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“Mama Africa”: HIV/AIDS and national identity in South African choreography

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MAMA AFRICA

The spotlight warms the dance mats/The dancer begins walking with her arms stretched out to the side/Her hand moves backwards then forwards slicing the space around her/The sound of a slap/Her torso moves up and down/She stops/She stands still/She slides her arms open and out again to the side/She bends her body backwards/She curls over and unfolds/Sinking into a deep bend, she rocks to open her arms/She moves to close her arms/Fast/She balances/She rocks her body, gently playing with her weight/On the ground she opens and closes her body in the foetal position/The voiceover changes its voice/Another dancer begins to shift.¹

Introduction

Choreography articulates the body’s somatic and cultural identity, and a reading of South African dance theatre uncovers a complex and multifaceted version of the South African body, for instance, how the body is employed in medical and national discourse. Flatfoot



Photo 1 - TRANSMISSION: Flatfoot Dance Company's *Transmission: Mother to Child* (2005)

Dance Company is a contemporary dance company based in Durban, South Africa that “works to create socially conscious dance theatre”.² The company’s recent choreography of *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* (2005) explores the theme of motherhood, focusing on HIV/AIDS and mother-to-child transmission, the surrogacy relationship between ‘black’³ domestic workers and ‘white’ children, and the construction of the nation of South Africa as mother: a Mama Africa. More specifically, a reading of *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* uncovers a complex and multifaceted version of the South African body in relation to national discourse and HIV/AIDS, especially the term ‘mother-to-child transmission’ and its effects. In response to Flatfoot Dance Company’s choreography, I created a solo performance project entitled *Mothers and Daughters* (2005), in which I used my own embodied experience of the surrogate relationship between ‘black’ domestic workers and ‘white’ children in apartheid South Africa in order to suggest that the inheritance of this relationship makes me, like all South Africans, regardless of ‘race’, gender, or HIV status, responsible for the transmission and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS and motherhood in South Africa

The South African constitution of 1996 “guarantees equality on the basis of sex, gender and sexual orientation; principles enshrined in the Bill of Rights and supported by several other clauses in the Constitution” (Walker, Reid & Cornell, 2004: 38). However, over a decade later in South Africa poverty has become feminised, women and children are violently raped and murdered, and “being a victim of a violent attack is almost an unremarkable part of being a woman in South Africa, and violence is a contributing factor to HIV transmission” (Walker, Reid & Cornell, 2004: 39). Distressing statistics and reports on poverty, crime, violence and other social evils are common.⁴ These and other aspects of South African society, like certain social customs related to sexual practice, are conducive to aggravating the impact of HIV/AIDS on South African female bodies.⁵

There is an extremely high rate of infection of children if prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programmes are not effective and “[w]omen also face the terrible predicament of transmitting HIV to their babies either during childbirth or through breast-feeding” (Walker, Reid & Cornell, 2004: 50). Added to this, there is much confusion over the mixing of breast-feeding and formula feeding of infants and this further complicates HIV/AIDS treatment programmes. There is evidence that PMTCT programmes are not effective in South Africa because too few women are tested for HIV, receive antiretrovirals (ARVs), or breastfeed exclusively (Daniels, 2006). In addition, there are taboos connected to sexual practice and sensitivity to these are considered to be the woman’s responsibility;

if these taboos are not adhered to, the result is disease. Therefore, women are viewed as the source of the pollutants and are blamed for the HIV/AIDS disease (Walker, Reid & Cornell, 2004: 97). *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* (2005) is located in this debate, and through its choreography refers to contemporary South African social discourse around the disease and the role of women in the disease.

Though focusing on West African and African-American notions of motherhood, Patricia Hill Collins explores motherhood in the Afrocentric and Eurocentric context, and her analysis of the image of 'black' women's role as 'Mammy' influences my argument (2005: 285 – 295). Collins explores the function of this image and states that this categorisation places "Black women in a no-win situation" (2005: 287). Collins's investigation of the role of Bloodmothers (biological mothers), Othermothers (women who offer care and support to mother and child), and Women-Centred Networks shapes my thinking and offers South African women a positive strategy of resistance to sexist and racist practices in our society. For instance, Othermothers who might be blood relatives or friends of the Bloodmother are able to offer support to, and care for, the Bloodmother and children (Collins, 2005: 288). This, and the supportive structure of Women-Centred Networks, enables 'black' women to invoke Motherhood as a "symbol of power" (Collins, 2005: 287) and by extension South African women, ideally of all 'racial' classifications, are able to access this strategy to unite against the negative effects of South African patriarchal society and HIV/AIDS.

It is important to state that understanding women as "caregivers and mothers is central to understanding womanhood" (Walker, Reid & Cornell, 2004: 50) in South African society, which is why the construction of the South African woman as not only bearer and carer of future citizens, but as a carrier of disease and death, as transmitter in HIV/AIDS terminology, is dangerous. This is decidedly hazardous, given the lower status of women in South African society because it further oppresses women, especially 'black' women in rural and urban areas of poverty. Affixed to all of the above are the social stigma and myths attached to HIV/AIDS, which only complicate and encourage further negative practices and attitudes towards South African women.

HIV/AIDS in dance

David Gere, in his introduction to *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS*, raises the question – "How Can a Dance Say 'AIDS'?" (2004: 11). He explains how he formulated a "basic hypothesis, that all three factors must

be present in order for a dance to conjure AIDS in a viewer's mind" (2004: 12). These three factors are: "must depict gayness. I call this the *abjection factor*", "depiction of [...] homosexual desire", and finally, "in order for the dance to be perceived as having to do with AIDS, it must depict some mourning, ranging from the anticipation of loss to unabashed grieving. No loss, no conjuring" (2004: 12). Gere's formulation demonstrates a Western bias because of his strong emphasis on the relationship between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality, and this limits the acknowledgment of how the disease has impacted on all societies. *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* depicts none of Gere's points as, in South Africa, HIV/AIDS is "mainly heterosexually transmitted" (Walker, Reid & Cornell, 2004: 13). Nevertheless, *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* is a major choreography that represents current HIV/AIDS discourse, created and performed in the HIV/AIDS era, and is titled using a popular and medical HIV/AIDS term.



Photo 2 - TRANSMISSION: Flatfoot Dance Company's *Transmission: Mother to Child* (2005)

TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child is not concerned with homosexual desire, but the relationship between children and women; the focus is on heterosexual and maternal relationships in South African society which result in the majority of HIV/AIDS transmission cases.⁶ There is no depiction of mourning and, although there is a dance film image of a lone 'black' child projected near the closure of the dance performance, the female dancers onstage are choreographed holding babies and young children, gently rocking them and lullabying them with their bodies. This isn't a depiction of mourning or an anticipation of loss, but rather a powerful physical image of care and support; a community of motherhood. *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* is, from the onset, an 'AIDS dance' (to use Gere's terminology) that attempts to reproduce the HIV/AIDS body not as disease-carrier, but as a powerful positive transmitter, accessing popular political and positive connotations of South African women in the struggle *against* apartheid and HIV/AIDS. *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* is a dance that says 'AIDS', but is choreographed with a purposeful and empowering political strategy.

"*Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokodo/You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock*" is a popular phrase with its roots in a political protest song sung by women demonstrators on the Anti-Pass Laws March to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 9 August 1956. In 1955 the apartheid government had extended Pass Law regulations to include women, and in 1956 20 000 women marched on the apartheid regime's government buildings in Pretoria, singing "*Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokodo*". This phrase (and the title of a South African play by the Vusisizwe Players, 1996⁷) demonstrates the position of women as the backbone of the political struggle against the apartheid regime. After apartheid, this role and location of women in South African society has been further extended as it is women who in previous times cared for freedom fighters and who now care and provide for family members in the age of HIV/AIDS.

In the name of family values, so deeply anchored in the South African mindset, despite all that had been attempted by the Afrikaners to destroy the cohesion of their black adversaries, they [women] actively, massively joined in resistance to oppression, no doubt more than anywhere else in Africa and in ways that were uniquely theirs: no wonder Nelson Mandela understood that the ANC would win as soon as women entered the struggle. (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1997: 195)

A voiceover in the dance performance highlights the negative portrayal of mothers in the term mother-to-child transmission and responds with the suggestion of the term parent-to-child transmission. Liane Loots's choreographic intention, highlighted in the voiceover,

underpins women as historical activists, and calls for the inclusion and responsibility of men (and the wider community) in the transmission of the HIV/AIDS disease to children in the suggestion of the term parent-to-child transmission. This inclusion of and responsibility of men is implemented in a variety of ways; through the voice-over directly altering the medical term, the costuming of male dancers in hula-hoop skirts and female domestic worker uniforms, male and female dancers using similar movement languages, and through other choreographic materials, such as lighting and music that support Loots's choreographic response of locating men and women of the South African community as jointly responsible for the transmission of HIV/AIDS to the nation's children.

Choreographed moments of partnering between the dancers and unified group motifs amongst the Flatfoot dancers in *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* physically reflect the support and community bonds that do occur in the form of Othermothers and Women-Centred Networks, and how these, as well as stronger bonds across gender and 'race', are needed more than ever in post-apartheid HIV/AIDS South Africa. The struggle against apartheid is succeeded by the struggle against HIV/AIDS, and performance in all its configurations has a vital role to play by offering multiple theatrical representations that acknowledge the complexity of the disease and its effects, and of course, encouraging further discussion and debate in South African society. Dance, with its focus on the body, is a valuable and active weapon in this struggle as dance can offer bodies a means to allow multiple representations of a body with HIV/AIDS, and perhaps depict, instead of the diseased body, a determined and strong mother's fight for survival for both herself and her children. In the light of the onslaught of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, this positive image, which might be criticised as too optimistic, is desired and extremely necessary in the present South African AIDS pandemic.

Choreographing the dancing body to respond

Examining the body and identity in contemporary dance, Ann Cooper Albright's premise is that the dancing body is responsive (1997: xiii). She states how this responsive dancing body "engages with and challenges static representations of gender, race, sexuality, and physical ability, all the while acknowledging how deeply these ideologies influence our daily experience" (Albright, 1997: xiii). This notion of the responsive body that investigates the relationship between the body and identity is further developed when Albright describes dance as containing a "double moment of representation in which bodies are both producing and being produced by the cultural discourses of gender, race, ability, sexuality, and age" (1997: xxiii). This "double moment of representation" highlights how the

dancing body can be choreographed as responsive in order to expose and question cultural codes and conventions surrounding the dancer's physical body; the dancing body makes visible the process of identity formation – the “becoming” (Albright, 1997: 91). For example, two ‘black’ male dancers with strong physical appearances performing a choreography of gentle and soft movement qualities demonstrate how the dancing body is able to expose and question the ‘becoming’ of the gendered and cultural body, and thus the cultural positioning of African masculinity as predominantly athletic and aggressive is questioned and another representation of what it means to be a man in Africa is offered. My appropriation of the dancing body as responsive acknowledges how some choreographers are aware of this double moment of representation and thus choreograph to question, resist and offer other representations of the body in society, thus reiterating the claim by Jay Pather of Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre that South African dance is responsive (Young-Jahangeer, Miranda and others, 2004: 19).

Unlike most other cultural productions, dance relies on the physical body to enact its own representation. But at the very moment the dancing body is creating a representation, it is also in the process of actually forming that body. Put more simply, dancing bodies simultaneously produce and are produced by their own dancing. This double moment of dancing in front of an audience is one in which the dancer negotiates between objectivity and subjectivity – between seeing and being seen, experiencing and being experienced, moving and being moved – thus creating an interesting shift of representational codes that pushes us to rethink the experience of the body within performance. (Albright, 1997: 3)

What Albright offers my reading of dance performance is a double moment of representation that “allows for a slippage between what I call a somatic identity (the experience of one's physicality) and a cultural one (how one's body renders meaning in society)” (1997: xxiii). This recognition of the physical identity is particularly relevant to my study of the South African body in dance. It was the physical identity that affected (and still affects) many South Africans' experiences of their social context. Therefore it is vital that there is acknowledgement of the body as a material and physical form, and of how this materiality interconnects with the body's cultural context. This ‘slippage’ between the somatic and cultural identity of the body highlights the actuality of the constant negotiation and engagement of the dancing body with the discourses of ‘race’, gender, and nationality.

This double moment of representation must not be considered as a binary or an evenly-matched polarity with the body being produced and producing itself, as this locks the body into a match of opposites that are equally balanced, and thus fixes this identity dance as a

status quo where there can never be any movement in either direction; a constant state of animated suspension. Rather, this is a state where the body is intertwined, moving within and outside of dominant repressive discourses, constantly altering itself and being altered (Albright, 1997: 13). It is the dancing body's core position of offering the possibility of perpetual movement that produces these moments of slippage between how the dancing body moves and what the dancing body represents in society, between the personal experiences of the body and the cultural representation of the body, thus foregrounding the instability of identity construction in performance (Albright, 1997: 26). The various discourses of 'race', gender, and nationality are also undergoing this dance and are never themselves fixed. It is this moment of movement, this dance, this struggle, that allows for no static identity to colonise the body.

Transmission and the dancing body

The act of 'transmission' and its connection to body fluids,⁸ especially blood, is explored in a variety of ways in *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child*. Firstly, in the programme the choreographer Lliane Loots states how blood is connected to the birthing process, the South African nation's violent history and formation as a state, and how through blood the HIV/AIDS disease is transmitted. The choreography questions how women are constructed to represent the disease carriers of HIV/AIDS with sole responsibility for the transmission of the disease to children (2005: 15). Secondly, a video installation, which is projected at various moments throughout the piece, portrays different moving images. At times there is red paint resembling blood running across the screen, or hands being washed in this blood, or hands washing the blood off in water. Lastly, text (as voiceover, part of the video installation, or spoken by the performance-poet) refers to blood, for instance, "old blood cleansed by fresh blood" and "giving death through blood". This visual image of the hands both washing in and removing the blood remind me of Albright's notion of the body "becoming – and becoming undone" (1997: 5) as there is never any certainty where the exact moment occurs when the hands are cleansed of blood or immersed in blood for the first time. The hands in blood, like the body, are in a constant state of motion, preventing the fixing of dominant repressive discourses.

Barbara Browning "attempt[s] to engage recent work in medical anthropology in thinking about dance" (2004: 98), and focuses on Afro-Brazilian dances, the politics of breast milk and formula feeding, and how dancing, like breast-feeding, "is a potentially nurturing, sustaining activity, an act of transmission" (2004: 104). Here transmission is firstly regarded as positive and vital unlike the HIV/AIDS term which signifies the passing of

death and disease from a mother to her child. Browning's direct coupling of dance and breast-feeding and her article on the ambiguity and cultural values of fluids, and fluidity of the body, offers a choreographic pathway for this article and serves as a reminder of the dangerous relationship between the term mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS and the social connotations of fluids in South African society; at this junction, the politics of breast milk become a life or death sentence. This predominantly depends on the information received by the mother, to solely breast feed⁹ or exclusively formula feed (and this decision is profoundly influenced by economic factors), whether she is aware of her HIV status, whether she has access to a treatment programme, and how her "sexuality is informed by social expectation, personal aspirations and sexual customs" (Walker, Reid & Cornell, 2004: 46), such as societal beliefs attached to body fluids.

Loots's choreography demonstrates the fluidity of the body when a motif that references African warrior preparation is performed by both male and female dancers regardless of 'race'. A 'white' female performer, Caroline van Wyk, shifts her weight over to her left side and bends and lifts her right leg, carefully maintaining contact with the floor through the soles of her right foot. She brings this foot slowly off the floor. Suddenly the right foot hits the floor flat. As she does this, her arms mimic the journey over her right foot, quickly flicking the air with her wrists and palms upwards. She shifts her weight over to her right-hand side and begins to repeat the motif. Later, Thulile Bhengu, a 'black' female dancer, performs the motif. Though both dancers are moving through the same motif, the physical anatomical marking of the body, the dancers' skin colour, intersects with the cultural representation of their identity. Bhengu as a 'black' woman and van Wyk as a 'white' woman might share a gendered grouping, but this performance of the motif is a reminder of the 'racial' segregationist practices of the apartheid regime, and how recent the onset of democracy is in South Africa. This is important and, although there is debate on whether focusing on a particular dancing body's 'racial' grouping might be construed as objectification or negative categorisation as it prevents the dancer escaping the construct of 'race', 'racial' identity is not static as both Bhengu and van Wyk demonstrate as they move in and out of a dance language that traditionally would have been performed by mainly 'black' men and boys.

Mother to the South African nation

Another outcome of the choreographic intention and staging of the body in *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* is the articulation of the relationship of mother to the South African nation. The obvious link here is that it is women who literally give birth to

other South Africans. More importantly, there is recognition of the historical role performed by women in the struggle against apartheid, as freedom fighters and mothers to freedom fighters. In addition, there is a dominant and popular connotation or stereotype of “Mama Africa” in general circulation. However, this figure is not unique to ‘black’ South African history; the feminisation of the nation occurs in fellow Afrikaner and English settler histories, and this is represented through the predominance of monuments to women and children around the country.¹⁰

Michael Billig states that the “reproduction of nation-states depends upon a dialectic of collective remembering and forgetting, and of imagination and unimaginative repetition” (1995: 10). This dialectical dependence, which Billig points towards predominantly in the American context, enables an awareness of both the apartheid and post-apartheid context’s daily flagging of what Billig calls banal nationalism. Though termed banal, this banality is not without harm (1995: 6-7). For instance, the daily raising of the apartheid state flag in my ‘whites-only’ junior school in the 1980s, and recently the ‘Proudly South African’ campaign, which promotes commercial goods manufactured in South Africa, might appear to be superficial day-to-day or commercial rituals, but they shape the individual’s experience and understanding of the nation. Therefore, my perception and inheritance of South Africa as a nation is fashioned from my embodied knowledge of growing up under the apartheid regime as a ‘white’ South African, and from my present experience of South Africa as a nation that seeks to promote national pride through its economic and industrial strength.

In the concluding moments of *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child*, the female dancers cradle the young children in the stage lights, whilst the performance-poet refers to the South African nation as an 11-year old mother with AIDS, thus registering both the recent formation of the democratic nation (eleven years prior to the time of the performance) and the distressing reality of HIV/AIDS and its effect on South African bodies. This figuring of the nation as a pubescent HIV+ mother holds both positive and negative connotations. A Eurocentric version of the nation as mother reveals a stereotype of ‘black’ woman as domestic carer, soft and gentle, an earth-mother of sorts, almost maternal and passive: a ‘mammy’. This it seems is resonated by the dance’s film installation which portrays a ‘black’ domestic worker¹¹ walking a ‘white’ child down a suburban road. But herein lay a number of contradictions: this young nation-mother has HIV/AIDS – she is dangerous and diseased. She is a life-giver and life-taker as she transmits both life and death. There is the suggestion of violence against this national image who, as a young girl, is surely too



Photo 3 - TRANSMISSION: Flatfoot Dance Company's *Transmission: Mother to Child* (2005)

young to consent to sex, therefore resulting in the audience and me becoming conscious of the role that gender politics play in the transmission of the disease. This young mother is also a daughter of the disease and – like many young girls (and elderly women) in South Africa – is primarily responsible for the welfare of the family as a result of the loss and absence of both adult parents because of the disease. Moreover, my reading of the ‘black’ domestic worker walking the ‘white’ child alludes to Mama Africa caring for children who aren’t biologically her own and who are products of a hierarchy that is structured to oppress her; this is a Mama Africa who is a surrogate carer of all South Africans, no matter what the ‘race’, or the history, or the disease.

Accessing the history of ‘black’ South African women as mothers of freedom fighters, I perceive Mama Africa to be far more complex than what at first she might appear to be, and my reading of Mama Africa is further complicated when male dancers don female domestic worker uniforms. This Mama Africa, this image of nation, is now both male and female, thus visually locating both sexes (and all ‘races’) in the nationalist discourse, the disease HIV/AIDS, parenthood and surrogacy. Both sexes are parents, and surrogate parents to children of the nation and children of the disease. *TRANSMISSION: Mother to*

Child is a performance response to current HIV/AIDS medical and cultural discourses that stigmatise women. The choreography highlights the urgency of national responsibility and accountability for the disease across all 'races', sexes and regardless of HIV/AIDS status.

Daughter of the South African nation: Responsibility and Accountability

Koos Kombuis is singing about a sweet paradise where Afrikaans dances and artists make more money than preachers/Where hemlines are short and vegetables taste like cake/Where the cops are nice and the jails are empty/Where black and white are one and AIDS is a cold/I am walking backwards holding someone's bag and coat/I have to crouch as low as I can/The wire wrapped around my torso limits this/I go and arrange her coat and bag on the table/I walk backwards as fast as I can ensuring my soles of my big feet maintain as much contact with the floor/Moving through the balls of my feet to my toes/Someone enters late/I take their bag and coat and walk backwards/I place the bags and coat neatly on the table/Later, someone else is late/I refuse to take their coat and bag/They walk and sit quickly and quietly on the blue blanket.¹²

There were two images in *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* that led me to shift the emphasis from the transmission of HIV/AIDS from mother to child to focus on the relationship between 'black' domestic workers and 'white' children in my performance project *Mothers and Daughters*. The first image was that of the 'black' domestic worker walking a 'white' child down a suburban road. The second image was the donning of domestic worker uniforms by two 'black' male dancers near the end of *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child*. The dancers performed a motif that referenced a traditional African dance step associated with warrior preparation, except that this motif was performed with gentle movement qualities instead of the virile and athletic connotations normally associated with it. In this image the male dancers physically embody the call for responsibility and accountability of South African men in the current context of HIV/AIDS by moving with qualities associated with motherhood, and by wearing the work costumes of female carers.

Using my own embodied experience of this surrogate relationship in apartheid South Africa, and the call for the sharing of responsibility and accountability of South Africans of all genders for the transmission of HIV/AIDS, *Mothers and Daughters* was a solo performance project in which I performed both the role of the domestic worker and the child she helped to raise. I aimed to highlight how all South Africans regardless of 'race' share a responsibility for the nation and her children. Another reason for locating this performance in apartheid South Africa was to make the direct link between the struggle against apartheid and the struggle against HIV/AIDS; to demonstrate how dance can offer multiple representations of the body, and how this bodily performance could be used as a

form of social activism against HIV/AIDS, as illustrated by the march of female bodies on the apartheid regime's government buildings in Pretoria on 9 August 1956.

The apartheid government legislated against public gatherings and protest. For instance, in the Suppression of Communism Act 44 of 1950 the "Minister of Justice [had] absolute administrative powers to prohibit a particular gathering, or to ban gatherings generally in any area and for any period specified by him. The size or location of the gathering (including indoor meetings) did not limit the Act's application" (Rauch & Storey, 2006). Many governments, in periods of acute unease and unrest, curb and legislate against public gatherings of bodies.¹³ Nevertheless, in the previously legislated 'white' suburban areas of apartheid South Africa where I grew up, 'black' domestic workers tended to hold social gatherings by meeting up and sitting on blankets on the grass verges outside the fenced properties of their 'white' employers. Therefore, by email request, the spectators of my practice-based performance project *Mothers and Daughters* were asked to sit on blankets placed in the performance area.

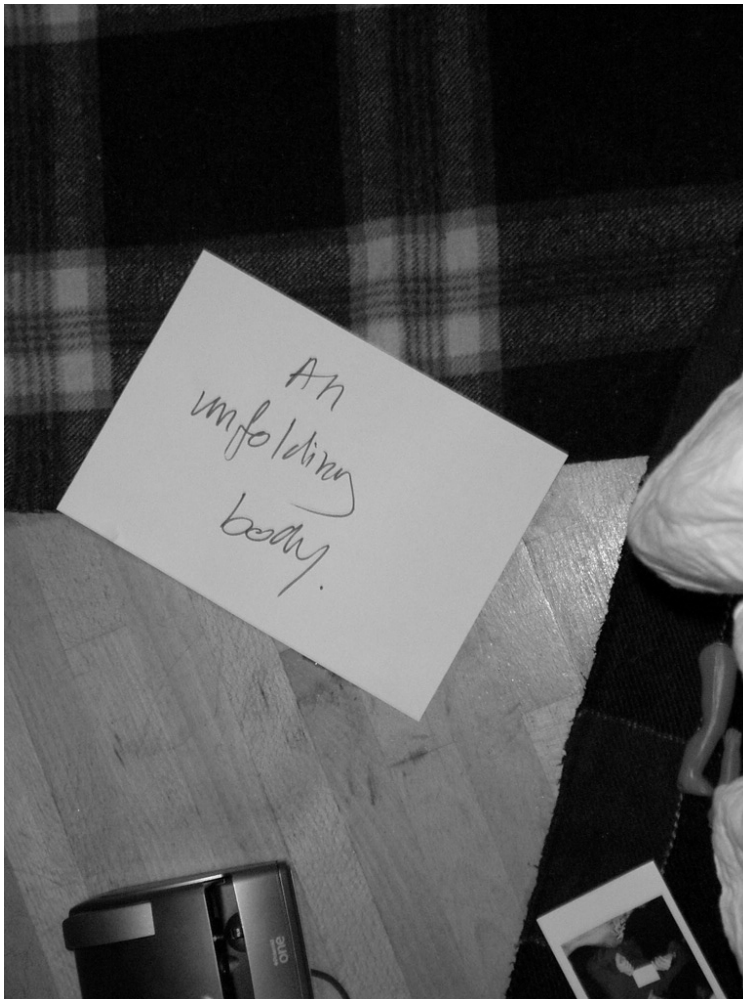


Photo 4 –MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS: Sarahleigh Castelyn's *Mothers and Daughters* (2005)

Underlying the spacing and placing of my audience was a desire to create a sense of gathering and sharing, and hint at possible future moments of mobilisation. The congregating of my spectators on the blankets was an attempt to represent a public gathering of bodies; a group of bodies that might behave badly against an oppressive state.¹⁴ On the other hand, this tactic of grouping the bodies of the audience together to encourage mobilisation can be negative too, and might hint at an attempt to enclose my audience and carefully watch and monitor them, looking for signs of possible rebellion. This “enclosure” (Foucault, 1997: 141) of bodies represents the enclosure of ‘racial’ bodies in apartheid South Africa and how the apartheid state monitored access to assigned ‘racial’ spaces through the enforcement of pass book and other apartheid legislation.

Nevertheless, Michel Foucault emphasises how this “principle of ‘enclosure’” is never “sufficient” and instead states how the enclosed space is divided up into further spaces occupied by individual bodies, and these are to be forever monitored for absences and presences in order to be supervised and assessed (1997: 143). This mammoth task, because of its scale, and the need for constant checking on it, could never and can never be completed or perfectly deployed. In the apartheid South African context the verges and the bodies sitting on the blankets on the verges could never be constantly monitored for absences and presences. The domestic worker’s on-site sleeping accommodation at the back of the ‘white’ employer’s garden could never be supervised and policed around the clock. And despite the threat of, and visitations and arrest by, apartheid government Security Branch officials, bodies could and would meet in secret and in public protest such as that of the women on the Anti-Pass Laws March of 1956. Moreover, the agency of the domestic workers sitting on the blankets must not be undermined or ignored, as many women built community networks which supported their home and work-life (McDowell, 1999: 86-87), and it is these Women-Centred Networks (Collins, 2005: 287) which now offer vital support in the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Hidden in my bra were photographs with slogans and statements scrawled on their reverse which I gradually revealed. These photographs consisted of a collection of landscape pictures of the South African coastline, and blurred pictures of game in the nature reserves. Also included were Polaroids of the performance area in various states of rehearsal. Originally, the photographs were to be bound with the plastic dolls tied around my body with garden wire underneath my costume of a domestic worker’s uniform. This idea was to invite discussion on the landscape of the body represented by the landscape



Photo 5 – MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS: Sarahleigh Castelyn's *Mothers and Daughters* (2005)

pictures of South Africa,¹⁵ and of course to make clear the construction of South Africa as a surrogate mother to all South Africans regardless of 'race' and gender.

Furthermore, my reason for the placing of the photographs was to make a visual link between my performance project and the debate on HIV/AIDS transmission via breast milk. Barbara Browning, in her discussion on the inclusion of Chico Cesar's song "Mama Africa" in the Brazilian film *Central Station* (1998), which contains lyric describing Mama Africa as a single mother preparing a baby bottle, states that "if 'Mama Africa' is a romanticised notion of cultural heritage transmitted lovingly, at the breast as it were, Chico Cesar's lyric demonstrates simultaneously the artificiality of the notion, and its continuing relevance and capacity to nurture and sustain" (2004: 103). I am also an aspect of her "cultural and political [and nurturing!] construct" (Browning, 2004: 105), and therefore am responsible and accountable to Mama Africa in relation to her apartheid history and HIV/AIDS transmission and treatment.

The cast of *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* was made up of dancers of many body types, 'races' and genders, and could demonstrate a common movement language and partner-work. I, however, was performing solo. As a force of circumstance, this has many pitfalls; I am unable to demonstrate effectively choreographically the relationships between 'black' men and 'black' women, 'black' women and 'white' women, and 'black' men and 'white' women which *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child* stages and investigates. In response, I accessed costumes and props in my attempt to portray these relationships, especially the relationship between 'black' domestic workers and 'white' children. This resulted in my binding of 'white' dolls to my body underneath my costume of a domestic worker's uniform. My London-based audience was not able to recognise movement codes and conventions typical of South African genders and cultures, and therefore my tactic was to focus on the qualities of these performed movements. For example, the crouching movement I performed in the opening of the performance piece, which represented the lower status of South African female domestic workers, was constantly repeated, and this repetition hopefully allowed the audience to recognise a body that served and laboured.

In my performance I distributed my photographs and encouraged the audience member to hold a photograph, show the slogan, and I would take a Polaroid picture of their pose. The resulting Polaroid picture was passed over (transmitted?) to the audience member. Despite all the posturing I was making to take the perfect photograph, the resulting image was blurred and poor. This was firstly an attempt to demonstrate the slippage that occurs

between the cultural identity (which is both constructed by the individual and society) and the somatic identity: the photograph could not accurately capture this slippage. Furthermore, this alluded to the construction of 'racial' identities in apartheid South Africa; the Population Registration Act of 1950 and its enforcement demonstrated how the apartheid regime articulated 'race' based on "appearance and lifestyle" and not descent (Posel, 2001: 102). My body was classified as 'white' because I resembled a 'white' female and my parents lived in a 'white' area of town. Whether or not my ancestors were not 'white' or not 'black' or not 'coloured' or not 'Indian' was not the issue or criterion for my 'white' classification in terms of the Population Registration Act. The practice of determining 'race' by descent (as in the United States of America) was not adopted by the apartheid social engineers, because of the history of inter-racial relationships (and transmission) amongst people in South Africa.

Testing for race on the basis of descent (the American 'one drop of blood' notion) was also out of kilter with the social meanings of race. Although popular discourses of race were shot through with notions of 'blood' – 'pure' races being 'full-blooded' – the daily-lived experience of race derived from the ordinary, immediate experience of how people looked and lived. 'Full-bloodedness' was a metaphor for racial purity rather [than] a literal statement of its preconditions. Indeed, with many supposedly 'white' South African families having distant, or not so distant, histories of intermarriage across color lines, the issue of descent was often a discomfiting one, and not considered the most appropriate basis on which to defend white privilege. (Posel, 2001: 93-94)

The statements on my photographs included the following: "my body is a racist", "my body is an escape artist", "my body has scarred other bodies" and "my great-great grandfather was a magistrate who whipped people". These statements were an attempt to acknowledge my cultural body's involvement in racist and colonial history, and my ongoing responsibility and accountability to the nation, particularly in the face of HIV/AIDS. By taking Polaroids of the audience members holding these photographs (with their statements), I was enabling them to witness my act of taking responsibility for my cultural body's involvement in history and accounting my own bodily history in South Africa. I was not aware of the injustices of apartheid during my youth, but my 'white' body was permitted access to particular areas and aspects that were constructed for the benefit and privilege of 'white' South Africans. By highlighting my 'white' body for the audience, I attempted to foreground my 'white' privilege and the politics of being a 'white' body in South Africa. Nevertheless despite my 'race' privilege, I am a child of Mama Africa and am therefore to

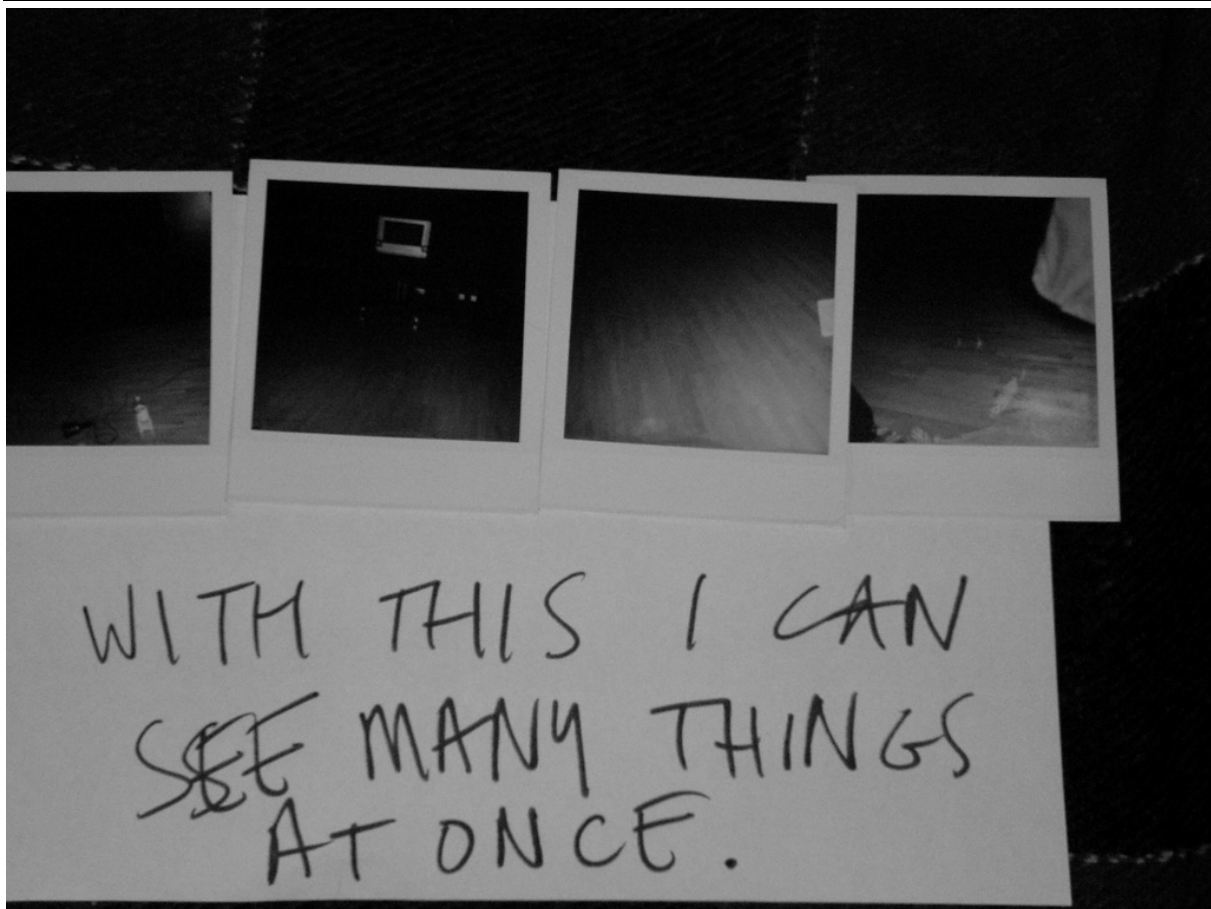


Photo 6 – MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS: Sarahleigh Castelyn's *Mothers and Daughters* (2005)

be held accountable for her apartheid history and am therefore responsible for the transmission and treatment of HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

Conclusion

I had engineered a response section for the audience at the end of the performance. Here an audience member arranged four Polaroid photographs of the performance venue in a row. Underneath the Polaroids was written “[w]ith this I can see many things at once.” This insightful response led me to consider Foucault’s development of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, which Foucault posits as “polyvalent in its applications” (1977: 205), for example, as a laboratory and as a site for observation (Foucault, 1977: 201). The apartheid state utilised this ‘machine’ in its racial policies, through its legislation and law enforcement, and through its citizens and their daily rituals, including myself as a ‘white’ South African, in order to “alter [my] behaviour, to train or correct [myself and other] individuals” (Foucault, 1977: 203).

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously

upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relations in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (Foucault, 1977: 202 – 203)

This serves to stress how important it is to acknowledge my own function in the apartheid state. My body was inscribed with apartheid power relations. My body was both subject and object of the apartheid machine. My 'white' body was allowed access to certain areas of privilege that the 'black' domestic worker who cared for me was not. According to the interplay of apartheid power relations, my body was forbidden access to other areas of South African life. My 'white' body was a tactic of the apartheid regime. My 'white' body represented and spoke for the apartheid state. My 'white' body oppressed other bodies for apartheid, and my 'white' body constrained itself for apartheid; my 'white' body transmitted for the apartheid state.

Likewise it is necessary to acknowledge my body's function in HIV/AIDS South Africa. My body is both subject and object of HIV/AIDS discourse, and my performance of both the role of 'black' domestic worker and 'white' child is an attempt to portray the complexity of the national image of Mama Africa and her children. The performance project's focus on, and performance of, this surrogate relationship of domestic worker and child, and nation and daughter, in apartheid South Africa paralleled the relationship of nation and citizens in HIV/AIDS South Africa; it is vital that South Africans are aware of the role and representation of their bodies in HIV/AIDS discourse, and therefore I, like other South African performance-makers, can respond and transmit multiple versions of the HIV/AIDS body. This is especially important as I argue that, as a part of the South African community, I have a responsibility for the disease, and through my awareness of this role, I can access strategies in the struggle against the disease. This is similar to Flatfoot Dance Company altering negative representations of mothers who live with the disease, and encouraging fathers of the disease to take responsibility for supporting and caring for their families with the disease. I know I am a child of "an 11-year old mother with AIDS",¹⁶ and likewise, I know I am a child of apartheid South Africa.

Notes

- 1) Throughout this article, I incorporate creative writing sections, differentiated from the main body of the text by italics. These sections serve as a methodological tool to describe the dance performances I viewed, choreographed, or performed in. These creative writing extracts and my use of photographs (as a visual layer) are intended to provide the reader with not only a form of documentation and evidence of these performances and historical moments, but a type of pictorial and textual choreography too. The first italicised excerpt refers to the opening moment of Flatfoot Dance Company's *TRANSMISSION: Mother to Child*.
- 2) Jomba! 2005 Contemporary Dance Experience Programme Note, p. 15.
- 3) After much contemplation, I have kept my placing of 'racial' categories in inverted commas throughout this article for the following reason: to make the reader aware of the artificiality of 'race', and how this apartheid categorisation had very real effects on the South African body – then and now in the early stages of the twenty-first century. I know some might view the text as 'littered' with these grammatical markings, but I believe that this type of literary 'littering' further heightens the absurd and destructive literal value-system placed on a South African's skin-colour.
- 4) Whilst I was preparing this article, South Africa was part of the 2006 global campaign of '16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women' (25 November – 10 December). Because of the high level of violence directed towards the young, South Africa has included children in this campaign. See '16 Days of Activism against Abuse', 2006, <<http://www.southafrica.info/women/16days.htm>> (Accessed 7 December 2006).
- 5) There is substantial research into South Africa and HIV/AIDS conducted by both local and international organisations. This article acknowledges that there is an ongoing debate about social practices, prevention and treatment of the disease. HIV/AIDS information presented here is specific to the period of my research into the body and South African dance theatre. For instance, when I began this research in 2005, the South African Health Minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, promoted an AIDS treatment consisting of a diet of African potatoes, garlic and beetroot, and was publicly denounced by Stephen Lewis of the United Nations at the Toronto Aids Conference 2006. Finally, after years of AIDS denial, the South African government announced it would increase its fight against the disease by rolling out more treatment campaigns and working with other organisations. The (now ex-)South African Deputy Minister of Health, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, stated that the "implementation of programmes to prevent mother-to-child transmission has been 'most uneven'". See 'SA government ends AIDS denial', 2006, <http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=288029&area=/breaking_news__national/> (Accessed 6 December 2006). For more recent reports on the disease in the South African press, see 'Aids: A Special Report', 2006, <http://www.mg.co.za/specialreport.aspx?area=aids_report> (Accessed 6 December 2006).
- 6) See Didier Fassin, 2007, *When Bodies Remember: Experience and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*, translated by Amy Jacobs and Gabrielle Varro (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press) for extensive anthropological research into the politics of AIDS in South Africa.
- 7) For more on the Vusisizwe Players, see Loren Kruger, 1999, *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics Since 1910* (London and New York: Routledge), p. 181.
- 8) I acknowledge that there is valuable performance research into the body and the transmission of HIV/AIDS via bodily fluids, but for the purpose of this article's focus and length, this is not fully explored, nor is the link between blood and sacrificial practices and beliefs.
- 9) The choice and practice of solely breast or formula feeding is currently recommended by organisations such as the United Nations. However this choice and its implementation are intricately tied to economics, access to services (for example, electricity and clean water), and social beliefs and customs. For more detailed research into the politics and practices of infant feeding in South Africa, see the following: R. M. Bland, N. C. Rollins, H. M. Coovadia, A. Coutsooudis, and M. L. Newell, 2007, "Infant Feeding Counselling for HIV-Infected and Uninfected Women: Appropriateness of Choice and Practice", *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, 85, 289-296; Anna Coutsooudis, 2005, "Infant Feeding Dilemmas Created by HIV: South African Experiences", *American Society for Nutritional Sciences*, 956-959; and Tanya Doherty, Mickey Chopra, Lungiswa Nkonki, Debra Jackson, and Ted Greiner, 2006, "Effect of the HIV Epidemic on Infant Feeding in South Africa: 'When They See Me Coming with the Tins They Laugh at Me'", *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, 84, 90-96.
- 10) See Sarah Benton, 1998, "Founding Fathers and Earth Mothers: Women's Place at the 'Birth' of Nations", in *Gender, Ethnicity and Political Ideologies*, ed. by Nickie Charles and Helen Hintjens (London and New York: Routledge), 27-45 (p. 38).
- 11) See Alison Jill King, 2007, *Domestic Service in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Deference and Disdain* (Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, VT: Ashgate) for research into the conditions of domestic workers (their work and lifestyle) in post-apartheid South Africa. King follows on from Jacklyn Cock,

- 1979, *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation* (London: Women's Press) and develops the concept of the "chain of otherness" and "embodied female labour" (p. 3).
- 12) Description of the opening section of my *Mothers and Daughters* performance.
- 13) For instance, the British government's Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 "makes it illegal to hold an unauthorised protest within 1 km of Parliament Square". See Jason Bennetto and Terry Kirby, 2006, "Acts of Defiance Against War Turned Ordinary People into Criminals", <<http://www.news.independent.co.uk/uk/legal/article331782.ece>> (Accessed 12 December 2006).
- 14) See Susan Leigh Foster, 2003, "Choreographies of Protest", *Theatre Journal*, 55, 2003, pp. 395-412. Foster, though referring to three American protests, demonstrates the importance and role of the physical body in "political 'movements'" (2003: 412).
- 15) I explore the relationship of the body to landscape in another related performance project.
- 16) Extract of the closing text spoken by the Performance Poet in *Transmission: Mother to Child*.

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