

“Thinking Through, Talking Back: Creative Theorisation as Sites of Praxis-Theory” – A creative dialogue between Sharlene Khan, Pumla Dineo Gqola, Yvette Abrahams, Neelika Jayawardane and Betty Govinden

Sharlene Khan

The panel “Thinking Through, Talking Back: Creative Theorisation as Site of Praxis-Theory”, held at the African Feminisms Colloquium at Rhodes University in July 2017, converses on the role of the imagination and creativities in black-African feminisms. Imagination is seen as underlying the important work of identifying everyday lived experiences as sites of knowledge production that has been central to black-African feminisms’ creative theorisation, whether in popular platforms or academic spheres. The panel discussion moves between abstract and personal conversations on the following black feminist epistemological strategies: black women as agents of knowledge; lived experience as “useful embodied interrogation” and “situated critiques”; creativities as sites from which black-African feminist critiques and theorisations emerge; and the role of imagination in our lives as a critical, political force.

Introduction

The panel discussion “Thinking Through, Talking Back: Creative Theorisation as Site of Praxis”, took place on the 21st of July 2017 at the first African Feminisms (*Afems*) Colloquium “Six Mountains on her back: (Re)Thinking African Feminisms” held at Rhodes University, co-hosted by the Department of Fine Art and the Department of Literary Studies in English. It marked the first creative dialogue of the *Art on our Mind* research group, headed by Dr Sharlene Khan.¹ The *Art on our Mind* group selects a South African woman-of-colour creative (with an emphasis on visual artists), researches her for two to three months and composes questions for the public conversation, which is recorded. The creative practitioner is asked about her influences, inspirations, challenges and creative working methodologies. The video and audio recordings, as well as a transcript of this session, along with all secondary research materials are made available on the *Art on our Mind* website. This is to not only generate primary discursive material on South African women-of-colour artists, but to also collate material into an archive to facilitate and promote research on these amazing creatives. For the very first public event, Khan chose to engage black-African feminist² scholars who, for the last three decades, have been discussing and “doing” creative theorisation in their respective fields: Pumla Gqola, Yvette Abrahams, Betty Govinden and Neelika Jayawardane. Each of them has an established scholarship dealing with the entanglements and intersection of feminisms with race, class, sexuality, nationalism and religion. Their works have been quite influential to Khan in developing her ideas on the importance of black feminist creativities as prime sources for theorising on women-of-colour’s lives and knowledge generation. This talk lasted for two and a half hours, and below are (highly edited) extracts from that conversation that respond to the focus of this Agenda edition, teasing out questions on the role of the imagination in contemporary discussions and black-African feminist worldviews; the ways in which popular creativities shape our lives and representations; and the need to be critical of the use of imagination and its manifestations in society. With kind permission from the participants, Khan has tried to maintain the texture of the feminist voices in live discussion, a methodology used purposefully to solicit and excavate more immediate responses from the

participants about their lives and creative inspirations.³ The very lively, unruly full talk and transcript can be viewed on the *Art on our Mind* and *Afems* websites.⁴

Dr Sharlene Khan (SK): This panel launches the National Research Foundation funded project called *Art on our Mind*, inspired by the bell hooks book *Art on My Mind* (1995). It really influenced me about the potential of creative theorisation in how hooks uses the visualities of our cultures to theorise around our lives. Sustained academic discourse, especially emanating from scholars within the visual arts and art history fields, on women-of-colour visual artists have been in short supply. In this vacuum, people like Pumla Gqola, Betty Govinden, Yvette Abrahams and Desiree Lewis have stood in that gap.

We are going to start off with a question that doesn't just assume that because you are here at an African Feminisms colloquium that you are an African feminist. I have spoken briefly about how many of us as women-of-colour come to Western feminism and feel so dissatisfied with it, that we do not find a home in it and go searching for other alternatives. What is your perception of what we currently call feminism(s), and what is your relation to the concept of feminism at this moment? Is there a specific name that you call your feminism?

Dr Betty Govinden (BG): I wanted to start with this book *Fifty Shades of Feminism* (2013). Here, there are many shades of feminism. I am old enough to know that feminism is changing over the decades, but I think that at the centre of feminism, however we define it, is an agenda of protest, an agenda of critical thinking and I wanted to quote just one of the shades. So it's fifty shades of feminism, but also fifty shades of red when you are thinking of feminism: "Not grey, that in-between yuppie hue of prevarication, indecision and relativism. Feminism is coloured the red of women's rage, women's despair, women's power, women's brilliance and women's ability to survive. It is the life blood of emancipation, which pulses with never-ending faith that freedom and justice are only ever a heartbeat away" (Bidisha, 2013:42).

Prof Neelika Jayawardane (NJ): I think that movements around other political issues must include women's perspectives, presence, their voices, ideas and experiences, and that gender is essentially limited and limiting to all of us. I don't think that women should be in the service of liberation movements that do not liberate them and do not, in fact, call on men to liberate themselves from the shackles of seeing women as support systems, editorial help, cooks, drivers to airports, you name it. Along with that, we are in a moment where we are finally discussing the realities about the fact there is no such thing as a gender binary and that the physical bodies that we are born with are far more complex than male or female. If we can include these thoughts without finding them threatening, then we have a feminism that I am there for.

Dr Yvette Abrahams (YA): Pumla and I, we had this discussion a couple of decades ago. I would call myself an African womanist and she and Des [Desiree Lewis] would call themselves black feminists, and one day I asked, Pumla why "black feminism"? And she was like, "because black comes first". And I thought, okay, and so ever since then I have always called myself an African womanist or black feminist, because that made perfect sense that the African and the black still comes first. And for me, I think that's ideologically important. With that said, I have huge reservations around the price that feminism has paid to become academically respectable and the ways in which the movement had to

straighten it's healing to build gender studies departments or to become a recognised academic field of study. Now I want to say it in a non-judgmental way, I think that it is necessary to have feminists on the inside as well as on the outside. I think the work they do is incredibly important. I take my hat off to all of you that have managed to survive it reasonably intact. But I do still think that we need to question what is the relationship between feminism within the academy and the broader women's movement outside.

Prof Pumla Dineo Gqola (PDG): I started to call myself a feminist when I was fifteen and I will die calling myself a feminist. Sometimes I qualify it and sometimes I don't. But I also believe that all feminisms are qualified. There's no feminism that is unqualified, right? So we are all different kinds of feminists, sometimes we foreground what the qualification is for whatever the work it is that we are trying to do in that very moment and other times we don't. But you know, I think, there's no such thing as just feminism full stop. I started calling myself a feminist when I was fifteen because I found enormous pleasure in discovering this word that described something I already was. I cherished and still do, the enormous value that word has in connecting me to millions of other people in the world who want to create the kind of world that I want to live in. So that's why I call myself a feminist unapologetically since then. I suppose like every movement, I don't need all of us to do our feminisms in exactly the same kind of way. I think that, of course, we are going to disagree and sometimes we are going to fight, and I think that's the risk you take when you are in a movement, and I think that we are able, and need to do different kinds of work. So for me, feminism is about changing the world.

SK: An influential text alongside bell hook's *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984/2000) for me has also been Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* (2000/2009), which literally became my handbook. It started to tell me that theory has been made into this abstraction divorced from our lives. Some of the tenets that she outlines include some of the following: lived experience as a criterion for knowledge; the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; the ethic of personal accountability; and black women as agents of knowledge. It has taken something like twenty years for me to reflect this coherently in my practice, career and life. I want to ask each of you how black-African feminist practices have affected you, and how they play out in your various capacities as academics, scholars, creatives and mentors?

BG: Lived experience is experience on the ground but that does not mean that it precludes people in the academic world. We all, whether we are academics or not, have lived experience. I think for me, the theory that I have access to in the academy, has, in a paradoxical way, sent me back to my lived experience. In a way, I was isolating and abstracting myself from my scholarship. That's how I was brought up, not to think of myself as a site for any kind of reflection. But, over the years, that's also linked and influenced the kind of research I did. Being brought up in a colonial tradition and then gradually reading all the theorists across the board made me begin to have a new understanding of lived experience. And so, in many ways, I traverse the spaces of the academy, which is my ground, and the other grounds in which I live and inhabit. For me, it's just the most liberating, exciting experience. That's how my research on *'Sister Outsiders'* (2008) emerged. I would never have conceived of doing research, for instance, on my grandmother. So much of the work I do is about women who don't get into the history textbooks (the story of my grandmother, my son-in-law's

grandmother), but that is because we were schooled in a particular way of what is legitimate knowledge and what isn't. For me, it is a shifting ground.

NJ: A lot of what it means to include my lived experiences is to really trust that when I'm feeling something, that is a legitimate response and that it comes from evidence-based observation. I think there's so much science drummed into me, that I am always looking, is there evidence? Am I just feeling this and de-legitimising it? And you know, even science has caught up and said it's actually that you're responding to enormous amounts of evidence that's coming from the environment and this is, in fact, how we evolved to give us a response to protect ourselves. We may not, at that moment, be able to deconstruct exactly why we're responding in that way and, others may tell you that you're crazy for responding that way but pay attention to it. You can return with a different thing later, if it's not legitimate, but protect and trust yourself and be confident enough to respond as your body and emotional self is telling you.

YA: You know, when we started out and I was working on my PhD thesis on Sarah Bartmann⁵ and was looking for theories through which to tell her story, they were all there: Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, etc. Angela Davis' *Women, Race and Class* (1981) changed my life completely. And yes, particularly Collins' ideas on ways of knowing, of experiential knowledge. Interestingly, twenty years later, I've come full circle, because for the past three years I have spent my time working on the epistemology of climate change. Climate change, in a sense, is the utter ruin and bankruptcy of positivist epistemologies. I'd started off wanting to write [in her PhD thesis] the story of Sarah Bartmann and didn't. I actually ended up writing the story of the white men who wrote about her. And the minute I was done, I was like "okay, now I am going to do the biography". But because I wanted to write a story about Sarah Bartmann, in the way that she would have written it, I got into indigenous knowledge systems and after about five years of that I realised that she wouldn't have written a book at all – she would have grown a garden. I promptly went and grew a garden that took me ten years. Now I want people to see this garden that I grew in homage. So there's her story, but having gone from being the "anti-" and the "hahaha you bunch of idiots", to okay fine, let me just go and do my thing. Let me just grow that garden, let me just make Khoisan black soap, let me just do the famous buchu oil.

PDG: Several years ago I started teaching this course [Gender and Writing in African Literature] I inherited. One of the things that felt important for me in how to teach this course, was as someone who works in an African feminist literary tradition, was the "what" I was not able to do. I was not able to teach this course in the old fashioned conventional way in which we are trained in in English Studies, i.e. literary theory is something that you use in some instances to create knowledge out of creative texts. Now I was also faced with this task of introducing this thing called writing gender in African writing and I didn't know how to just teach the novels and then bring feminist literary theory as though they were separate things. Even though that was technically how I was supposed to be taught and trained in English Literature studies, it wasn't always how I was taught. It occurred to me that it isn't really a sustainable and convincing project to teach them as though they're separate things. Not just at the level of conceptual vocabulary, but even at the practical level – I don't know how to teach Buchi Emecheta as though "sociologist Buchi Emecheta" and "novelist Buchi Emecheta" and "Buchi Emecheta who is organising black women's publishing things in London with Lauretta Ngcobo" are not the same person. So the relationships between practice and the imagination were always kind of fuzzy, the boundaries were always porous. And so I suppose, thinking about creative

theorisations was inevitable, because I didn't know how else to relate to creative living but to be provoked and transformed, whether it came in the form of watching people who behaved badly and finding myself being drawn to people who behaved badly, or whether it was me reading a weird novel and learning things I wasn't technically supposed to be learning from that novel.

It was a difficult separation for me to learn, this notion that the courses that were called theory were where you learnt the stuff that allowed you to unlock the world, because creative texts were always doing that. I suppose for me then there is a connection between creative theorisation and life experience. Not just mine, but also the life experiences that I have the opportunity and the honour, and, sometimes, the irritation of being witness to. [...] You asked another question about naming. Look, I think, this is probably the only thing I haven't changed on in twenty years. I think that names are important. I think what we call ourselves is important. I think that sometimes there's some things you are like, "I'm okay to be called that thing but I am not necessarily going to call myself that thing". But I do think that names are important and I think that we have come from a history that is not going to make that redundant. I think how we qualify our feminisms, when we qualify them, is a political decision that is important and that is valuable and that we are going to revisit over and over again.

SK: Okay, you're also talking about how creative theorisation was intrinsic to your life and so, one of the things that I want to ask the panel is, as a child, what kind of creativities made an impact on you? If I think about my life, it was plasticine and doilies, which I hated, and my mother's atrocious love for porcelain dogs and fruit. We also had these cheap Chinese oil paintings. My mother was always making things: dolls, candles and flowers, and my father was doing welding and making gates for people. I realised that I was always surrounded by creativity, it's just that I didn't know that that was creative.

BG: It's interesting, but my creativity derived from my father. My dad was an upholsterer and I learnt creativity from him. He made bags, I made bags; I still make bags. I knit; he knitted. He sewed for my mother blouses, clothes for me and he made underskirts and all of that and I did the same. But I also thought, as Yvette was speaking, that I learnt gardening with my dad.

NJ: I also learnt gardening from my father. So now that I own a home, I've started gardening. [...] My earliest memories of what is known as "art" in the Western world was on Buddhist temple walls, and through performance artists' costumes in street processions – each of these had to do with Buddhist calendar year events. In the temples, there are frescoes within the inner chambers meant to educate the public about the mythologies surrounding the birth, enlightenment, and "parinirvana" of the Buddha, as well as morality tales. I now realise, as an adult, that these images and statuary collections are a significant part of how Sinhala Buddhists learn to believe that they have a right to the land, above that of, and to the exclusion of, others; it tells us that our right to this island was "meant to be". So, I learned, from my first encounters with art, that art is not only intimately connected with a people's worldview, but that it can also be intimately tied to expressing dominant – and violent, exclusionary – discourses.

And, important for women to pay attention to, it teaches us that self-sacrifice (doing violence to the self for the “good” of others) is holy and to be rewarded with praise. But I was always questioning some of that. Later, as we were growing up, my father took us to museums in Moscow and London, and I remember him saying these are also temples. It’s only among other artists with whom I went to university that I began to think about creative practice as a location in which one can theorise, debate, dissent, have a conversation. I started writing about art because that was how I chose to contribute to that conversation.

YA: My parents had this fabulous opportunity in Sweden in the 70s to bring up the perfect socialist human beings. It was interesting, I never heard the word “Coloured” until I came to Cape Town at the age of twenty-one. I lived my entire life without knowing anything about these people, because they were bringing us up to be socialists, so we had no clue. In case you wondered why I ended up studying the Khoisan, it was kind of a need to root myself. My mother would tell stories and she always sewed and knitted. These were formative influences and this despite the fact that they insisted on us doing everything. My father took me to the opera, my mother made me play classical piano and violin. She taught me to garden and that has become my life. I’m not at all surprised I ended up making soap because for me it’s full body art. What do the different oils do for the body, which oil do you pick depending on what you are doing. So that has become, I think, my creative theorisation: natural colours and canvases and fragrances as a form of poem. That’s forced me to kind of go back to a very, very ancient culture that I hold deep and didn’t know I had, but that, in actual fact, has always been there.

PDG: Okay, so like you Sharlene, I suppose, various things. The doilies were very important. My mom was very meticulous, they had to be starched and ironed a certain way. They had to have perfect symmetry. Then there were also the ornaments. Hideous. I mean some of the vases I now recognise are actually quite beautiful, but I remember as a child thinking that they’re ornaments. I’m a child of the 70s and what I remember about the visuality of that time is how much work went into body styling. The big hairstyles, the elaborate kind of plaits. On one hand I would look at these gorgeous women, with these elaborate plaited hairstyles as pineapples and flowers, and I would want to be them, but I also knew what a nightmare it was to have to sit still between some sisi’s thighs on a Saturday and have my hair combed and plaited to look that beautiful. And also, of course, bell-bottoms and platforms for men and women, and the Dashikis. And then occasionally, every three months, my family would drive to Matatiele, which is where my maternal grandparents had retired to. The houses in Matatiele have this thing that they call Ditema. And at Christmas, all the houses have these exquisite patterns, from different kinds of soil. I suppose a lot of it was about the stuff you do to your house, and stuff you do to your body, and then there were the non-visual things. Like all those records, music and dancing. So my nostalgia is for bellbottomed, fancy haired men and women dancing to those LPs.

BG: We had a wood and iron home, and the kitchen had just shelves where you put all your enamel wear. And he [my dad] had a knack of folding the newspaper and cutting out dolls. He also made gudries. This is a heavy duvet that you will really need in the Grahamstown mid-winter. It’s not like your light, featherweight duvets, no, it’s one of those duvets that you are really crushed under its weight.

SK: Following on from that, I feel like there's a resurgence in an understanding and emphasis on imagination, and I wonder if it is particularly in regard to world events at the moment, where it does seem, on the one hand, like our imaginations have been hijacked, and at the same time it's given birth to a lot of creativities. And so, I want to ask you whether you think that the imagination can be a political, critical force and how so?

YA: For a long time I have been focusing more exclusively on questions of knowledge and knowledge creation. And what has fascinated me is how this creativity emerges. What social/historical circumstances, what conditions of labour or voluntary work create a particular concentration of creativity? This is precisely because I am trying to study the emergence of new sciences or new ways of approaching the notion of scientific thinking. But also very old ways. You may have noticed that we [the South African economy] have not grown since 2008 and we're now in a negative growth rate, along with the rest of the world. So I share your concerns around what are we educating young people for, when the predictions are for anything from a two metre to twelve metre sea level rise by 2015. These are the people that are going to have to fix that. We are going to be dead. And the fact that we have a university system that is not even asking the questions, never mind preparing the youth for what we have done and is not even educating them to ask the questions, is shameless. Such an act of genocide – spiritually, intellectually and physically.

How are we going to imagine the future? How are we going to teach you who are stuck with the melting of the polar ice caps and the extinction of the Great Barrier Reef to deal? And if we say, okay white supremacy is in a lot of ways a distraction and a side issue, what does that mean? So we figure out what are we like, what are we for. And is this not the historical juncture at which we should be devoting ourselves, with every fibre of our being, to stimulate the creative imagination because without it, we are going to go extinct? Once again, I apologise for my generation's faults. How do we create the material conditions, the psychological conditions, the confluences of ideas and flows that are going to bring forth our best in creativity? I have for the past couple of years been working on using arts and culture as the way to bring across the message of climate change, because, as you can see, a lot more people relate to the arts. Last year I executive produced a play in Vrygrond with a youth club – so having the youth do plays around climate change for the youth. And this year I am executive producing this movie.⁶ But when I started, I did not know that this is the first documentary on climate change to be produced and directed and filmed and written by black women. So back to the very old feminist questions around voice, around material conditions: who has been telling the stories about climate change?; who has been in front of the camera?; who has been behind? Once again, coming full circle. All I can say Sharlene, I think that is the key question we need to be asking. How are we going to make these young people be geniuses? And how do we create the social circumstances that make that happen?

PDG: I, unlike Yvette, am not so optimistic that we can teach these young people. I think that is both what's hopeful about this moment and what is clear is that what we take for granted is failing us, is failing this generation, is failing humanity. Perhaps the invitation to the imagination requires that we recognise that this is something that we can't teach. Because how are we going to teach what we do not know? And what we need desperately at this point, is the courage and the capacity to imagine the counter-intuitive. So you had to have Rhodes Must Fall, you had to have Fees Must Fall, but we

couldn't have imagined it. You [the current student generation] are not beholden to any of the things that we are, any of the systems of thinking about freedom that we inherit, that we take for granted, that was passed down to us. And so you are saying, "I'm sorry but we are not doing politics only along our silos of student organisations". You are saying, we have figured out something that didn't even occur to you, we are going to work across and we don't want to protest against financial exclusions, in fact we realise their limit – what you actually need is to smash the whole fee structure. You had to imagine that. I'm just using things that are already happening, but those are projects of the imagination.

We come from people who've always recognised that we cannot have freedom without imagination. And that freedom comes with imagining the counter-intuitive. But maybe that is exactly why we are so stifling, why the people who we put in power have such contempt and are so dismissive towards the arts, because they know exactly what the imagination can do, and they recognise that what is happening in the visual arts, literature and music is not separate from smashing structures and redefining how institutions work. And so, I think, that this is the time for the imagination. I think this is the time to break those boundaries and to recognise that they are connected. That the counter-intuitive and the imaginative are connected.

BG: I just wanted to agree so much with Pumla and to pick up on the word that Yvette used, "confluence". The kind of work that we do in our arts world is contrary to the way in which the institution understands the role of the imagination. The scientists don't understand this and so, for me, this is my plea, this is my cry, what Arundhati Roy has talked about as the "end of the imagination". It cuts across, and it's because of that we have war and we have the crises of refugees and all of that. It is not just about an arty world that's separate from the real world. It is about an inclusive world. When there's the end of the imagination, that's the end of our world. The imagination has power.

Notes

1. This work was supported by the South African National Research Foundation Thutuka Grant for the project *Art on our Mind* [TTK160601167174]. Post-graduate student members in 2017 were funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Inclusive Professoriate Fellowship at Rhodes University. The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the *Art on our Mind* team in the recording of this dialogue and Hayley Axford in the transcription of the full public talk.
2. This discussion takes for granted black/African/ postcolonial feminist perspectives as part of contemporary theoretical discourse that theorises – to paraphrase Nigerian feminist Molaria Ogundipe – from the "epicentres of African women's agency". There are diverse strains of these thoughts as they respond to geo-specific particularities. The guests were selected on the basis of their sustained scholarship on (South) African/ black/postcolonial/womanist perspectives and creativities, which have been influential to the field of South African visual arts and Khan's understanding of an "art history" that is under contest by the many South African women creatives-of-colour who have been displaced from this authorised body of knowledge. Gqola, Abrahams, Govinden and Desiree Lewis (not available for this panel), have made critical interventions since the 2000s – not least through this *Agenda* journal – in readings and understandings of women-of-colour creatives. Thus, as a basis for the project *Art on our Mind*, this group of scholars was asked a series of questions around contemporary black-African feminisms and creative theorisation.
3. Grammar, repetition, etc., have only been mini-mally corrected.

4. *Art on our Mind* website: <https://artonourmind.org.za>; African Feminisms Rhodes University (*Afems*) website: <https://afems2018.wixsite.com/afemsconference>
5. This spelling of Bartmann's name follows Abrahams' usage in her text "Colonialism, dysfunction and disjuncture: Sarah Bartmann's resistance (Remix)" (2003).
6. *Love in the Midst of Climate Change*, documentary project directed by Poet on Watch and executive produced by Yvette Abrahams.

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Panelists

Yvette Abrahams

I have worked at the University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape. I have consulted for both government and various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on issues relating to gender equality in policy and practice. I have published widely both locally and internationally on various topics related to gender equality, queer theory, as well as the history of First Nations South Africans. At the Commission for Gender Equality, I was head of their programmes on poverty, energy and climate change. I am currently nominated Extraordinary Professor in the Department of Women and Gender Studies, University of the Western Cape, while I continue to consult for NGOs in the age of gender and climate change. My work at present focuses on food security, energy, and climate particularly indigenous economic plants (as they speak to economic development and climate resilience); and climate change economics. As part of that work, I realised that you can write a hundred papers and attend a thousand conferences, but nothing has the impact of actually practicing what you preach. So now I make organic carbon neutral soaps and oils, based on my many years of research and growing indigenous plants. I reckon one bar of soap does more to convince people of the need to act to end climate change than all my words.

Pumla Dineo Gqola

Pumla Dineo Gqola is a feminist author and Dean of Research at Fort Hare University. She works on African feminist imagination, slave memory, Black Consciousness literature, postcolonial literatures and cultures, post-apartheid public culture and feminist sexualities. She holds MA degrees from the Universities of Cape Town and Warwick, and a PhD from the University of Munich. Her books are:

What is slavery to me? Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-apartheid South Africa (2010), *A Renegade Called Simphiwe* (2013), the Sunday Times Alan Paton Award for Non-Fiction winner for 2016, *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (2015) and *Reflecting Rogue: Inside the Mind of a Feminist* (2017).

Devarakshanam (Betty) Govinden

Betty Govinden is a literary and educational scholar and poet. She is the author of the award-winning book *'Sister Outsiders': Representation of Identity and Difference in Selected South African Indian Women's Writings* (Unisa Press, 2008) and *A Time of Memory: Reflections on South African Writing* (Solo Collective, 2008).

Manori Neelika Jayawardane

M Neelika Jayawardane is Associate Professor of English at the State University of New York-Oswego, and an Honorary Research Associate at the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa (CISA), University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa). She is a recipient of the 2017 Creative Capital Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant for a book project on the Afrapix photographers' agency. She was a founding member of the online magazine, *Africa is a Country*, where she was Senior Editor and contributor from 2010-2016. Among published texts, Jayawardane recently contributed the introductory essay for the South Africa pavilion's 57th Venice Biennale catalogue, and essays for The Walther Collection's publication (2017) and other artists' catalogues. Her writing is featured in *Al Jazeera English*, *Transition*, *Aperture*, *Contemporary Art South Africa*, *Contemporary Practices: Visual Art from the Middle East*, *Even Magazine*, and *Research in African Literatures*.

Sharlene Khan is a South African visual artist and scholar. Khan uses masquerading as a decolonising strategy to interrogate the intersectionality of race, gender and class of her South African heritage, and the sociopolitical realities of a post-apartheid, post-colonial society. She holds a PhD in Arts from Goldsmiths, University of London and is currently a Senior Lecturer in Art History and Visual Culture at Rhodes University. She runs the NRF-Rhodes University funded visual arts project *Art on our Mind*, a bi-weekly black feminist reading group, and is co-convenor of the Rhodes University African Feminisms (*Afems*) Conference.

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