hobbs, 2003:86). It is possible then, that whilst self-motivated in his commitment to a biblical idiom, Mbatha's subsequent representations of Christ as black were motivated in part by Gowenius' challenge.

²⁰⁸ *Isicolo* headdresses are traditionally worn by Zulu women, denoting their status as married women – and in the case of the image, the legitimacy of the infant Christ (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:187).

nonsystematic Christology'. A notion explained by Charles Nyamiti as a pragmatic and informal adaptation of Christ and his teachings to, "the problems, needs and ways of thinking of the African peoples"²⁰⁹ (cited in Leeb-du Toit, 1998:41).

Also produced in 1963, and similarly figuring a black Christ are Mbatha's images *The Raising of Lazarus* (1963) and *Early Life of Jesus* (1963–4) (plate 73). In the latter, the sense of narrative implied in full-frame images like *Jesus Carrying the Cross* and *The Flight* is extended within a sequential mode of visual storytelling. Forming a kind of episodic tableaux, eleven individual vignettes are arranged within a single image frame – running along three horizontal planes and reading from top left to bottom right, with each vignette presenting an episode of Christ's early life. Configured in this way, the image recalls to an extent the narrative formulations figured on the apron panels of thirteenth century historiated crosses, and the predella of medieval altarpieces. Given his project of 'Africanisation', a more appropriate reference is perhaps the five-hundred-year old Coptic tradition of painted icons in Ethiopia, the side-panels and episodic vignettes of which similarly figure Christological scenes.²¹⁰ However, whether these historic formulations were an inspiration (or even known) to Mbatha at the time is uncertain.²¹¹ What is clear, even at this early stage, is the centrality of narrative – of storytelling – to his essentially didactic visual practice. And, in that regard, the applicability of Christ's earthly life to the cultural context and contemporary experience of black people in apartheid South Africa.

Another such self-contained cycle is Mbatha's *The Passion of Christ* (1963-4) (plate 74) – which in its episodic representation of Christ's Passion, prefigures by some three decades the visual narrative of his *Stations of the Cross for Africa*. Sub-divided into fourteen rectangular vignettes, the image traces the tribulations of Christ – from the Last Supper to his condemnation, flagellation and eventual crucifixion.²¹² Enhancing its didacticism, each episode is accompanied by a Zulu subtitle. In the case of the Crucifixion for example, the caption reads: *Nkosi ungikhumbule* ('Lord remember me') – recalling the words of the

²⁰⁹ Nyamiti differentiates between 'systematic' and 'nonsystematic' Christologies, associating the former with the academic discipline of 'systematic theology' (developed within an established, traditionally western, discursive context), and the latter with alternative (mostly oral) traditions practiced amongst laity and within independent African church contexts (Rockrohr, 1998:21).

²¹⁰ Complicating essentialist ideas of an 'authentic' African iconography, the Ethiopian iconographic tradition was cross-cultural and essentially hybrid from the start – developed as it was in conversation with sacred art developments in medieval and Renaissance Europe. See Holbert. Ed. 2001. *Ethiopian Art - The Walters Art Museum*.

²¹¹ In this regard Hobbs notes that there is no historical evidence that Mbatha had (at that time at least) any access to medieval imagery – citing his own insistence that until 1964 he saw 'no pictures at all' (Hobbs, 2003:80). As to the possibility of a Coptic influence, she does relate that upon visiting Rorke's Drift in the early 1960s Peder Gowenius' father brought with him a Coptic painting, which afterward hung in the Gowenius' residence. Though hardly conclusive, it is then possible that Mbatha may have seen and even drawn inspiration from the image (Hobbs, 2003:88).

²¹² Although presented in fourteen episodes, Mbatha's narrative presentation of Christ's Passion differs from that common to the Stations of the Cross – starting as it does with the episode of the Last Supper and concluding with the Resurrection. In the broader art historical tradition of the Passion cycle, however, the inclusion of these and other episodes is quite common (Hourihane, 2009).

penitent thief crucified with Christ. Emphasising the ‘salvatory drive’ of Christ’s suffering, the narrative is resolved in a triumphant portrayal of the Resurrection – centrally placed on the lower horizontal plane of the image. Notably, whilst figured as black in the antecedent episodes of his Passion, in this concluding vignette the victorious body of Christ is radiantly white – referencing according to Gowenius the *abaphansi* (ancestral spirits traditionally understood as being white in colour) (Hobbs, 2003:87). That being said, it is worth noting that in reference to similar examples, Mbatha recalls that whilst seeking at the time to ‘Africanise’ biblical episodes, his representation of human bodies as black or white was by no means strictly denotative of race. Rather, given the monochromatic strictures of the linocut medium, in certain instances his allocations in this regard were aesthetically motivated. He notes: “in those areas of my prints in which there was a black background I had to make the figures white. And so figures were not always representative of black or white people” (Mbatha, 1998:59).

Noting these developments, Hobbs and Rankin observe a certain ambiguity as to the signification as well as political implications of black and white bodies in religious works produced by Mbatha in the early 1960s – his designations reflecting, as they propose, a somewhat generic mode of ‘Africanisation’.²¹³ Nevertheless, from the mid-1960s they note in a number of his works an increasingly calculated and more explicitly ideological approach to his figurations of Christ, as well as of other biblical characters²¹⁴ (Hobbs & Rankin, 1998:67). Most notable in this regard is his regular treatment of Christ in works produced in and after 1964, as simultaneously black and white – an amalgamative gesture demonstrating the cross-cultural and multi-racial applicability of his person.²¹⁵ Reflecting on his thinking in this regard, and the early application of this significant motif, Mbatha recalls:

I started to accept the image of a Biblical black God who originated in Africa and who was going to save black and white people, alike. It seemed as if I had in mind both a black God as well as a white God. When I forged them together it was as a sign of being the product of a multicultural society, or as evidence of acceptance (Mbatha, 1998:58).

²¹³ By contrast, and despite these variances, Jansen insists on a measure of implied politics. She notes: “For Mbatha to continue to use a medium which invites the kind of racial distinction seen in his work there must be more than a little significance in the issue of race. Even though almost every character has been depicted as black at some stage, there is no piece where the antagonist is only black and the oppressed party only white, but the opposite is seen in works like *David and Goliath* (1963) and others” (Jansen, 2007:109).

²¹⁴ For a more in depth analysis of these more ideological applications of black and white to the figure of Christ (in particular), see Chapter Six of Jansen, L. 2007, *Deciphering aspects of Azaria Mbatha's worldview located in specific religious themes and images employed in his work*.

²¹⁵ In this regard, Mbatha reflects: “Sometimes I made Jesus black as in *The Flight of 1963* and at other times both black and white, as in the 1965 version of this subject to symbolize that he was there for all people” (Mbatha, 1998:58).

An early example of this metaphoric, ‘two-tone’ representation is *Jesus in front of Pilate* (1964).²¹⁶ Condemned, the figure of Christ stands bound in the centre foreground of the image. Whilst his stripped torso is black, his face is rendered half black and half white – as is Mary’s, whose weeping figure clutches at his side. Congregated to his left and right are two accusatory and oppositional groups – with those on his right figured as black, and those on his left as white. Separating the two is a black and white cross, held aloft toward the top of the image frame. In this tense and racially polarised context – suggestive of the political situation in South Africa, but possibly also the racial segregation common within church denominations at the time – the figure of Christ is presented as both a model of fortitude and a universal arbiter of social and political reconciliation. Similarly, in his *Sermon on the Mount* (1967) (plate 75), the integrated figure of a black and white Christ presides over a vast religious community.²¹⁷ Translated as such, within a contemporary cultural and socio-political situation, are the partisan directives of the Beatitudes – which, as central tenets to Christ’s sermon on the mount, praise those who are peacemakers and promise to the meek an inheritance of the earth.²¹⁸

Anticipating to a degree the situational application of Christianity in Black Theology, the figure of Christ is thus presented as both a spiritual and socio-political redeemer – reflecting the active dialogue Mbatha sustained with LTC students whilst based at Rorke’s Drift. Equally significant for this increased politicisation of his practice and treatment of Christ, was his first trip to Sweden in 1965, and following his relocation there in 1969, his experience as an artist living in self-imposed exile. Awarded a two-year scholarship at the University College in Stockholm, Mbatha spent three years in Sweden studying textile design, decorative painting and printmaking (Addleson, 1998:14). Appreciative of the tolerant atmosphere he experienced there (Mbatha, 2005:113), the disparities of apartheid were all the more apparent to him on his return to South Africa in 1967 – motivating in his work a more explicit degree of social commentary. He reflects:

Arriving in Johannesburg in the mid-1960s was like being at war. I tried to smile at it but it was useless. Again I began to think about drawing black and white figures as I had done when I started making art in the early 1960s; but this time my images were stronger and clearer in conveying my message [...] (Mbatha, 1998:61).

²¹⁶ To view this image as well as others referenced in this chapter but not necessary accompanied with image plates, see *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition*. J. Leeb-du Toit, Ed. Durban: Durban Art Gallery.

²¹⁷ This gathering may recall those associated with Shembe pilgrimage, as well as other congregational gatherings associated with African independent churches.

²¹⁸ Given at the sermon on the mount (as recounted in Matthew 5:1-12), the Beatitudes are eight proverb-like blessings promised by Christ to, amongst others: the poor in spirit, the meek, those who weep, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for their faith. Positioning Christ as ‘irreversibly partisan’, Leeb-du Toit observes that it is in the Beatitudes that Christ first “singles out those for whom He is” (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:202). As such, she notes the particular applicability of Mbatha’s *Sermon on the Mount* to the social and political situation in South Africa at the time (1967).

Teaching for a year at the newly established art school at Rorke's Drift, Mbatha entertained the idea of assisting in the establishment of an art centre in Swaziland. After a brush with the security services, however, he abandoned his plans in that regard and at the soonest possibility relocated to Sweden, this time permanently (Mbatha, 2005:43). Threatened by the intolerant and policed environment of apartheid South Africa, he describes the move as one of self-imposed exile, and as motivated largely by the reprisal he feared on account of the increasingly political nature of his work: "Whether one was ignorant or kind, apartheid was sharp on all sides. Nor was my art a neutral issue. It could cause me a lot of trouble. Goliath was white and David black" (Mbatha, 2005:42).

Settled in Sweden Mbatha felt personally liberated, shedding as he recalls the negativity bred in him by apartheid (Mbatha, 2005:113). Completing his matriculation, he worked as an artist and designer for Katja of Sweden, and from 1977–1979 studied toward a degree in Art History and Social Science at the University of Lund (Addleson, 1998:14). Theorising his practice in a more critical sense, he extended and matured strategies and visual motifs initiated in the early to mid-1960s – noticeably in the increasingly political and universalist (rather than strictly Christian) orientation of his biblical adaptations.²¹⁹ These individual as well as artistic developments were encouraged no doubt by the progressive context of his new environment, as well as prevailing anti-apartheid sentiments in Sweden – one of South Africa's harshest critics at the time. In this respect, Mbatha acknowledges his personal indebtedness to Olaf Palme, Prime Minister of Sweden from 1969 till his assassination in 1989 – of whom he observes:

Olaf Palme confronted the fundamental dilemma latent in all political conflict. Should change be wrought by violence and revolution, or were there alternative methods of eradicating oppressive systems like racism, colonialism and apartheid? (Mbatha, 2005:112).

For Mbatha, exile was thus not only an experience of remove, of a certain cultural and geographical dislocation, but also one of *reorientation*. Of formulating a more politically informed personal and artistic response to the situation in South Africa. Applicable in this regard is, I believe, the creative role credited by Kobena Mercer to experiences of estrangement and displacement within the modern experience of diaspora. The experience of which, as a global phenomenon necessitates, in his view, a fundamental and essentially

²¹⁹ In this regard, Botha observes how in the period following Mbatha's relocation to Sweden: "The personal associations of his biblical imagery accrued with time, developing from moralising to politicised and universalising associations" (Botha, 2005:xxi). Whilst Mbatha originally felt Christianity to be the key to social harmony, his views were altered by the hypocrisy he observed in South African society during apartheid. Embracing a more secular attitude, he no longer considers himself religious as such, but something of a universalist. That being said, Christian theology presents for him a valuable model, or 'pattern', for society (Mbatha, 2005:310). In that regard, of the religious thematics so central to his work he notes: "One need not have faith or be religious to be inspired by these stories. It is there for you to choose some parts that encourage you to live and think positively" (cited in Leeb-du Toit, 1998:43).

postcolonial rethinking (or ‘re-historicising’) of modern art as a whole (Mercer, 2008:7). Reflecting on the personal and political predicament of exile in particular, Mercer cites Edward Said, who explains it as affording for the denaturalised subject a certain originality of vision – a ‘multi-perspective’ outlook. He notes:

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions (cited in Mercer, 2008:9).

Confirming something of this dual perspective, and asserting the creative role of exile not only within his practice as an artist but also in the recollection (or as Stuart Hall might say *production*) of his personal and cultural identity,²²⁰ Mbatha observes:

Cultural differences have lent my art its own perspective – it is a matter of distance in time and space – the privilege for me as an artist in exile has been to formulate my earlier experiences. Collecting thoughts and memories, arranging and revising them, takes place as one assimilates new impulses ... No one stands still in time; I can discern the changes wrought in me in the mirror of my work. But my adherence to a fundamental cultural identity is my sounding-board all the time. The extent to which my exile reinforced this identity is very important to understand (Mbatha, 2005:288).

Acknowledging this creative plurality of exile is of course to appreciate Mbatha as both a South African artist, as well as an artist of the African diaspora.²²¹ In contrast, however, Danilowitz observes the limited and essentially institutional lens through which he has been traditionally regarded, and synonymised as such with the story (or *myth*) of Rorke’s Drift (Danilowitz, 1998:25). Mbatha himself complains of being reduced at times to just another exponent of a “collective Rorke’s Drift style” (Mbatha, 2005:308). As similarly reductive, others have observed the application of a certain ethnic frame – wherein as Rhoda Rosen critically observes, Mbatha is routinely figured as an ‘authentic’ African artist, untainted by the modern world (Rosen, 1993:20). Similarly, Hobbs and Rankin observe his problematic reception as a ‘quintessential black artist’, liberated by white patrons and displaying in his work an intrinsic and homogeneous ‘Africanness’ (Hobbs & Rankin, 1998:65). Deconstructing these essentialist readings, Hobbs and Rankin emphasise rather the cultural hybridity, and as an artist in exile, *duality* of Mbatha’s experience – noting in particular his personal affirmation of ‘Africanness’ as a conscious state of mind (Hobbs & Rankin, 1998:69). In this sense, I would suggest that rather than rooted in ethnicity or geography, the self-proclaimed ‘Africanness’ of Mbatha’s work demonstrates a creative and essentially hybrid mode of cultural memory, or identity. A *being in the world* – whether in South Africa or

²²⁰ In his essay, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’ (1990) Hall makes the point that rather than intrinsic, and needful of representation, cultural identity is continually produced. Which is to say, constituted – and forever reconstituted – *within* representation (Hall, 1994:392).

²²¹ Emphasising his plural identity, Mbatha considers himself first and foremost an ‘international citizen’, and only secondarily one of ‘the Nguni people of South Africa’ (Mbatha, 2005:318).

Sweden – wherein to reapply a phrase of Hall's: “Africa' is retold through politics, memory and desire” (Hall, 1994:399).

Cultivated within this ‘creative remove’, the politics of Mbatha's practice as an artist in exile has centred largely on what one might call the *imperative of reconciliation*. Culminating in the final episodes of his *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, this political refrain is developed both conceptually and iconographically through a sequence of thematically related works, produced over a period of twenty-five years. Tracking the evolving political situation in South Africa, and in that regard Mbatha's personal reflections on reconciliation, these interconnected images present a kind of back-story or contextual genealogy to the climactic narrative of his *Stations of the Cross for Africa*. Significant in this regard is his *Crucifixion/Reconciliation* (1967–8), an image produced shortly before his permanent relocation to Sweden in 1969 (see plate 76). Foregrounded within the image frame are two prominent figures – one bearded and white, the other black (with Mbatha confirming the latter as a representation of himself) (Mbatha, 1998:61). Introduced here, these protagonists appear as a recurrent motif throughout this extended image narrative – their relation one to another marking over time successive states of alienation, despair, hopeful anticipation and ultimately, reconciliation. Palpable in this case, however, is a sense of individual as well as racial estrangement. To the left of the image and pictured in profile, the head of the white protagonist stares forward as though transfixed by some vision or sense of destiny. Contrarily to his right and set slightly behind, the black protagonist (and reference to self) looks sidelong at his disengaged or *otherwise engaged* counterpart, regarding him with anticipation – or is it mistrust, or both? Mirroring it would seem the respective aspirations of these two, the background of the image is similarly divided. To the left, black and white groups are obviously segregated, partitioned by a vertical wall and reflecting no doubt the racial polarities of apartheid in the late 1960s. To the right, a multiracial group clusters around the emblematic figure of a crucified Christ – his body black, but his face characteristically black and white. Sub-dividing these binary perspectives – of Mbatha and his ‘other’ – is a vertical column of similarly black, white and black and white faces, reinforcing it would seem the socio-political as well as ethical imperative of reconciliation. In keeping with this implied demand for social cohesion, and speaking to the injustice and threat of racial segregation in apartheid South Africa, Buthelezi confirms:

In so far as a security problem exists only as long as there are two parties, the threat and the threatened, a deliberate creation of the state of reconciliation is the only reasonable solution short of mutual annihilation or the destruction of the imagined threat by the threatened (Buthelezi, 1974:4).

Having settled in Sweden, and just a year after his *Crucifixion/Reconciliation*, Mbatha produced *Dialogue* (1969). Figured once more are the black and white protagonists. Less

transfixed than grimly set, the bearded white figure looks onward still. The black protagonist, on the other hand, looks fixedly out toward the viewer – as though seeking consensus on the need for mutual recognition and dialogue in a situation of social discord. In *Group inbetween [sic]* (c.1980), the earlier image of *Crucifixion/Reconciliation* is replicated, but as though torn down the centre – exaggerating the rift between the foregrounded protagonists, as well as the social conditions they represent. Arranged in the centre of the image frame is a vertical cluster of elongated human silhouettes, whose clasped hands effect a measure of suture between the sundered panels of the image. According to Eichel, who in the late 1980s produced an index of symbols regularly employed by Mbatha, these intervening silhouette forms make reference to *amadlozi* (ancestors) – “considered [in Zulu cosmology] to be the bearers of wisdom, able to help the living cope with their present situations” (Eichel, 1987:11).

More emphatic still in advocating this *imperative of reconciliation* is *Between Hope and Despair* (c.1980) (see plate 77). Here the black and white protagonists appear head to head, as wearied but unyielding opposites. Unlike previous iterations, however, Mbatha appears on the left and the bearded white figure on the right – suggesting perhaps that the grounds of their engagement have shifted somehow. In the background and to the left, black and white groups are segregated still, whilst to the right a flailing black figure grasps desperately at an arm (presumably divine) reaching down from above. Again the silhouette forms of ancestors appear, lining the upper reaches of the image frame, whilst the centre background is occupied by the emblematic figure of a black and white Christ. Crucified, his outstretched arms form a shelter of sorts for a tightly knit, multi-racial group – his presence, as a model of social reconciliation, reaffirming the artist’s long-held conviction that transformation in South Africa, “can only be built through love and tolerance” (Mbatha, 1998:63). Somewhat more hopeful is *The News*, an image produced at some point between 1980 and 1990, and anticipating a more positive political situation in South Africa.²²² Seated in a lounge chair, a lamp-lit figure – presumably Mbatha – watches television. Presented on screen are two jubilant presenters, one black one white, and behind them a solitary figure waving a black and white flag – heralding what Mbatha would later describe as, “the miraculous dawn of freedom in South Africa”²²³ (Mbatha, 2005:ix). Pictured on the wall behind the seated figure is a framed image of *Crucifixion/Reconciliation*, situating *The News* within an extended personal, artistic and essentially political narrative. Arguably concerning the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, and the National Party’s associated commitment to negotiating

²²² To view this image as well as others referenced in this chapter but not necessary accompanied with image plates, see *Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition*. J. Leeb-du Toit, Ed. Durban: Durban Art Gallery.

²²³ Whilst the date of the image is unclear (c.1980-90), it seems probable to me that it was produced in 1990, at the time of Nelson Mandela’s release from prison and the National Party’s commitment to negotiating change in South Africa.

change, the positive message of transformation flashing on the television screen serves further to affirm the exiled artist's longstanding commitment to reconciliation.²²⁴

It is in his *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, however, that this *imperative of reconciliation* finds within the sustained theoretical engagement of Mbatha's practice its most profound resolution. Analogously enacted within the episodic sufferings of an African Christ, the project of social, political and ultimately racial reconciliation articulated in these earlier works is extended – negotiating not only the historical traumas and residual legacies of apartheid, but of colonialism and slavery too.

III. A Stations of the Cross for Africa

Let us see apartheid, above all else, as a curse that must never visit us again; and let us always remember colonialism, the scourge of Africa, that made the continent what it is today (Mbatha, 2005:210).

Over the years, narrative has remained a central component of Mbatha's visual practice – be it in the episodic tableaux of images like *The Passion of Christ*, or the extended narrative of thematically related works such as *Crucifixion/Reconciliation*, *Between Hope and Despair* and *The News*. Distinctive, however, in the case of his *Stations of the Cross for Africa* is its compilation as a multi-image series – tracking in sixteen sequential images the narrative of Christ's Passion.²²⁵ In addition, whilst biblical motifs feature prominently within his personal visual language, the appropriative gesture of his *Stations of the Cross for Africa* is unprecedented in its conscious redeployment of a specific and traditionally Catholic iconographic programme.

As noted in Chapter Two, from the late 1950s a number of black artists were commissioned in South Africa to culturally reinterpret (or 'Africanise') the Stations of the Cross. Motivated by the new cultural imperatives of Inculuration, the objective of their commissioning was in general to motivate a more culturally relevant, or 'authentic', expression of Christianity. In contrast, Mbatha's treatment of the programme – realised some three and a half decades later – is a self-initiated and essentially secular gesture.²²⁶ As with Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, his presentation of the Passion is fundamentally re-historicised, and underscored by a distinctly sociological and political agenda. That being said, whereas Nkosi's visual narrative departs quite radically from the established format of the Stations of the Cross, the conscious citation

²²⁴ For a more theologically-inflected account of such images as *Crucifixion/Reconciliation*, *Between Hope and Despair* and *The News*, see Jansen. 2007, *Deciphering aspects of Azaria Mbatha's worldview located in specific religious themes and images employed in his work*:122-129.

²²⁵ Arguably his most ambitious visual project, Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* is, as far as I can tell, his only multi-image work, or series.

²²⁶ I consider Mbatha's application of the Stations of the Cross secular to the extent that it is not a work of liturgical art (meant for devotional practice), but rather independently achieved, and in service of a distinctly social and political agenda. His gesture is in this sense appropriative, and in keeping I believe with his latter approach to Christian theology as a useful model, or 'pattern', for society (Mbatha, 2005:310).

of Mbatha's rendition sustains a measure of structural and iconographic fidelity. Tracing the episodes of Christ's suffering, death and burial, the first fourteen images of the series correspond exactly to the traditional sequence of the Stations of the Cross, as fixed by Saint Leonard in the 1720s. In each case, however, the traditional episodes (or stations) are radically resituated – redirecting the tribulations of Christ toward the racial, political and economic subjugations of apartheid, and its catastrophic antecedents: slavery and colonialism. Departing from the traditional format of the programme, Mbatha includes an additional two stations: *Station XV: Jesus Rises from the Dead* and *Station XVI: Reconciliation*. Bringing to the historical traumas embodied in the preceding narrative a measure of resolution, envisioned in these images is a worldly rather than heavenly ideal of social, political and ultimately racial reconciliation. In this regard, Mbatha's appropriation of the Stations of the Cross demonstrates something of what Jan Verwoert describes as a 'ceremony of invocation'. An appropriative gesture whereby a 'temporally layered' object or theme – in this instance the Stations of the Cross – is 'called forth' with critical intent. *Invoked* rather than seized, and in acknowledgment of its latent even unpredictable semiotic agency, put to new use²²⁷ (Verwoert, 2012:149–50 & 153).

For Verwoert, critical to such a 'ceremony of invocation' is the material nature of its performance – the practicalities or mechanics of its enunciation as a form of language (Verwoert, 2012:153). As such, in approaching the images of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, it is necessary, I believe, to consider first their material quality and didactic application as printed media, as well as the explicit directive of the series itself: as one for Africa. Significant also is the particular post-colonial/post-apartheid moment of the work's conception, as well as Mbatha's stated commitment to the necessary work – or 'reconciling task' – of historical revision.²²⁸

The sixteen images of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* are linocut prints – as are most of the artist's works. As discussed in Chapter Three, linocut has been regularly considered a medium 'typical' to black South African artists – its relevance and appeal presumed as stemming from a kind of affinitive connection, based on its apparent

²²⁷ In his essay, 'Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art' (2007) Verwoert shifts the debate in and around appropriation (as an artistic strategy) from its association with postmodern strategies deployed in the 1970s and 1980s to its application (and agency) in different historical situations, and in relation to more contemporary practices. He notes: "the specific difference between the momentum of appropriation in the 1980s and today lies in a decisive shift in the relation to the object of appropriation – from the re-use of a dead commodity fetish to the invocation of something that lives through time [...]" (Verwoert, 2012:150). In regard to the latter he reflects on appropriation as a 'ceremony of invocation', whereby objects, images or allegories are staged in such a way as to evoke what he describes as the 'ambiguous influences' and 'latent presence' of unresolved histories (Verwoert, 2012:154).

²²⁸ Observing certain 'blind spots' in the history of South Africa, Mbatha considers the revisiting and revising of this history as a personal duty – and as he puts it, a "task of reconciliation" (Mbatha, 2005:16).

comparability with traditionally ‘African’ cultural modes like carving and pokerwork.²²⁹ This ethnographic association finds its way, however, even into such recent texts as Gerald West’s reading of Mbatha’s *Joseph Story* (published in 1998), wherein despite the postcolonial orientation of the text itself, linocut is registered as an ‘African form’ (West, 1998:85). On a visual level, Mbatha himself acknowledges a certain correlation between the flat, tonal contrasts of the technique and that of *amabhaxa* – wooden matt racks traditionally carved by Zulu men, and decorated with two-tone relief designs.²³⁰ Nevertheless, as he further observes, the medium is distinguishable from such formally related traditions in its functionality as a printmaking technique – as a means not only of generating an image and achieving certain graphic effects, but also of serialising the image as a printed edition (Hobbs, 2003:69).

Committed to an art of social utility, this functional dynamic was stressed by Gowenius, who introduced Mbatha to linocut printing in the early 1960s.²³¹ Although later exploring a variety of printmaking techniques, particularly following his move to Sweden, linocut has nevertheless remained central to Mbatha’s practice – as a consciously deployed and essentially didactic mode of address. As such, whilst he considers his drawings and etchings to be more personal in nature (his ‘hidden’ works), his linocuts constitute a more public, openly communicative artistic gesture. As Danilowitz relays, works he sends out to, “talk their own language” and, “stand with their own feet just like human beings [...]” (cited in Danilowitz, 1998:31). Consequently, one might think of Mbatha’s *Stations of the Cross for Africa* as a kind of self-published and essentially didactic visual document.²³² Acknowledging within the series this agency of print is to release it from the ‘typicality’ assigned to a black South African ‘tradition’, and see it rather as critically extending a broader art-historical trajectory. Recalling as it does the didacticism of relief print cycles like Dürer’s *Small Passion* (1508-1511), and in its more polemical orientation, the close historical association of printmaking in particular with artistic practices of radical social critique.

The title of Mbatha’s series is also significant – situating his invocation of the traditionally European programme of the Stations of the Cross as one *for Africa*. Outlined already, as a liturgical tradition the Stations of the Cross is essentially a devotional exercise, facilitating for adherents a meditative retracing of Christ’s Passion: the objective being, by way of its stational narrative, to ‘revisit’ a certain iconic and transformative history. Implied then in

²²⁹ For an in-depth reflection on these dynamics see Hobbs. 2003, *Shifting Paradigms in Printmaking Practice at the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre, Rorke’s Drift, 1962 – 1976*:66–79.

²³⁰ In the *amabhaxa* technique, a wooden plank is blackened by charring, after which a design is achieved in negative (as with linocut), with greys achieved by light scraping, and lighter tones by carving away from the darkened surface (Hobbs, 2003:66).

²³¹ For an in-depth account of Gowenius’ approach in this regard, see Hobbs. 2003, *Shifting Paradigms in Printmaking Practice at the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre, Rorke’s Drift, 1962–1976*.

²³² Mbatha’s *Stations of the Cross for Africa* was printed as an edition of fifty.

Mbatha's critical redeployment of the Stations of the Cross, is a similar 'revisiting' – but of specifically African histories. Writing in his autobiography – tellingly titled, *Within Loving Memory of the Century* (2005) – Mbatha stresses the value of so doing: "I am convinced today that African history demands as serious an approach as does the history of any other continent. There is a broad and vivid process of human development to be discovered in its evolution" (Mbatha, 2005:230). For Mbatha, recouping this 'broad and vivid process' is all the more critical given the imperial authorship of African history in western colonial discourse, and its adverse sociological implications in regard to both individual and cultural identities. He notes:

The past is part of one's identity ... We need to be reminded by and about our past, which we as Africans were compelled to forget (Mbatha, 1986:7).

And again:

Post-colonial Africans saw themselves through the eyes of others who imagined that their own views on Africa were the whole truth. Many of us still understand ourselves in this way ... I choose to follow Apademak²³³ – don't do this for me: I'll do it myself – that seems like a start in the right direction (Mbatha, 2005:231).

The practice then of recalling the past, and of revising an essentially colonial historical narrative, is for Mbatha a personal prerogative. And one reflected as Botha confirms, in the imaginative mode of historical reconstruction that in general characterises his visual as well as literary storytelling (Botha, 2005:xvi). For Mbatha, this recollective drive constitutes not just a means but the necessary grounds for a truly democratic and reconciled social experience. Thus: "we suddenly realise that without it [the past] there is no future; that it is the very foundation of life. It then becomes integral to the continuity of our existence" (Mbatha, 2005:217). As such, I would forward the historical re-enactment of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* as a significant and self-conscious exercise in cultural memory. By which I mean: critical activity whereby the past, as inscribed within a given discourse, is imaginatively reactivated and reprocessed as 'memory' within the shared experience of culture.²³⁴ Related to this notion, and more specifically relevant to the series in question – as one concerned with the recollection of an alternative, Afrocentric historical

²³³ *Apademak*: a lion-headed god associated with the Meroitic culture of Upper Nubia. In his book, Mbatha relays a fable wherein, having heard the partial accounts of a number of blind lions, the god commissions a renewed study of 'the Elephant'. To 'follow Apademak' is thus to critically rethink historical accounts. Mbatha notes: "Apademak opened a new chapter in African History. He did not simply contribute fresh details to existing facts ... but replaced a series of conflicting opinions with a consolidated body of knowledge while engaged in independent research" (Mbatha, 2005:231).

²³⁴ In his essay, 'Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, and Trauma' (1999), Van Alphen reflects on the idea of cultural memory – situating the production of memory *within* discourse, or 'culture', and thus establishing it as both an individual and shared experience. He notes: "Memory is not something we have, but something we produce as *individuals sharing a culture*. Memory is, then, the mutually constitutive interaction between the past and the present, shared as culture but acted out by each of us as an individual" (Van Alphen, 1999:37). Similarly, Mieke Bal describes cultural memorisation as: "an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continually modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future" (Bal, 1999:vii).

narrative – is Barnot Hesse's idea of *postcolonial memory*. Explained by her as a creative as well as critical engagement with the past, postcolonial memory entails: "a critical excavation and inventory of the marginalized, discounted, unrealised objects of decolonization and the political consequences of these social legacies"²³⁵ (Hesse, 2002:165). In keeping with this, and stressing once more the sociological imperative of rethinking the relation of past to present, Mbatha himself concludes: "*The Stations of the Cross for Africa* was another attempt to solve the problems of today with assistance from the past" (Mbatha, 1998:62).

Noteworthy in this regard is the particular post-colonial/post-apartheid moment in which the series was produced. Following the elections in 1994, a new era of freedom was declared by President Mandela – a 'new South Africa', premised on the joint imperatives of nation-building and reconciliation. Understood as critical to this aspirant project was an engaged process of historical revision – a programme of redress, or as De Kok explains: "of reconciling to the present a complex and painful past" (De Kok, 1998:57). Central to this was the TRC, announced by Dullah Omar in 1995, and inaugurated the following year. Mediating the public testimonies of victims and perpetrators, the commission was envisioned as a means of both deciphering the immediate past – and therein the manifold traumas of apartheid – and of shaping a new and reconciled society (Gqola, 2010:3). Not dissimilarly, in the narrative programme of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, a vision of social reconciliation is premised on the necessary revisiting of a traumatic history. In Mbatha's case, however, this project of reconciliation is somewhat more broadly directed – not limited to the nationalist project of the 'new South Africa', but extended rather as a universal imperative to the continent and people of 'Africa'. And one might assume – given Mbatha's own experience of exile, and his claim to 'Africanness' as a mode of identity – those of its diasporas.²³⁶ In consequence, the *imperative of reconciliation* advocated within the series

²³⁵ In her essay, 'Forgotten Like a Bad Dream: Atlantic Slavery and the Ethics of Postcolonial Memory' (2002), Hesse stresses the ethical prerogative of postcolonial memory, as an activity less concerned with the past itself than with critically addressing the 'historical complicity' and 'forgetfulness' of the present. Thus she notes: "the ethics of postcolonial memory concerns itself less with the historical "wrongs" of the colonial question than with interrupted and incomplete forms of decolonization and their relation to contemporary social constructions of justice/injustice. In this precise sense, postcolonial memory in the West is not concerned with the (colonial) past through an obsession with the past, but through an engagement with the (liberal-democratic) present ... to encounter or confront the (liberal-democratic) contemporaneity in terms of what has constituted its (imperial) history" (Hesse, 2002:165).

²³⁶ In a literary context, Appiah notes how similar applications of 'Africa' (as the "continent and its people") are regularly used in preference to the idea of nations in particular – demonstrating for him a general resistance within postcolonial thinking to neocolonial associations of nationalism (Appiah, 1992:152). In general, these resistances are rooted in what he terms an *ethical universal*. By which he means a form of humanist thinking, motivated by a general respect for human suffering – and particularly within the context of Africa's traumatic histories (Appiah, 1992:152). In the case of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, rather than celebrating in particular the nationalist ideal of 'the New South Africa' he advocates rather a kind of aspirant universalism. Or, as Mandisi Majavu and Mario Pissarra might say, a *post-national globalism* – a concept they note as particularly pertinent to the experience of artists of the African Diaspora, who have benefitted more immediately from the benefits of globalization (Majavu & Pissarra, 2011:7). With respect to Africa, however, they later ask: "Can we really talk of post-national globalism when Africa has failed to integrate into the world economy?" (Majavu & Pissarra, 2011:7). Perhaps then, in his *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Mbatha is thinking through and shifting the terms of a post-nationalist globalism – from an economic imperative to the more humanistic agenda of an 'ethical universal'.

demands a return not only to the more immediate traumas of apartheid, but also to a more expansive colonial (or rather *anti-colonial*) historical narrative. Thus, the instance of South Africa's political transformation, described by Okeke as an iconic moment in the broader narrative of decolonisation in Africa (Okeke, 2001:34), marks for Mbatha a corresponding point of retrospective departure. In fact, Mbatha himself does not differentiate between apartheid and colonialism, but considers the 'scourge of colonialism' to have found its clearest and most painful expression in South Africa: "There we see the patterns of colonialism most clearly" (Mbatha, 2005:262). In keeping with this idea, Pumla Dineo Gqola argues against the idea of slavery, colonialism and apartheid as mutually exclusive periods, situating them rather as moments within a continuum. She is careful, however, to differentiate her application of the term 'continuum' from what might be read as a form of chronological linearity – inconsistent for her with the workings of memory and ideology. By contrast, she stresses these traumatic legacies as mutually embedded, entangled over time, and in a variety of cultural forms and practices, attested to in the present (Gqola, 2010:6–11). And such is, I believe, the layered continuum of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* – as an imaginative work of postcolonial memory, presenting in the episodic sufferings of an African Christ the mutually embedded historical traumas of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

As per tradition, the first episode (*Station I*) of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* bears witness to the public condemnation of Christ (see plate 78). Bound and crowned with thorns there is a sense of abjection, of total isolation to the figure of Christ, who stands humiliated upon an elevated podium of black and white bands. Denouncing him is the exaggerated figure of Pilate one might presume, or perhaps a high priest²³⁷ – leaning forward in a gesture of oratory theatrics, with a giant finger pointed at the accused. Bearing witness to the scene is an arc of robed figures or elders, recalling the jury gathered in *Jesus in front of Pilate* (1964). However, whereas those figures actively partook in the condemnation of Christ, these stand mute, impassive in their solemnity. Confirming the socially historicised and essentially analogous application of the Passion narrative in the series, the power dynamics of these juridical proceedings are translated within the lower half of the image frame. Below the figure of Christ and set before the podium sits the figure of a slave driver – white-faced and clutching a heavy wooden staff or club. To his right four enslaved men stand in tow – hands bound and shackled neck-to-neck. Further recalling the injustices and horror of slavery, to the left of the frame a naked black form is bound to a post, beneath which lie the

²³⁷ Rather than denouncing Christ, Pilate is noted in the gospel accounts as attempting to negotiate his freedom. In contrast, Christ's primary accusers are established as the Jewish religious leaders, or Pharisees (See Matthew 26&27, Mark 14&15, Luke 22&23 and John 18). That being said, Hourihane notes the manner in which the figure of Pilate has been variously construed within the visual arts, and often presented as a vociferous accuser of Christ (and in that regard, despite being Roman, derogatively figured as Jewish) (Hourihane, 2009:233).

discarded corpses of adults and children. Established then as primary to the postcolonial reimagining of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* is what Bogues has called, "the historical wound of racial slavery" (Bogues, 2010:78). A social incursion described by him as, "a layered traumatic event that created the ground and opened the space for another series of traumatic events that made history a catastrophe [...]" (Bogues, 2010:43). Illustrating the geopolitics of this catastrophic history is the silhouette form of Africa – set behind the central figure of the slave driver. Split in places as though cut or wounded, referenced here is a continent sub-divided – subjected to the social, economic and territorial violence of colonialism. In this respect Alan Rice observes:

After slavery, Europeans continued their exploitation of overseas colonies, most notably in the 'scramble for Africa'. Between the 1880s and the First World War European powers desperate for access to African natural resources divided up much of the continent between them – literally with a ruler hence the straight lines of many African borders (Rice, 2015).

Granted this visual sub-text, the episode of Christ's condemnation figured in the image plane above, takes on new significance. Displayed on his podium the isolated figure of Christ is very much that of a slave at market, and the gesticulating form of his detractor that of the slave dealer, enthusiastically promoting his wares.²³⁸ As such, the grounds of Christ's denunciation are shifted – his condemnation not so much an issue of his claim to divinity, as Messiah,²³⁹ as his equally blasphemous claim to humanity, as slave. Reflecting on the power dynamics of racial slavery, Bogues explains the respective conditions of the 'human' and 'nonhuman' as conditional to its logic. Regarded as less than human, slaves were reducible to the category of things (or 'chattels'), their appropriated bodies regarded and transacted as 'property in person' (Bogues, 2012:36). As Mbembe notes, this 'logic' upon which slavery was both enacted and defended, was extended to 'the native' in the context of colonialism – the 'civilizing' violence of which was predicated on the assumed animalism (or primitiveness) of those colonised.²⁴⁰ (Mbembe, 2001:236). Thus for Aimé Césaire, the colonial encounter was not about human contact but rather, "relations of domination and submission which turned the colonizing man into a class room monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production" (cited in Bogues, 2012:36). Similarly, in the racial hierarchy of apartheid, black people were considered as

²³⁸ Unlike the seated slave driver, whose white face may be a racial indicator (or a kind of symbolic reversal of 'black face'), the figure of Pilate – understood in this context as a slave trader – is represented as black. The ambiguity of race in this regard is interesting, given Mbatha's strategic assignations in other works, and may point to the complex and often complicit histories of slavery in Africa.

²³⁹ Ultimately, the charge brought against Christ was that of blasphemy – for declaring himself the Son of God. "Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61–62).

²⁴⁰ Mbembe notes: "Colonization as an enterprise of domestication includes at least three factors: the *appropriation* of the animal (the native) by the human (the colonist); the *familiarization* of man (the colonist) and the animal (the native); and the *utilization* of the animal (the native) by the human (the colonist)" (Mbembe, 2001:237).

third class subjects – relegated as Mbatha notes to a “special category of ignominious citizens” (Mbatha, 2005:210). Thus condemned – as slave, native and ignominious citizen – within the metaphoric narrative of Mbatha’s *Stations of the Cross for Africa* the figure of Christ is introduced as a paradigmatic embodiment of the ‘nonhuman’, and subject as such to the dehumanising violence of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.²⁴¹

In *Station II* (plate 79) the figure of Christ steps forward into a wasteland of famine and poverty, burdened by the weight of an immense black cross. Encumbered by the instrument of his pending execution, his is a life determined – a fate governed by the exercise of sovereign power over, as Foucault might say, his ‘right to live’.²⁴² Reinforced then is the idea of Christ as slave – or ‘living corpse’, as Bogues names those who, “because of various historical and social conditions, were never seen as alive, erased bodies that existed in what Frantz Fanon has called the “zone of non-being”” (Bogues, 2012:33). Significant here is Mbatha’s particular treatment of Christ, whose figure is granted a human tangibility and fragility absent in earlier representations – and whose body is rendered entirely black, rather than as black and white. Given the institutionalised racism exercised throughout the historical continuum of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, one may of course assume of this blackness a racial association. Although it must be said that in later episodes, other characters – amongst them the uniformed soldiers that are Christ’s tormentors, and thus associated with forces of racial subjugation – are similarly figured in black. As such, and appropriately perhaps, the formal gesture of Christ’s ‘blackness’ is made racial only in context, and by association. Thus registered, the blackness of Christ in Mbatha’s visualisation is, I feel, in keeping more with that observed by Kwame Appiah in regard to the black priest and central protagonist of Mudimbe’s *Entre les eaux* (1986). The blackness of whom he interprets as less a marker of race than a ‘sign of Africanity’ – a kind of embodied solidarity, wherein to be black is also to be African and so, “committed, nolens-volens, to an engagement with African suffering” (Appiah, 1992:153). Staggering beneath the weight of his cross and negotiating a landscape of waste and of abject human suffering, it is in this sense I believe, that the epitomic figure of Mbatha’s black Christ is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, an *African Christ*. For as Mbatha reflects in his autobiography: “it was not with colour in mind, but to save humanity from shame, slavery and murder that Africa shed its blood” (Mbatha, 2005:24).

²⁴¹ At the same time, in this image (as well as those following) the figure of Christ is granted centrality – haloed as it were by the surrounding crowd. Employing a vocabulary of iconic veneration, the humanity and indeed divinity of Christ is thus affirmed, in spite of (and in resistance to) the dehumanising context of his abjection.

²⁴² Applying Foucault to the violence of genocide (as well as to colonialism), Bogues observes: “Foucault tells us that historically sovereign power exercised its authority through a right over life. He notes also that when, in nineteenth-century Europe, this right was transformed into the right “to make live and let die”, it still belonged to the sovereign” (Bogues, 2010:70).

Extending this engagement with African suffering is *Station III* (plate 80), in which the figure of Mbatha's African Christ is cruelly tormented, and shown collapsed beneath the punishing weight of his cross. Referenced in the image is the 'first fall of Christ', one of three falls common to the episodic programme of the Stations of the Cross – the second and third of which are similarly represented in stations seven and nine of the series (see plates 84 & 86). Demonstrated in the symbolic re-enactment of these three falls are, it would seem, interrelated forms of human domination common to the social and political programmes of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Situated within a political field, the body of Christ is subject to a variety of forces – technologies of power which to quote Foucault: "invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault, 1991:173). Consequently, in all three falls (stations 3, 7 & 9) a colonial styled soldier polices the chained and prostrate figure of Christ; threatening him, pulling him, trampling him underfoot. Emphasised in this domineering relation is the coercive military power that underpinned the colonial enterprise in Africa and apartheid in South Africa. A transaction wherein, as Fanon insists, the only language deemed comprehensible by the 'native' was that of force²⁴³ (Fanon, 2001:66). In this respect he observes in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961):

The settler-native relationship is a mass relationship. The settler pits brute force against the weight of numbers ... His preoccupation with security makes him remind the native out loud that he alone is master. The settler keeps alive in the native an anger which he deprives of outlet; the native is trapped in the tight links of the chains of colonialism (Fanon, 2001:42).

Amplifying in *Station III* the dehumanising violence of this encounter, two rabid dogs are pictured before Christ, to the left of the image frame. Scrapping and baring their teeth, these may refer to those mentioned in Psalm 22 – a passage long understood within Christian tradition as pertaining to Christ's Passion: "For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me". Shackled to these creatures, Mbatha's African Christ – himself on all fours – is seemingly reduced (in his 'fall') to the inchoate and strictly biological level of the animal. For Mbembe, this denial of transcendence, wherein the humanity of the 'native' is refused and consigned to the animal world, constitutes the root extremism of colonial violence. As he explains: "if this is the case, it can be understood that killing a native belongs to the same register as killing an animal or expunging something no longer of any use" (Mbembe, 2001:193).

²⁴³ As such, he observes: "In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression" (Fanon, 2001:28). In apartheid, the situation was no different, with Minister of Justice Jimmy Kruger declaring in 1976 that the rioting 'natives' of the Soweto Uprising, "had to be made tame by the gun" (Welsh, 1998:475).

Determining it would seem the residual ‘usefulness’ of Christ – as ‘property in person’ and a ‘thing of value’ – are a set of scales hung over the raised horizontal beam of the cross and laden one side with what seem to be gold bars.²⁴⁴ Christ’s life is thus hung in the balance – measured against this standard and, given his eventual ‘expungement’, presumably found wanting. Extending the injustice of this inhuman trade-off, to the left of the image a head of six oxen – in Zulu culture a standard of wealth, legitimacy and cultural order (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:186) – exit the scene, choking as they go the dog to which they are yoked. In terms both human and economic, registered then in this fall of Christ and in those that follow is something of the devastating transaction of colonialism. The ambition of which, for Mbatha, found its most imperious expression in the continental ‘business-plan’ of Cecil John Rhodes – whom as he notes: “not only determined to secure the mineral wealth of the continent … but also wished to expand British dominion in Africa and make his people the rulers of the world” (Mbatha, 2005:201). Closer to home, Mbatha further observes how Rhodes was the father of the migrant labour system in South Africa, wherein rural black men wishing to work on the mines or in urban areas were separated from their families for eleven month spells, and strictly regulated in their movements – “by permit and by ruthless police raids at all hours of the day and night” (Mbatha, 2005:107). Equating the system to the human deprivation and commodification of slavery, he notes:

Slavery is wrong, to be sure, but the practice shocked only its victims. To buy someone who is compelled to sell himself infers that the person bought becomes the property of the buyer. He is no more than a slave. What is more, the majority of labourers in South Africa, and in most other countries, have a restricted choice of occupation and little freedom of movement. Consequently, they depend on fixed rules and on the will of others as much as they would in any system of slavery (Mbatha, 2005:206).

And again:

It is imperative to record this long history, to know how apartheid affected my people at the turn of the century; and to see how their masters reduced them to virtual slavery (Mbatha, 2005:208).

Exaggerating in these images the isolation of Christ’s predicament is the disengaged presence and mute witness of various social groupings. In *Station VII* for example a selection of robed figures look out; two of them women in traditional wear and the other a man, prayerfully clutching a crosier of sorts and so possibly a priest of the Zionist church.²⁴⁵. Although seemingly concerned they keep their distance, maintaining an essentially

²⁴⁴ Mbembe notes that whilst in colonialism the ‘native’ was reduced to the status of a thing, it was still a ‘thing of value’. This value, however, was not intrinsically human but determined rather by a measured usefulness. Which is to say, the value of the ‘native’ was that of a tool (Mbembe, 2001:187).

²⁴⁵ Despite embodying a legitimate protest against ‘white racism and ecclesial imperialism’, and fostering amongst migrant labourers and urban black South Africans a measure of social and cultural cohesion, De Gruchy notes that the AIC’s were for the most part apolitical in nature (De Gruchy, 1979:46–7). This apolitical stance may explain to a degree the seemingly disengaged witness of Mbatha’s ‘Zionist priest’.

background presence. To the fore, however, a well-dressed man – presumably white and a missionary or administrator of some sort – leans over the fallen, choking figure of Christ. Well placed to help or intervene, the figure's presence is ambivalent, standing as he does with one arm behind his back and the other gripping what may be a bible. Lamenting the misapplication of Christianity within apartheid, wherein as he notes, "the government was ruling South Africa unjustly with the Bible in its hands" (Mbatha, 2005:300), Mbatha reflects:

Few Green [by which he means white] Christians in South Africa at this time obeyed God rather than man, though most of them advocated this behaviour. Take up your cross and follow me they mouthed Christ's sternest directive – but they never contemplated it seriously at all (Mbatha, 2005:301).

By contrast, a measure of solidarity is shown in the human encounters of stations four, five, six and eight, which together reimagine the traditional episodes of Christ's meeting with his mother, the recruitment of Simon of Cyrene, Veronica's veil, and Christ's final interaction with the weeping women of Jerusalem. In the first of these – *Station IV* (plate 81) – the burdened figure of Christ is met by Mary, identifiable as African (and more specifically Zulu) by her dramatic *isicolo* headdress. Standing between Christ and the soldier leading him, her polymorphic figure is a picture of solidarity, as a unified throng of miniature people rising from her feet support the cross with their outstretched arms. Extending this matriarchal picture, two pregnant women – one naked, one clothed – stand to Christ's left and right; a picture of Mary as both virgin mother and wife, and the bearer of her people's future liberation.²⁴⁶ Comparably, in an imaginative passage of his autobiography Mbatha's own mother becomes a localised and contemporary model of Mary – as in giving birth and pondering on the 'lamentable history to come', she declares: "This boy, and others like him, will bear the cross of the coming struggle" (Mbatha, 2005:282).

In stations five and eight the figure of Christ is further assisted in the bearing of his cross – understood by Mbatha as the social burden of racial discrimination.²⁴⁷ In *Station V* for example, the determined support of Simon of Cyrene – whose African status was for Mbatha's father a point of insistence – is powerfully reinforced by additional black arms, and the unified efforts of an ascending phalanx of miniature robed forms (see plate 82). Similarly, in *Station VIII* (plate 85), a muscular black arm shoulders the cross whilst a sympathetic crowd gathers about Christ, some weeping others reaching out, touching his hand. Resisting the isolation and dehumanising treatment of Christ, emphasised here is a sense of community, of identification – and therein something of the shared responsibility and social humanism of *Ubuntu*. As a philosophy of life, *Ubuntu* is for Mbatha a distinctly African

²⁴⁶ At the annunciation, the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will give birth to a son and future redeemer, of whose kingdom "there will be no end" (Luke 1: 30-33).

²⁴⁷ In his autobiography, Mbatha reflects: "What would an immigrant do if, for example, he condemned racial discrimination? This, I believe, is the substance of Christ's bidding to carry one's cross and follow him" (Mbatha, 2005:301).

approach to ‘being humane’ – grounded in the universal acceptance of others as being fundamentally part of oneself.²⁴⁸ As such he claims:

African society has always placed a high value on human worth and, throughout history, our humanism has expressed itself communally rather than in western individualism²⁴⁹ (Mbatha, 2005:350).

Presented then in these moments of solidarity is one might say a form of oppositional humanism – rooted in an ethics of human mutuality, and contra to the individualism traditionally pronounced within western Enlightenment. In fact, as Bogues critically observes, the individualistic humanism generally associated with western modernity was formulated in tandem with the wholesale institution of slavery and colonialism – to the exclusion of those consequently subjugated²⁵⁰ (Bogues, 2012:37). Disqualified in this way from one form of humanism, Mbatha’s Christ thus embodies another – his emblematic person constituting for those similarly relegated a collective site of both identification and resistance. This is, I believe, especially true of *Station VI*, Mbatha’s personal reimagining of the apocryphal episode of Veronica’s veil (see plate 83). Rather than burdened or collapsed, the figure of Christ stands proudly erect, looking back directly toward the viewer with his hand raised in seeming salutation. At his side an accompanying figure holds to their face a mask-like representation, bearing Christ’s visage. Less a miraculous transfer than a gesture of empathic self-identification, reinforced in the gesture is something of the social agency and *mutuality* of this ‘oppositional humanism’. In this respect a reference to Biko, and his bold affirmation in 1971 of a radical and essentially African humanism, is perhaps appropriate:

In rejecting Western values, therefore, we are rejecting those things that are not only foreign to us but that seek to destroy the most cherished of our beliefs – that the corner-stone of society is man himself – not just his welfare, not his material wellbeing but just man himself with all his ramifications ... We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationship. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face (Biko, 2004:51).

Tracking in sequence Christ’s bearing of the cross, demonstrated throughout these early stations is both a dominant narrative of dehumanising violence, and a counter-narrative of embodied resistance and human solidarity. Leading toward the definitive moment (one might even say collision) of the Crucifixion itself, the dichotomy of these is further exaggerated in

²⁴⁸ Mbatha explains how in *Ubuntu*: “Virtue lay in being humane, in accepting humans as part of yourself, and in granting them the right to share all that you had. This code was a philosophy of life. The great African family called it Ubuntu, the practice of being humane” (Mbatha, 2005:34).

²⁴⁹ This emphasis on community is reiterated in the lower left corner of *Station VIII*, wherein the departure of a figure – presumably Christ – is registered as a loss to his local (African) community.

²⁵⁰ Useful also, and I think applicable to Mbatha’s outlook is Fanon’s ‘radical humanism’ – wherein, as Bogues explains, and in contrast to traditionally western humanist traditions: “hierarchies are flattened, the other is no longer an Other, and a common ground of being human is established by which we may live together and construct humane ways of life” (Bogues, 2010:118).

the dramatic episodes of stations ten and eleven. In the former – *Station X* (plate 87) – Christ's dislocated body is manhandled and stripped. Symptomatic of the degrading abuses and violent ontologies of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, his naked form is publically reduced to the physical rudiments of what Agamben calls 'bare life'. The revealed biology of which, though incontestably human: "cannot in any sense be a kind of dignity" (Agamben, 1999:69). That being said, even within this total abjection a certain agency is nevertheless sustained. A kind of resilient will embodied in the redemptive person of Christ, whose Passion amounts as Mbembe observes, not only to an act of politico-religious murder, but also to a form of suicide (or self-willed sacrifice). Or in other words, though acted upon Christ also *acts*²⁵¹ (Mbembe, 2001:226). Similarly, whilst in *Station XI* (plate 88) the cross is fatefully raised, a measure of agency is once again demonstrated, this time in the form of a naked black figure, who resisting the colonial soldier opposite, supports the crucified figure of Christ. Significant also, and referencing perhaps a more combative resistance, is the discarded garment of Christ – a torn coat lying at the foot of the cross, the decorated lapels of which have a distinctly military air.

The apogee of these successive episodes is of course the Crucifixion itself – *Station XII* (see plate 89). Central to the image is the crucified figure of Christ, his mortality emphasised in the slumped arc of his body on the cross as well as the gathering above him of vulture like forms.²⁵² To the right of the frame savage beasts bare their teeth and claws – a motif denoting in a number of Mbatha's works the subjugation, violence and cunning he associates with human power²⁵³ (Mbatha, 1986:10). Accentuating this, rendered above is the unsettling figure of a man – presumably a reference to death, or Satan perhaps²⁵⁴ – striding forth with two limp human forms ominously slung over his shoulders. Threatened by his presence as well as that of the beasts is the isolated figure of Mary, who protectively holds a baby to her breast – presumably symbolic of Christ as an infant. By contrast, to the left of the image a winding column of robed figures make their way toward the foot of the cross – a scene recalling April 27th, 1994 when queues of people gathered at polling stations across South

²⁵¹ In this sense one might read the nakedness and seeming helplessness of Christ as demonstrative of what in theological terms is understood as his *kenosis* – which is to say, as De Gruchy explains: "the divine condescension and self-emptying (*kenosis*) of the incarnation and the humiliation of the cross" (De Gruchy, 2001:123).

²⁵² Recalled in the slumped arc of Christ's body is the sacred art tradition of the *Christus Patiens* (suffering Christ). Anne Derbes observes how European representations of Christ's crucified body were transformed in the early part of the thirteenth-century – from the traditional *Christus Triumphant* (Triumphant Christ) to the *Christus Patiens* (Suffering Christ). In the former, Christ "transcends suffering and is victorious over death, gazing out with head held erect", whilst in the latter "His eyes are closed, his head bowed, and his body begins to lose its upright stance, sagging to the left" (Derbes, 1996:5). The object of this transition was to emphasise the human experience of Christ's Passion, and so to affect in viewers a more empathic response.

²⁵³ Such symbolic creatures appear regularly in other works as tigers or apocalyptic beasts. See Leeb-du Toit. 2003. *Contextualizing the use of Biblically derived and metaphysical imagery in the work of black artist's from KwaZulu-Natal: c1930–2002*:200 & 2004.

²⁵⁴ Satan and other demonic figures feature in a number of previous works by Mbatha. In the context of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, I presume his presence to embody forces of evil and death.

Africa to cast their vote in the country's first democratic elections. Leading the way, a priestly figure lies prostrate beneath the weight of his own cross, demonstrating it would seem that as those following Christ's 'sternest directive', represented in this collective gathering are those who share in both the suffering of his sentence and the oppositional humanism of his struggle. Visualised in this sense – each side of Christ's crucified form – are the contesting operations of a dehumanising violence and its collectively embodied resistance, as well as the possibility of its transformation.²⁵⁵ Invoked as such, and applied within a distinctly African historical paradigm, is the dual operation of the Crucifixion itself – whereby as De Gruchy observes, revealed on the one hand are the "dehumanising powers at work in the world", and on the other, "the extent of God's solidarity with creation and humanity in its suffering" (De Gruchy, 2001:245).

Following the Crucifixion and marking the traditional episodes of Christ's descent from the cross and burial in the tomb, the implications of this emblematic death are further implied in stations thirteen and fourteen. A reinterpretation of the *Pietà*, presented in *Station XIII* is the lifeless body of Christ, cradled in the lap of his African mother and surrounded by a community in mourning²⁵⁶ (see plate 90). As background to this but of symbolic significance two ladders are pictured, one raised each side of the cross. As the shorter of the two, that on the right leads only so far as the transverse beam of the cross – the structure of which is reconfirmed as an implement of violent discipline by the embedded presence of a giant sized nail. Of significance also is that two of the ladder's steps are broken, a motif denotative in earlier works by Mbatha of cultural imposition, social fracture and 'broken promises' (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:181; Mbatha, 1998:62). Contrarily, the ladder to the left is unbroken; rising heavenward it stretches beyond the limits of the image frame. Raised as it is on that side of the cross associated in the image before with a shared narrative of suffering and resistance, implied in this symbolic reference is, it would seem, a certain transcendence. The idea being that in the self-willed act of his death on the cross, Mbatha's Christ transcends the socio-political paradigm of his execution – and in doing so opens the way as Mbembe might say, to a "not yet", a "remainder", a "power to be" (Mbembe, 2001:223).

The redemptive (and as such collective) nature of this gesture is reconfirmed in *Station XIV* (plate 91) – where in descending to the grave the figure of Christ embraces and seemingly calls forth the skeletal forms of the dead.²⁵⁷ Thus, to apply once more a reflection of

²⁵⁵ Made explicitly political in this dichotomy is a visual tradition associated with sacred western art, where in examples like Giotto's *Last Judgment* (c.1305), the redeemed community of the saints gather in calm solidarity and veneration to the left side of the cross, whilst to the right the damned collapse in disarray.

²⁵⁶ Although wearing a different headdress from that in the preceding image, the figure supporting the body of Christ is presumably Mary, who wears a similar headdress in *Station IV*.

²⁵⁷ Registered here is a possible allusion to the 'cult of the shades', where in traditional Zulu practice the ancestral spirits (*amadlozi*) are invoked in particular circumstances. Temba Mafico explains: "Interaction with the shades would be more rightly termed dialogue or communion in the sense that the descendent communicates his

Mbembe's: "the god who goes to his death does not do so solely for his own sake. He goes for everyone else, as well, for all of humanity, whose experience he has shared" (Mbembe, 2001:223). Given the series' specific directive one might assume, however, that in Mbatha's case he goes in this sense *for Africa*. Above, in the 'land of the living', Mary and the gathered host of those similarly bound to this paradigmatic death stand vigil. Fixing their attention is the spectral image of a tree-like form, which rising from below presents a kind of visionary promise of renewed life. As such, the transformative encounter of Christ with those 'dead and erased' registers above – which is to say in the present – as a nascent and anticipatory future vision.²⁵⁸ One in keeping perhaps with that described by Mbatha, whereby:

In their escape from political despair and hopelessness, from colonial exploitation and the misery of apartheid, people's hearts swelled with courage as new vistas spread out before them. Things begin as they were yesterday, but they soon evolve into a vision of tomorrow (Mbatha, 2005:257).

Positing just such a 'vision of tomorrow' are the concluding images of stations fifteen and sixteen. Extending the traditional sequence of the Stations of the Cross, reimagined in these images is the new dispensation brought about through Christ's resurrection. Pictured as such is what one might describe as a secularised eschatology of social, political, and ultimately racial reconciliation. Recalling the 'great cloud of witnesses' spoken of in Hebrews 12:1–2, in both images the robed figures of previous episodes stand solemnly arranged in circular formation²⁵⁹ – some looking down as though from a kind of trans-historical purview, and others out, engaging the viewer directly. Differentiating the stations, and establishing between them a measure of narrative sequence, is the embrace in *Station XV (Jesus rises from the dead)* (plate 92) of Mbatha's black and white protagonists, whose previous estrangement he chronicled in earlier works like *Crucifixion/Reconciliation* and *Between Hope and Despair*. Following this conciliatory gesture, in *Station XVI (Reconciliation)* (plate 93), an iconic visual of the earth – recalling the wreathed globe of the United Nations logo – occupies the central circular space about which the throng stands gathered. Extending the gesture of the preceding image is a shaking of black and white hands emblazoned across the front of the globe, presenting a universal picture of racial reconciliation.²⁶⁰

situation to the shades requesting that they 'express themselves' in the situation, on the basis of the understanding that they provide for the material and spiritual needs of the family, as well as for protection from illness and other adversity" (cited in Jansen, 2007:43).

²⁵⁸ By the 'dead and erased', Bogues refers to those historically excluded and 'silenced' by the systemic violence of slavery and colonialism (Bogues, 2012:34).

²⁵⁹ In a brief reference to *Station XVI: Reconciliation*, Jansen observes as significant to this gathering the association in Zulu cosmogony of circles with: "life, harmony, perfection, togetherness and rhythm" (Jansen, 2007:127).

²⁶⁰ Positing such a vision of global reconciliation, Mbatha's concluding image recalls in many respects the end wall mural Pablo Picasso produced for the Temple of Peace in Vallauris (1958). Based on a design previously produced for the second *Présence Africaine* Congress in Paris, the image depicts four figures, collectively representing the races of the world. Working in unison these figures uphold an earth-like globe, emblazoned with the symbol of a dove and olive branch (Bindman, 2014:260).

Established then in the embracing figures of station fifteen are, one might say, the prerequisite terms of Mbatha's more global vision – terms grounded in the mutual recognition and ethical demands of an oppositional and fundamentally African humanism. In this direct human contact (and reaffirmation), the dichotomy of 'self' and 'other' so fundamental to the binary logics of slavery, colonialism and apartheid is critically undermined – subsumed within what Fanon imagined as the mutually affirming "world of the *You*" (Fanon, 2008:181). In relation to this '*You*' and the embodied politics of Fanon's 'radical humanism', Bogues reflects: "There is no more Other and I, as a common humanity in all its pluralism and difference becomes the foundation for critical thought and radical political praxis" (Bogues, 2010:118).

Of significance also to *Station XV (Jesus rises from the dead)* is the extent to which whilst reflecting in many respects the public forum in which the TRC hearings were performed, the requisite human engagement foregrounded in the image challenges to a degree the ethical and structural conditions upon which that 'reconciliation' was brokered. Writing in his critical essay, 'Forgiving and forgetting: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission' (1998), Anthony Holiday observes the TRC as having fundamentally misunderstood the necessary encounter of genuine reconciliation – having confused remorse with disclosure and forgiveness with amnesty. The result of this, as he argues, was that indemnities rather than genuine contrition, or the promise of reconciliation, served to induce the full confession of perpetrators²⁶¹ (Holiday, 1998:47). In contrast, he insists legitimate expressions of remorse and forgiveness come attached with a certain 'sincerity constraint' – an authenticity conditional to their 'completion', and so to the possibility of genuine reconciliation²⁶² (Holiday, 1998:52). Thus, whilst in the juridical context of the TRC the confessions of perpetrators were empirically verifiable as 'true', their sincerity as expressions of proper contrition were not. Sidestepping the 'sincerity constraint' of genuine forgiveness, reconciliation of this sort compromised for Holiday, "the private, ethical space of the individual" (Holiday, 1998:55). By contrast, Mbatha establishes as prerequisite to his global vision of reconciliation the ethical demands and liberating potential of forgiveness – an activity critical in his view to the self-release of African peoples, as well as to the self-determination of their futures. In this respect he observes:

²⁶¹ Thus as William Kentridge observed of the Commission: "A full confession can bring amnesty and immunity from prosecution or civil procedures for the crimes committed. Therein lies the central irony of the Commission. As people give more and more evidence of the things they have done they get closer and closer to amnesty and it gets more and more intolerable that these people should be given amnesty" (Kentridge, 1998).

²⁶² For Holiday, forgiveness (as a 'species of forgetting') marks a certain release – "severs the remorseful tie fettering authors of evil to those they have harmed". It is thus a conferral of absolution, "which may or may not be conditional on retribution or restitution – such that past evils no longer exert a claim on us or those who have visited evil on us" (Holiday, 1998:44).

Africans can be justly proud of their achievements today. They went to school, they struggled to pay the fees, they did without food. Today they are not where they were yesterday. If only they could see it with their own eyes. Yet they remember with pride how they freed themselves from colonialism. Despite their suffering they were ready to forgive. Forgiveness, as I say, is greater than love. That is why South Africa has a future. Its people neutralised their ongoing conflict by means of forgiveness (Mbatha, 2005:355).

Registered in the emblematic shaking of black and white hands, pictured in *Station XVI (Reconciliation)* is the end-goal or *telos* of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* – a geopolitical 'world of the You', premised on the ethical exchange of genuine forgiveness. In this regard his symbolic amendment of the United Nations logo constitutes I propose an essentially subversive gesture, recalling perhaps the pan-Africanist call of Robert Sobukwe – whom, as Mbatha himself relates: "believed that the elimination of imperialism in the United Nations would create a forum for true independence and solve Africa's problems" (Mbatha, 2005:174). Positing here an alternative vision of global reconciliation, stressed once again are the *terms* of that reconciliation – this time within a broader political field. Rather than a world peace brokered 'on behalf of' and by the powers of global imperialism, instantiated rather is an insistent ideal of reconciliation – one grounded in what Appiah describes as an 'ethical universal,'²⁶³ and realised in terms commensurate with the radically reconfigured power relations of decolonisation. In this sense, as Benita Parry observes of Fanon's later work, a transfigured social condition is envisioned not as the fulfilment of some western imperium, but as, "holding in place that vision of the anti-colonial struggle as a global emancipatory project and projecting the radical hope of an oppositional humanism"²⁶⁴ (Parry, 1994:193).

Reconfirming this historical and ideological counter-narrative as central to Mbatha's vision is the symbolic presence of a riven stone, occupying the lower foreground of both stations fifteen and sixteen. Recalled is the final station of the *Via Dolorosa* in Jerusalem, traditionally marking the site of Christ's crucifixion on Calvary.²⁶⁵ As a residual trace, its presence acts as a critical reminder; calling to mind the antecedent episodes of Christ's Passion, and the narrative of human suffering and resistance it embodies. Such an envisioning, however, wherein a social ideal of reconciliation is premised on a central socio-historical narrative,

²⁶³ Appiah observes intellectual responses to oppression in Africa as generally grounded in an appeal to an *ethical universal*. An appeal, as he further explains: "to a simple respect for human suffering, a fundamental revolt against the endless misery of the last thirty years" (Appiah, 1992:152).

²⁶⁴ Similarly, and in keeping I think with the general project of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Asmal Jamal ventures: "that after five hundred years of slavery and colonialism, after the travesties of independence movements, the influx of foreign capital and the makeshift emergence of some worldly ethos – a kind of structural and imaginary 'pop-up' – ... Africa at its best can now be construed as a trope for a new, global and ethical humanism" (Jamal, 2015:34).

²⁶⁵ In the Middle Ages, housed in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was a stone, venerated as that which held in its socket the cross of Christ. For pilgrims like Fabri, meditating on this residual trace was a profoundly moving experience – 'making present' the redemptive sufferings of Christ's Passion: "for who could have so hard a heart that it would not be rent in that place, where he beheld before his eyes the hardest rock to have been rent?" (cited in Thurston, 1914:150).

runs the risk of homogenising a complex, fragmentary and often contradictory history of political engagements and human experience. And one might add, to the exclusion of such intersectional narratives as those of class, gender and sexuality.²⁶⁶ That being said, it is I think undeniable that the recent histories of Africa have been in a fundamental and epistemic sense informed by the historical catastrophes of slavery and colonialism, as well as their extended social and political legacies: be it the travesties of the independence movements, the slavish economic reliance of neo-colonialism, or the systematised racism of apartheid in South Africa (Jamal, 2015:34). In this sense, it is then perhaps not entirely inappropriate that in positing a vision of universal reconciliation – but one still explicitly *for Africa* – Mbatha should establish as primary the problematic of *race*. Committed as he is to a ‘world of freedom’, Mbatha is nevertheless careful to admit the limitations of his vision – insisting less on the particulars of his own conception than on their underlying ethical insistence. Thus he reflects:

I may have conceived theoretical truth wrongly; but I was right in affirming its existence and the allegiance we owe it. Perhaps I thought that the road to a world of freedom was shorter than it is: but I was right in thinking that such a world was possible and worth drawing closer ... So we live in pursuit of a vision, both personal and social. On the personal level, let us care for what is important – beautiful gentle things – and seek the insight of wisdom in difficult times. In the social sphere, again, let us envision a new society where individuals grow freely – where hate, greed and envy die, because nothing sustains them – and let others with different insights proffer their interpretations differently (Mbatha, 2005:14).

Having retraced and to some degree contextualised the episodic sequence of Mbatha’s *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, I have sought in this chapter to demonstrate its operation as an imaginative exercise in postcolonial memory. Reconstituting as it does in the analogous sufferings of an African Christ the mutually-embedded traumas of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, as well as the oppositional humanism of their embodied resistance. Pictured in its final stations, and as premised on this history is a vision of social, political and racial reconciliation – significant to which, as I have argued, is a measure of authentic personal encounter. From the perspective of the viewer, significant in this regard is, I believe, the extent to which as a conscious invocation of the Stations of the Cross – as both a visual tradition and established religious practice – inherent to the series is a certain implied action, or ritual. Recalled in this sense is the original function of the programme itself as a ‘pilgrimage in miniature’ – wherein meditatively retracing the footsteps of Christ devotees perform an affective reimagining of the Passion. ‘Making present’ in their devotion an iconic and transformative history. As such I propose that in the radical redeployment of Mbatha’s

²⁶⁶ By intersectional narratives I mean that idea of ‘interlocking oppression’ whereby, according to feminist Patricia Hill Collins, cultural patterns of oppression are bound together and mutually influenced by such ‘intersectional’ systems of society as race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Collins, 2000:42).

Stations of the Cross for Africa – and as necessary to its envisioned ideal of reconciliation – is extended to the viewer the ritual imperative of affectively reimagining, or ‘revisiting’, the traumatic but also transformative histories of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

Recollecting what Belting describes as the ‘sympathetic and affective participation’ traditionally associated with Passion iconography, and with reference not only to Mbatha’s *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, but also Nkosi’s *Crucifixion*, I advance in conclusion a rethinking of pilgrimage.

Conclusion

History in the present is not about burden or mourning; it is about accounting for the population of the dead. But this dead population is not dead, because their actions leave traces that work to configure the world. In this sense our present historical actions are dialogues between the living and the dead. This is why the questions of history are always about the present. To engage in this dialogue we remember wounds. Those cries affirm a different kind of freedom; they point us to a different song of the future upon which we can draw. But we draw from these future songs with a sense of history.

Anthony Bogues, in *Empire of Liberty* (Bogues, 2010:116).

In this research I have traced, as it were, the Passion of a black Christ – demonstrating ways in which, both during and after apartheid, black South African artists have creatively reinterpreted and critically redeployed the Stations of the Cross, and more broadly the iconographic tradition of the Passion cycle. Reflecting on their complex sociological and political implications, I have noted these developments in both sacred and secular contexts. Focusing my enquiry, I concentrated primarily on the reimagined Passion dramas of Sokhaya Charles Nkosi's *Crucifixion* series (1976), and Azaria Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* (1995). Reflecting on these coded visual narratives, and the socio-political contexts of their production, my objective has been to demonstrate as strategic their respective invocations of Christ's episodic sufferings: in analogously chronicling situations of historical trauma, as well as in articulating more aspirant (or 'counter') narratives of political resistance, self-liberation and reconciliation. In conclusion, I argue that these reimagined Passion narratives demand a necessary rethinking of African histories – as, in their conscious redeployment of an iconographic and essentially devotional tradition, facilitated for viewers are opportunities for affective and critical encounters, wherein black suffering and resistance are invoked and made central. Reflecting on this, I propose in this closing chapter a rethinking of pilgrimage.

Contextualising the projects considered in this research, I traced in Chapter One the historical emergence of the Stations of the Cross, as both an iconographic programme and liturgical practice. In this regard I outlined its genealogy in the long-established practice of venerating in Jerusalem the stations that mark the *Via Dolorosa*, as well as in derived practices of simulated pilgrimage formulated in Europe in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. Stemming from these, I forwarded the programme of the Stations of the Cross as a kind of 'pilgrimage in miniature'; its fourteen stations constituting for devotees a practicable means of meditatively revisiting the iconic history of Christ's Passion, and of reaffirming in the present its redemptive agency. Central to this is the idea of anamnesis – by which is denoted something more than the memorialisation of an historical event, but rather

its ‘reactualisation’ within the personal experience of the participant. Reflecting on its visual aspect, I then situated the programme within the broader context of western sacred art. As significant in this regard, and motivated by the ‘devotional turn’ of European Christianity in the 13th century, I noted how in emphasising the human experience of Christ’s suffering, Passion cycles and devotional images (or *Andachstbilder*) functioned as *aides-mémoire* – eliciting from viewers a form of ‘sympathetic and affective participation’ (Belting cited in Derbes, 1996:11). Conscious of the more social application of projects considered in the chapters following, I emphasised also the regular application in this history of Christ’s redemptive sufferings to specific socio-political situations. Reflecting on this more political register I cited as an example Duccio di Buoninsegna’s *Maestà* (1308-11), as well as the more racially inflected renderings of Giotto di Bondone’s *The Flagellation of Christ* (c. 1305), and Antonio Lisboa’s sculpted Passion episodes (1796–99). Formalised in the early nineteenth century and subsequently established as a requisite feature in Catholic church contexts, I noted in closing the ubiquitous spread of the Stations of the Cross as concomitant with the general advance of colonialism. Anticipating its later appropriation by black South African artists – as an apt visual metaphor – my objective in presenting this early history of the Stations of the Cross was to demonstrate as fundamental to its programme both a visualisation of human suffering, and the facilitation for viewers of a necessary and essentially affective historical revisiting.

Observing its introduction to Catholic mission contexts in Africa, I traced in Chapter Two the commissioned reinterpretation (or ‘Africanisation’) of the Stations of the Cross by black artists in South Africa. Concentrating on works realised in the late 1950s and early 1960s – with a particular focus on sacred projects by Sydney Kumalo – I reflected on the personal narratives and underlying politics involved in these complex cultural transactions. I noted the installation and practice of the Stations of the Cross in diverse African social and cultural contexts, popularised as it was by Catholic missionary endeavours in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whilst a certain universality was implied in this common relation to Christ’s Passion – as one who suffered for the sins of the whole world²⁶⁷ – I demonstrated, however, the significant degree to which this ideal was compromised by the cultural agenda and associated politics of an explicitly European styled Christianity. Implicated in the ‘civilizing mission’ of colonialism, the conflation of Christian faith and western culture demanded nothing less than the total reformation of native societies – “in the name of God and European civilization” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991:6). As a practical means of both modelling and inculcating the narrative of Christ’s Passion, I presented the Stations of the Cross as a case study in this regard, as versions imported from Europe and erected

²⁶⁷ 1 John 2:2 (NIV)

throughout Africa represented in their stations the episodic sufferings of a distinctly white Christ. With reference to Hans Belting, I argued that the retracing of these by black devotees demonstrated as such a problematic form of image transfer and mental colonisation. Thus, rather than reaffirming the community of humanity – understood by Mbembe as central to the founding ethos of Christianity (Mbembe, 2001:219) – the institutionalised practice of so commemorating Christ's Passion served rather to reinforce the hierarchical and essentially racial schemas of colonialism.

Shifting this cultural bias, and constituting for Mudimbe a fundamental redefinition of 'Christianisation' in Africa (Mudimbe, 1988:60), was the socio-theological turn marked by the emergence of African Theology – and as particularly relevant to the self-reappraisal of Catholic visual culture, the broader project of Inculturation. Tracing these developments, I noted as primary to this critical shift an active process of ecclesial 'decolonisation', and the associated propagation of a new cultural plurality. Central to my analysis in this regard was the commissioning from the late 1950s of black artists in South Africa – mandated with the cultural reinterpretation (or 'Africanisation') of an essentially European iconography. With an initial focus on the liturgical works of mission-based artists such as Bernard Gcwensa and Ruben Xulu, I noted the figurative emergence of a black Christ and a localised Passion. In this iconographic transformation I emphasised as implicit a certain fundamental politics, one calling into question the racial hierarchies of both colonialism and apartheid. In this respect I argued that in the reaffirmation of Christ's universality, and the application of his Passion to distinctly African social and cultural situations, artists asserted the corresponding value and equality of black identities. Acknowledging the complexity of these interactions, I noted as well the significant role played by liberal white patrons in the regular commissioning of these revisionary projects, and their promulgation of certain primitivist tropes associated with notions of indigeneity and Africanness. Seeking to unsettle these problematic reductions, I stressed, however, the multiple approaches and individual resistances enacted by the artists themselves in actively negotiating the commissions they received. As exemplary in this regard I argued the case of Sydney Kumalo's distinctive renderings of the Stations of the Cross, produced between 1957 and 1961. Reflecting on these renditions, I emphasised how in their modernist and essentially hybrid formalism, they both extended the religio-cultural remit of inculturation, and demonstrated in the racialised context of apartheid a subversive cross-culturalism.

Revealed, I believe, in this broad and complex process of iconographic revision is the manner in which the prevailing visual order of colonialism itself, as entrenched by the cultural imposition of a European styled Christianity, was both thrown into relief and fundamentally questioned. Central is the extent to which the visual reaffirmation of Christ's universal person

essentially compromised the racial structures of colonial and apartheid power, and how in a diversity of responses, black artists disrupted an otherwise largely reductive project of ‘Africanisation’. Releasing these works from a purely religious or ethnographic framework, and acknowledging as implicit this politics and hybridity, is important in granting to them (or recognising rather) their particular agencies.

Marking a significant departure from these ecclesial projects of iconographic revision, I considered in Chapter Three the more secular rendering of Sokhaya Charles Nkosi’s *Crucifixion* series (1976). Formulated in response to the intensifying atmosphere of political unrest that followed the traumatic events of the 1976 Soweto Uprising, I advanced the series as a socially historicised reworking of the Passion drama. By way of both visual and contextual analysis I demonstrated the episodic tribulations of Nkosi’s black Christ as documenting, in a veiled religious idiom, what Ndebele describes as the ‘violent science’ of apartheid (Ndebele, 1998:23). More specifically, I showed as analogously portrayed in the thirteen images of the series the incarceration and torture of political activists by apartheid security forces in the late 1970s. Demonstrated in this analysis is, I believe, a conscious and counter-archival practice, where in the covert redeployment of Christ’s Passion, Nkosi made ‘shareable’ an otherwise largely unmediated situation of social and political trauma.

On a more ideological level, I demonstrated ways in which the figure of Nkosi’s incarcerated Christ – in his blackness, as well as in the ultimately victorious narrative of his suffering – embodied something of the collective experience and self-liberation espoused within Black Consciousness, and its theological counterpart Black Theology. I emphasised the symbolic application of Christ’s Passion experience to the social reality and political aspirations of black people in apartheid South Africa. Extending a semiotics of the body long associated with sacred Christian art, I argued as such that in the sequential episodes of Nkosi’s *Crucifixion*, the black body of Christ is framed not only as the traumatised object of a gross political violence, but also as a site for the demonstration of belief – and more specifically, an alternative and radical politics of resistance.²⁶⁸ Acknowledging this semiotic and ideological aspect, I nevertheless observed the scepticism of some toward the metaphorical treatment of human bodies in general. In this respect I noted how for Robins the symbolic translation of human bodies into ‘totalising narratives’ does violence to the complex reality of trauma as both lived experience and embodied memory (Robins, 1998:122–4 & 140). Rather than enacting any such violation, however, I proposed that in the case of Nkosi’s *Crucifixion* the symbolic association of a suffering human body with the ideological aspirations of Black Consciousness asserted if anything the complex reality of that particular ideology – as one

²⁶⁸ At work within images produced within and before the Catholic Counter-Reformation, Jane Taylor observes a certain ‘language of authenticity’. In these she notes how the body of Christ, and those of the saints, were traditionally treated as markers of belief (Taylor, 2011:230).

embodied in experiences of physical and psychological trauma. In this regard I argued that as both man and metonym, sustained within the emblematic body of Nkosi's Christ are experiences both individual and collective. A bridging of public and private worlds, demonstrating as Annette Khun might say: "that political action need not be undertaken at the cost of the inner life, nor that attention to matters of the psyche necessarily entails a retreat from the world of collective action" (cited in Siopis, 1998:10).

Demonstrated in my analysis of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* is thus a strategic appropriation of Christ's Passion, in which the subversive dynamics and power plays of the narrative are put to new use. On the one hand, chronicled in its visual sequence is the largely undocumented violence of detention and torture in apartheid South Africa, and on the other the more aspirant ideology of Black Consciousness. Understood in this way, the work constitutes, I propose, a critical project of cultural memory – affording for viewers imaginative and affective opportunities for bearing witness, to situations of historical trauma as well as to embodied narratives of political resistance.

Moving from the political crisis of 1976 to the particular post-colonial/post-apartheid moment of 1995, I reflected in Chapter Four on Azaria Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* (1995). As a conscious invocation of the Stations of the Cross, I situated the work as an imaginative exercise of historical revision – or 'postcolonial memory'. In this regard, I argued that a fundamental rethinking of African histories is critical to the project of social, political and racial reconciliation envisioned in the series. Contextualising the project within Mbatha's distinctive oeuvre, I noted as central his longstanding reinterpretation of biblical themes. Considering his engagement in this regard, I emphasised the complex trajectory of his personal and artistic development: from the religio-cultural dynamic of his *Kholwa* upbringing, his influential involvement with the ELC Art and Craft Centre, Rorke's Drift, to his interaction in the early 1960s with students at the Lutheran Theological College at Mapumulo. Wary, however, of the limited and essentially 'ethnic' frame in which Mbatha's work has been regularly cast, I stressed the significance of his relocation to Sweden in 1969, and his experience there as an artist in exile. Furthering this contextual analysis, I situated his *Stations of the Cross for Africa* within a certain iconographic and semiotic genealogy, tracing over a thirty-year period his particular treatment of the figure of Christ. In this I emphasised the regular signification of Christ as a universal arbiter of reconciliation, in relation to the artist's shifting reflections on the political situation in South Africa.

Subsequently, I concentrated on the sixteen images that together constitute Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*. By way of extensive visual analysis, I presented its episodic stations as an allegorical retelling of African histories, reconstituting in the episodes of Christ's suffering the mutually embedded traumas of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. As

subjacent to this dehumanising narrative of racial subjugation I emphasised a certain counter-narrative of embodied resistance, registered in the self-willed passage of Mbatha's African Christ, as well as in the mutual identification of his followers. Undermining the racialised logics of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, demonstrated in this embodied counter-narrative is, as I have proposed, a kind of 'oppositional humanism'. One rooted for Mbatha in a universal ethic of human mutuality, and reflecting as such the social philosophy of *Ubuntu*, as well as the more radical humanisms pronounced by anti-colonial figures such as Biko and Fanon. In regard to the latter, I noted as especially relevant his dissolution of the 'Other' within a more pluralistic and humane 'world of the You' (Bogues, 2010:118).

Posited in the concluding stations of the series is a universal vision of reconciliation – granting to the antecedent episodes of Christ's suffering and death a kind of socio-historical and ideological *telos*. On reflection, I noted as central the ethical imperative of reconciliation, not only to the conceptual narrative of the series itself, but also to the broader political project of Mbatha's visual practice. Conscious of the socio-political moment of the work's inception, I considered the extent to which the particular vision of reconciliation posited in the series both reflects and challenges that advanced within the 'transformative' context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In this respect, I referenced in particular Anthony Holiday's critique of the TRC proceedings, wherein he observes a certain problematic conflation of disclosure and remorse, amnesty and forgiveness. By contrast, I argued as sustained within the human and inter-personal encounter of Mbatha's vision a certain 'sincerity constraint' – conditional in Holiday's view to the ethical encounter of true reconciliation. In closing, I proposed that intrinsic to Mbatha's strategic appropriation of the Stations of the Cross is a certain implied *action* – forwarding as he does a future vision of reconciliation, predicated on the ritual and essentially postcolonial practice of revisiting, and personally encountering, African histories of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

With respect to the symbolic redeployment of a sacred iconographic programme, this idea of an implied action or response is I believe of some significance – and applies, as I have argued, not only to the narrative of Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, but also to that of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*. As concluded in my analysis of both of these series, facilitated in their respective formulations of Christ's Passion are meaningful opportunities for viewers to imaginatively revisit and critically rethink historical narratives of dehumanising violence, as well as the oppositional narratives of their resistance. In working through some of these possibilities, I advance in the reflection that follows a rethinking of pilgrimage.

Rethinking pilgrimage

Speaking to a specifically postcolonial context, Leela Ghandi emphasises the imperative for a sustained revisiting and rethinking of histories previously subsumed within, or silenced by, the dominant narratives of modernity and colonialism. The criticality of this revisionary work – described by her as a kind of anamnesia – is further exaggerated by a social condition she observes as ‘postcolonial amnesia’. In this respect she notes as common to post-colonial and specifically nationalist contexts, a certain ‘will-to-forget’ – a conscious repression of colonial memory, motivated by a need for social, cultural and political reinvention (cited in Lloyd, 2000:213). This idea of an embedded ‘will-to-forget’ is central also to Derrida’s thinking on history, and its inscription within the archive²⁶⁹ – stressing as he does its capacity to facilitate not only the operation of memory, but as its unacknowledged corollary a forgetting too. As he explains it: when a thought is jotted down, committed to paper and then kept folded in a pocket, or better still secured in a vault, its very safekeeping renders it in the meanwhile conveniently forgettable. Thus as he concludes, even if one were to gather and collate everything needed to fully represent the past and perfectly interpret it – as a history in every sense satisfactory – granted in such a complete history (or archive) would be, rather than ‘true memory’ this kind of forgetting (Derrida, 2002:54).

Speaking in Johannesburg in 1998, he directed these thoughts to a specifically South African context, addressing in particular the kind of social and historical resolution sought in the archival processes of the TRC. Imagining a situation wherein the entire history of South Africa was thoroughly transcribed, he suggested that in consequence this valued history would be safely consigned – kept for posterity in some impregnable safe, and so effectively forgotten (Derrida, 2002:54). Reflecting on the recollection and ‘resolution’ of historical traumas advocated within the confessional project of the TRC, it was in this sense that he proposed as its ‘unconfessed desire’ a forgetting rather than remembering – an amnesia and desire to *move on* not unlike that observed by Ghandi. However, it goes without saying that no such ‘full history’ of South Africa exists – nor do the published volumes of the TRC’s Final Report constitute anything so final as to have resolved (or fully archived) the lived histories of millions of people traumatised by apartheid. Contrarily, as Derrida insists, no history is ever complete – is never so safely and completely realised as to sanction this sort of forgetting. Rather, as ‘open’ its perpetual revision remains for us an ethical and political responsibility (Derrida, 2002:46).

²⁶⁹ In his text *Archive Fever* (1995), Derrida explains ‘the archive’ as a location for the inscription of a given past – or its traces at least. For an explication on this see Derrida. 2002. *Archive Fever* (A seminar by Jacques Derrida, University of the Witwatersrand, August 1998, transcribed by Verne Harris).

This kind of self-willed forgetting, or *moving on*, is critically addressed by Mbatha in his autobiography, wherein he insists as necessary to the task of both negotiating the present and envisioning the future, a perpetual reengagement with the past – an attendance as he puts it to the ‘alarm bell’ of memory. Reflecting on the transacted future of the ‘new South Africa’, he observes:

They try to forget the past, to envision a bright future. The question is – how do we forget the past? Do we bury it or consign it to safekeeping? I believe that the past should be kept like an alarm bell for access to memory at all times (Mbatha, 2005:170).

A ritual programme of memorialisation, the Stations of the Cross embodies in many respects this kind of imperative to remember – albeit in an explicitly religious context. Following its programme, devotees both meditatively revisit and reaffirm in the present an iconic and transformative history. Thus, as resident priest Fr Michael Rossello confirms, come Holy Week and to this day parishioners gather at the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary in Thabong to ‘walk the stations’ and commemorate Christ’s sufferings. Undertaking a pilgrimage in miniature, they follow along the inside walls of the church quadrangle the terracotta panels of Kumalo’s Stations of the Cross; performing in their journeying a ritual and anamnestic reimaging of Christ’s Passion (personal communication, 12 July 2013). Of course, retraced in this case is by no means a regular rendition of the Stations of the Cross, but one fundamentally revised – ‘Africanised’, or rather hybridised, in Kumalo’s unique vision. As such I would argue that in their commemoration of a certain history – namely that of Christ’s Passion – made possible for parishioners is also that history’s reinterpretation, as one traditionally inscribed within an explicitly ‘white’ (or European) idiom.

As observed, in their synthesis of African and modernist sculptural traditions, Kumalo’s sequential renditions of the Stations of the Cross laid claim to a certain artistic and essentially secular contemporaneity. At the same time, they were produced as functional programmes of devotional art – commissioned by the church and installed in situ. The reimagined Passion dramas of Nkosi’s *Crucifixion* and Mbatha’s *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, however, were produced outside of a sacred context and are essentially appropriative in nature. More overt in their politics, in each the iconic history of Christ’s suffering, death and subsequent resurrection is consciously redeployed as a symbolically charged visual narrative. On reflection, I have stated as implicit in both of these projects a certain demand, or implied action. In this my argument has been that in their conscious invocation of iconographic traditions like the Passion cycle and Stations of the Cross, extended to viewers is something of the engaged witness – or ‘sympathetic participation’ – traditionally associated with such programmes of sacred or devotional art.

On this premise, it is I believe valid to assert that co-opted in these strategic invocations is more than just a visual or iconographic tradition, but a *practice* also. Which is to say, a form of simulated pilgrimage, encouraging from viewers a measure of performance. As such, I believe that in both Nkosi's *Crucifixion* and Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* unique opportunities are afforded for viewers to revisit, revise and rethink in the present marginalised histories of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

In the case of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, tracing the narrative of its thirteen images is then to embark on a pilgrimage of sorts – an imaginary revisiting, not so much of the historical sites and episodes of the Passion itself, as of the hidden world and frightful violence of apartheid power. Similarly, following the Passion of Mbatha's African Christ is to bear witness, however imaginatively, to a history (or histories) of dehumanising violence and racial domination. Significantly I think, implied in such a pilgrimage is, rather than a cursory, detached sort of spectatorship, something of that sympathetic and affective participation observed by Belting with respect to the engaged appreciation of devotional art. Encouraged from the viewer then is more than the simple recognition of these past traumas as events 'that happened' – but rather as Penny Siopis might say, an involved encounter with the psychic and affective dimensions of those happenings as lived realities (Siopis, 1998:2).

Reflecting on the complex dynamics of 'appreciating' images of trauma, James Polchin differentiates between spectatorship and witness – the latter involving for him a measure of co-affectivity, as well as of ethical responsibility (Polchin, 2007:210). Similarly, for Griselda Pollock the art of trauma serves not only to address situations of unspeakable violence, but rather, "to transport the spectator/reader/listener into the realm of the experience" (Pollock, 2013:3–4). Thus 'involved', she observes as implicit in the reciprocal act of witness a certain hospitable and participatory responsiveness (Pollock, 2013:26–7). Redirecting a tradition of empathic devotion, it is this kind of co-affective witness that is, I believe, made possible in the visual programmes of Nkosi and Mbatha. That being said, it is important to acknowledge the given limitations of such 'involved' encounters – as mediated and so essentially removed. In this regard Jill Bennett warns against a certain over-identification with the trauma of others – which is to say on the viewer's part an assumed capacity to relate or understand. As appropriate rather, she insists on an empathic relation grounded not in actual affinity – with the traumatised subject represented – but rather as she puts it, "on a *feeling for* another that entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible"²⁷⁰ (Bennett, 2005:10). Encouraged then in both Nkosi's *Crucifixion* and Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* is less the cognition of past horrors, than an empathic reaffirmation of their

²⁷⁰ In this regard, as Geoffrey Hartman asserts: "Art expands the sympathetic imagination while teaching us about the limits of sympathy" (cited in Bennett, 2005:9).

'irreducibility', as embodied experiences of incommensurable trauma. Reemphasised here as well as in the implied ritual of both series – as envisioned histories of slavery, colonialism and apartheid – is a perpetual and ethically engaged re-visiting of histories, as advocated by Derrida. It is in this vein that Kylie Thomas, commenting on artworks depicting the tortured body of Biko observes how in drawing us to the complex task of bearing witness, such images of trauma refuse the kind of closure associated with fixed historical narratives (Thomas, 2014:139). Instead she insists that they maintain as open the traumatic wounds of the past – encouraging viewers, "to engage with the unresolved, unmourned deaths of others, and to recognize that to which we cannot be reconciled" (Thomas, 2014:123).

This rethinking of pilgrimage is, however, not only to suggest a ritual revisiting of historical traumas, but also, I propose, of the aspirant ideologies and future visions of freedom embodied in the analogous Passion dramas of both Nkosi and Mbatha. In the case of Nkosi's *Crucifixion*, revisiting the sufferings and subsequent resurrection of his black Christ is then to 'make present' the emancipatory politics of Black Consciousness. Doing so presents, I believe, an opportunity to both recall the sociohistorical context of its enactment – as embodied resistance – as well as to acknowledge its bearing on a democratic and 'free' South African experience. Called for in this retrospective criticality is a necessary return to the fundamental questions and anticipated outcomes of an anti-colonial/anti-apartheid discourse – the implications of which, as Bogues insists, we have yet to fully negotiate (Bogues, 2010:111, 119–120). Extending this prerogative, I would suggest that in Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, demanded of viewers is the reaffirmation of a certain 'ethical universal' – by which I mean a politics of human mutuality demonstrated in the counter-narrative and oppositional humanism of an African Christ's Passion. This imperative I believe, is further implied in the aspirant vision of social, political, and racial reconciliation posited in the closing diptych of the series – presenting as it does a 'vision of tomorrow' premised on an essentially postcolonial rethinking of African histories. The implications of pilgrimage in this regard suggest a necessary rethinking of both the historical grounds and ethical demands of genuine reconciliation. The urgency of this project is made all the more clear by recent criticisms levelled against the social imaginary of the 'new South Africa', and the brokered reconciliation of the TRC. This growing discontent is well articulated in the searing pronouncements of the Rhodes Must Fall movement:

Giving legitimacy, attention, and respect to our pain, the false pretence of a superimposed dream of a "Rainbow Nation" has quickly become apparent. In this ideology of ignorance framed as 'reconciliation', which invisibilises and dehumanises black lives – the "Wretched of the Earth" – there are inevitable

injustices of structural violence that face black bodies simply by virtue of our existence²⁷¹ (Rhodes Must Fall, 2016).

In light of this statement, the value of works such as those of Nkosi and Mbatha cannot be underestimated; in making black suffering felt and positioned as central, and in helping us to think about the relation of that suffering, and its emancipatory demands, to the so-called democracy of a contemporary and socially stratified South Africa. In their creative embodiment of historical trauma, as well as in projecting alternative visions of future freedom, the reimagined Passion dramas of Nkosi's *Crucifixion* and Mbatha's *Stations of the Cross for Africa* present meaningful opportunities for critical reflection – advocating as they do a necessary and sustained dialogue with the past. This amounts, as I have proposed, to a kind of pilgrimage – understood as requisite to an engaged rethinking of reconciliation, premised not so much on 'forgiving as forgetting' as on the somewhat more challenging basis of forgiving as *remembering*. Sustained in this project and as necessary to the task of envisioning new futures, is a past that is fundamentally and critically 'open'. To this end, tracing the Passion of a black Christ calls for a ritual revisiting and reimaging of African histories, motivated not by some 'unconfessed desire' for historical resolution, but by a perpetual need for transformation in the present.

²⁷¹ Formed as a result of an open-air dialogue that took place on March 12th, 2015 at the University of Cape Town, the Rhodes Must Fall Movement is a collective of students and staff members committed to addressing through radical action aspects of institutional racism seen as endemic to the University of Cape Town (UCT). The movement's activities saw the removal in 2015 of a prominent sculpture of Cecil John Rhodes from the main campus of UCT. The movement was also central to the student riots of 2015, enacted under the associated umbrella of the Fees Must Fall movement. See Rhodes Must Fall 2016. #rhodesmustfall. Available: <http://rhodesmustfall.co.za/> [2016, May 24]

Image plates



Plate 1: Adam Krafft, *The Seven Falls of Christ, Station Four: Veronica wipes Jesus' face* (replication), ca. 1490, Nuremberg. Photo Sailko



Plate 2: Adam Krafft, *The Seven Falls of Christ, Station Four: Veronica wipes Jesus' face*, Bass-relief detail, ca. 1490, Germanic Museum, Nuremberg. Photo Sailko



Plate 3: Artist unknown, *Pietà with Saint John*, hand-coloured woodcut, ca. 1465, Germany, c. National Gallery London



Plate 4: Artist unknown, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows with Arma Christi (Instruments of the Passion)*, Glass painted with enamels and silver stain, ca. 1650, Switzerland, c. Victoria & Albert Museum, London

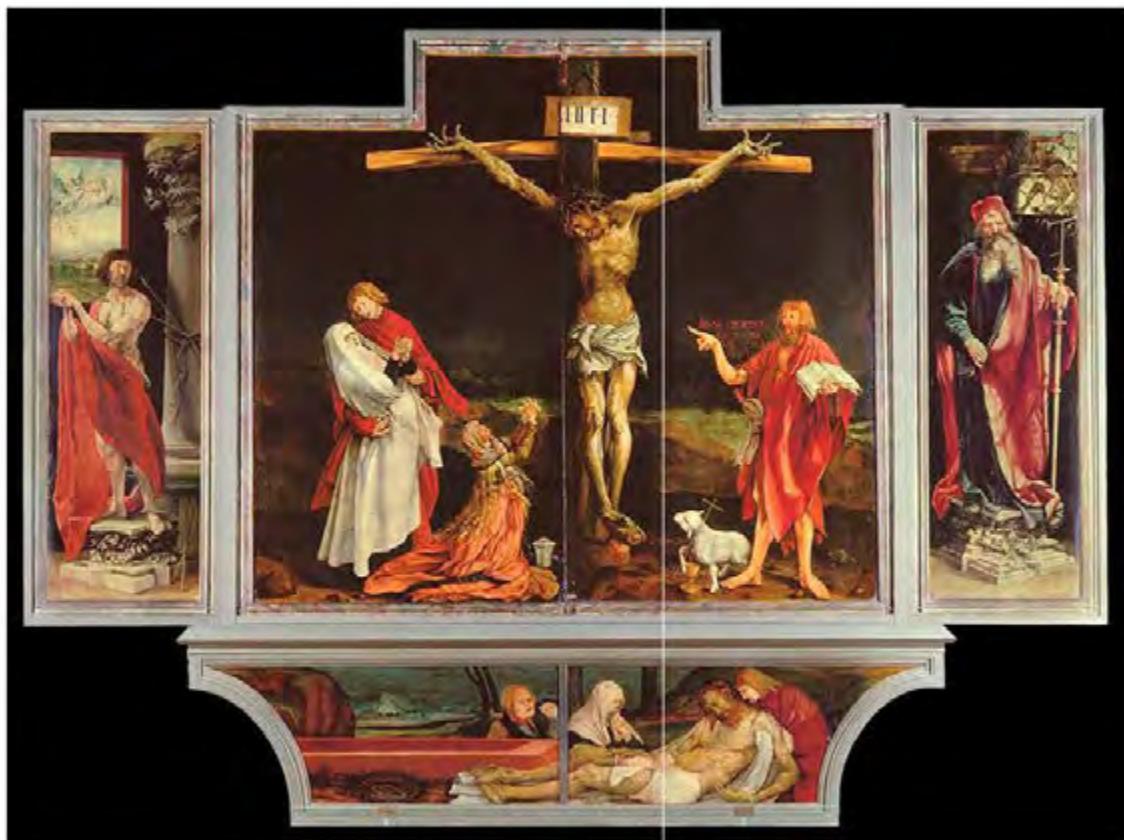


Plate 5: Mathias Grünewald, *The Isenheim Altarpiece* (closed), tempera and oil on panels, 1512-16, Alsace, c. Musée Unterlinden, Colmar

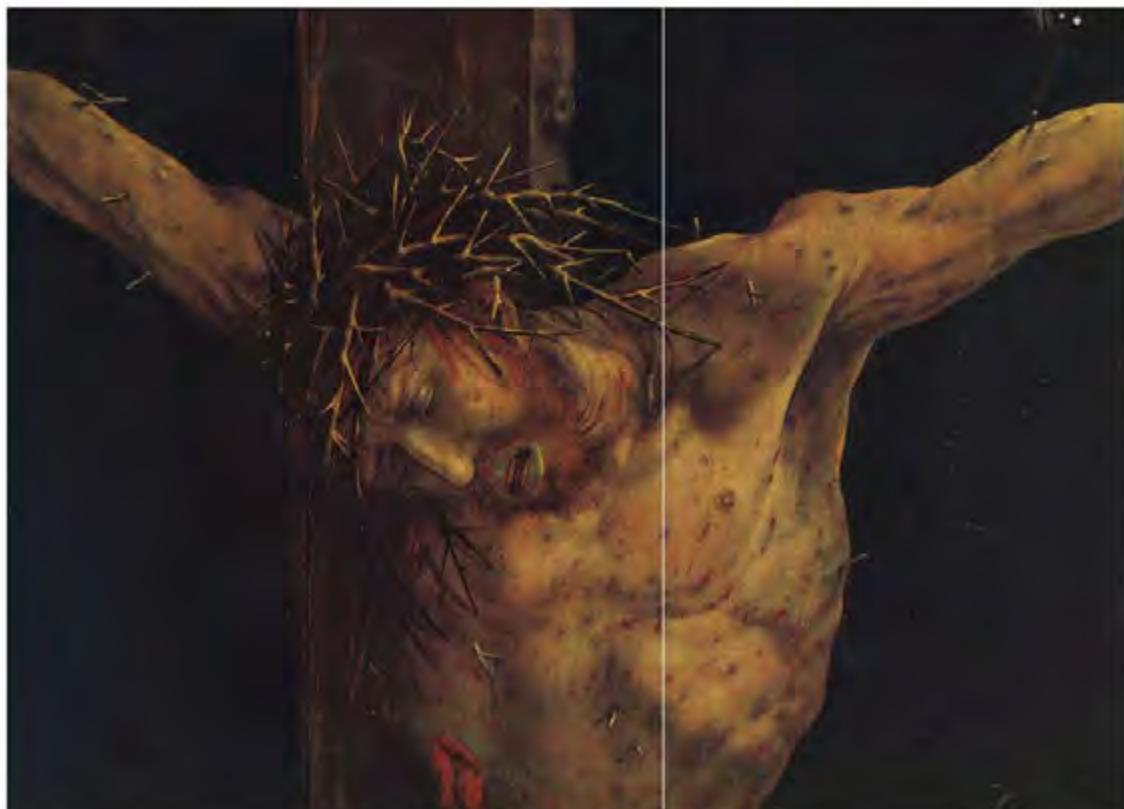


Plate 6: Mathias Grünewald, *The Isenheim Altarpiece* (detail of Crucifixion), tempera and oil on panels, 1512-16, Alsace. Photo Gottfried Richter



Plate 7: Albrecht Dürer, *Small Passion*, *The Flagellation* (Image 17), Woodcut, 1511, c. British Museum, London



Plate 8: Albrecht Dürer, *Small Passion*, *Christ Bearing the Cross* (Image 21), Woodcut, 1511, c. British Museum, London



Plate 9: Albrecht Dürer, *Small Passion*, *Christ on the Cross* (Image 24), Woodcut, 1511, c. British Museum, London



Plate 10: Albrecht Dürer, *Small Passion*, *The Descent from the Cross* (Image 26), Woodcut, 1511, c. British Museum, London

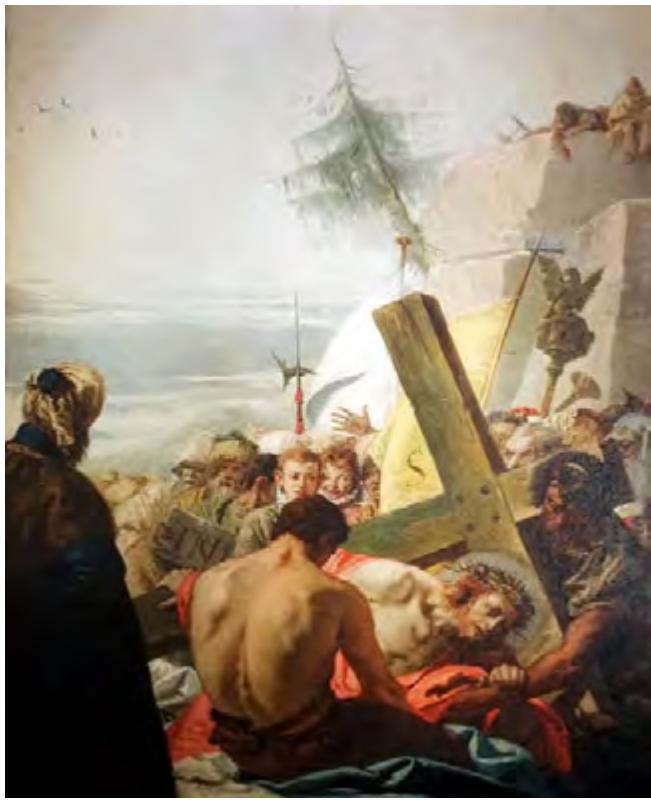


Plate 11: Giandomenico Tiepolo, *Station IX: Christ Falls Beneath the Cross for the Third Time*, oil on canvas, 1747-9, San Polo Church, Venice. Photo Panathinaeos



Plate 12: Giandomenico Tiepolo, *Station XI: Christ is Nailed to the Cross*, oil on canvas, 1747-9, San Polo Church, Venice. Photo Panathinaeos



Plate 13: Giandomenico Tiepolo, *Station XII: Crucifixion*, oil on canvas, 1747-9, San Polo Church, Venice. Photo Panathinaeos



Plate 14: Giandomenico Tiepolo, *Station XIII: Deposition*, oil on canvas, 1747-9, San Polo Church, Venice. Photo by Panathinaeos

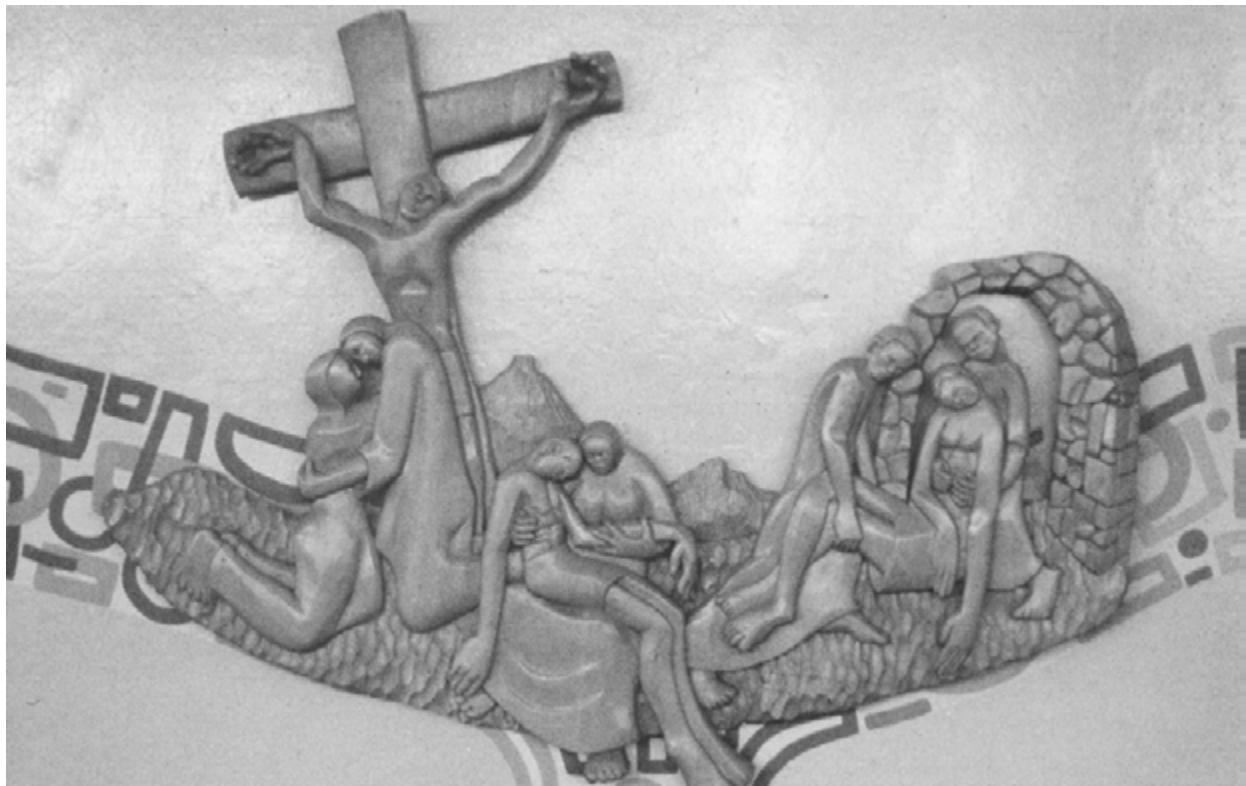


Plate 15: Duke Ketye, Stations 12-14, wood carving and painted frieze, 1976, Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, Makwane. Photo Frieda Harmsen



Plate 16: Lamidi Fakeye, *Station 4: Jesus meets his mother*, wood panel relief, ca. 1950s. Photo Robert Bridger

Plate 17: Lamidi Fakeye, *Station 6: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus*, wood panel relief, ca. 1950s. Photo Robert Bridger



Plate 18: Ernest Mancoba, *African Madonna*, Yellowwood carving, 1929, Johannesburg Art Gallery



Plates 19-22: Bernard Gcwensa, Stations of the Cross (stations 5, 6, 11 & 12), c.1959, Church of the Good Shepherd, Hlabisa.
Photo Dina Cormick

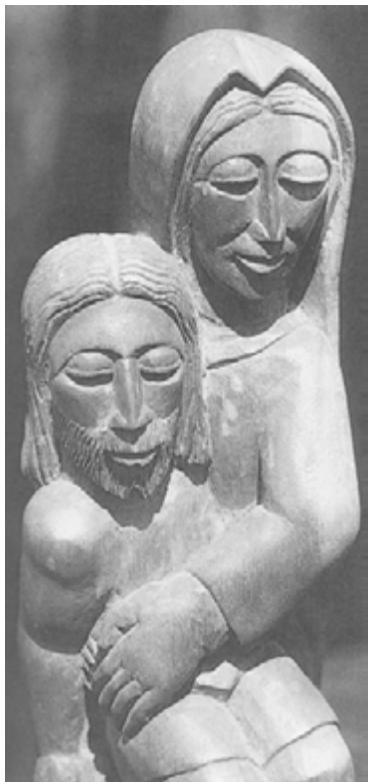


Plate 23: Ruben Xulu, Station 13: *Jesus is taken down from the cross*, wood carving, c. 1959-1962, St Martin de Porres, Ezibayeni. Photo Dina Cormick

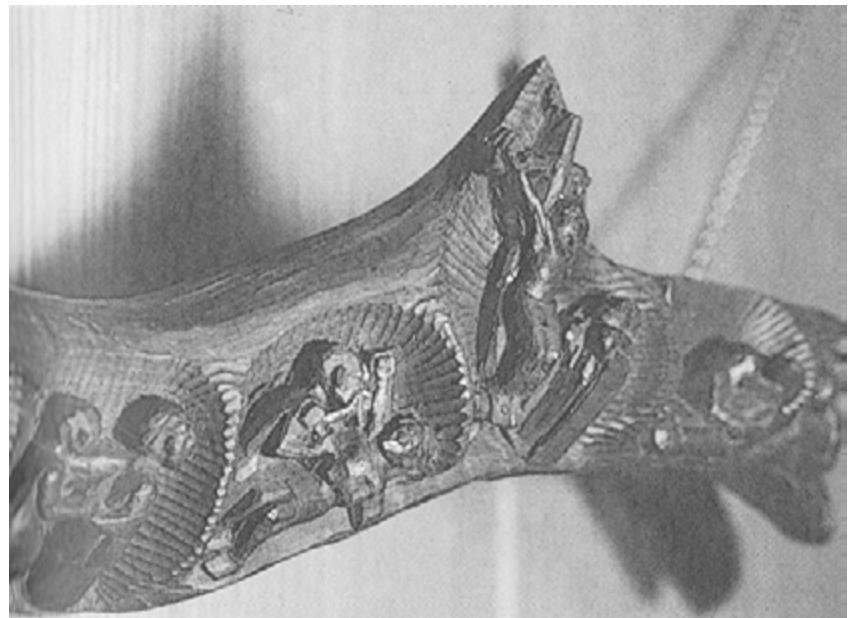


Plate 24: Ruben Xulu, Stations of the Cross, relief carving in red ivory, c. 1967, Catholic Church of St Lucia. Photo Dina Cormick

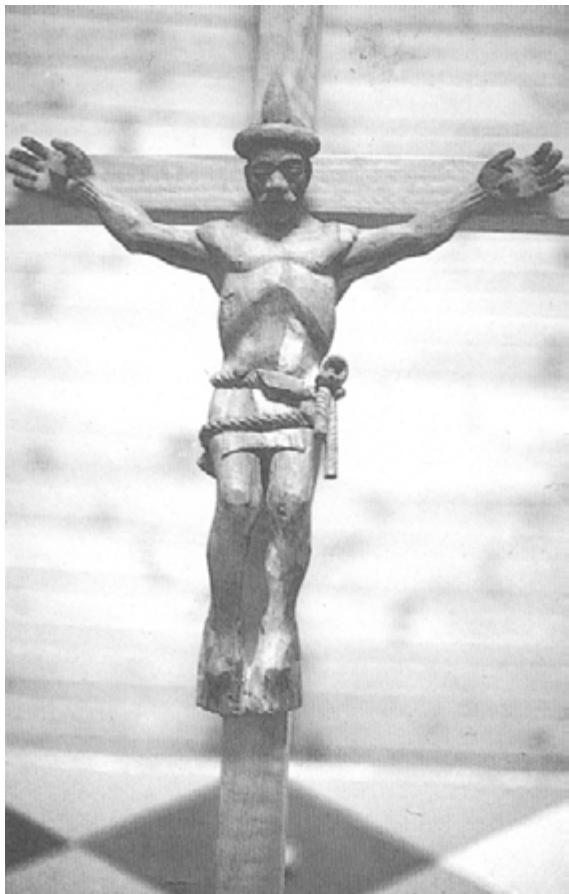


Plate 25: Ruben Xulu, Processional crucifix, 1976, Catholic Church of Njengabantu, Photo Dina Cormick

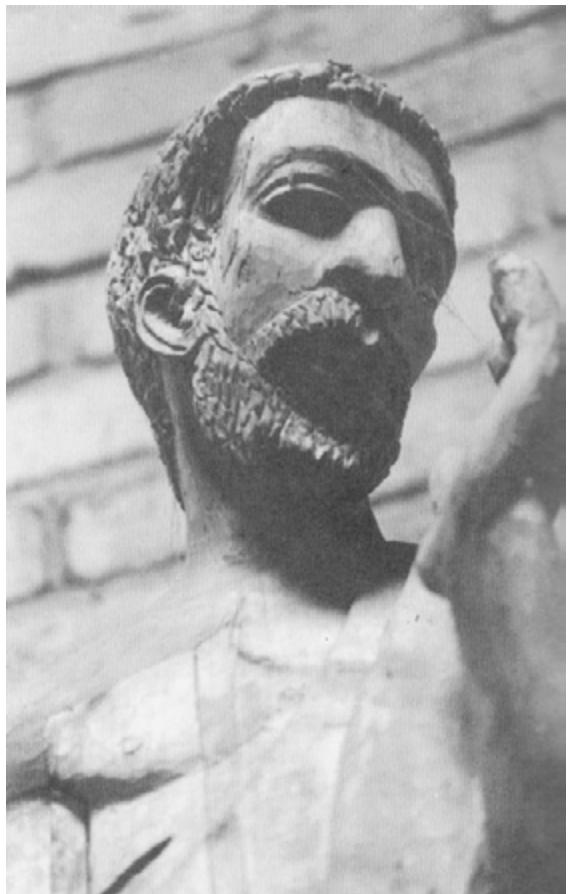


Plate 26: Ruben Xulu, *The Ascension*, 1976, Catholic Church of Njengabantu, Photo Dina Cormick



Plate 27: Sydney Kumalo, Station 1, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 28: Sydney Kumalo, Station 2, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 29: Sydney Kumalo, Station 3, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 30: Sydney Kumalo, Station 4, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 31: Sydney Kumalo, Station 5, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 32: Sydney Kumalo, Station 6, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 33: Sydney Kumalo, Station 7, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 34: Sydney Kumalo, Station 8, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 35: Sydney Kumalo, Station 9, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 36: Sydney Kumalo, Station 10, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 37: Sydney Kumalo, Station 11, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 38: Cecil Skotnes, Station 12, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 39: Sydney Kumalo, Station 13, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 40: Sydney Kumalo, Station 14, baked brick clay, 1957, St Peter Clavers, Seeisoville



Plate 41: Sydney Kumalo, Station 1, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 42: Sydney Kumalo, Station 2, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 43: Sydney Kumalo, Station 3, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong

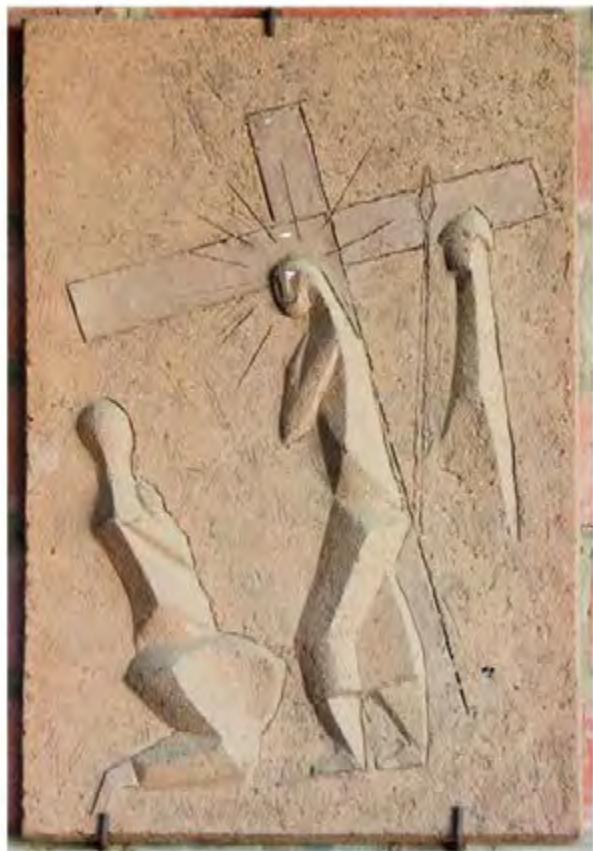


Plate 44: Sydney Kumalo, Station 4, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong

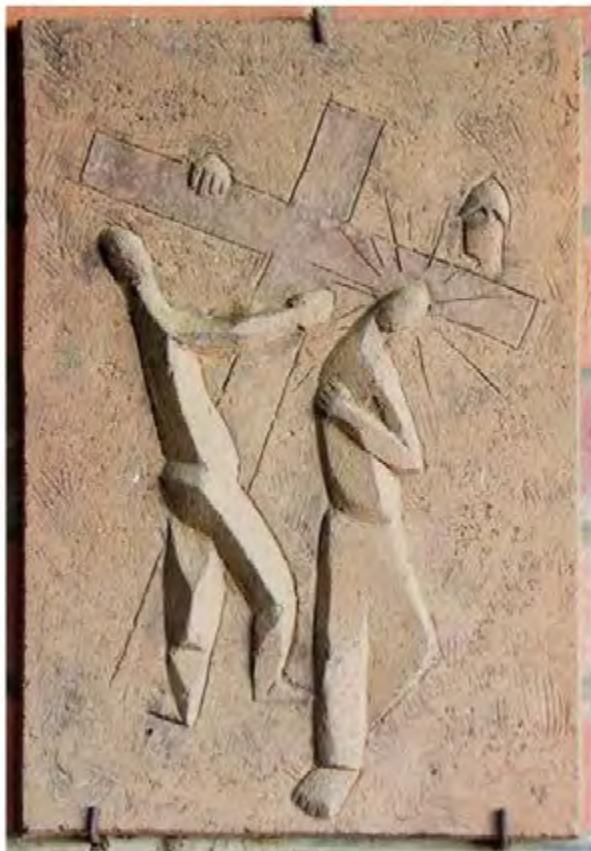


Plate 45: Sydney Kumalo, Station 5, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong

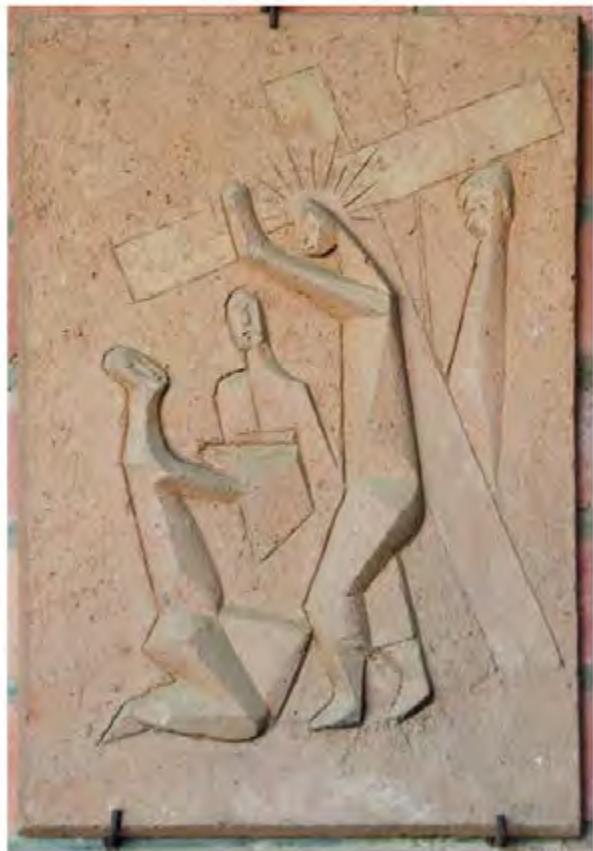


Plate 46: Sydney Kumalo, Station 6, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 47: Sydney Kumalo, Station 7, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 48: Sydney Kumalo, Station 8, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 49: Sydney Kumalo, Station 9, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong

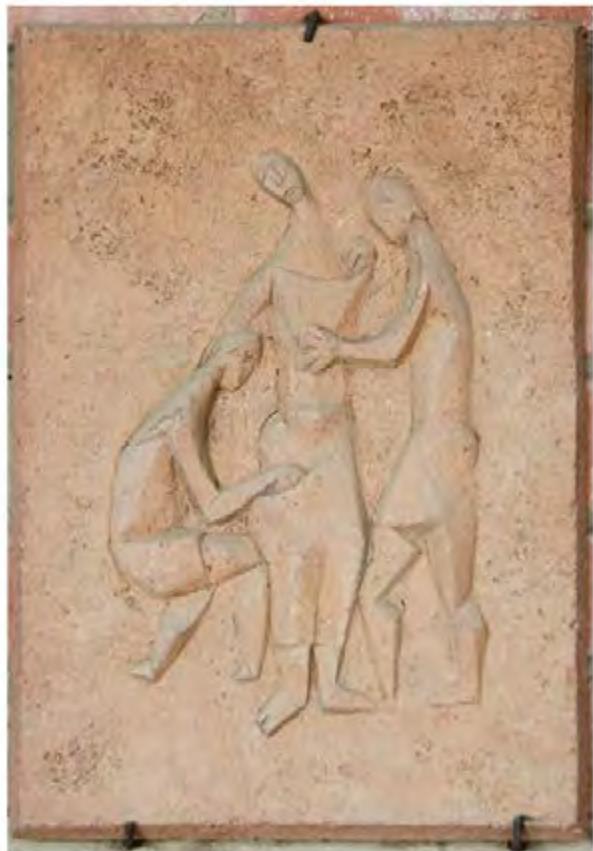


Plate 50: Sydney Kumalo, Station 10, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 51: Sydney Kumalo, Station 11, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 52: Sydney Kumalo, Station 12, terracotta, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 53: Sydney Kumalo, Station 13, terracotta, 1961,
Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 54: Sydney Kumalo, Station 14, terracotta, 1961,
Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 55: Artist unknown, Baule carving of a spirit figure (*blolo bian*), wood carving, Côte d'Ivoire, c. British Museum, London



Plate 56: Cecil Skotnes, The Apocalypse, mural painting, 1961, Church of Our Lady of the Rosary, Thabong



Plate 57: Ronald Harrison, *The Black Christ* (installation view), 1962, Oil Painting, Iziko South African National Gallery



Plate 58: Tshibumba Kanda-Matulu, *The Historic Death of Lumumba*, ca. 1973, paint on flour sack, photo Bohumil Jewsiewicki

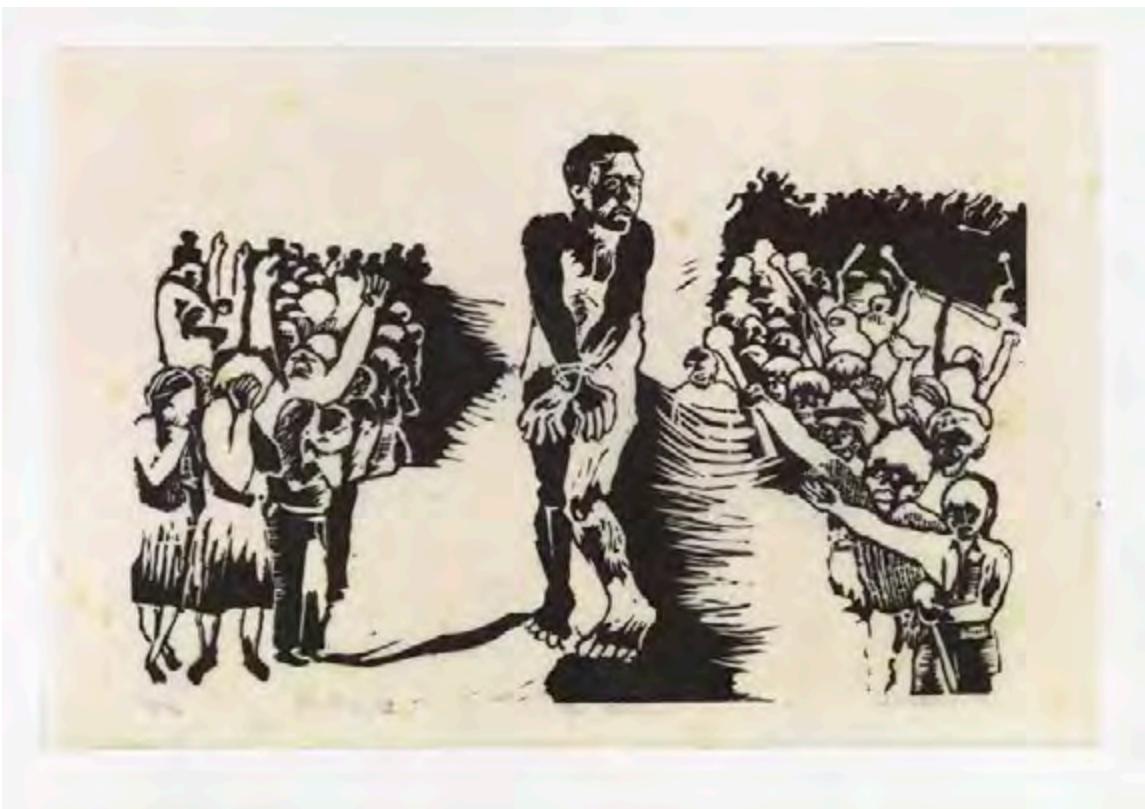


Plate 59: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *The Tribunal (Crucifixion I)*, 1976, Linocut, AP 6/6, collection of Rev Hans Blum.
Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 60: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *Torture and Humiliation (Crucifixion I)*, 1976, Linocut, AP 6/6, collection of Rev Hans Blum. Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 61: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *He endured Pain and Weakness (Crucifixion I)*, 1976, Linocut, AP 6/6, collection of Rev Hans Blum.
Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 62: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *A Tragic Blow to the Christians (Crucifixion I)*, 1976, Linocut, AP 6/6, collection of Rev Hans Blum.
Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 63: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *Mary and Joseph (Crucifixion I)*, 1976, Linocut, 3/14, collection of Rev Hans Blum.
Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 64: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *Premonition of the Hour (Crucifixion I)*, 1976, Linocut, 5/14, collection of Rev Hans Blum.
Photo Wolfgang Günzel

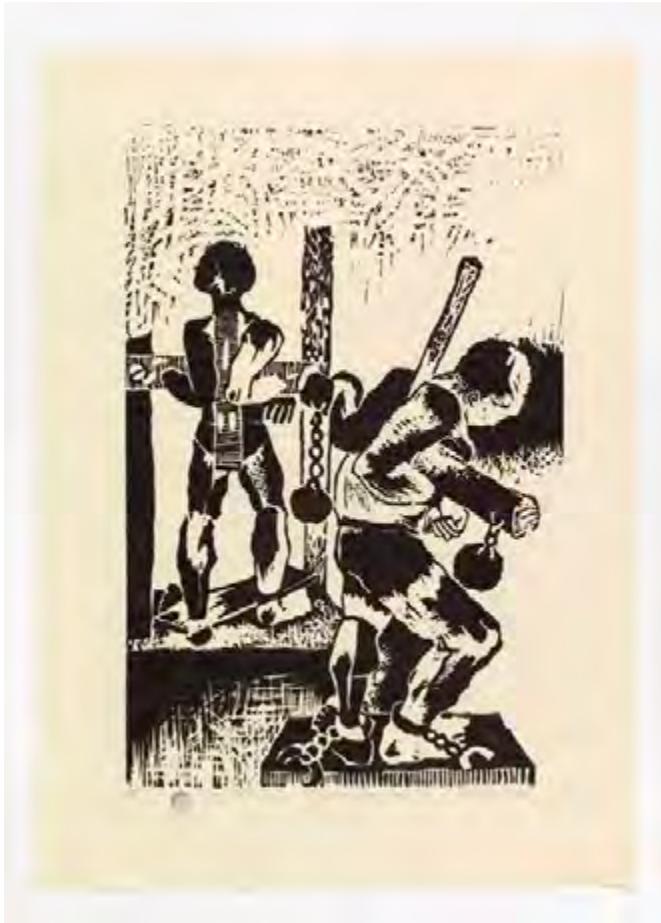


Plate 65: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *Pain on the Cross I (Crucifixion II)*, 1976, Linocut, 3/14, collection of Rev Hans Blum. Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 66: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *Pain on the Cross II (Crucifixion II)*, 1976, Linocut, 14/14, collection of Rev Hans Blum. Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 67: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *Pain on the Cross III (Crucifixion II)*, 1976, Linocut, 6/14, collection of Rev Hans Blum. Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 68: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *Pain on the Cross IV (Crucifixion II)*, 1976, Linocut, 8/14, collection of Rev Hans Blum. Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 69: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *Pain on the Cross V (Crucifixion II)*, 1976, Linocut, 7/14, collection of Rev Hans Blum. Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 70: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *Submission to Death (Crucifixion III)*, 1976, Linocut, AP 6/6, collection of Rev Hans Blum. Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 71: Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, *Resurrection (Defeat of the Cross) (Crucifixion III)*, 1976, Linocut, AP 6/6, collection of Rev Hans Blum.
Photo Wolfgang Günzel



Plate 72: Azaria Mbatha, *The Flight*, 1963, Linocut, Collection of Azaria Mbatha



Plate 73: Azaria Mbatha, Early Life of Jesus, 1963-4, Linocut, Durban Art Gallery



Plate 74: Azaria Mbatha, *The Passion of Christ*, 1963-4, Linocut, Carnegie Art Gallery, Newcastle

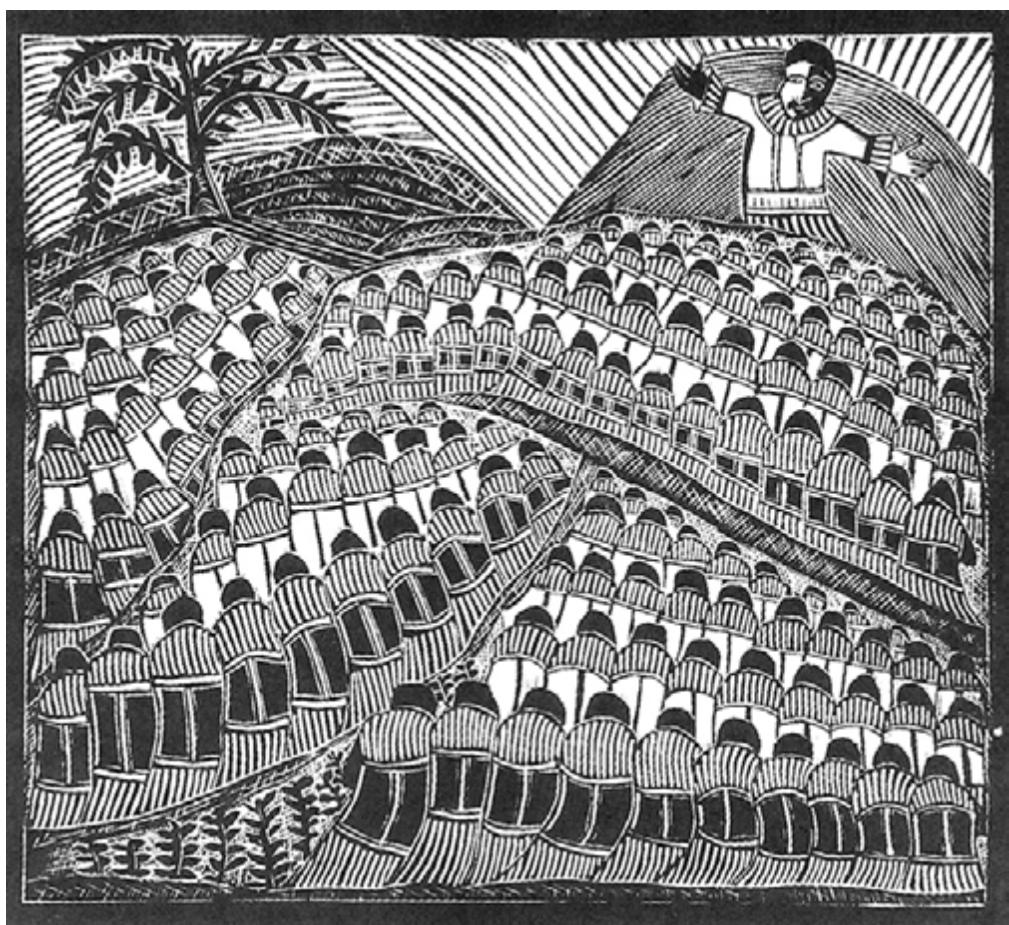


Plate 75: Azaria Mbatha, *Sermon on the Mount*, 1967, Collection of Azaria Mbatha



Plate 76: Azaria Mbatha, *Crucifixion/Reconciliation*, 1967-8, Linocut, Durban Art Gallery



Plate 77: Azaria Mbatha, *Between Hope and Despair*, ca.1980s, Linocut, Durban Art Gallery



Plate 78: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa, Station I*, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 79: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa, Station II*, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 80: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa, Station III*, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 81: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa, Station IV*, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 82: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station V, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 83: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station VI, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 84: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station VII, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 85: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station VIII, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 86: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station IX, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 87: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station X, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 88: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station XI, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 89: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station XII, 1995, Linocut, image taken from catalogue of Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition (1998)



Plate 90: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station XIII, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 91: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station XIV, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 92: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station XV - Jesus Rises from the dead, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy



Plate 93: Azaria Mbatha, *Stations of the Cross for Africa*, Station XVI - Reconciliation, 1995, Linocut, Gauteng Regional Legislature. Photo Anthea Pockroy

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