

The power of Hair

The politics of Hair in a (South) African context

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About two years ago South African musician Hugh Masekela made a public announcement that he would not take pictures with women who wear weaves or do not wear their hair in its natural state, which caused an uproar from women across the country. Local celebrity Dineo Ranaka had to wrap her head with a towel to hide her weave so she could take a picture with legendary musician ‘Bra Hugh’ stating that he could not let it kill her joy, adding she refused to let her ego rob her of a moment to smile and laugh with this “lovely” man. Ask almost any black woman and she will probably tell you that her relationship with her hair is similar to a love affair. Whether it’s the long hours spent waiting at the hair salon, the pain endured from relaxing or braiding, or the amount of money spent—hair is truly an obsession.

TV and Radio personality Dineo Ranaka and legendary musician Hugh Masekela

Within Black culture in South Africa hair is important, and it is synonymous with identity, many individuals use their hair to make a statement. For the longest time, black women have been made to feel ugly, insecure and ashamed because of their natural hair, while at the same time scrutinised for their choice to wear extensions, weaves or braids. In a column in one of the local newspapers Masekela explores the history behind what has influenced our ideas about 'good hair' and 'bad hair'. He explains how African people's hair is "an amazing psychological jigsaw puzzle regarding their identity, image, self-esteem and heritage". This oppressive hair hierarchy is linked to race, the pursuit of straighter hair during apartheid and its hair tests to determine race- which I will unpack later on in this talk, resulting in derogatory terms and splits within communities, and embarrassment and shame over texture.

Our hair choices, then, are built on the politics of race-based oppression alone. He adds that “Africans and Europeans have had a long historical issue about African hair. Historically, we’ve been given an inferiority complex about who we are; about our noses being flat, our lips being big and our asses being big. Of course we were defeated in trying to defend Africa, we were enslaved and then we were urbanised and also religionised. We are very very far from who we are; we’re only a society that imitates other cultures.”

<http://ewn.co.za/2015/11/02/OPINION-Danielle-Bowler-Hair-and-Hugh-Masekela>

My hair story

Growing up it never occurred to me that straightening my hair was potentially problematic. I must add that straightening my hair did not mean that I doubted my Black identity or was ashamed of my natural hair texture. I grew into it- in the sense that I never questioned my mother, and because most of my peers relaxed their hair- it seemed normal. In other words, my generation shared values of a specific culture, space and time. Every time schools were about to reopen my mom would take me to the salon, which would be packed with other school going girls, who were there for the same reason. We had to straighten our hair to 'look presentable' and neat. Some opted to plait their hair which too had to be presentable, neat and looked after. Hair salons in townships range from a shack in the back or front yard of a house, the garage of a house, or shipping containers which have been turned into hair salons. In down town Johannesburg, we have pop up salons, along the streets. In most salons women can get their hair and nails done and some are also barber shops.

Shipping containers converted into hair salons/ barber shops in most townships in South Africa



Pop up salons: street vendors treat clients on the streets of Johannesburg



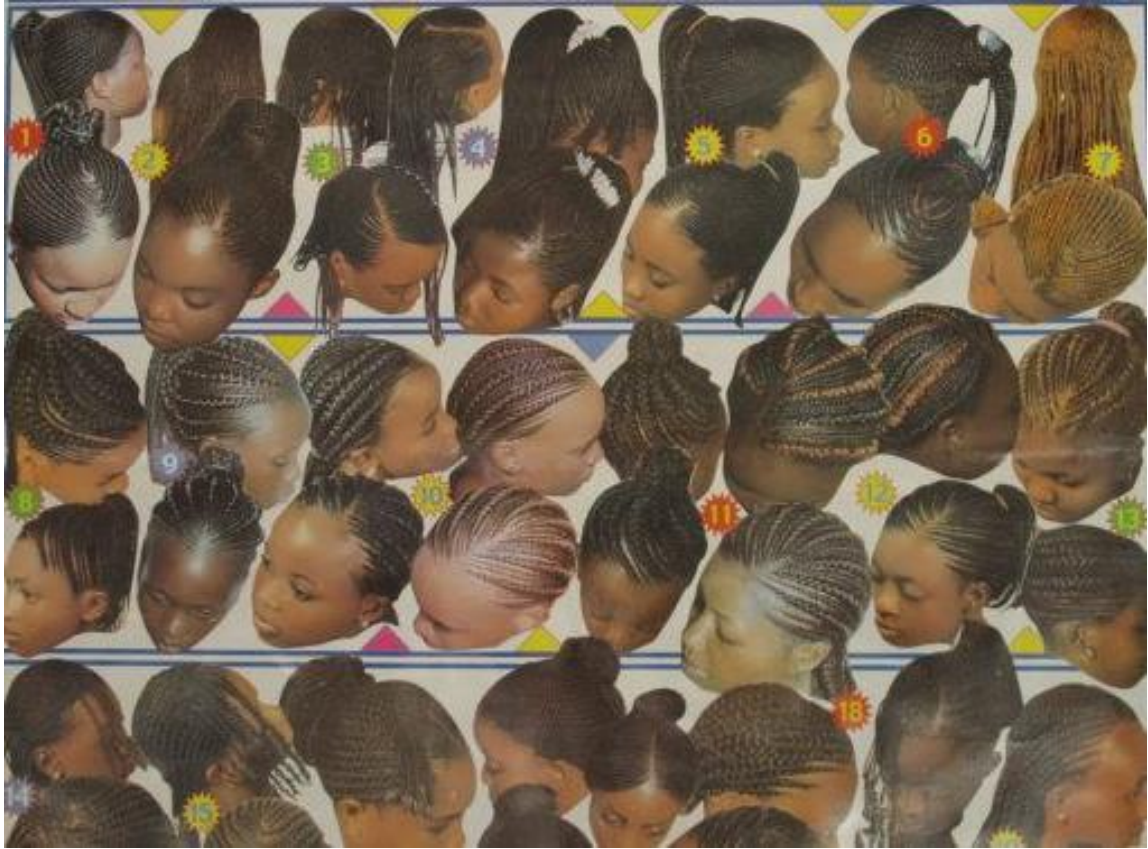


My hair story continued.....

What is interesting to note is that most hair stylists working in South Africa are not South African, my first stylist's name is Olga, and she is from Mozambique, she was the best in the sub location Naledi ext 2 where my mother lives. In Isizulu there is a saying "ubuhle buyabekezelwa" which means that beauty is something which you should be willing to persevere for. I'd sit for more than two days getting my braids done. Now that I have moved, my current hairstylists are from Ghana, they take pride in their work, often declaring that South Africans are lazy considering the high unemployment rate. Hair care is a vital source of jobs for women and men, who make up a large slice of the informal economy on the poorest continent. They make a good living off styling peoples hair, they are willing to knock off late. Twists which used to take over two days to finish are now done in three hours min by Masai warriors, and we now also have the option of twist wigs which are trending. At the Arabella hair salon, you name the style, they do it. If you don't know what to do, they have an album with the various hairstyles they have done for other clients.

Masai twist braids- done in 3hours by men in Arabella hair salon - Midrand





A brief history of Hairstyling in Africa

The texture of black hair varies across Africa ranging from loose curls to kinks and coils. Most Africans express similar views on the cultural and social significance of their hair. Hairstyles in Africa are ever-changing, yet deeply rooted in a shared past. Africans had symbolic hairstyles because of tribal traditions.

The Social significance of hair

According to Byrd and Tharps “in the early fifteenth century, hair served as a carrier of messages in most West African societies” (Tharps and Byrd 2001). Within the Mende, Wolof (of Senegal), Yoruba (of Nigeria), and Mandingo (Sierra Leone) communities, hair often communicated age, marital status, ethnic identity, religion, wealth, and rank in the community. Hairstyles could also be used to identify a geographic region.

In the book *Hair Story: untangling roots of black hair*, the work of anthropologist Sylvia Boone is cited, and she notes that among the Mende tribe of Sierra Leone, ‘big hair, plenty of hair, much hair’ were qualities a women wanted. Woman's hair is a sign of femininity. Both thickness and length are elements that are admired by the Mende.

Thickness means the woman has more individual strands of hair and the length is proof of strength. It takes time, care and patience to grow a beautiful, full head of hair. Ideas about hair root women to nature. The way hair grows is compared to the way forests grow. The vegetation on earth is the "hair" on the head of Mother Nature in the same way the hair on the head of a woman is her "foliage." A woman with long, thick hair illustrates a life force, she may be blessed with a green thumb giving her the ability to have a promising farm and many healthy children. And so Hairstyles are very important in Mende society. A Mende woman's hair must be well groomed, clean, and oiled.

The next Black and white photographic print shows four young women, initiated into the Sande society, wearing traditional hair styles which bare resemblance to those depicted on many Soweï masks. Sande is the guardian of women; their protector and guide through life. It is Sande that grants a woman with an identity and a personality. The Soweï mask is used for a girl's initiation into womanhood within the Mende society. It is decorated with symbolic meanings like a high forehead for mind and knowledge, a bird on top of the head means woman's natural intuition, while scars decorate the face to show her new, and harder life as a woman.

A brief history of hair and hairstyling in Africa:

The Social significance of hair: The Mende tribe- initiation of women into the Sande society.



Figure 1: Black and white photographic print showing four young women, initiated into the Sande society, wearing traditional hair styles which bare resemblance to those depicted on many Sowei masks.



Figure 2: Sowei mask

In the Wolof culture of Senegal, young girls partially shaved their hair as an outward symbol that they were not courting. However, boys also partially shaved their hair. Boy with plait from Namibia is similar to Popular Mohawk with shaved sides as seen in this slide which are mostly done by contemporary women. And the Karamo people of Nigeria, for example, were recognized for their unique coiffure—a shaved head with a single tuft of hair left on top.” Likewise, widowed women would stop attending to their hair during their period of mourning so they wouldn’t look attractive to other men. And as far as community leaders were concerned, they donned elaborate hairstyles. And the royalty would often wear a hat or headpiece, as a symbol of their stature.

I assume that contemporary versions of African hairstyles (slide) have been inspired or influenced by Rihanna and other Western celebrities which are known by their creative, stylish & bold looks. Those hairstyles range from the sexy short hairstyles to the elegant long hairstyles. I speculate that most South African women are ignorant of where the hairstyle originated.

Wolof culture of Senegal, young girls partially shaved their hair as an outward symbol that they were not courting



Senegalese girl.

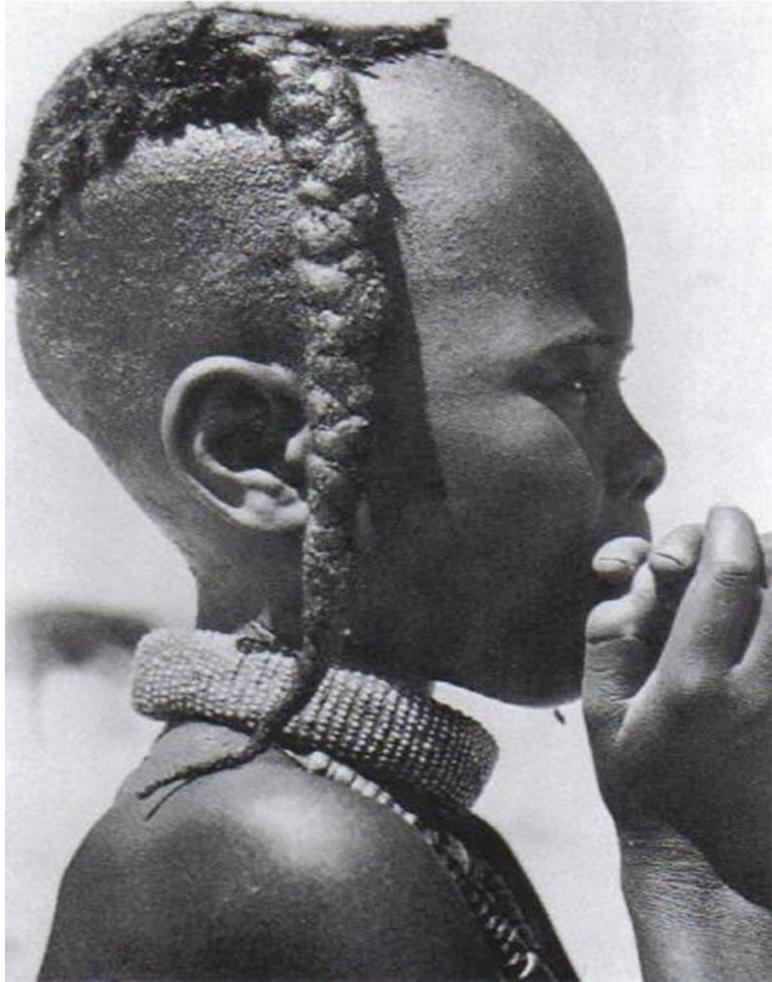
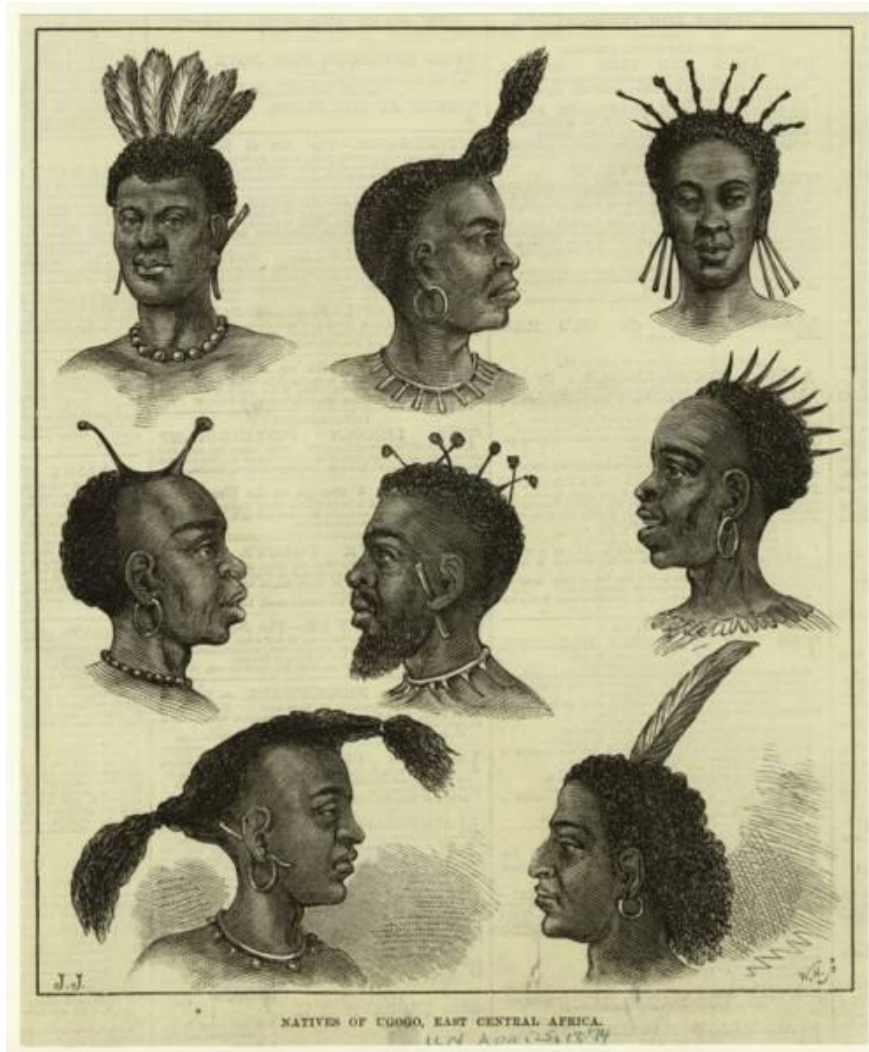


Figure: 4 Boy with
plait (*ozondato* and *ondengura* neckband, Himba
amibia, Africa
Photo dated: *Anneliese Scherz, 1940's*

The Aesthetic significance of hair



“There was more to being beautiful than having long tresses. One’s hair also had to be neat, clean, and arranged in a certain style. These styles included, but were not limited to, cornrows, and other braided styles. They also adorned the hair with ornaments such as beads and cowrie shells.”



Girls passing through Nkpu ceremony: In African Tribal art this hairstyle is represented by the Agbogho mmwo, or “maiden spirit,” masks worn by men at festivals that honor important deities. They represent the Igbo ideal of female beauty: small, balanced features, elaborate hairstyles, and delicate tattoos.



Two women whose braids have been lengthened to their ankles through the use of sinew (eefipa) extensions, Mbalantu of Wambo group, Namibia, Africa

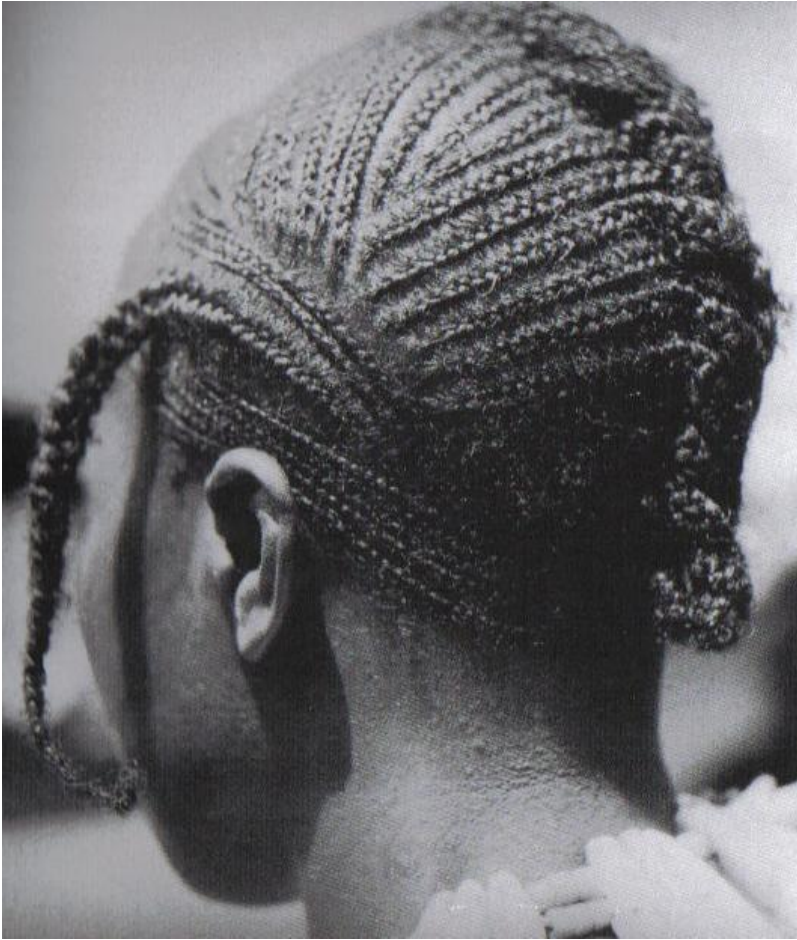
Photo: M.Schettler, 1940's
Photo from the book *Hair in African Art and Culture*,
Edit by Roy Sieber and Frank Herreman, The Museum
for African Art, New York, 2000

Doing some research on African hairstyles, I found the visual aesthetics of the to be interesting so I decided to put together a couple of the references and find contemporary styles which have a similar resemblance, in order to demonstrate how our hair ideas and styles have developed yet remained relatively the 'same'. Post colonial theorist Homi K Bhabha's (1994:122) thoughts on colonial mimicry. Bhabha (Slide); posits that and I quote, "colonial mimicry is a sign of 'double articulation' or the double-edged sword through which 'the desire for a reformed, recognisable "Other", as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite like the Other' is realised. He states that for mimicry to be effective, there should always be a space where difference is perceived and discovered (Bhabha 1994:122-123).

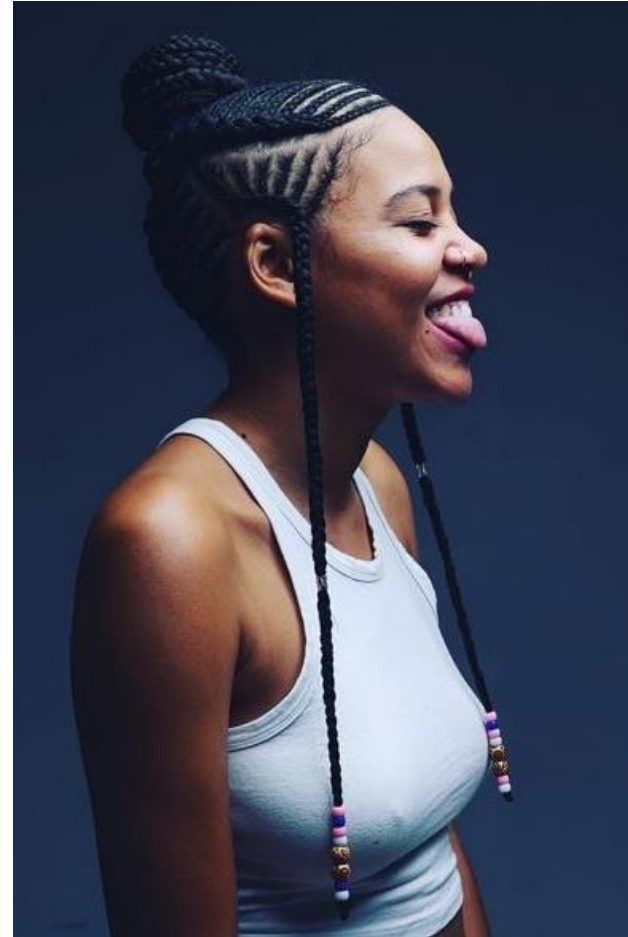
If Bhabha's theory on mimicry is applied to hairstyles and extensions in the context of contemporary South Africa, I put forward that it might be said that all hairstyles are 'the same but not quite' as the original hairstyles can never be replicated exactly the same. As I pointed out earlier in the similarities between Africa then and South Africa now (slide), the hairstyles become re appropriated to become current.

“...colonial mimicry is a sign of ‘double articulation’ or the double-edged sword through which ‘the desire for a reformed, recognisable “Other”, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite like the Other’ is realised. He states that for mimicry to be effective, there should always be a space where difference is perceived and discovered” (Bhabha 1994:122-123).

Africa then and South Africa now



Wife of the Niao chief at Ganya in West-territory of Ivory Coast, West Africa.



Sho Madjozi. Photo from Instagram (@shomadjozi)







Zulu Hairstyle



Hair as a tool of 'othering' / excluding

Hair is the most visible marker of Blackness next to skin (Mercer 1987), and refusing unruly hair is also about silencing inassimilable Black politics. In South Africa during the Apartheid era racial classification was everything, the division of people into racial groups using a complex and trivial series of tests. The result was the classification of the population into one of four groups: White, Black, Indian and Colored, with Colored and Indian groups further subdivided. These unofficial tests were also set up to determine the race of individuals who either appealed their classification or whose classification was challenged by others. The tests were primarily based on appearance — skin color, facial features, appearance of head (and other) hair.

Most infamously, the "pencil test" decreed that if an individual could hold a pencil in their hair when they shook their head, they could not be classified as White. The problem with these tests is that they were so inaccurate and vague that members of an extended family could be classified in different racial groups. In democratic South Africa race and ethnicity still is at the heart of its history, politics, society and economy, and the notion of mimicry plays itself out across many spheres. South Africa remains a complex mix of different races, cultural identities, languages and ethnic bonds.

<http://mashable.com/2015/06/20/apartheid-south-africa-signs/#tkxXclCc7Pqq>

Artists Farieda Naziera and Alberta Whittle problematize the pencil test in their work titled Right of Admission. Right of Admission seeks to unravel the construction of a normative value for bodily identity by looking at extremes, obsession, spectacle, transgression and obscurity. Furthermore, their aim is to unpack the idea of 'acceptable' body aesthetic, as related to colourism, mixedness and privilege in order to problematize these prescribed ideals of beauty that have been cultivated over centuries. I discuss more of their work later in this talk.

<http://rightofadmission.weebly.com/the-apartheid-museum.html>

Farieda Nazier and Alberta Whittle
Location: ROOM - The Prologue



After reading the cut from Celia and Kris' proposal in an email they sent to me on how the other has not yet been acknowledged in Antwerp, I thought of my experience in China which I'd like to share with you. I was invited as assistant curator to Prof Karen von Veh and my office mate Gordon Froud in 2015 of the Beijing Biennale, (slide Behind us there is Brett Murray's Painting titled Rainbow over Nkandla, and Walter Oltman's Lamella which is a drawing. I must admit that I was not expecting it, but in Beijing I was the other. I was asked about what I did to maintain my hair- by those who spoke English, how long I kept my braids in, how often I wash my hair and although it was interesting for me to take a step back and reflect on my hair styling and maintenance processes this reminded me of the othering of Sarah Baartman.

Without getting lost in Baartmans narrative which is pivotal in South Africa's history, never in my life had I been othered/exclusion because of the colour of my skin and texture of my hair and hairstyle. And this is interesting because I was born during the apartheid era. I went to former Model C schools- which were multi racial and known to be the best government schools, partially administrated and funded by parents and a governing body. Known as "Model C" schools during Apartheid, the name has stuck and the best of them continue to offer exceptional facilities and high academic standards.

China became a space where my difference was perceived, and put in Bhabha's words I became the recognizable "Other". The irony with my hair being this 'new discovery' to the locals in Beijing is that I had synthetic hair which is produced in China. In China my hair spoke alter/native politics-unpack. I could not hide the colour of my skin, I could not change my hair to fit in. Instead I stood out as though there was a spotlight shining on me everywhere we went. The only place I felt a slight bit of comfort was when I saw a couple of other young black women with braids while visiting the Great Wall.

Gordon joked that we were the braidy family. While having to take selfies with complete strangers, upon reflection I realized that I had to remember that braids are of great importance to my culture and racial identity. Most South African women are still under the impression that the European way is real beauty, with skin lightening treatments on the rise.... More women in South Africa are going natural. Whilst others are embracing western standard of what is beautiful now more than ever.



Curators of the South African exhibition at the Beijing Beinnale 2015: Prof Karen von Veh, Mr Gordon Froud, Shonisani Netshia. With the work of Brett Murray's *Rainbow over Nkandla*, Wynne Barker's *Lady Gaga*, and Walter Oltmann's *Lamella*



Sarah Baartman- Hottentot Venus



The idea of the 'Other' is best described in the seminal work *Orientalism* (1994) by literary theorist Edward Said. Said explains that the 'Other' is an identity, a culture, or a body that is not you. Methods such as 'studying, displaying and reconstructing the biological, linguistic, racial, cultural, social and historical 'characteristics' of this so called 'Other', not only reveal the foundations of cultural prejudices, but also reveal how such cultural prejudices have historically functioned in justifying the colonial and the imperial ambitions of European powers.

Using Said's theory of 'Orientalism' to trace processes of 'Other-ing' through colonial and post-colonial experiences in Africa, we can begin to lay bare the ideological biases, assumptions and desires underneath much study of cultural practices in Africa (Said 1994:68). In colonial and post-colonial contexts hair has been and continues to be used in the control of classification of identity, belonging and institutional conformity.

A connection between contemporary practices of control and classification can be seen in Anders Kelto's Public Radio International's 2013 radio story, titled "School year: A dress code to keep 'gangsters' away". Kelto's story exposes how hair can become caught up in the tactics of cultural classification and social control. In the story Mrs. Godden, an English teacher at a public high school outside Cape Town, took an extreme approach to enforcing the schools code of conduct. Fearing that the 'upper cut' hairstyle was a 'gangster' hairstyle. This English teacher forced her students to shave their heads, right in her classroom.

<https://www.pri.org/node/1754/stories?page=2>



Anders Kelto, *School year: A dress code to keep 'gangsters' away.* Batabila, a ninth-grader at COSAT, shaves a schoolmate's head while English teacher Mrs. Godden watches. 2013.

There is much that can be inferred in this story about hairstyling and the construction of masculinity and youth identity in South Africa. Mrs. Godden's method of enforcement recalls early Cape colonialist's concerns for 'respectability'. David Goodhew (2000:241) posits that respectability is difficult to define; 'what writers mean by respectability varies, but the concept does contain a fixed core'. He (2000:266) elaborates that respectability is not always ascribed to language or race, but that it is associated with orderliness, cleanliness and comfort. If viewed from a different perspective, respectability might be seen as colluding with a "desire for whiteness", which may be unpacked through the lens of Bhabha's (1994) concept of colonial desire. Bhabha (1994:63) hypothesises that desire emerges within or throughout the 'process of identification'. He gives an account of the relationship between the colonialist Self and colonised Other, in which a 'visible exchange of looks' takes place (Bhabha 1994:63). In this exchange, differences or divisions in identity emerge.

Hair protests

Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Former President's Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki have articulated prolific and poetic words about the rainbow nation and being African, but despite this underlying issues of race and identity surfaced recently through hair protests in South Africa and continue to bubble under the surface. The embracing of black natural hair is a positive however, in South Africa black natural hair is connected to racism. Black natural hair is vulnerable to political, aesthetic, psychic, social and by the ideology, politics, and practice of white/whitened state as it operates through school rules. What has been interesting to note about these protests is that these young black women did not experience apartheid.

Culture within South African schools implies that rules relate to everyone, braided hair is included but natural, afro hair and dreadlocks in some instances are excluded in the dress code. Questions such as: Where is freedom to express identity when pupils are told that their hair 'violates school dress code?' arise. Rules on unruly hair are racialised, and dictate that Black hair needs to be tamed or domesticated to be acceptable or respectable, in order to meet expectations of what it should be. Therefore, white racial power is drawn out as it extends from institutional to everyday interpersonal hair surveillance which dictate that Black hair has no place within hierarchies that are based on race and politics.

And a possible answer can be that the black community's cultural norms have not been taken into account, afros, braids, dreadlocks have for a long time not been accepted in most schools codes of conduct because they are considered as not being conventional. Conventional referring to what is generally done; the traditional norms of the then Model C schooling system which catered predominantly to white pupils. With the new dispensation, these codes of conducts have not been reshaped to include and accommodate all pupils. In other words hair is a matter of (in)justice and (in)equality when what is normal or 'conventional' in white eyes and that of black culture do not concur. This (in)justice and (in)equality plays itself out in the form of hair protests.

Pretoria high school for girls has been accused of racism for allegedly telling black girls to straighten their hair and not wear afros. Pupils at the school said they were forced to chemically straighten their hair and not have afros that were deemed untidy. Students donning afro hairstyles and braids held a protest at the school to voice anger against the alleged longstanding rule. The prestigious school in Pretoria was historically attended by whites only but now admits black children following the end of apartheid in 1994. The school's code of conduct had a detailed list of rules about hair, but does not specifically mention the afro style.

Politicians weighed in on the row, with the Economic Freedom Fighters party accusing the school of seeking "to directly suppress blackness in its aesthetics and culture". Panyaza Lesufi, the minister of higher education department in the Gauteng province, visited the government-run school for talks with senior staff and students. He said that he wants to "arrest the situation before it gets out of control". An online petition against the school's alleged policy. It was titled Stop Racism at Pretoria Girls High and called on authorities to ensure that the "school's code of conduct does not discriminate against black and Muslim girls".

<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/black-girls-in-tears-at-pretoria-school-hair-protest-20160829>

<https://mg.co.za/article/2016-08-29-pretoria-girls-high-school-pupil-i-was-instructed-to-fix-myself-as-if-i-was-broken>



Pretoria High School for Girls. (News24).



Protests in solidarity with the pupils have taken place outside the school in South Africa's capital



👤 #ZulaikhaPatel, 13, is one of the young ladies leading the protest against discriminatory hair policies at Pretoria Girls High School in #SouthAfrica.

A contrasting hair protest erupted at a school in Bloekombos in Cape Town two months ago, where learners at Masibambane were aggrieved because of the school's policy on hair and clothing. The learners were requesting hair extensions and braids be permitted to be worn at the school. Which led to the school principal holding a referendum where learners had to vote yes or no the suggestion put forward by the protesting group of learners. “The principal approves students wearing their natural hair but is opposed to braids and extensions because he wants his learners to embrace their own.” The principal said he hopes to change what the learners perceive as beautiful and in his own words, wants to decolonise their minds. There are those who are for natural hair and those who are against it...

<http://www.702.co.za/articles/273296/cape-town-learners-call-principal-to-lift-ban-on-braids-and-hair-extensions>



Masibambane High School.

Hair posters and magazines

In an effort to educate women about black hair and to celebrate its diversity, Drum launched a magazine in 2012 that has it all. The magazine is filled with the latest trends from faux locs to crochet braids to weaves and afros, the red carpet, salons and Mzansi's streets. It offers advice and step-by-step guides to inspire your next look. Offering a digital copy on Magzter that can be read on iPad, iPhone, and Android devices and the web.

<https://www.mysubs.co.za/magazine/drum-hair>

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PHLENG MOIEBATS

TEYONAH PARRIS

KHANYA MKANGISA THE A-Z OF WEAVES

TAMAR BRAXTON

EMBRACE YOUR HAIR TEXTURE

There's no need to fear going natural, it need not be a painful experience. We chat to experts about the best ways to look after your beautiful tresses and what to remember while letting your hair be free

BY NONTSIKELELO MPULO

THE natural look is making a serious comeback – for every woman wearing a weave or braids there's one rocking a natural afro, twists or dreadlocks.

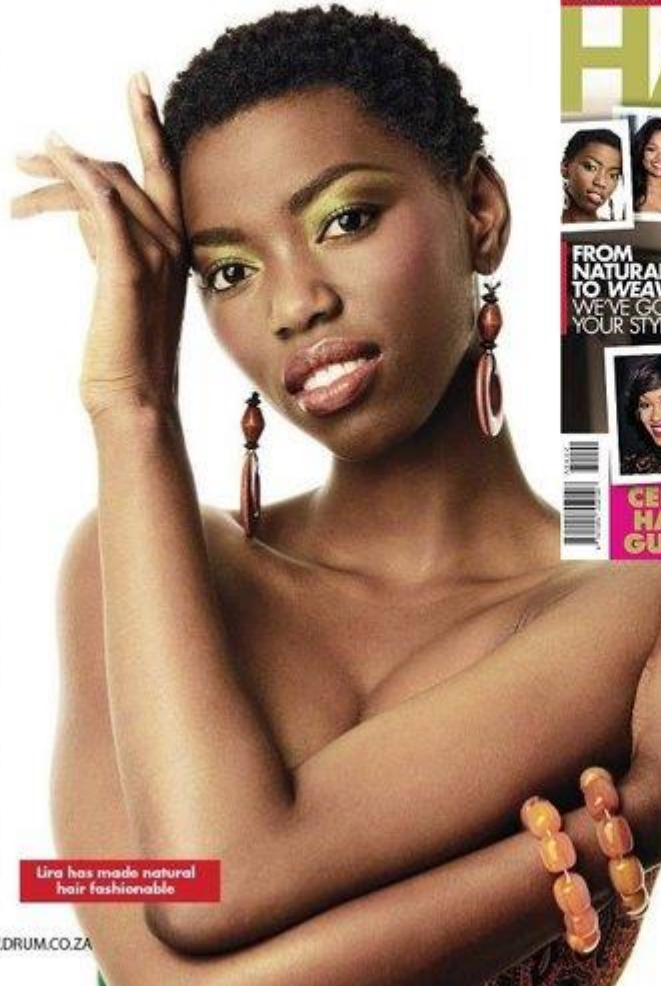
Just look at singer Lira, it's her signature style. Natural hair guru Jabu Stone, who is the owner of Jabu Stone natural hair salons, says, "Lira's hair is beautiful. She's really started a natural hair revolution. The style she wears used to be seen as undesirable."

"It was associated with people who were too lazy to keep their hair beautiful but she's made it fashionable, especially for women who want to embrace natural hair. Many of them come into my salon and ask for the Lira hairstyle."

"I've always admired how Lira styles her hair as I believe that our people look most beautiful when they have natural hair."

We spoke to Jabu and Kenneth Mokgosi, a fellow natural hair guru and owner of Royal Hairstyles Training Academy and Salon, about how to look after natural hair.

They agree the best way to keep it



Lira has made natural hair fashionable

beautiful is to take care of yourself – wise words from men who have taken care of women's hair for more than 20 years. Read on for more tips from Jabu and Kenneth.



AZANIA
MY HAIR JOURNEY
"BE KIND TO YOUR HAIR"

PHOTO: GUY AROG/GETTY IMAGES; HAIR: JABU STONE; MAKEUP: KENNETH MOKGOSI

LET IT TO GROW

Want a healthy head of hair? Look at your diet. Hair is made from protein so you must ensure you eat enough protein and include a variety of fruits and vegetables in your diet so your body gets all the vitamins, minerals and micro-nutrients it needs.

Kenneth warns that having a weave could slow down hair growth because the hair woven in with yours might prevent the products from penetrating through to the scalp.

It's a good idea to massage your scalp regularly to improve blood circulation to the follicles because this aids hair growth.

PREVENT A RECEDING HAIRLINE

A receding hairline can develop when hair follicles in that area stop producing hair and start producing skin. This can result from the hair shaft being destroyed by constant tugging and pulling that goes

with intense styling. Do not overstyle your hair. "Let it breath," Jabu advises.

TOO MUCH IS A BAD THING

Overuse of products could cause problems. Hair looks greasy or weighed down, and then you tend to wash your hair too frequently, which strips moisture.

BE PATIENT

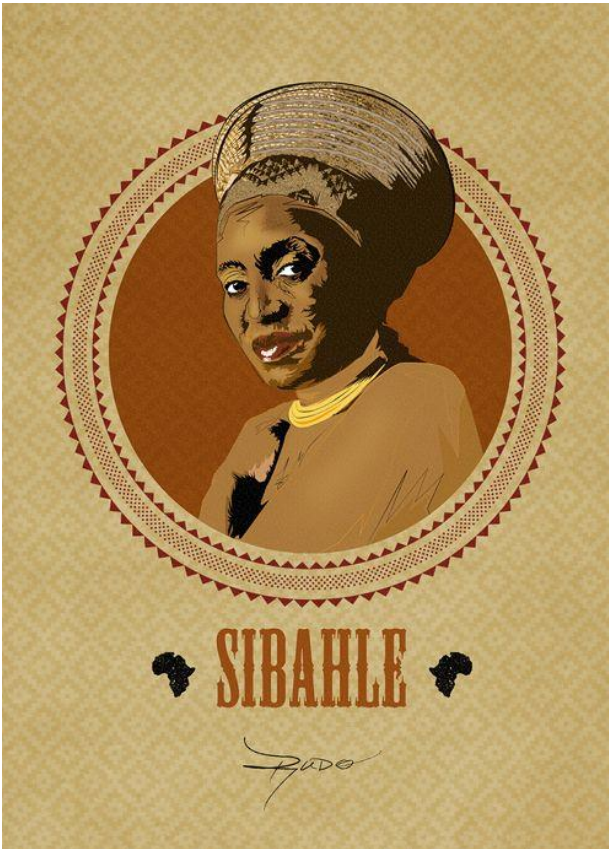
When people decide to go natural, they are often frustrated by how long it takes for hair to grow and look 'attractive', so in desperation they go back to relaxing it. Remember, the first six to eight months of growth after relaxing are not your hair's natural curl pattern or texture.

"The scalp and follicles are still healing, so they need to make it through this 'scalp hair period' and into your true hair texture. Once you've made it through this patch, you'll have softer, more manageable hair," Kenneth says.

Zimbabwean-born illustrator Ruramai Musekiwa "Reluctant feminist" is passionate about changing the way Africans are seen and how they see themselves. The Joburg-based talent is also the founder of Sibahle Magazine, an online publication that aims to bring together creative artists from across the continent by uncovering positive narratives from across Africa. She created a series of South African hairstyle posters of celebrities who embrace their natural hair. She felt that in mainstream media, anything related to Africa is generally negative. She believes the Africans can be empowered only if they live from a place where they recognise their worth and their beauty. So what came to her was the word "Sibahle" (we are beautiful).

<http://www.destinyconnect.com/2016/04/08/151991/>

Ruramai Mukesiwa- Zimbabwean born Illustrator: Sibahle (We are beautiful) Magazine
Phenomenal African Women Celebrated In Posters For Women's Day



**Mama Miriam
Makheba**



**Claire Mawisa, South
African journalist**



Lebo Mashile



Lira

The Madiba poster was one of many posters shown at the *Doing Hair: Hair and Art in Africa* exhibition at the Wits Art Museum in 2014 curated by Prof Anita Nettleton, right in the heart of Braamfontein with its abundance of hair salons. The exhibition was sponsored by Black Like Me, South Africa's iconic hair care company. The partnership between WAM and Black Like Me, the company who revolutionised the South African hair care industry in the 1980s, made possible an exciting and highly topical exhibition.

<https://citybuzz.co.za/17506/curator-talks-the-art-of-hair-in-africa-or-hair-today-gone-tomorrow/>

Doing Hair: Hair and Art in Africa exhibition at the Wits Art Museum 2014



Artist unrecorded, Ghana, Passion Hair Cut Mandela (double sided barber poster), date unknown, paint on wooden panel, 80.5cm x 52cm. Standard Bank African Art Collection (Wits Art Museum).

The exhibition celebrated the creativity, individuality, and innovation in hairstyling and art, in South Africa and other parts of the African continent. It also explored the political, social, cultural, and economic implications of hair and hairdressing, and looks at how hair communicates information about age, religious affiliation, social status, political ideologies, and aspirations. Extraordinary objects that are used to protect, style and adorn hair, historical and contemporary artworks, barbershop posters, films and installations from the Wits Art Museum and other public and private collections were included. The exhibition was accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue and an educational resource.

The museum hoped to draw new visitors and larger audiences with the exhibit, which explores the political, socio-economic and cultural nuances of hair, particularly black people's hair. In an interview with the Citizen shortly after the exhibition opened Prof Nettleton described hair as something that "carries a whole cultural heritage". "The minute that you run a comb through your hair it becomes a cultural object," she said. Black hair makes a political statement, even when that is not the intention. The exhibition makes an honest attempt to illustrate this but one has to ask whether it has done so in an Afrocentric way. Speaking about changes in African hair design and adornment over the centuries, Nettleton said that the most significant shifts happened under colonial rule. "In some instances, young men acquired elaborate hairstyles as markers of their having freed themselves from the control of older patriarchs," she said. They also ran a competition the winning work was part of the exhibition.



Artist unrecorded, Diplomatic, date unknown, paint on wooden panel, 122cm x 61cm. Standard Bank African Art Collection (Wits Art Museum).



Artist unrecorded, Ghana, Gentel boy – Extra O, date unknown, paint on wooden panel, 61.2 cm x 122cm. Standard Bank African Art Collection (Wits Art Museum).

DOING HAIR COMPETITION

CALLING ALL PROFESSIONAL AND STUDENT HAIRDRESSERS/STYLISTS



Artist unrecorded, Kumasi, Ghana, New York City Hair Saloon, date unknown, paint on wooden panel, (w) 157 x (h) 44.5 cm. Standard Bank African Art Collection (Wits Art Museum).

*FROM RETRO TO MODERN - LET YOUR IMAGINATION RUN WILD!
SHOWCASE YOUR CREATIVITY & HAIRSTYLING SKILLS!*

Stand a chance to be part of a world class exhibition at Wits Art Museum



Turn over for competition details

WM
WitsArtMuseum

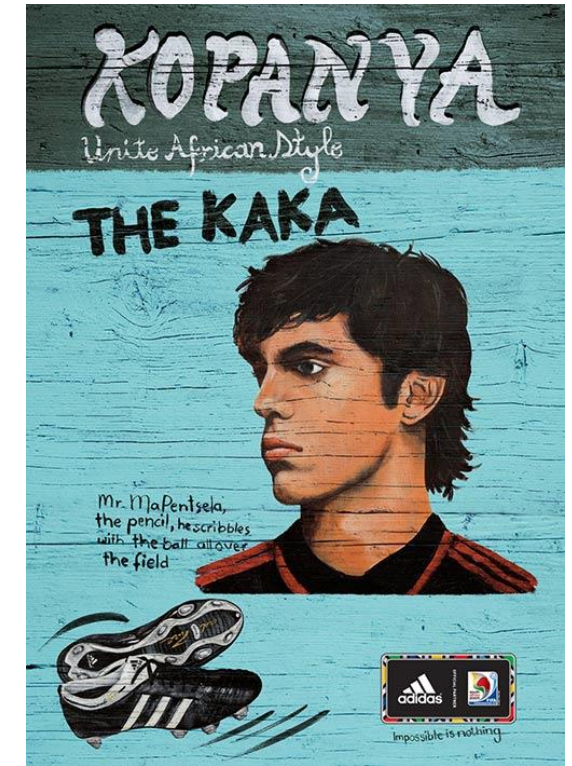
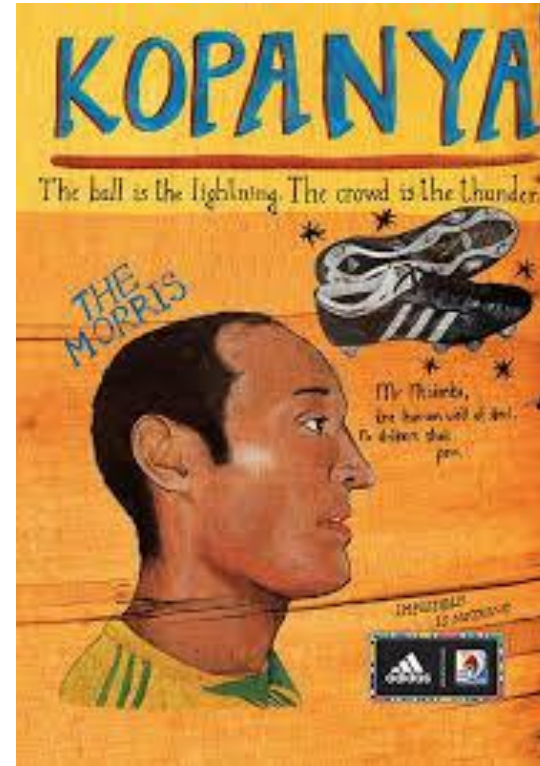
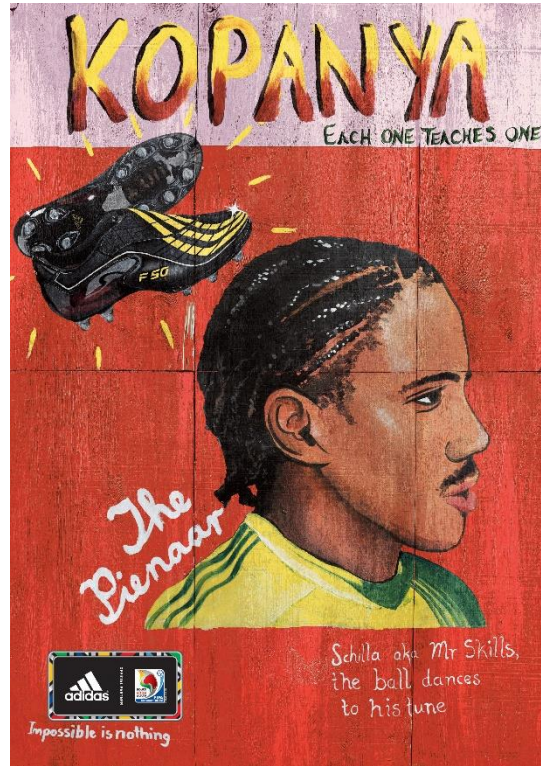
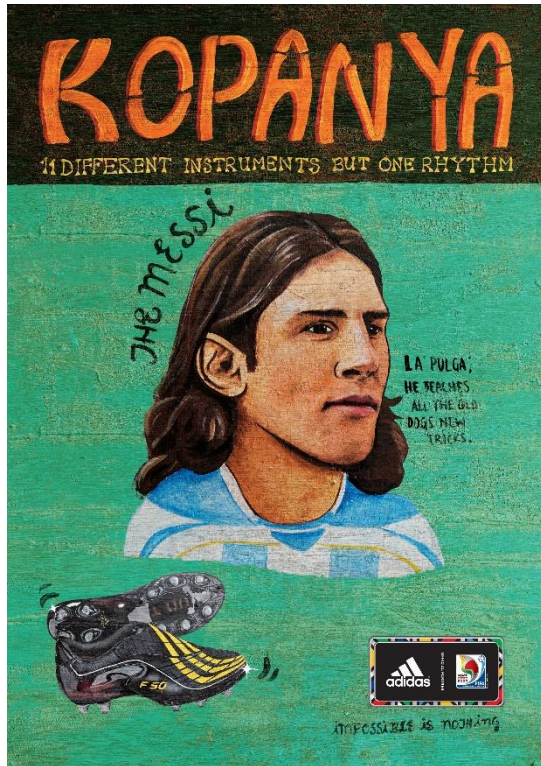


BLACK
Like me

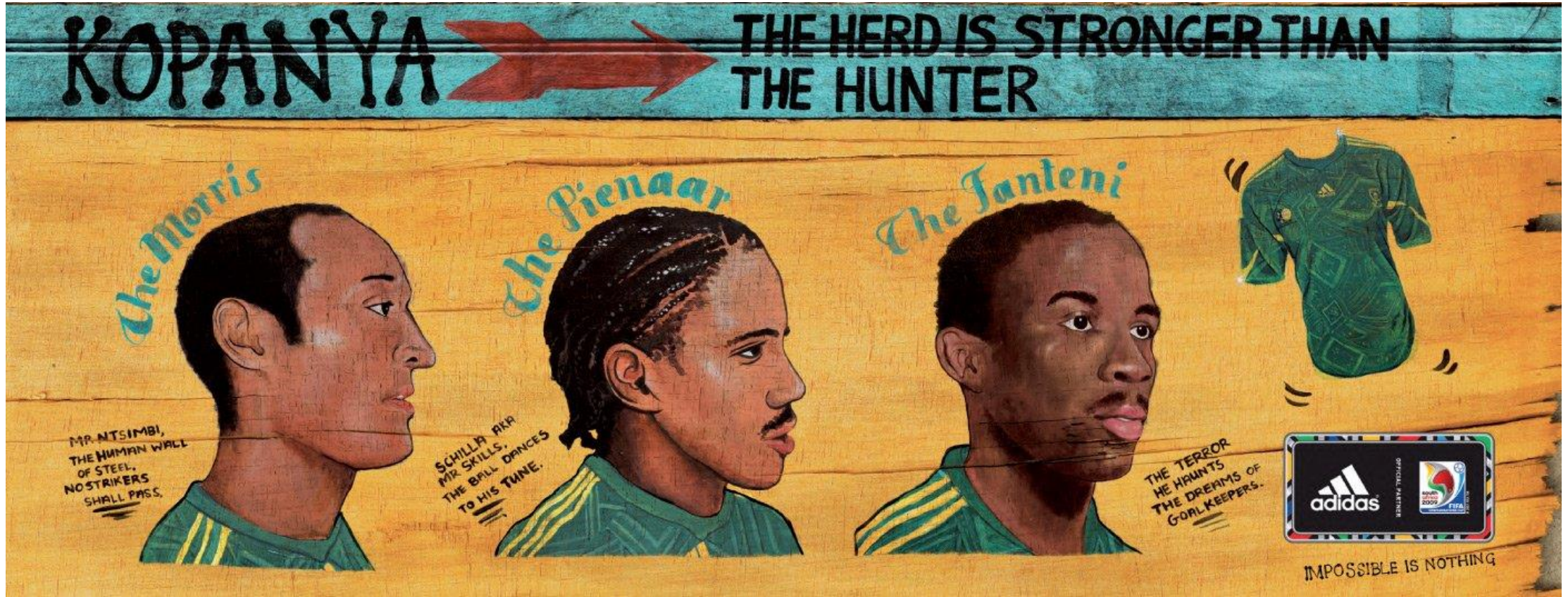
Inspired by barbershop art, art director Nadja Losgott based in London, created a series of Award-winning Adidas posters with soccer player's haircuts. She and her team were briefed to do a print and outdoor campaign to celebrate South Africa hosting the Confederation's Cup in 2010 – the first time it would be played on African soil. Adidas commissioned this series of 'barbershop' artworks to honour their galaxy of stars like Messi, Kaka and Pienaar many of whom would be in Africa for the first time. A hair 'cut' was created for each player according to their skill. Every poster, print advert, in-store element and billboard was hand painted by Losgott to resemble the ubiquitous signage of barbershop art. The award was given in Cannes advertising film festival. Kopanya means 'together' which made the campaign unique in being an African interpretation of adidas' global positioning of 'together I am strong' essentially an international brand has created an African campaign which it sent out to the world.

<http://www.adeevee.com/2010/08/adidas-kopanya-the-pienaar-the-morris-the-fanteni-the-messi-the-kaka-outdoor/>

Award-winning Adidas adverts with soccer player's haircuts.
Campaign confederations cup in 2010.



Nadja Losgott: Painted the images on wood to imitate the traditional barbershop signage.



Kopanya : 'Together'

Selected contemporary South African Artists and their works

Tracey Rose is a South African artist who lives and works in Johannesburg. Rose is best known for her performances, video installations, and photographs. Rose investigates issues around race, sexuality and the female body while simultaneously engaging with new media and new approaches to art production. Performance, a connection to body, is a major component. Her work is often discussed in terms of its relationship to her identity as a 'classifiably coloured' person in South Africa's racial landscape. And she herself has mentioned it, particularly with regard to some of her pieces on theme of hair, "that ever-present subject in the art (and life) of women of colour.

Tracey Rose

Span II
Performance Video installation
1997



Span II is a performance created for the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale of 1997, which has specific significance in the South African context. Rose in all her shaved glory sat inside a large glass display case. She perched on a television set which exhibited that staple of classical Western Art History, the reclining nude, the odalisque as seen in Titian's Venus of Urbino. Which was is about sensuality and physical beauty to be gazed at by mainly by men. Venus, gazes directly at the viewer, with a coyness that is alluring. Rather than being gainfully employed as a passive object of desire, Rose methodically knotted lengths of her discarded hair. It was a meditation and an action familiar to the Catholic raised Rose. However, it also signified the black labouring body, that support of colonial and modern affluence.

In Span II, Rose investigates the manifestation of hair as a symbol of cultural and gender identity. The usage of her own culturally specific hair and body serves as metaphor through which she critically engages with issues surrounding the gendered and racialized body. Rose challenges and subsequently deconstructs the rigidly defined monoliths of 'Woman', 'femininity', and the racially constructed category of 'Coloured', assigned and imposed on her during the Apartheid era.



Titian, Venus of Urbino, 1538, oil on canvas, 119.20 x 165.50 cm



**Span II, 1997
Installation view on 'Graft'**

Mary Sibande is the recent recipient of the Smithsonian National Museum award for African Art. She is a South African artist who lives and works in Johannesburg. Sibande has devoted her practice to unpacking the socio-political baggage weighing down the black female body in a post-colonial, post-Apartheid South Africa. Her concerns manifest primarily in an examination of the institution of the domestic worker - although Sibande never uses this politically correct term, preferring the more laden 'maid' - as embodied in the character of her alter-ego, Sophie. Her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother were all maids. Sibande was the first woman in her family allowed to study and she celebrate this.

Sophie is dressed in instantly recognizable domestic workers uniform, styled as an intricate Victorian ball gown, it spills outward in ever-expanding ornate folds from a body that, in sculptural form, stands well-over seven feet tall. In an interview Sibande states that "Sophie is me, my mother, my grandmother and great grandmother working to re-engineer our history".

Mary Sibande



Conversations with Madam CJ Walker 2009. Mixed media, life size synthetic hair on canvas.

In Conversations with Madam CJ Walker which is a mixed media installation, Sophie is represented weaving a portrait of Madam CJ Walker with synthetic hair on to a framed canvas. Walker was born in poverty but became the first self-made African-American woman millionaire in the United States and the first in her family to break from domestic servitude: her fortune was made from hair care products. Sibande uses synthetic hair to create a portrait of Walker in order to pay homage to her and celebrate her achievements as an Entrepreneur, philanthropist and social activist, as well as the three generations before her, and her own achievements as a graduate and artist.

In his work Lemoana deals with ideas of black masculinity. He engages with the notion of black masculinity in contemporary South Africa through parodic revisions of Christian iconography and within rugby, which is a predominantly white sport in South Africa; and explores how art can be used to pinpoint an alternative reality.

Lemoana interrogates the ways in which men position themselves through discursive practices to present a particular form of 'masculinity' to the world. His photomontage takes issue with a particular type of macho masculinity that has permeated South African society, both black and white, epitomised by the rugby-playing fraternity. Lemoana uses religious imagery and rugby to address the intersection of masculinity and race because both Christianity and sport have autobiographical relevance. Lemoana explains that his mother is a Catholic, and while he was a teenager she insisted on the whole family following the Catholic faith. She bought a reproduction of Da Vinci's Last Supper for their home, which made him suddenly aware of how many times this particular image was seen in the homes he visited in Soweto.

Lawrence Lemaona



The Discussion. 2006. Digital print on 100% cotton rag paper. 1120 x 1730mm. Edition of 10. Unisa Art Collection, Pretoria.

In the Discussion, Lemoana uses a male model with dreadlocks as the subject of his interpretation /re appropriation of Leonardo da Vinci's the last supper. His model is the dreadlocked Christ with a halo around his head, as well as the interchangeable characters/ disciples sitting at the table. In this work Lemaoana attempts to recreate the dream of a truly national sport that could uplift the lives of other potentially talented black players – a form of salvation for the disadvantaged majority.

In their work titled Right of Admission, South African artists Farieda Nazier and Alberta Whittle use the body and its appearance as key signifier, their aim being to problematize society's growing fixation on appearance, appraisal, classification and unofficial rights of admission. It is evident that these are deeply rooted in the politics of internalized racial and class-based hierarchies, which has been inculcated and incorporated into our daily rituals of adornment and beautification.

Based on this, their performance explores how Western/ Eurocentric conventions of beauty, acceptability, appropriateness of dress and bodily features, dominates as social conventions in post-colonial settings. In their work they draw on and draw attention to the visual signifiers (specifically sites of bodily aspiration) that they identify with most – that is marginalised hybrid identities including as 'blackness, colouredness and mixed race-ness'.



**Farieda Nazier and Alberta Whittle Right of Admission
Part 1: Classification and Pencil Test**

These signifiers play a huge role in their own histories and the shaping of their own identities. They include hair, skin tone, facial features and body stature. They activate these signifiers throughout the four stages of performance by changing our appearance in the most common way possible - switching from afro hair, to 'gelled' hair, to straightened hair, to weave or plaits, applying make-up and donning corsets.

The hair transformation, for example, plays with our own ambiguous appearance and our own relentless re-classification on a daily basis (as afro hair is associated to colouredness or mixed raced and weave or plats to black – in the South African context). The work further, looks at the appropriation and the exoticizing of such practices and products by artists – as they as artists buy-in assume and contend with the colonial gaze.



Part 2: The plating



Part 4: The Unravelling

Lebohang Motaung is a Hair Artist and Stylist. She grew up drawing and experimenting with her grandmother's hair. When she was ten years old her interest of braiding grew stronger and she used her skill to support her financial needs. Over the years it went from just being a tool of making money to an area of research in the art practice, as she became more fascinated with arrangements of patterns, colour and different textures. In her work, she focuses on the activity and process of doing hair, and the significance of hairstyles in women. She is mostly influenced by the conversations she has with some of the people she plaits.

She uses a wide range of mediums, from linocut, etching, paper making and drawings with hair on paper. She makes portraits using synthetic hair, adding that one's hair can be a symbol of one's identity, and how it has the power to dictate how a one is seen. Her etching process represents the pain and the timeous laborious process that comes with plaiting hair. While her linocuts, focus on the patterns and the texture of hair, because of the different mark makings that comes with carving a lino.

Lebohang Motaung



Self portrait



**HAIR: Medium for self expression,
Linocut 2013**



E Kojwa esale metsi, Etching 2017



Plaited Identity III synthetic hair on paper 2016

Nonkululeko Sibande completed her third year at the University of Johannesburg. Nonkululeko majored in printmaking and uses synthetic and natural hair as both a medium and subject. Her practice centres itself on black female subjectivity, black beauty, and often uses hair as an apparatus to identify facets of womanhood. Through her work, Nonkululeko aims to educate young girls about the importance of how they can wear their natural hair without damaging it with the use of hot irons and straightening chemicals, also expanding the bountiful actualities of African women by critiquing beauty ideals defined by Western standards.

Her work revolves around the inborn traits between her aunts, herself and her cousins. She learnt how to braid at the age of seven, it was expected for her to do so, given the fact that she grew up in a house with a salon in the front porch. The business belongs to her eight aunts, who share the responsibility evenly amongst them. For young black girls, hair is not just something to play with, it is something that is laden with messages, and it has the power to dictate how others treat you, and in turn, how you feel about yourself.

She states that her hair was an extension of my race, the idea that 'good hair' is 'straight hair' within the African community goes against the naturalness of black hair and black culture altogether. The two go hand in hand with one another and cannot be separated.

Nonkululeko Sibande





Untitled, synthetic hair on adhesive plastic cover, 42 cm x 59,4 cm. 2017.



Untitled, synthetic hair on adhesive plastic cover, 42 cm x 59,4 cm. 2017.