

Being/becoming the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’  
The botanical complex, flower selling and floricultures in Cape Town



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## Declaration

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I, Melanie Eva Boehi, declare that *Being/Becoming 'the Cape Town Flower Sellers': The Botanical Complex, Flower Selling and Floricultures in Cape Town* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete reference.



Melanie Eva Boehi, Cape Town, December 2010.



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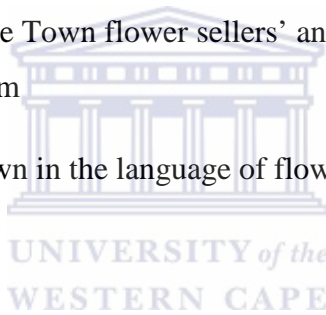
I received a lot of inspiration from the Pan African Space Station (PASS). Thanks to all space travellers and to the curators, Ntone Edjabe and Neo Muyanga.

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## Contents

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	Declaration	i
	Acknowledgements	ii
	List of images	iv
<hr/>		
<i>Introduction</i>	Studying flower selling in Cape Town	1
<i>Chapter One</i>	The botanical complex, disciplinary flower power and flower selling in Cape Town	13
<i>Chapter Two</i>	The ‘Cape Town flower sellers’	33
<i>Chapter Three</i>	The ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ and the flower selling curriculum	65
<i>Chapter Four</i>	Cape Town in the language of flowers	86
<i>Conclusion</i>		107
<i>Bibliography</i>		111



## Images

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<i>Cover</i>	Collage of postcards and photographs, top: Soraya Naidoo, beaded flower seller in Claremont, middle: Naomi Ward, Riedwaan Gamildien and Jafet, down: Diela and Fahmy Gamildien (Collage Melanie Boehi).	
<i>Figure 1</i>	Exhibition of the Kirstenbosch Biennale for Botanical Art 2010, Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden, Cape Town (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	31
<i>Figure 2</i>	“Bushman”-statue in the Harold Porter Botanical Garden, Betty’s Bay (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	31
<i>Figure 3</i>	Composite postcard <i>Cape Town</i> (SANL, PHA, CT. Composites).	39
<i>Figure 4</i>	Postcard <i>Beautiful Cape Town</i> (SANL, PHA, CT. Composites).	40
<i>Figure 5</i>	Postcard <i>Flower Sellers Adderley St. Cape Town</i> (SANL, PHA, CT. Flower Sellers).	41
<i>Figure 6</i>	Postcard <i>Flower-sellers. Adderley St. Capetown</i> (SANL, PHA, CT. Flower Sellers).	41
<i>Figure 7</i>	Jules Bastien-Lepage, <i>Flower-seller in London</i> , oil painting, 1882, <a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/freeparking/504178595/#/">http://www.flickr.com/photos/freeparking/504178595/#/</a> (accessed 20.12.2010).	45
<i>Figure 8</i>	John Thomson, <i>Covent Garden Flower Women</i> , c 1877 (Museum of London, Photographs, IN620. Image courtesy of the Museum of London).	45
<i>Figure 9</i>	Postcard <i>Cape Flower Girl</i> (SANL, PHA, CT. Flower Sellers).	47
<i>Figure 10</i>	Postcard <i>The Cape Peninsula Nature’s Masterpiece</i> (SANL, PHA, CT. Flower Sellers).	47
<i>Figure 11</i>	W.H.F. L. Langschmidt, <i>Long Street, Cape Town</i> , c 1845, oil on canvas (William Fehr CD115).	48
<i>Figure 12</i>	Vladimir Tretchikoff, <i>The Flower Seller Woman</i> , 1950, <a href="http://www.vladimirtretchikoff.com/gallery.htm">http://www.vladimirtretchikoff.com/gallery.htm</a> (accessed 19.12.2010).	49
<i>Figure 13</i>	Vladimir Tretchikoff, <i>The Flower Seller Girl</i> , 1950, <a href="http://www.vladimirtretchikoff.com/gallery.htm">http://www.vladimirtretchikoff.com/gallery.htm</a> (accessed 19.12.2010).	49
<i>Figure 14</i>	Price tag for roses grown in East Africa (Migros, 2010).	50
<i>Figure 15</i>	Index card “C.T. Flower sellers” in the National Library of South Africa (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	52
<i>Figure 16</i>	Amiena Williams (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	59
<i>Figure 17</i>	Diela Gamildien (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	60
<i>Figure 18</i>	Cecilia Williams (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	60
<i>Figure 19</i>	Soraya Naidoo (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	61
<i>Figure 20</i>	Diela and Fahmy Gamildien (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	61
<i>Figure 21</i>	Riedwaan Gamildien and Jafet (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	61
<i>Figure 22</i>	Ilhaam Benjamin (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	62
<i>Figure 23</i>	Cecilia Williams with one of her flower arrangements (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	62
<i>Figure 24</i>	Sharon Growers (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	63

<i>Figure 25</i>	Shaun (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	63
<i>Figure 26</i>	The Archdeacon Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot Memorial at Trafalgar Place in front of the Adderley Street flower market (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	79
<i>Figure 27</i>	Postcard <i>Adderley Street Cape Town</i> (SANL, PHA, CT. Flower Sellers).	82
<i>Figure 28</i>	Beaded flower seller Paradise Road in Claremont (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	83
<i>Figure 29</i>	Lilies made of beads and wire made by Lovemore Makondo at his stall in Silwood Road in Rondebosch (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	84
<i>Figure 30</i>	Giant or King Protea ( <i>Protea cynaroides</i> ) in the Department of Arts and Cultures list of national symbols, <a href="http://www.dac.gov.za/aboutDAC/nationalSymbols.htm#Flower">http://www.dac.gov.za/aboutDAC/nationalSymbols.htm#Flower</a> (accessed 27.12.2010).	92
<i>Figure 31</i>	Logo of the University of the Western Cape, <a href="http://www.uwc.ac.za/skins/uwcskin/images/header.jpg">http://www.uwc.ac.za/skins/uwcskin/images/header.jpg</a> (accessed 27.12.2010).	92
<i>Figure 32</i>	Logo of the Protea Coin Group, <a href="http://www.proteacoin.co.za">http://www.proteacoin.co.za</a> (accessed 27.12.2010).	92
<i>Figure 33</i>	This way to see the King Protea', sign board at Kirstenbosch (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	93
<i>Figure 34</i>	Fynbos grave decoration at Maitland Cemetery (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	93
<i>Figure 35</i>	Artificial flower grave decoration at Maitland Cemetery (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	94
<i>Figure 36</i>	Poppies at the Adderley Street Flower Market (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	100
<i>Figure 37</i>	Juan Manuel Echavarría, <i>Dionaea Severa</i> , from the series <i>Corte de Florero</i> , 1997, <a href="http://www.jmechavarria.com/gallery_florero.html">http://www.jmechavarria.com/gallery_florero.html</a> (accessed 27.12.2010).	102
<i>Figure 38</i>	Juan Manuel Echavarría, <i>Passiflora Sanguinea</i> , from the series <i>Corte de Florero</i> , 1997, <a href="http://www.jmechavarria.com/gallery_florero.html">http://www.jmechavarria.com/gallery_florero.html</a> (accessed 27.12.2010).	102
<i>Figure 39</i>	Andrew Putter, Hottentots Holland. <i>Flora Capensis 1</i> (2008), <a href="http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/putter/flora1.htm">http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/ putter/flora1.htm</a> (accessed 22.12.2010).	103
<i>Figure 40</i>	Beads and wire strelitzia made by Lovemore Makondo, Silwood Road, Rondebosch (Photograph Melanie Boehi).	110



## Abstract

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This mini-thesis is concerned with histories of flower selling in Cape Town. Since the late 19th century, images and imaginings of the flower sellers in Adderley Street and to a lesser degree in other areas of the city attained an outstanding place in visualisations and descriptions of Cape Town. The flower sellers were thereby characterised in a particularly gendered, racialised and class-specific way as predominantly female, coloured and poor. This characterisation dominated to an extent that it is possible to speak of a discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’. In tourism-related media and in personal memoirs, the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ often came to represent both the city and the inhabitants of Cape Town. The images and imaginings of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ can partly be traced back to representations of ‘flower girls’ in fictional stories, paintings, photographs and film in Europe, particularly in Great Britain. In Cape Town, this European discourse about flower selling developed in a specific way within colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid contexts. In previous city historiographies and tourist guidebooks, the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ have been described as having tradition, but not history. Contrary to this understanding, the women and men involved in flower selling had to make their trade possible and negotiate access to space, resources and opportunities on an ongoing basis. The genre of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ was used and deployed by them as a resource and this mini-thesis suggests that the performance of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ was part of the curriculum of flower selling in Cape Town. Interestingly, the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ were also incorporated in strategies of vendors of goods other than cut flowers, especially craft sellers. Flowers have been strongly associated with symbolic meanings, in flower selling and in narratives about history and life in Cape Town more generally. People involved in the cultivation and selling of flowers as well as artists have used flowers in creative and powerful ways to construct narratives. The mini-thesis suggests that studying these histories told in the ‘language of flowers’ can open up a more sensory approach to the discipline of history and shed light on aspects of life in Cape Town that historians have previously not taken much notice of. The mini-thesis thereby reflects upon theoretical assumptions and methodologies of studying history in contemporary South Africa and postcolonial spaces more generally.

## Introduction

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### Studying flower selling in Cape Town

Flowers, flower markets and flower selling have obtained a significant position in practices of imaging and imagining the city in Cape Town. The flower sellers of the central Adderley Street market were prominently depicted on early postcards and in other tourism-related media. Genre-specific images of flower selling emerged continuously since the late 19th century in the discourses of tourism, nature conservation and urban planning. The images and imaginings of flower selling thereby remained astonishingly stable. In visual and textual productions, the flower vendors were predominantly characterised as female, coloured and poor. The perceptions of gender, race and class were thereby streamlined to an extent that makes it possible to speak of a discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’.

Many historical writings and personal memoirs included the flower sellers in descriptions of Cape Town. Also visually, the flower sellers were often reproduced. Well-known painters like Vladimir Tretchikoff and numerous amateur artists produced images of Cape Town’s flower sellers. They were also an outstandingly popular subject among photographers and filmmakers, as lately in the short film promotion of Cape Town as a host city of the FIFA World Cup that was shown at the tournament’s final draw in December 2009. Often, the figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ was deployed to represent and personify the city and its inhabitants. For example, in the coffee table-book *Cape Town Uncovered* the “characterful flower-sellers of Adderley Street” were described as having “been a feature of Cape Town for more than a century, and ... become synonymous with the city.”<sup>1</sup> In spite of this prominence, the future of the flower selling was put at risk at numerous moments in the past.

While the discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ was highly visible and many Capetonians claimed to know ‘the flower sellers’, not much attention was paid to the activities that happened beyond the image. While the dominant discourse stated that flower sellers had a long tradition, little was said about their history. Despite the prevalence of uncertainty in the activities of the flower vendors, their presence was taken for granted. A more thorough engagement with their history though shows that

<sup>1</sup> Gillian Warren-Brown, Yazeed Fakier and Eric Miller, *Cape Town Uncovered: A People’s City* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005), 38.



the flower sellers have not always just been there, but have also actively made their own presence possible. The people involved in the flower selling might not be the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’, but the discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ was a part of their professional lives. People directly involved in flower selling, but also others, developed creative ways of using the genre-specific images and imaginings as a resource when access to space, opportunities and networks had to be negotiated. A study of the relationship between the discursive figure the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ and the practices of using and performing the image open up questions about how people have lived in and made sense of the city in Cape Town since the late 19th century.

This thesis attempts to do two things. First, the emergence, circulation and use of the discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ are studied. Second, the symbolic use of flowers in Cape Town is examined and the possibilities of studying flowers for a multisensory approach to the discipline of history are elaborated. Underlying this thesis is a curiosity about how one could study the production of identity, meaning and value in the city in the practices of representation around flower selling. The thesis is much inspired by recent writings about life in African cities and studies that focus on the senses.

### *City life in Cape Town*

Recent scholarly and artistic works emphasised the importance of acknowledging the complexities of urban life if any understanding of what goes on in cities should be gained. These recent interventions were directed at literature that mostly reproduced stereotypes rather than elaborated upon the many layers at work in life in cities in the ‘global South’. According to Edgar Pieterse and others, much literature on African cities has until today either started off from an apocalyptic (Afro-) pessimistic point of view or deployed a limiting “policy-fix” approach.<sup>2</sup> Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall criticised South African city historiography for having predominantly approached the city as “a problem to be solved” and for being narrowly focused on apartheid-imposed segregation of space, thus remaining preoccupied with the tasks of spatial refiguration

<sup>2</sup> Edgar Pieterse, *City Futures: Confronting the Crisis of Urban Development* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2008), 1-4.

per se.<sup>3</sup> Correspondingly, in the *African Cities Reader* published in 2010, Ntone Edjabe and Edgar Pieterse summoned people interested in cities to develop

an aesthetic agenda that can capture something about the stylisation of thought and practice as it emerges from the complex indeterminacies of city-making, city-burning and city-dreaming.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, AbdouMaliq Simone suggested shifting the analytical focus in urban studies away from the city to cityness, thereby referring to “the city as a thing in the making.”<sup>5</sup> Focusing on cityness thus allows acknowledging the diversity and quick changes that characterise the practices of inhabiting urban environments in the South. Simone suggested to ask questions like:

How do people collaborate, on what basis, and with what objects and tools? How are these collaborations nurtured and extended, both in space and time? What will be recognized as useful and salient?<sup>6</sup>

According to Simone, the city is not an abstract space consisting merely of physical infrastructure, technologies or legal entities. Instead, the city is also made of “actual people, images and architectural forms, footprints and memories” and constitutes “a place of manifold rhythms, a world of sounds, private freedom, pleasures, and sensations.”<sup>7</sup> The infrastructure of a city thus consists also of the people who live in it, their activities and their interactions with each other.<sup>8</sup> Simone suggested to acknowledge that people make life in cities possible through developing ways of acting as resources for each other.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike conventional political economy approaches that associate power primarily with ownership, Simone emphasised taking into consideration that power worked in more diverse ways. In African cities, power is less consolidated in ownership than in the “capacity to generate advantageous relationships with a multiplicity of production forces and strategic flows.”<sup>10</sup> Similar to the approach of Simone, the pan-

<sup>3</sup> Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, ‘Writing the World from an African Metropolis’, *Public Culture*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2004, 255-258.

<sup>4</sup> Ntone Edjabe and Edgar Pieterse, ‘Preface’, in Ntone Edjabe and Edgar Pieterse (eds), *African Cities Reader* (Cape Town: Chimurenga and African Centre for Cities, 2010), 5.

<sup>5</sup> AbdouMaliq Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar: Movements at the Crossroads* (Routledge: New York, London, 2010), 3.

<sup>6</sup> AbdouMaliq Simone, ‘The Visible and the Invisible: Remaking Cities in Africa’ in Okwui Enwezor et al (eds), *Under Siege: Four African Cities Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos, Documenta11\_Platform4* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2002), 31.

<sup>7</sup> Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), chapter 1, quoted in Mbembe and Nuttall, ‘Writing the World from an African Metropolis’, 360.

<sup>8</sup> AbdouMaliq Simone, ‘Urban Social Fields in Africa’, *Social Text*, no. 56, 1998, 81.

<sup>9</sup> Simone, ‘People as Infrastructure’ in Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (eds), *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 68.

<sup>10</sup> Simone, ‘Urban Social Fields in Africa’, 84.

African magazine of writing, art and politics *Chimurenga* suggested in its 15th issue to follow up the question of the curriculum, asking about how knowledge, strategies and skills that are necessary for making life possible are generated.<sup>11</sup>

Much groundbreaking literature on urban life in South Africa focused on Johannesburg. Among it are Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe's *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, Lindsay Bremner's *Writing the City into Being*, and several articles by AbdouMaliq Simone.<sup>12</sup> Noëleen Murray, Nick Shepherd and Martin Hall's *Desire Lines*, Sean Field's *Lost Communities, Living Memories: Remembering Forced Removals in Cape Town* and Sean Field, Renate Meyer and Felicity Swanson's *Imagining the City: Memories and Cultures in Cape Town* took up some of the recent debates in urban studies in Cape Town.<sup>13</sup> Interesting engagements with city life in Cape Town occurred especially outside academia. Particularly insightful is the musical intervention of the Pan African Space Station (PASS). Also interesting are the community museum work of the District Six Museum and the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum and the public arts festival 'Infecting the City'.<sup>14</sup>

Despite occupying a key position in genre-specific discourses, the existing literature on tourism and heritage in Cape Town has so far not been concerned with flower selling.<sup>15</sup> This literature discussed insightfully how the city became a tourist destination, but excluded the 'Cape Town flower sellers' in the studies of genealogy of

<sup>11</sup> 'The Curriculum is Everything', *Chimurenga*, vol. 15, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Nuttall and Mbembe (eds), *Johannesburg*. Lindsay Bremner, *Writing the City into Being: Essays on Johannesburg 1998-2008* (Johannesburg: Fourthwall Books, 2010). AbdouMaliq Simone, 'People as Infrastructure'. AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2004). AbdouMaliq Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar*.

<sup>13</sup> Noëleen Murray, Nick Shepherd and Martin Hall (eds), *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-Apartheid City* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007). Sean Field (ed), *Lost Communities, Living Memories: Remembering Forced Removals in Cape Town* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2001). Sean Field, Renate Meyer and Felicity Swanson (eds), *Imagining the City: Memories and Cultures in Cape Town* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> For an online introduction to these projects see: [www.panafricanspacestation.org.za](http://www.panafricanspacestation.org.za), [www.districtsix.co.za](http://www.districtsix.co.za), [www.lwandle.com](http://www.lwandle.com), [www.infectingthecity.com](http://www.infectingthecity.com).

<sup>15</sup> For example: Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, 'South Africa: A World in One Country: Moments in International Tourist Encounters with Wildlife, the Primitive and the Modern', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, vol. 41, no. 3, 1996, 335-371. Leslie Witz, Ciraj Rassool and Gary Minkley, 'Repacking the past for South African Tourism', *Daedalus*, vol. 130, no. 1, 2001, 227-296. Nigel Worden, 'Contesting heritage in a South African city: Cape Town', in Brian J. Shaw and Roy Jones (eds), *Contested Urban Heritage: Voices from the Periphery* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 31-61.

pictures that came to dominate the images and imaginings of Cape Town.<sup>16</sup> Reading tourist media against its grain, the studies focused on the persistence of colonial systems of knowledge. According to the literature, tourism framed Cape Town as a city that consisted of both a modern European and a primitive African part. Focusing on how tourism reproduced segregation in Cape Town, the literature risks repeating the error Nuttall and Mbembe criticised South African urban scholarship for, of concentrating too narrowly on spatial segregation. Also, the studies of tourism and heritage paid only little attention to how the genre-specific images impacted upon the everyday life of the inhabitants of the city.

How did tourism matter for those who were not privileged travellers at a destination, but residents of an urban space or passing through it, with other aims than leisure and pleasure in mind? Images and imaginings produced in tourism circulated widely and often entered the field of politics. For example, in an attempt to demonstrate commitment to the promise of providing adequate housing for all, the South African Human Settlements Minister Tokyo Sexwale in August 2009 not only visited the residents of the informal settlement of Diepsloot, but also attempted to sleep in one of their shacks.<sup>17</sup> In many ways, the minister's visit to Diepsloot resembled the conventions of the standardised township tour offered by travel agencies. Unlike tourists, politicians do not arrive with one camera but with a whole group of reporters. The images produced in tourism and political campaigning are nonetheless strikingly similar. How do images then circulate between tourism and politics and connect with each other? How should they be studied if we attempt to increase our understanding of what is happening with them and beyond them? This thesis tries to approach these questions in the particular case of the genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' that emerged out of the fields of tourism, environmentalism and urban planning alike.

<sup>16</sup> Witz, Rassool and Minkley, 'Repacking the past for South African Tourism', 227-296. Leslie Witz, 'Transforming Museums on Post-apartheid Tourist Routes', in Ivan Karp et al (eds), *Museum Frictions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 107-134. Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz, 'South Africa: A World in One Country: Moments in International Tourist Encounters with Wildlife, the Primitive and the Modern', 335-371. Nigel Worden, 'Unwrapping History at the Cape Town Waterfront', *The Public Historian*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1994, 33-50.

<sup>17</sup> Sapa, 'Sexwale samples Diepsloot', 4.8.2009, <http://news.iafrica.com/sa/1613419.htm> (accessed 28.11.2010). Monako Dibetle, 'Sexwale fails to impress cynical residents', *Mail & Guardian*, 9.8.2009.

### *History and the senses*

Several recent publications have drawn from personal experiences of life in urban environments and, as Jacob Dlamini described his own work, fused “the anecdotal and the general without losing sight of either.”<sup>18</sup> Explicitly or implicitly, they emphasised the importance of the senses and sensual memory for understanding more about city life. Dlamini’s *Native Nostalgia*, an account about growing up and living in Katlehong, a township east of Johannesburg, draws attention to how limited scholarly writing about life in townships has been, reducing them to “sites of struggle” or “sites for development.”<sup>19</sup> Also insightful for understanding city life in South Africa under apartheid are the two childhood memoirs of poet Chris van Wyk, *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy* and *Eggs to Lay, Chickens to Hatch* about his growing up in the coloured townships of Newclare, Coronationville and Riverlea.<sup>20</sup> The essay collections *At Risk* and *Load Shedding* are insightful attempts by scholars, many of them particularly interested in questions about urban life, to transcend disciplinary boundaries and find a language and a style of expression that are capable of grasping more than the conventional academic narratives do.<sup>21</sup>

Jacob Dlamini insists on the importance of the senses for historical writing about South Africa. He criticised scholars for often failing to acknowledge “the description that Africans gave to their feelings, their sense of what it meant to be urban.”<sup>22</sup> According to Dlamini, urbanisation has not only a material dimension, but also a sensuous one. Urbanisation thus “was as much about material conditions as it was about how people felt it, and, dare we say, felt about it.”<sup>23</sup>

Since the early 1990s, cultural studies has increasingly paid attention to the senses.<sup>24</sup> A shift of focus towards the senses emerged as a critique of the textualism and ocularcentrism that dominated the earlier scholarship. It was acknowledged that a

<sup>18</sup> Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Cape Town: Jacana, (2009) 2010), 154.

<sup>19</sup> Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*, 153.

<sup>20</sup> Chris van Wyk, *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy: A Childhood Memoir* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004). Chris van Wyk, *Eggs to Lay, Chickens to Hatch* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Liz McGregor and Sarah Nuttall (eds), *At Risk: Writing on and over the Edge of South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2007). Liz McGregor and Sarah Nuttall (eds), *Load Shedding: Writing on and over the Edge of South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*, 129f.

<sup>23</sup> Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*, 129f.

<sup>24</sup> Constance Classen and David Howes, ‘The Museum as Sensescape: Western Sensibilities and Indigenous Artifacts’ in Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth B. Phillips (eds), *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 199.



broader understanding of the senses was necessary if more profound insights about human experience were to be gained.<sup>25</sup> The senses are fundamental to our being in the world, as the human body perceives the material world and responds to it through the senses. As Diane Ackerman wrote,

[t]here is no way in which to understand the world without first detecting it through the radar-net of our senses. Our senses connect us intimately to the past, connect us in ways that most of our cherished ideas never could.<sup>26</sup>

Recent literature criticised the dominance of Western definitions of the senses and their functions. In the system of knowledge that emerged in Western Europe, the human encounter with the world was assumed to occur through the five senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. The five senses thereby were hierarchically ordered. At the top of this order were set the “civilised” senses of sight and hearing, at the bottom the “lower” and “primitive” senses of smell, taste and touch. The first two senses were associated with the mind, the rest with the body. The five senses-model is not only not universal, but also emerged only relatively recently in the West.<sup>27</sup> The ordering it implied was bound up with colonial history. As Europeans perceived themselves as the rational and civilised elite of the world, the variations in sensory practices were deployed as a vehicle for distinction.<sup>28</sup> The five senses-model was only one among many systems of sensory concepts that developed over time and space. Neuroscientists also showed that the five senses-model was not an adequate explanation for how the human body experiences the world.<sup>29</sup>

Human beings do not simply deploy the natural capabilities of their bodies as “radar-nets”, but first have to learn how to use them, thus actively shaping their bodies according to cultural perceptions. The senses then should not be understood as passive bodily functions but as actively deployed skills. According to Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth B. Phillips,

[t]he human body can be seen ... as part of the set of physiologically grounded human skills which render a world intelligible and workable.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Classen and Howes, ‘The Museum as Sensescape’, 199.

<sup>26</sup> Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), xvi.

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth B. Phillips, ‘Introduction’ in Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth B. Phillips (eds), *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Classen and Howes, ‘The Museum as Sensescape’, 206.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, ‘Introduction’, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, ‘Introduction’, 5.



Edwards, Gosden and Phillips suggested that studies of material culture should not be concerned with “things” but with “sensible objects.”<sup>31</sup> These “sensible objects” are integral to human behaviour, as the “sensory and the material call each other into existence.”<sup>32</sup>

From a multisensory perspective flowers are, as any other “thing”, “sensible objects”. They are particularly interesting, as flowers seem to evoke particularly strong sensory responses. In remembering flowers, talking about flowers and using flowers, people express meaning about all kind of things. Complex issues about what it means to live in South Africa today and how to make sense of the past are addressed in surprising ways when broken down to the subject of a flower. For example, explanations given for why certain flowers disappeared from the market and others entered are sometimes poignantly told interpretations of social, political and economical developments that affect people’s everyday lives. The power of flowers for historical and ethnographic research has been pointed out by scholars since the 1990s.

### *Studying Flowers*

Considering the extent to which flowers were invoked in processes of the making of Cape Town, it is surprising that relatively little scholarly attention was paid to them. So far, flowers have predominantly been written about by scholars concerned with nature conservation, but not so much with their symbolic meanings in a wider cultural context. Internationally, flowers have increasingly been studied by academics since the 1990s. Most prominently, the potential of flowers as a subject of scholarly interest was emphasised by Jack Goody in his 1993 book *The Culture of Flowers*.<sup>33</sup> According to Goody, “countless” books had been published on botany, flowers and gardens in general, but only little attention was paid to the culture of flowers.<sup>34</sup> Goody suggested that flowers were an eligible subject for ethnographic studies as they were at the same time part of nature, ideas about nature, and culture. Goody elaborated that

[b]y concentrating on flowers, which are part of nature and of society’s views about nature, one has a better chance of approaching problems that are less easily approached at the general level. For flowers are also part of culture: firstly, because they have been brought under cultivation by mankind and, secondly, because they are used throughout social life, for decoration, for medicine, in

<sup>31</sup> Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, ‘Introduction’, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, ‘Introduction’, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, xii.

cooking and for their scents, but above all in establishing, maintaining and even ending relationships, with the dead as with the living, with divinities as well as humans.<sup>35</sup>

Through writing about flowers, Goody tried to address the interrelations between the fields of ecology, economy and everyday practices.<sup>36</sup>

European flower culture was strongly influenced by colonial activities. The trade in flowers developed parallel to colonialism, as the expansion of trade networks and territorial occupation led to an increase in available flowers on the European markets. Flowers like the tulip were brought from the Near East, many others from America, and in the 19th century, South African flowers were especially sought after in Europe. As much as Goody's work is useful to think about the circulation of knowledge and meaning around flowers, it is limited by taking geographical areas as study units rather than spaces shaped through power distribution. Also, his assumption that flowers were culturally less significant on the African continent than in Asia and Europe is rather narrow.<sup>37</sup> Flower culture in Cape Town and in other colonial settlements was part of a wider culture of imperialism, to which Dutch and British flower cultures belonged as well as local knowledge and practices, both of indigenous people and settlers. The culture of flowers thus is better understood as an imperial culture than a specifically European one.

Anna Pavord and Michael Pollan, both authors who have written extensively about flowers, suggested that the relationship between flowers and people worked in two ways, as human beings used flowers, but flowers also used them.<sup>38</sup> According to Pavord, "[f]lowers are born to seduce."<sup>39</sup> With their colour, texture and scent, they attract pollinators that enable them to reproduce themselves. Primary targets are insects and hummingbirds, but human beings feel attracted to flowers just as well, and through their cultural practices facilitate their reproduction. Also, flowers can themselves be studied as histories, as their appearance bore witness to human desires and activities. Referring to the historical content of flowers, Pollan wrote that flowers existed

around which whole cultures have sprung up, flowers with an empire's worth of history behind them, flowers whose form and

<sup>35</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 26.

<sup>37</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 1-27.

<sup>38</sup> Anna Pavord, 'Introduction: A Passion for Flowers', in Andrew Moore and Christopher Garibaldi, *Flower Power: The Meaning of Flowers in Art* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2003), 11. Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), 61-110.

<sup>39</sup> Pavord, 'Introduction', 11.

color and scent, whose very genes carry reflections of people's ideas and desires through time like great books.<sup>40</sup>

While academics were reluctant to write about flowers, intriguing engagement with flowers took place in art and art criticism. In South Africa, Willem Boshoff's long-term engagement with botany and gardens and Andrew Putter's work *Hottentots Holland: Flora Capensis* are insightful engagements with metaphors and the history of colonialism and ecology. Very interesting is also the work of Moses Jaftha, a flower farmer in Constantia, who maintained a garden in which he cultivated old plant species that were about to disappear, as they were no longer grown by the entrepreneurs of the flower industry. The flowers and fruits in Moses Jaftha's garden bear witness of forms, tastes and smells of the past and tell histories of life before the apartheid-induced forced removals in Constantia. Without making that claim, Moses Jaftha curates a powerful historical narrative in his garden.

### *Flower Selling*

Just as the discursive figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' has so far been left out of academic studies, also the histories of the flower markets and the people involved in flower selling were not much written about. In the two volume-study of Cape Town-history by Vivian Bickford-Smith, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Nigel Worden, the flower sellers were included in a way that did not differ much from the stereotyping in tourism productions.<sup>41</sup> On a double page rendering an "illustrated social history" of "Coloured Capetonians in the 1940s", a critical discussion of photographs of the carnival and of a "Malay wedding" was given, while a photograph of the flower sellers was included without elaborating upon how the flower sellers featured in the visual economy of Cape Town. A brief contribution to the history of flower selling in Cape Town was made by R.E. van der Ross in *Buy my Flowers!*, a historical account of Strawberry Lane in Constantia. Flower selling was also written about in literature about nature conservation. Lance van Sittert suggested that the debates about the wild flower trade were a suitable site for studying how the perception of wild flowers shifted from "mere weeds" and "bosjes" to "indigenous flora" of a "Cape floral kingdom".<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*, 77.

<sup>41</sup> Nigel Worden, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town: The Making of a City: An Illustrated Social History* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1998). Vivian Bickford-Smith, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Nigel Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated Social History* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Lance van Sittert, 'From "mere weeds" and "bosjes" to a Cape Floral Kingdom: The Reimagining of Indigenous Flora at the Cape, c. 1890-1939', *Kronos*, vol. 28, 2002, 102-126.

Unlike in Cape Town, more research about the flower trade was conducted in Johannesburg and Durban by Ruth Tomaselli and Goolam Vahed.<sup>43</sup> In both Johannesburg and Durban, the first flower sellers were Indians whose ancestors came to South Africa as indentured labourers.<sup>44</sup> Flower selling was one of the few opportunities that unskilled people could take up to make a living. The flower sellers in Durban and Johannesburg didn't become part of the visual and imaginative city infrastructure as much as in Cape Town, though. On the contrary, the Johannesburg City Council was rather hostile towards all street vendors who were regarded as symptoms of Third World cities and therefore unworthy for Johannesburg.<sup>45</sup> Flower sellers were treated slightly better than other street vendors, which Ruth Tomaselli explains as coming from the fact that the flower sellers catered for a market of

nice clean middle class people, with whom it was easy for the authorities to identify.<sup>46</sup>

Both Tomaselli and Goolam Vahed focused on the economic and legal aspects of flower selling rather than symbolic meanings and social practices which this thesis focuses on.

Jack Goody and Kristina Huneault wrote insightfully about the figure of the female flower seller and the emergence of the trope of the 'flower girl' in Europe. Huneault analysed how from the 1870s onwards, 'flower girls' were depicted more often than any other type of urban working women, despite the fact that only a relatively small number of women was occupied with flower selling.<sup>47</sup> Importantly, she discussed how the discursive category of the 'flower girl' emerged both through pictures and text. According to Huneault,

the flower-girl as an urban type offers an opportunity to interrogate popular expectations around issues such as the transformative potential of charity, the commodification of working-class female sexuality and changing visions of women's relation to urban space.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Tomaselli, 'Indian Flower Sellers of Johannesburg: A History of People on the Street', in Belinda Bozzoli (ed), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1983), 215-239. Ruth Elizabeth Tomaselli, 'On the peripheries of the defended space: hawkers in Johannesburg' in Richard Hainer and Gina Buijs (eds), *The Struggle for Social and Economic Space: Urbanization in Twentieth Century South Africa* (Durban: Institute for Social and Economic Research University of Durban-Westville, 1985), 131-190. Goolam Vahed, 'Control and Repression: The Plight of Indian Hawkers and Flower Sellers in Durban, 1910-1948', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1999, 19-48.

<sup>44</sup> Tomaselli, 'Indian Flower Sellers of Johannesburg', 216; Vahed, 'Control and Repression', 20.

<sup>45</sup> Tomaselli, 'Indian Flower Sellers of Johannesburg', 215.

<sup>46</sup> Tomaselli, 'Indian Flower Sellers of Johannesburg', 219.

<sup>47</sup> Kristina Huneault, *Difficult Subjects: Working Women and Visual Culture, Britain, 1880-1914* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Huneault, *Difficult Subjects*, 15.

Huneault's analysis of the 'flower girl'-discourse is important for the study of the 'Cape Town flower sellers', as the latter was most likely influenced by the first. This thesis then attempts to elaborate upon Huneault's suggestions outside of the British context and to take into consideration how images and imaginings circulated through imperial systems of knowledge.

### *Chapter outline*

This thesis draws upon the theoretical questions mentioned in this introduction and tries to address the gaps identified. The first chapter discusses how power was exercised through deploying a set of institutions and discourses that can be conceptualised as the botanical complex of Cape Town. Social and cultural hierarchies in Cape Town were, among other vehicles, produced through putting people in particular relations to the flora. The second chapter studies the genealogy of the discursive figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. The genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was related to European notions of urban 'flower girls' of the 19th century and was later influenced by colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid perceptions of the city of Cape Town. The third chapter studies how people involved in the flower selling related to the discursive figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. The chapter asks how the 'Cape Town flower sellers' became a part of the curriculum of flower selling in Cape Town. It suggests that the 'Cape Town flower sellers' constituted a decisive resource for people involved in flower selling, but also for others. The fourth chapter is concerned with the way flowers are embedded in story telling as "sensible objects."

This work is only a mini-thesis and unfortunately, this prohibits sustained, detailed examination of a range of issues which are raised in this study. The work presented here has taken up a broad variety of issues and has analysed them together sometimes fruitfully, and at other times only in a fragmentary way. More extensive research and explanations need to be done, and more connections drawn in a more thorough way. Indeed, this mini-thesis shows that there are remarkable possibilities for future scholars interested in the study of flowers and floricultures. I truly hope that this mini-thesis will be a starting point for more engagement with flowers and flower selling in Cape Town.

## Chapter One

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### **The botanical complex, disciplinary flower power and flower selling in Cape Town**

The introduction of a license of £ 3 for flower selling is directed “more against the flower sellers than in favour of the protection of flowers.”

Mr. Garlick, Debates in the House of Assembly, 1905.<sup>1</sup>

“People before fynbos.”

Denis Goldberg, *Cape Times*, 11.10.2010.<sup>2</sup>

Social classification and cultural distinction among the inhabitants of Cape Town were made through various practices, including such related to botany. Botany thereby functioned in a museological way that put people into place in society through defining their relationship to the flora. The institutions and practices involved in this hierarchical ordering can be described as the botanical complex of Cape Town. The thinking about a botanical complex draws from Tony Bennett’s concept of the exhibitionary complex.<sup>3</sup> The suitability of Bennett’s theoretical framework might be most apparent in the case of the botanical gardens, as they by definition served a museological purpose. But also other institutions made use of the curating and displaying of flora. Together, botanical gardens and scientific institutes, flower shows, horticultural societies, nature conservation, flower tourism, media reporting and floral displays in public and private spaces functioned as means of shaping aesthetic agendas and senses of entitlement that installed hierarchical orders. Studying the botanical complex of the city can open up questions about how various systems of knowledge intersected and can increase our understanding of the making of social distinction among the inhabitants of Cape Town. Diverse fields of knowledge production that are usually rather difficult to bridge, for example botany and urban planning, can thus be thought together.

The writing of Tony Bennett about the formation of the museum in Europe in the 19th century is insightful for the understanding of how botany worked in Cape Town. As Bennett writes, in the late 18th and early 19th century, culture was employed

<sup>1</sup> House of Assembly, ‘Wild flowers protection bill’, Debates in the House of Assembly (Cape Town: Cape Times Printing Works, 1905), 303.

<sup>2</sup> Denis Goldberg, ‘Put people of Hangberg before fynbos and firebreaks’, *The Cape Times*, 11.10.2010.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 49-88.



as a vehicle through which new forms of power were exercised.<sup>4</sup> Drawing from Foucault, he suggests that as the juridico-discursive form of government was replaced by the disciplinary apparatus, high culture was no longer performed by the sovereign as a spectacle. Instead, culture became deployed in a way that reflected the change to governmental power. People were no longer supposed to be mere witnesses, but directed to perform and internalise culture themselves.<sup>5</sup> In the rise of industrialisation, culture was regarded as a vehicle for obviating riots among the working classes and making their bodies more docile and productive.

To apply culture in this logic, it had to be transformed in ways that made it available for the appropriation by those who were to be governed.<sup>6</sup> The dominating sites through which the new cultural dispositions were imposed on society were exhibitions and the modern museums, through which also a new form of public sphere emerged. In these exhibitions and museums, the social relation between the owner and the audience of collections were mediated through the order of the displays.<sup>7</sup> The new museums were built and organised in ways that not only made the collections visible, but also rendered the visitors observable to each other. People were not only put into their place through the mediation of their encounter with the collections, but also through the organisation of their relations among each other.

Although the new museums made collections available to a wider public, exclusiveness persisted, as not everybody could enter every museum.<sup>8</sup> Especially, the modern art gallery was appropriated by the social elites and thus differentiated classes. The modern museum also included a reordering of the displayed objects. Collections were built in processes of organising and judgement and they are always experienced through socially-coded ways of seeing.<sup>9</sup> Following Pierre Bourdieu, Bennett wrote about the art gallery that its

capacity to function as an instrument of social distinction depends on the fact that only those with the appropriate kinds of cultural capital can both *see* the paintings and *see through* [his emphasis] them to perceive the hidden order of art which subtends their arrangements.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 19.

<sup>5</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 35.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 35.

Genre-specific cultural capital was not only required to participate in the social space around the art gallery, but also in other museological institutions. In Cape Town, one of them was the botanical complex.

### *Disciplinary flower power*

Similarly to the modern art gallery, the botanical complex of Cape Town defined the distribution of cultural capital, and thus installed a hierarchical order among the inhabitants of the city. Cultural capital thereby took the form of specific floricultural capital. In the debates about the use of flowers, the question of who could do what with the flora was embedded in a wider set of issues around the entitlement to natural resources. Who was capable of applying a rational approach towards nature and had thus fostered higher degrees of its aesthetic perception were central issues. The distribution of floricultural capital that was integral to these questions contributed to the production of a hierarchical ordering of society. Through defining people's relationship to nature, this order itself was naturalised.

The pattern of arguments in the debates about flowers also prevailed in the wider discourse of nature conservation. For example, the telling of an anecdote about Jan van Riebeeck's concern with wood shows how nature conservation was invoked to legitimise colonial domination. In an article in *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, H.B. Rycroft traced nature conservation back to the early years following the Dutch East India Company's arrival in 1652.<sup>11</sup> According to Rycroft, Van Riebeeck had realised that "within a few years, most of the larger trees had gone" and in response "issued a notice or 'placaat' prohibiting the cutting of trees except under certain special conditions."<sup>12</sup> Instead of understanding the colonial occupation as the beginning of overexploitation of resources, Rycroft described Van Riebeeck as introducing a rational use of nature, thereby producing historical weight for the governmental policy at the time of his writing.

The Cape's indigenous vegetation, called fynbos (Afrikaans for 'fine bush'), is particularly diverse, and is regarded within the field of botany and botanical conservation as the smallest of the world's six 'floristic kingdoms'. The 'floristic kingdoms' define geographic areas with a high degree of endemism and uniformity of plant species. The 'Cape Floral Kingdom' contains nearly 9000 plant species, of which

<sup>11</sup> H. B. Rycroft, 'Saving our Flora', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XLI/XLII, 1955/56, 13.

<sup>12</sup> H. B. Rycroft, 'Saving our Flora', 13f.

69 per cent are endemic.<sup>13</sup> The indigenous flora was studied with eager curiosity by Europeans who travelled to the Cape in the 17th century. Plants were collected, catalogued, and shipped to other colonial settlements as well as to Europe where they were given much attention. According to Pooley, “the Dutch aristocracy were keen collectors of Cape plants.”<sup>14</sup> In the 18th century, followers of the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus travelled to South Africa and searched for species to newly integrate into the Linnaean system.<sup>15</sup>

Until the late 19th century, relatively little attention was paid to indigenous flowers at the Cape. Early nature conservation was primarily concerned with the regulation of forests.<sup>16</sup> Also, unlike in Europe, the fynbos flora was not popular among the settler inhabitants of Cape Town until the late 19th century. The botanical garden in the city contained mostly exotic species.<sup>17</sup> The preference of exotic over indigenous species was typical for European colonial settlements.<sup>18</sup> But, as Lance van Sittert writes, unlike in other colonies, the indigenous flora was later appropriated in the process of the making of a settler identity at the Cape. According to Van Sittert

[f]loral nativism provided both a sense of identity for an emerging White settler nationalism and a justification for evicting the underclass from the commons.<sup>19</sup>

Indigenous plants were thus predominantly identified with by the urban, English-speaking white middle class of Cape Town.<sup>20</sup>

The pattern of arguments around nature conservation that emerged in the debates around the use of flowers in the early decades of the 20th century has remained powerful until today. In 2010, arguments about nature conservation were used prominently by politicians arguing for the eviction of the informal settlement of Hangberg in Hout Bay, as will be discussed later in this chapter.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Simon Pooley, ‘Pressed Flowers: Notions of Indigenous and Alien Vegetation in South Africa’s Western Cape, c. 1902-1945’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2010, 609.

<sup>14</sup> Pooley, ‘Pressed Flowers’, 600.

<sup>15</sup> Pooley, ‘Pressed Flowers’, 600.

<sup>16</sup> Pooley, ‘Pressed Flowers’, 600.

<sup>17</sup> Pooley, ‘Pressed Flowers’, 600.

<sup>18</sup> Lance van Sittert, ‘Making of the Cape Floral Kingdom’, *Landscape Research*, 28, 1, 2003, 114.

<sup>19</sup> Van Sittert, ‘Making of the Cape Floral Kingdom’, 113.

<sup>20</sup> Van Sittert, ‘Making of the Cape Floral Kingdom’, 114.

<sup>21</sup> Aryan Kaganof, Dylan Valley and Greg Louw, *The uprising of Hangberg* (Documentary Film, 2010), <http://www.hangberg.co.za> (accessed 22.12.2010).

### *Flower selling and the wild flower protection legislation*

It is impossible to say with certainty when flower selling in the streets of Cape Town began. Several narratives about its origin exist and various dates and circumstances were mentioned. Some authors surmised that flower selling began in the 18th century as an occupation of slaves.<sup>22</sup> Others gave specific dates in the late 19th century as starting points.<sup>23</sup> In a more recent article, Van Sittert suggested that flowers were sold in the city since the mid-1880s.<sup>24</sup> People involved in flower selling in Cape Town today assumed that their families have been conducting the trade for at least three generations, which strengthens Van Sittert's suggestion.<sup>25</sup>

Legislation concerning the gathering and trading of flowers was first implemented in the last decade of the 19th century and ever since, the question of who could do what with flowers remained pressing. Early debates about the picking of flowers on Table Mountain took place when the Forestry Department introduced permits for it in 1893.<sup>26</sup> The permits did not have the desired impact though and the question about further protective measurements was taken up again in the House of Assembly in August 1894.<sup>27</sup> Central to this debate was the argument about who was entitled to pick flowers. In parliament, Mr. De Waal complained that areas on Table Mountain were cordoned off for the aristocracy to collect flowers and Mr. Sauer argued against these restrictions, saying that as nature put the flowers there,

they belonged as much to the poorest man in Cape Town as to Government officials, under certain restrictions, of course.<sup>28</sup>

In 1897, the gathering of flowers on Table Mountain was prohibited completely, but the railways enabled flower vendors to travel further away to collect flowers and continue their trade.<sup>29</sup> Flower picking continued to be regarded as a threat to the flora. In February 1905, Henry Harold Welch Pearson, who had been appointed to the Chair of Botany at the South African College in 1902, called for stricter regulation of the

<sup>22</sup> For example Barbara Campbell Tait, *Cape Cameos: The Story of Cape Town in a New Way*, (Cape Town: Stewart, 1949), 113.

<sup>23</sup> George Manuel, *I Remember Cape Town* (Cape Town: D. Nelson, 1977), 93. Lawrence G. Green, *Tavern of the Seas* (Cape Town: Rustica Press Limited, 1947), 76.

<sup>24</sup> Van Sittert, 'From "mere weeds" and "bosjes" to a Cape Floral Kingdom', 110.

<sup>25</sup> Interviews with flower sellers in Cape Town, conducted in 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Van Sittert, 'From "mere weeds" and "bosjes" to a Cape Floral Kingdom', 112.

<sup>27</sup> House of Assembly, 'Saturday, August 1, 1894', *Debates in the House of Assembly*, (Cape Town: Cape Times Printing Works, 1894), 1894, 479.

<sup>28</sup> House of Assembly, 'Saturday, August 11, 1894', 479.

<sup>29</sup> Van Sittert, 'Making of the Cape Floral Kingdom', 119.

selling and exhibiting of wild flowers and initiated the meeting of a committee of botanists and the attorney general that led to the drafting of additional legislation.<sup>30</sup>

In the debates about the Wild Flowers Protection Act in parliament in May 1905, the protection of flowers and the control of people were intertwined to the extent that it was questioned whether the debate was more concerned with the regulation of flowers or the control of people. Among the suggestions put forward were the introduction of a licence of £-3 for flower sellers as well as the publication of a list of the wild flowers that were allowed to be traded.<sup>31</sup> Several parliamentarians argued against the introduction of the permit with philanthropic reasoning. They described the flower sellers as “little boys and girls” and “poor people [who] had no other means of support”, and mentioned as examples a “widow with eight children”, “another woman [who] had seven children,” and “a blind girl who supported her aged mother” to make a point for pitifulness.<sup>32</sup> The permit was opposed by the philanthropists as “it was a very serious thing to compel those poor people to pay a licence which they could ill afford.”<sup>33</sup> One parliamentarian, Mr. Garlick, even argued that the licence was directed “more against the flower sellers than in favour of the protection of flowers.”<sup>34</sup> Defending the draft, Mr. Viljoen argued that the opponents confused matters and that the legislation was not motivated by issues of race or class. He explained that

[i]n no part of the Bill was mention made of colour or class, and it was never his intention when drafting the Bill to introduce class or colour legislation in a measure that was to protect one of the beauties of the country. The bill was intended for all.<sup>35</sup>

The entitlement to flowers was also at the core of the debate about the Wild Flowers Protection Act Amendment Bill that took place in July 1915 in the House of Assembly. Additional measures were suggested to prohibit the gathering and sale of certain plants that were still seen as a threat, combining nature conservation and the fostering of patriotic feelings. It was argued that the flowers should be protected as

<sup>30</sup> Van Sittert, ‘Making of the Cape Floral Kingdom’, 119.

<sup>31</sup> House of Assembly, ‘Wild flowers protection bill’, Debates in the House of the Assembly (Cape Town: Cape Times Printing Works, 1905), 201.

<sup>32</sup> Mr. Viljoen and Mr. Garlick in the debate about the wild flowers protection bill. House of Assembly, ‘Wild flowers protection bill’, 303.

<sup>33</sup> House of Assembly, ‘Wild flowers protection bill’, 303.

<sup>34</sup> House of Assembly, ‘Wild flowers protection bill’, 303.

<sup>35</sup> House of Assembly, ‘Wild flowers protection bill’, 303.

a national feeling [has been] growing up in this country, and if there was one thing which that feeling ought to promote it was the salvation of the beauties of the country.<sup>36</sup>

The debate in parliament took up issues of who was responsible for the destruction of the flora and implicitly, who threatened recently awoken patriotic feelings. Thereby both upper-class white people and coloured, poor flower sellers were perceived as threats.<sup>37</sup> Again, the debates about the protection of the wild flowers intrinsically contained a debate about race and class. For example, taking the issue beyond nature conservation, one parliamentarian, Mr. Powell, raised the issue of appropriate employment for coloured people, thereby expressing specific ideas about who should be a flower seller and who not. He explained that whenever he walked past

an able-bodied coloured man selling flowers ... he always thought he would be better employed on a farm, and when he saw an able-bodied coloured woman selling flowers, he always thought she would be much better employed in domestic service.<sup>38</sup>

It was also frequently argued that wealthy white people encouraged the destructive activities of the flower sellers, as they stimulated the trade with their luxurious craving for fresh mountain flowers. In an article in *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa* published in 1920, D. Gordon Mills argued that there were

scores of householders (and this applies particularly to the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town and the False Bay Coast) who still illegally purchase the protected flowers which are mostly hidden in the baskets of the coloured vendors under the unprotected and cultivated flowers. It is stated that were it not for the number and extent of this class of clientele who are willing to pay high prices, there would be little incentive to the coloured folk to break the Law.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, in an article published in the same journal in 1936, it was suggested that as every trade was “regulated by the law of supply and demand”, protected flowers were illegally traded “not in Adderley Street, perhaps, but surely at the back doors in the fashionable residential suburbs of Cape Town.”<sup>40</sup> Also the 1939 report of the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee of the Botanical Society stated that the

<sup>36</sup> Mr. Viljoen in the debate about the wild flowers’ protection amendment bill, House of Assembly, ‘Wild flowers’ protection act amendment bill’. Debates in the House of Assembly (Cape Town: Cape Times Printing Works, 1908), 229.

<sup>37</sup> House of Assembly, ‘Wild flowers’ protection act amendment bill’, 229.

<sup>38</sup> House of Assembly, ‘Wild flowers’ protection act amendment bill’, 229.

<sup>39</sup> D. Gordon Mills, ‘The Protection of Wild Flowers’, *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part VI, 1920, 15.

<sup>40</sup> F. Guthrie, ‘Our Wild Flowers’, *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXII, 1936, 15.



protection of the flowers was

very difficult to enforce as the beauty of our flowers seems to overcome any scruples which our womenfolk have in buying them at the door.<sup>41</sup>

Particular concepts of class, race and gender were powerfully constructed in these debates about the use of wild flowers. On the one hand, flower sellers were framed as poor, coloured people who denuded the mountains to make a living. On the other hand, upper class white people, especially women, were characterised as irrational in their use of flowers. So-called 'African' people were not mentioned in the debates about nature conservation at all. It was probably assumed that they did not have any floricultural capital at all and lacked the capability of either an aesthetic or an economic approach to flowers.

In the debates about the protection of the wild flowers, poor coloured flower sellers and wealthy white women were imagined as threats to the flora and also to the consolidating ruling white middle-class society. Through the botanical complex, a stricter control not only of the flowers, but also of the people involved in the trade was demanded. The botanical complex also set the white middle-class inhabitants into a favourable position. According to Van Sittert, only the typical middle-class cultural activities around indigenous flowers such as gardening, exhibitions, science and commerce were not disturbed by regulatory attempts.<sup>42</sup>

As the above mentioned reports stated, the laws regarding the protection of wild flowers were passed more quickly than they were actually enforced. In the years following their implementation, complaints were still lodged about the lack of improvement. As mentioned, the demand of upper class customers was blamed for retarding betterment. It was further suspected that people generally were not educated enough to recognise and appreciate endangered wild flowers. Also, it was argued that "the average Police Officer" remained unable to recognise protected species."<sup>43</sup> In the decades following the implementation of the protectionist laws, the exhibitionary complex was set at work to educate both the general public and the police about the flora, thereby bringing nature conservation and governmental power into a close relationship.

<sup>41</sup> 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1939', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXVI, 1940, 16.

<sup>42</sup> Van Sittert, 'Making of the Cape Floral Kingdom', 120.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon Mills, 'The Protection of Wild Flowers', 16.

### *Protecting and policing*

In 1912, the Wild Flowers Protection Committee, an organisation that was later renamed the Wild Flowers Protection Society and operated as a sub-committee of the Botanical Society from 1938 onwards, was formed by Capetonians concerned with the inert implementation of the protection of the wild flowers.<sup>44</sup> In 1939, the Committee discussed whether there was a need for appointing special police inspectors to protect the wild flowers more efficiently.<sup>45</sup> Also, concerned botanists assisted the law enforcement with specialist knowledge. In 1944, an album with illustrations of protected species was compiled by the botanist Harriet Margaret Louisa Bolus for the use of the magistrate and the public prosecutor of Caledon and Grabouw.<sup>46</sup> The Committee discussed the training and appointment of officers with botanical knowledge with the police. The police expressed their willingness to assist in the protection of the flora, but their engagement remained more talk than action.<sup>47</sup> Law enforcement still depended on members of the public to bring offenses to the attention of the police.<sup>48</sup>

Dissatisfied with the police work, the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee finally decided to appoint an officer of its own.<sup>49</sup> In April 1947, H.D. Meyer, a former police sergeant with sufficient botanical knowledge, was employed to enforce the regulations issued under the Wild Flowers Protection Ordinance. A few months after his engagement, the police appointed Meyer as special constable. His salary was paid by the Committee and complimented by witness fees for attending cases he brought to court.<sup>50</sup> The special constable's task consisted of controlling the flower market, identifying illegal flower selling and reporting about his activities to the Committee. From the beginning, the Committee was satisfied with Meyer's work, as he

<sup>44</sup> Van Sittert, 'Making of the Cape Floral Kingdom', 123.

<sup>45</sup> 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1939', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXVI, 1940, 16.

<sup>46</sup> R. H. Compton and L. A. Solomon, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1944', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXX, 1944, 21.

<sup>47</sup> R. H. Compton and L. A. Solomon, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1946', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXXII, 1946, 20.

<sup>48</sup> Compton and Solomon, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1946', 20.

<sup>49</sup> R. H. Compton and L. A. Solomon, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1947', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXXIII, 1947, 20f.

<sup>50</sup> Compton and Solomon, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1947', 20f.

managed to bring around 200 cases to court in the first year and to increase the amount of fines that were paid.<sup>51</sup>

The inspections of the flower selling led to extensive interactions between the Wild Flower Protection Section and the police. It was even suggested that the police should contribute to the wage of the inspector through a refund of a part of the fines that he brought in.<sup>52</sup> The police considered themselves unable to appoint a special officer to enforce the protection of the wild flowers due to a shortage of personnel, but they made use of the Committee's inspector.<sup>53</sup> In an initiative of the police, Meyer was invited to talk to their members about flowers and in 1950 he even held a series of lectures for the police at the Kirstenbosch botanical garden.<sup>54</sup> In the years following the appointment of the special inspector, the relationship between the Wild Flowers Protection Section and the police were increasingly institutionalised. In 1952, the police gave the members of the Wild Flowers Protection Committee special authority "to investigate and take action against any contraventions of the Ordinances" and appointed them as "Honorary Nature Conservation Officers."<sup>55</sup>

The cases that Meyer brought to court involved the selling of protected species, trading without a valid licence, children under sixteen years selling flowers and other offences.<sup>56</sup> While the first two offenses were still closely related to the wild flower protection, the third demonstrates how closely interlinked the botanical complex and the repressive apparatus had become by the middle of the 20th century. The police also offered transport and personal assistance to the special inspector for his trips outside of

<sup>51</sup> Compton and Solomon, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1947', 20f.

<sup>52</sup> R. H. Compton and W. N. Hall, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1948', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXXIV, 1948, 18.

<sup>53</sup> R. H. Compton and W. N. Hall, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1949', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXXV, 1949, 17.

<sup>54</sup> Compton and Hall, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1949', 17. R. H. Compton, and W. N. Hall, 'Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee annual report for the year ended 31st December 1950', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXXVI, 1950, 21.

<sup>55</sup> R. H. Compton and W. N. Hall, 'Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee annual report for the year ended 31st December, 1952', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXXVIII, 1952, 20.

<sup>56</sup> Compton and Hall, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1948', 18. Compton and Hall, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1949', 17. Compton and Hall, 'Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee annual report for the year ended 31st December, 1950', 21. R. H. Compton and W. N. Hall, 'Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee annual report for the year ended 31st December, 1951', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XXXVII, 1951, 21.

Cape Town where, from 1953 onwards, he also controlled wild flower nurseries and fined people who gathered flowers illegally.<sup>57</sup>

From the late 1950s onwards, a shift in the perception of threats to the flora occurred that made the work of the special inspector less important. As “alien” plants became increasingly regarded as an urgent ecological and political problem, the activities of the Botanical Society shifted away from the control of the flower trade.<sup>58</sup> The Wild Flower Protection Section Committee was also satisfied with the developments that had taken place, stating in its report for the years 1955/56 that “the control of the sale of protected wild flowers by local sellers [was] well in hand.”<sup>59</sup> In 1959, Meyer brought a relatively small number of offences to court and reported that the cases were mostly concerned with flower sellers who did not renew their licenses or who flouted other regulations.<sup>60</sup> He continued daily rounds of inspection on the flower market and focused on the control of nurserymen.<sup>61</sup> In 1961, the Cape Provincial Administration also employed further Nature Conservation Officers whose task was to ensure the protection of wild flowers and who were better equipped than their predecessors, both with knowledge and transport facilities.<sup>62</sup>

#### *The media and the botanical complex*

Besides stricter regulation and more effective control, it was frequently argued that the public should be educated in accurate appreciation of the wild flowers. The protection of the indigenous flora thereby was closely linked to the fostering of a national identity. For example, F. Guthrie argued in *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa* in 1936 that

<sup>57</sup> H. B. Rycroft and W. N. Hall, ‘Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee annual report for the year ended 31st December, 1955’, *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XLI/XLII, 1955/56, 36.

<sup>58</sup> In 1958, the Control of Alien Vegetation Committee was established as a part of the Wild Flower Protection Society Committee. John and Jean Comaroff have asked how an “anxious public discourse” over invasive “alien” plants was related to the reasoning about the concept of the nation-state as economical and political developments increasingly question national borders and sovereignty. According to the Comaroffs, the concern with aliens in South Africa since the millennium has been excessive and gone beyond botany, environmental science and disaster control and are deeply enmeshed in processes of the making of citizenship, identity and nation building in the postcolony. Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, ‘Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse, and the Postcolonial State’, *Social Identities*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2001, 236f.

<sup>59</sup> Rycroft and Hall, ‘Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee annual report for the year ended 31st December, 1955’, 36.

<sup>60</sup> H. B. Rycroft and W. N. Hall, ‘Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee annual report for the year ended 31st December, 1959’, *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XLVI, 1960, 25.

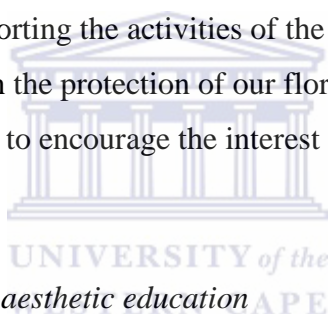
<sup>61</sup> H. B. Rycroft and W. N. Hall, ‘Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee annual report for the year ended 31st December, 1960’, *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XLVII, 1961, 21.

<sup>62</sup> H. B. Rycroft and W. N. Hall, ‘Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee annual report for the year ended 31st December, 1961’, *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XLVIII, 1962, 23.

[b]y propaganda through the medium of schools, churches and other organisations, broadcasts, etc., calculated to instil in our public, young and old, a love for our wild flowers, to make them realise that they are the trustees and guardians of this rich treasure and that it is their sacred duty to do everything in their power to preserve it for all time.<sup>63</sup>

Accordingly, the media were deployed to implement a new nationalistic aesthetic agenda around flowers. The newspapers of the city wrote regularly about cases of illegal flower picking and reported frequently about activities at Kirstenbosch. Also, the flower season was an annual media event, with newspapers informing people about when and where to go to see flowers in the Western Cape area, and how to behave properly on such excursions.

The Wild Flowers Protection Society acknowledged the importance of the press for the implementation of its agenda. From the mid-1950s onwards, the media's engagement was pointed out in the annual reports of the Society. The press was thanked for "their propaganda in reporting the activities of the section" and for having "done much to foster the interest in the protection of our flora."<sup>64</sup> According to the Society, the press had done "a great deal to encourage the interest and appreciation of our wild flowers."<sup>65</sup>



#### *Flowers, beautification and aesthetic education*

On the one hand, disciplinary flower power was exerted through the meeting of the botanical complex and the repressive apparatus in the joint policing work described above. On the other hand, the disciplinary forces were also invoked in more subtle ways. As in many other cities, flowers were put on display in Cape Town in public and private spaces. Journalist Barbara Stewart's writing about flowers in New York is informative for the understanding of how flowers can intervene in urban spaces.<sup>66</sup> Stewart reflected upon how flowers emerged in New York after the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. According to Stewart, in the days after 9/11, New York had

<sup>63</sup> Guthrie, 'Our Wild Flowers', 16.

<sup>64</sup> H. B. Rycroft and W. N. Hall, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1955', 36.

<sup>65</sup> H. B. Rycroft and W. N. Hall, 'Report by the Wild Flowers Protection Section Committee for the Year Ending 31st December, 1956', *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XLIII, 1957, 26.

<sup>66</sup> Barbara Stewart, 'Even the Delicate Survive', *New York Times*, 22.11.2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/22/nyregion/even-the-delicate-survive.html?scp=1&sq=barbara%20stewart%20even%20the%20delicate%20survive&st=cse> (accessed 15.07.2010).



been given flowers by the millions ... four and five layers deep, at the doorsteps of fire stations and churches and at impromptu shrines on park lawns, stoops, windowsills and sidewalks.<sup>67</sup>

It was not only the displays of cut flowers that astonished Stewart in the situation after the attacks, but also that a little garden beside the St. Vincent's Manhattan Hospital "provided a moment of lovely, orderly civilisation ... against the smoke-dark sky."<sup>68</sup>

Michael Pollan thus said about flowers in city streets that they

provide a contrast to the toughness all around them ... Putting something so vulnerable in ... a public space sends a very strong message ... That something so delicate can survive and thrive outside in New York – there's something very happy about that. When you think about it, what's more fragile than a flower?<sup>69</sup>

Flowers were deployed in interventions in the urban environment of Cape Town both by governments and private actors. Governments, municipal departments and the police planted flowers with the intention to impact upon people's behaviour, and to make themselves look good. Also, people used flowers on private property and in public spaces to make their own impact on the city's surface and life, through pots on stoeps or in parking lots, suburban gardens or guerrilla gardening in public areas. Gardening can indeed be seen as a way of intervening in and appropriating space.

In Cape Town in the 1960s, the implementation of floral decorations in the streets was frequently debated as a measure of beautification and development. It was even assumed that beautification directly led to development. For example, Cape Town's mayor Alfred Honikman explained in 1962 that the erection of flower-boxes in Adderley Street would be a way of showing "what improvements could be made to the city."<sup>70</sup> He suggested that the introduction of "more of our flora to the city and suburban streets" would improve the "aesthetic standard [of Cape Town's] streets 'furniture'."<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Jan de Klerk, then minister of Education, Arts and Science, called on people at the opening of a flower show in 1963 to "use indigenous plants on a larger scale in your gardens and parks and along our roads," as these would make both visitors and South Africans "more conscious of the beauty that is theirs."<sup>72</sup> Even the police used flowers to make themselves more appealing. In 1965, the Woodstock police station

<sup>67</sup> Stewart, 'Even the Delicate Survive'.

<sup>68</sup> Stewart, 'Even the Delicate Survive'.

<sup>69</sup> Stewart, 'Even the Delicate Survive'.

<sup>70</sup> The reporter, 'Honikman gives city extra touch of beauty', *The Cape Argus*, 28.11.1962.

<sup>71</sup> The reporter, 'Honikman gives city extra touch of beauty'.

<sup>72</sup> The reporter, 'De Klerk: Gardens our Finest Envoy', *The Cape Argus*, 19.3.1963.



acquired flowers in “an effort to make the police station more attractive.”<sup>73</sup> The police assumed that the “minor face-lift in form of two large cement bowls filled with flowers” would “bring pleasure to people passing the station with a splash of brightness in the concrete and tar surroundings of the Main Road.”<sup>74</sup>

The association of flowers and beauty was also invoked in descriptions of the flower sellers. For example, in a letter published in the *Cape Argus*, the author protested against the prohibition of flower selling in Sea Point, arguing that the “flowers do a great deal to add colour and beauty to the daily scene [in the] concrete jungle” that Sea Point had become.<sup>75</sup> Probably the flower sellers here not only added beauty, but also nourished a nostalgic longing for past times. The writer of a column in the *Cape Argus* in 1968 lamented about the “deplorable waste of flower power” in Cape Town.<sup>76</sup> It was argued that Capetonians should appreciate the display of the flower sellers in Adderley Street more and make more use of their offers. The writer also suggested that people should plant more flowers and make “use of window-boxes, as they do so admirably in European cities.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Keith Pulvermacher, director of the Cape Arts Festival of 1968, initiated a campaign to beautify Cape Town in 1969 that encouraged shops and offices to buy flower boxes from the Peninsula Youth Association.<sup>78</sup> C.R. Benson also suggested in a letter to the *Cape Argus* that the city should make more effort to spread flowers in poorer and crowded areas, where residents should be encouraged to maintain gardens and flower boxes.<sup>79</sup> Benson argued that

[i]n areas of New York where crime once flourished, violence abated when flower boxes appeared in the streets. Nearer town, what wonderful opportunity Durham Avenue, Salt River, provides for trees and flowers down the middle of its present barren width.<sup>80</sup>

As the above mentioned attempts to use flowers as interventions to beautify city space show, the botanical complex of Cape Town was drawn upon to exert control over the aesthetic experience of the city. Just as the modern art gallery or museums were not supposed to be entered by everybody, the beauty displayed in the botanical complex of Cape Town was not supposed to be approached by everybody in the same way. Who, actually, was entitled to floral beauty? Who could produce beauty, and who could

<sup>73</sup> The reporter, ‘Flowers will brighten up the police station’, *The Cape Argus*, 24.12.1965.

<sup>74</sup> The reporter, ‘Flowers will brighten up the police station’.

<sup>75</sup> M.T. Hill, ‘Letter to the editor’, *The Cape Argus*, 18.2.1966.

<sup>76</sup> The Wanderer, ‘What a deplorable waste of flower power’, *The Cape Argus*, 15.8.1968.

<sup>77</sup> The Wanderer, ‘What a deplorable waste of flower power’.

<sup>78</sup> The reporter, ‘City to get floral facelift’, *The Cape Argus*, 2.5.1969.

<sup>79</sup> C.R. Benson, ‘Flower Boxes in the Street’, *The Cape Argus*, 29.3.1976.

<sup>80</sup> Benson, ‘Flower Boxes in the Street’.

experience it? There is no doubt that De Klerk had the ruling white minority in mind when he suggested to encourage South Africans to appreciate “the beauty that was theirs”.<sup>81</sup> When the ugliness of apartheid became brutally obvious, politicians called upon flowers to maintain that white South Africans and the international public should still see and believe in the beauty of the country. This was in particular the case with the Kirstenbosch jubilee festivities that will be discussed later. Politicians tried, literally, to hide the ugliness of apartheid behind the beauty of flowers.

### *Horticultural societies and the botanical complex*

The question of who was entitled and capable of producing and experiencing beauty was also taken up in debates around horticultural societies. Apartheid complicated the multi-racial membership in horticultural societies. Access to venues for flower shows was restricted to one race group at the time and special permits had to be requested so that all members could participate in the events. This made the activities of the societies more difficult to organise and costly.<sup>82</sup> Astonishingly, debates about horticultural societies sometimes took up the whole complexity of life under apartheid, breaking it down to the discussion of a single flower. In a letter published in the *Cape Argus* in 1965, the absurdity of apartheid ideology was tellingly exposed in a discussion of the case of the dahlia. In a letter titled ‘Apartheid among the dahlias’, horticulturalist L.E. Edwards elaborated the consequences of apartheid for horticultural societies as following:

As the 1964 treble dahlia champion and holder of the bronze and silver medals, may I champion the cause of South Africa’s most popular flower – the dahlia? The Cape dahlia shows are invariably the principle floral occasion of the year. Our flowers compare favourably with those from any part of the world. This standard was built up by White and non-White flower lovers who, over the years, have exhibited side by side on the show bench. Now with Government policy our standard is in jeopardy ... Some dahlia-growers have said they will have nothing to do with apartheid shows. Secretaries are in a dilemma in regard to their mixed membership and rather than cause embarrassment are contemplating resigning. Committees are at loggerheads over the vexed question, and consequently there may be more resignations. Previous to the new Government ruling on mixed gatherings, horticultural societies never objected to a mixed membership who together make up flower

<sup>81</sup> The reporter, ‘De Klerk: Gardens our Finest Envoy’.

<sup>82</sup> For example, permits were granted for the Western Province Horticultural Federation’s exhibition in the City Hall in Cape Town on 26 January 1974. The reporter, ‘No Race Bar at Dahlia Show’, *The Cape Argus*, 25.1.1974.

shows. I wish to inform the powers that all the non-White exhibitors at European shows are people with high regard to cultural endeavour and are not the unruly type who often join the bottle-throwing brigade at Newlands! These cultured people are not interested in politics ... The conduct of non-White exhibitors and spectators has always been exemplary at the predominantly White shows. All future White shows will certainly be the poorer without their support.<sup>83</sup>

The horticulturalist's argumentation both intervened in and reproduced the conventions of the botanical complex of Cape Town. On the one hand, he stated that the ability to produce beautiful flowers did not depend on race. Criticising racial segregation, he further argued that flower growing proved that a high standard could be developed when people of various racial categories worked together. On the other hand, distinguishing between "people with high regard to cultural endeavour" and the "bottle-throwing brigade" at the Newlands football stadium, Edwards accentuated that not everybody possessed enough horticultural capital to participate in the production of floral beauty. Here, the botanical complex was deployed to deconstruct racial ordering and to concomitantly reinforce a social hierarchy based on class.

#### *Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden*

Three of the most important institutions of the botanical complex of Cape Town and South African botany more generally were established in the second decade of the 20th century. In 1913, the Botanical Society of South Africa and the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden were founded.<sup>84</sup> Two years later, the first issue of *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa* was published.<sup>85</sup> The initial purpose of the botanical garden was to combine research, the cultivation and the display of the indigenous flora of South Africa.<sup>86</sup> In its beginning, Kirstenbosch remained Cape Town-focused and bound up in the making of a white, middle-class, urban identity. Later, Kirstenbosch was framed more nationally, as R.H. Compton, the garden's second director, called upon a broader South African patriotism to emphasise the urgency of the protection of indigenous plants.<sup>87</sup>

When Kirstenbosch turned fifty in 1963, various institutions which formed part of the botanical complex of Cape Town organised celebrations. Most prominently, the

<sup>83</sup> L.E. Edwards, 'Apartheid among the dahlias', *The Cape Argus*, 12.5.1965.

<sup>84</sup> Pooley, 'Pressed Flowers', 601.

<sup>85</sup> Pooley, 'Pressed Flowers', 601.

<sup>86</sup> Pooley, 'Pressed Flowers', 601.

<sup>87</sup> Pooley, 'Pressed Flowers', 601f.

botanical garden itself hosted festivities. But also the South African National Gallery and other institutions organised activities to mark the anniversary. For example, the National Gallery produced an art exhibition titled ‘South African Flora in Art’ and the South African Association of Arts Gallery hosted an exhibition with paintings, posters, photographs and embroidery of South African wild flowers.<sup>88</sup> The Michaelis Collection in the Old Town House also contributed to the Kirstenbosch celebrations with an exhibition of flower paintings belonging to the Michaelis Collection, the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the South African National Gallery and private collections.<sup>89</sup>

The Kirstenbosch jubilee was employed by the government to foster both a white South African nationalism at home and to counter the criticism of apartheid abroad. Through directing the eyes of the spectators to the floral beauty of Kirstenbosch, it was attempted to make the whole of South Africa look beautiful. The garden was increasingly equalled with the nation, and its flowers with the beauty that the nation could produce. Cape Town mayor Alfred Honikman said at the opening of the ‘South African Flora in Art’ exhibition that

[m]ost South Africans were unaware that the people of Cape Town were the trustees of a heritage of floral and scenic splendour unequalled – certainly unsurpassed – anywhere in the world. It is said that the Cape Peninsula is the second most fertile region in the world – the first is the Garden of Eden – and I believe it to be no more than true.<sup>90</sup>

In the comments about the festivities, botanical lobbyists and politicians alike stated directly that the jubilee was an ideal vehicle to counter the growing international disgust with current South African political life. For example, Jan de Klerk stated that the “world-renowned botanists” invited to the festivities would

return to their countries with a true perspective of our conditions and do a great deal to correct the impressions spread abroad by people who go out of their way to harm our cause.<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, I.P.S. Terblanche, director and treasurer of the Kirstenbosch Jubilee Organisation, emphasised that the festivities would demonstrate “scenic and floral beauty” to international botanists and horticulturalists and thus “paint a different picture of South Africa than they have believed in in the past.”<sup>92</sup> Piet Meiring, director of the South African Information Service, referred to the jubilee as “a wonderful opportunity

<sup>88</sup> The reporter, ‘Capetonians as trustees of floral beauty’, *The Cape Argus*, 15.8.1963. The reporter, ‘Works shown by young artists’, *The Cape Argus*, 23.7.1963.

<sup>89</sup> The reporter, ‘Paintings of flowers wanted by Michaelis’, 19.8.1963.

<sup>90</sup> The reporter, ‘Capetonians as trustees of floral beauty’.

<sup>91</sup> The reporter, ‘De Klerk: Gardens our Finest Envoy’.

<sup>92</sup> The reporter, ‘An export market in flowers ‘possible’, *The Cape Argus*, 28.9.1962.

to bring people here from overseas to show them something non-political.”<sup>93</sup>

Terblanche also highlighted that the flower trade was important for keeping up a proper image of South Africa in the world. Referring to the export of indigenous flowers, especially the proteas, he said that he believed that

[t]hey [could] boycott anything they want to abroad, but they cannot make the women of the world boycott South African flowers.<sup>94</sup>

The celebrations of Kirstenbosch within the botanical complex of Cape Town were also deployed to make South Africans look at themselves through the eyes of the foreign visitors, especially through the gaze of the learned specialist. Emphasising the visitors’ expert status, South African politicians quoted foreign botanists to have expressed their admiration for the country. For example, Piet van der Byl, a member of parliament, reported at the opening of a flower show that the director of the Bergen Botanical Museum and Garden had been struck by “the extremely precarious existence of many constituents of the Cape flora.”<sup>95</sup>

The botanical complex of Cape Town has not ceased to exist. Works and practices related to botany continued to circulate through the museological institutions of the city, blurring both genres of thematic orientation and exhibitionary practices. For example, Kirstenbosch still displays artworks among the plants in the garden and in 2000, the first Kirstenbosch Biennale for botanical art was held.<sup>96</sup> In 2010, this Biennale displayed over 200 works by more than 50 artists around the topic “rare, endangered and narrow endemic species of plants indigenous to Southern Africa.”<sup>97</sup> Through the arrangement of the displays and a competition that awarded medals to the painters similar to growers participating in horticultural shows, the genres of the art exhibition, the flower show and the botanical garden were blurred (see *Figure 1*). According to Nicki Westcott, the curator of the 2010 biennale, the exhibition was supposed to be

a celebration – of the extraordinary richness and beauty of the natural world and as a tribute to those who, through their minute observations and painterly depictions – strike us with a singular excellence of their work.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>93</sup> The reporter, ‘Kirstenbosch Jubilee Plan: State Aid Sought to Put South Africa on ‘Non-Political Map’, *The Cape Argus*, 8.3.1962.

<sup>94</sup> The reporter, ‘An export market in flowers ‘possible’.

<sup>95</sup> The reporter, ‘M.P.’s call: teach children to protect wild flowers’, *The Cape Argus*, 18.9.1963.

<sup>96</sup> Nicki Westcott, ‘Introduction’, *Kirstenbosch Botanical Art Biennale 2010 (Catalogue)*, 5.

<sup>97</sup> John Manning, ‘Foreword’, *Kirstenbosch Botanical Art Biennale 2010 (Catalogue)*, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Westcott, ‘Introduction’, 5.



In the catalogue of the biennale, botanist John Manning described botanical art as having emerged from botany 250 years ago and being located in a “significant position along the continuum between art and craft.”<sup>99</sup>



*Figure 1* Exhibition of the Kirstenbosch Biennale for Botanical Art 2010, Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden, Cape Town (Photograph Melanie Boehi).



*Figure 2* “Bushman”-statue in the Harold Porter Botanical Garden, Betty’s Bay (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

Botanical gardens have taken a long time to transform their displays in the post-apartheid era. While Kirstenbosch seems to have developed a more adequate way of displaying indigenous knowledge and the use of plants by the end of the year 2010, other South African botanical gardens are still filled with relics of the time when African people were placed within nature and thus readily displayed among plants. In

<sup>99</sup> Manning, ‘Foreword’, 1.



the Harold Porter botanical garden in Betty's Bay for example, a statue of a "bushman" has been placed among indigenous plants and stands until today (see *Figure 2*).

### *Disciplinary flower power in Hangberg in 2010*

The assumptions that some people constituted a threat to nature while others figured as nature's protectors that emerged in relation to the regulations of the flower selling around the turn of the last century have continued to exist powerfully until today. Most recently, this was made evident in the case of the informal settlement of Hangberg in Hout Bay during September 2010. In a letter published in the *Cape Argus*, activist Denis Goldberg invited everybody to chant with him "people before fynbos."<sup>100</sup> Fynbos had indeed been put before the residents of Hangberg. The municipality of Cape Town argued that the residents threatened an adjoining nature reserve and increased the risk of fire, as houses were built within a firebreak.<sup>101</sup> Western Cape premier minister Helen Zille also argued that the Hangberg community was ruled by "Rasta druglords."<sup>102</sup> The police carried out shocking violence against people protesting against the evictions and uninvolved residents in September 2010.<sup>103</sup>

The combination of issues of nature conservation, fire regulation and crime deployed by politicians to legitimise the attempted removal can indeed be understood as constituting a genealogy going back to the legislation around the protection of wild flowers and the regulation of flower selling. The events of Hangberg in September 2010 showed that the question over entitlement to land in former apartheid-classified white areas was far from being solved more than 15 years after the first democratic election in South Africa. What took place in Hangberg was not unique for the Hout Bay area, but resembled events in other parts of Cape Town and the whole country. The case of Hangberg demonstrates how people are still governed through setting them in a relation with nature, and how the combination of nature conservation, fire protection and crime suppression works powerfully to deny access to land to people made landless as result of colonial occupation and apartheid. Hangberg needs to be understood in the genealogy that saw the botanical complex and the repressive elements of the state operating together in the regulation of society and its concepts of citizenship.

<sup>100</sup> Goldberg, 'Put people of Hangberg before fynbos and firebreaks'.

<sup>101</sup> Sapa, 'Dozens arrested in Hout Bay violence', *Mail & Guardian Online*, 21.11.2010, <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2010-09-21-dozens-arrested-in-hout-bay-violence> (accessed 1.12.2010).

<sup>102</sup> Glynnis Underhill, 'Cape Town riot tactics under fire', *Mail & Guardian Online*, 8.10.2010, <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2010-10-08-cape-town-riot-tactics-under-fire> (accessed 22.11.2010).

<sup>103</sup> Kaganof, Valley and Louw, *The uprising of Hangberg*.

## Chapter Two

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### The ‘Cape Town flower sellers’

“Hang out with the ladies for a while ... they’re the heart and soul of this city.”

Toast Coetzer and Samantha Reinders, *Key to Cape Town*, 38.<sup>1</sup>

The flower sellers of Adderley Street have been mentioned in tourist guidebooks as an attraction of Cape Town since the late 19th century and their pictures appeared more often than any other group’s on postcards and in other tourism-related media.

Photographers, painters and filmmakers produced an abundance of images of the flower sellers. Also, many memoirs and historical narratives of life in Cape Town included anecdotes about the flower sellers, frequently accompanied by an illustration.

Newspapers and magazines too reported regularly about the flower market. Often, print media published pictures of the flower sellers for particular occasions like Mother’s Day or Valentine’s Day, almost as if this was an annual ritual.

In most of these textual and visual productions, the flower sellers were characterised with particular notions of gender, race and class. In the dominant images and imaginings of flower sellers in Cape Town, they were described as female, coloured and poor. The images and imaginings were streamlined to an extent that it is appropriate to speak of a discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’. It was stressed that flower selling was a family business and that the same families had been in the trade for several generations. Furthermore, flower selling was portrayed as an activity that took place in the inner city and the wealthier southern suburbs of Cape Town. Flower sellers in other central areas like Rondebosch, Gardens and Sea Point and on the Grand Parade were included in the genre-specific histories, but they were not nearly as prevalent as the vendors of Adderley Street. Flowers were also sold in the Northern suburbs, in front of shopping malls and cemeteries, but the flower sellers in the periphery were usually not described or depicted within the genre.

The discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ emerged at various sites simultaneously. Among them were practices of collecting and ordering in archives. The National Library of South Africa used the key word ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ in its

<sup>1</sup> Toast Coetzer and Samantha Reinders, *Key to Cape Town: Your Insider’s Guide to Exploring the Mother City* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2009), 38.

index catalogue and over the years, a collection of references to textual and visual productions about flower sellers in Cape Town was produced. The figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' also circulated through debates about nature conservation and urban planning in parliament, municipal correspondence and in letters to the editors of the city's newspapers. As the authors of a tourist handbook declared, for many Capetonians the flower sellers represented "the heart and soul" of the city.<sup>2</sup> For others, talking about the flower vendors constituted a vehicle to raise matters close to their own hearts.

The discursive figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was related to the figure of the 'flower girls' that emerged in discourses about European cities in the 18th and 19th century. Studying the connection of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' to these 'flower girls' can open up questions about the circulation of ideas in colonial cultures. This chapter then attempts to study the genealogy of the genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers', how it circulated through various systems of knowledge and how images of flower selling were incorporated into processes of imaging and imagining the city in Cape Town.

### *Histories of Origin*

A range of different stories were told about the origin of flower selling in Cape Town, most of them implying that the commerce began in Adderley Street. Brief historical accounts in tourist guidebooks usually referred to flower sellers as families who had been conducting their trade for generations. For example, in *Don't Tell Cape Town*, a guidebook published in 2003, it was explained that

[t]o be a flower seller runs in your blood and it is an occupation passed down from one generation to another.<sup>3</sup>

Similar to anthropological accounts of colonised people, flower sellers were conventionally described as having tradition, but not history. Historical narrations and personal memoirs of Cape Town paid more attention to the flower sellers' past, although this was mostly limited to attempts at defining a precise date of the beginning of the trade. Developments that took place later were usually not included in these accounts.

<sup>2</sup> Coetzer and Reinders, *Key to Cape Town*, 38

<sup>3</sup> Sheryl Ozinsky and Sam Wouldidge, *Don't Tell Cape Town: The Mother City's (hush-hush) Must-do List* (Cape Town: Struik Publishers, 2003), 191. A similar account was also given in Coetzer and Reinders, *Key to Cape Town*, 38.

Some storytellers dated the beginning of the flower trade several centuries back.

Barbara Campbell Tait for example suggested that

[f]or generations these coloured people have gathered and sold flowers in Cape Town. Their slave ancestors were the hawkers of the town, only in those days the proceeds of their laden trays filled their masters' and mistresses' pockets.<sup>4</sup>

The version that flower selling started as an occupation of slaves was also told in oral histories. Jerome Eston-Martin, an assistant of the flower sellers at the Adderley Street market, suggested that the flower selling went

back in the ancestors' days of the slavery era. When they disbanded slavery, it just continued from there and went on from generation to generation, up until to the ladies here ... It has been in the families for years, since the first European settlers came to South Africa, they started here.<sup>5</sup>

Lawrence G. Green wrote in his 1947 published *Tavern of the Seas* that the ancestors of the "present coloured women ... were probably offering daisies to the ladies of eighteenth-century Cape Town."<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, Green concluded that it was more likely that the flower sellers started as strawberry vendors in the 1870s. Also George Manuel wrote in his 1977 published memoirs that claims were made that the flower sellers had been conducting the trade that "their ancestors started well-nigh 200 years ago."<sup>7</sup> But Manuel too doubted that the flower selling had existed for such a long time, as no written documents confirmed this assumption.

Manuel quoted a story told by Cape Town business man and cabinet minister Richard Stuttaford according to which William Thorne, a former mayor of Cape Town, initiated the flower selling in the city.<sup>8</sup> Stuttaford said that Thorne asked a woman to collect flowers on the mountain and sell them in town after realising that visitors struggled to purchase wild flowers in the city in 1880. Soon after other people joined the women and "a tradition was born."<sup>9</sup> Journalist Margaret Williamson confirmed the version presented by Green, writing that "although flower markets are marked on the maps much older than 1886, that seems to have been the tradition's beginning."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Tait, *Cape Cameos*, 113.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Jerome Eston-Martin, Cape Town, 23.9.2010.

<sup>6</sup> Green, *Tavern of the Seas*, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Manuel, *I Remember Cape Town*, 93.

<sup>8</sup> Manuel, *I Remember Cape Town*, 93.

<sup>9</sup> Manuel, *I Remember Cape Town*, 93. The same version is also told in the article by Margaret Williamson, 'Idea that sparked off the blaze of colour', *The Cape Argus*, 2.10.1986.

<sup>10</sup> Williamson, 'Idea that sparked off the blaze of colour'.

*Tourism and the invention of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' as a sight and destination*

Tourism was central for the invention of the genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. In order to participate in the tourist industry, places have to be turned into destinations.

Tourism thereby puts places on display in ways that are similar to the practices applied in museums. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explained how "tourism stages the world as a museum of itself."<sup>11</sup> Just as ordinary things become special when placed in museums, every day practices are turned into attractions when taken up in the tourist discourse.<sup>12</sup>

In tourism, the world is seen in sights. As museums create "an effect *called* [her emphasis] the real world" through exhibitions, the tourist industry renders "the world as a picture of itself."<sup>13</sup>

John Urry and others discussed tourism as predominantly a visual experience.<sup>14</sup> Thereby, destinations are created in ways that meet the expectations of what Urry called the tourist gaze. Once people become tourists, they adopt a specific mode of experience that positions the world experienced at the destination in a "socially organised and systematised" way in contrast to the world experienced at home.<sup>15</sup> The tourist gaze is mediated by a variety of discourses and authorities, among them the operators of the tourism industry, guidebooks and media. The tourist gaze is already established prior to departure to the destination.

Tourist guidebooks were first published in the 19th century and have ever since exerted a substantial authority on the participants of the travel industry.<sup>16</sup> In the mid-1830s, the publishers Murray in London and Karl Baedeker & Sons in Leipzig produced books that constituted a new phenomenon in travel literature. Guidebooks were standardised and their content continuously updated.<sup>17</sup> With their new format that "fit easily into the tourist's hand", the books defined the sights tourists were supposed to visit during their journey.<sup>18</sup> While previous travel literature provided records of

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 144.

<sup>14</sup> John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage 1990). Carol Crawshaw and John Urry, 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye', in Chris Rojek and John Urry (eds), *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), 176-195.

<sup>15</sup> Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 1.

<sup>16</sup> James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways to 'Culture', 1800-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 65.

<sup>17</sup> Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, 65.

<sup>18</sup> Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, 66.

someone else's journey, the new handbooks directly suggested to individual tourists which routes to take and how to respond to the encountered environments.<sup>19</sup>

According to Leslie Witz, Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, South Africa has since the 1920s been characterised as a tourist destination for animal wildlife, primitive tribalism and modern society.<sup>20</sup> With the declaration of the Kruger National Park in 1926, South Africa became a destination for wildlife conservation, and the dispossessed African population, removed from the national park's territory, was turned into objects of nativism in the tourist gaze. Tourism thereby applied the classification of people devised by the colonial administration.<sup>21</sup> Africans were thus displayed in cultural villages and their performances sold as encounters with the real, primitive Africa that was otherwise inaccessible for tourist exploration. Later, organised township tours similarly turned urban residential areas into displays of a particular notion of African life.

Since Cape Town became a tourist destination in the late 19th century, the city was imagined along opposite ideas of progress and backwardness.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, Cape Town was presented as an extension of modern Europe. When the first tourism publicity association was founded in 1909, Cape Town was advertised as a classical seaside resort.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the "Malay Quarter, 'Coons', fish-horns and flower-sellers" were marketed as exotic sights.<sup>24</sup> The District Six quarter was described as dangerous until its residents were forcibly removed under the Group Areas Act. Later, the tourist discourse described the townships as dangerous and exotic zones of Cape Town. The image of South Africa as a destination of "wildlife, primitive tribalism and modern society" remained intact during the twentieth century, as did the image of Cape Town as a city of European-African polarity.<sup>25</sup> As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett wrote:

[m]arketing a troubled history that glorifies colonial adventures and a repudiated anthropology of primitivism, tourism provides a safe haven for these ideas.<sup>26</sup>

Guidebooks to Cape Town were primarily directed at tourists and settlers arriving from Europe. From early on, the books praised Cape Town as a city whose

<sup>19</sup> Buzard, *The Beaten Track*, 70.

<sup>20</sup> Witz, Rassool and Minkley, 'Repacking the past for South African Tourism', 2.

<sup>21</sup> Witz, Rassool and Minkley, 'Repacking the past for South African Tourism', 10.

<sup>22</sup> Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen and Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen and Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*, 41.

<sup>24</sup> Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen and Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century*, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Witz, Rassool and Minkley, 'Repacking the past for South African Tourism', 1.

<sup>26</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 136.



“special charm [lay] in its combination of natural wonders and urban attractions.”<sup>27</sup> The 1879 published *Guide to the Cape Colony* for example named as main sights the mountains, the architecture, the flora and the cities “mixed and cosmopolitan population.”<sup>28</sup> The ethnographically interested travellers were directed to the “Malay districts of the town” to observe the “peculiar oriental attire” of their inhabitants.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, in *The Cape Town Guide* published in 1894, the “Malay” were introduced as “one of the most picturesque features of the city,” especially the women with their “gorgeously coloured dresses.”<sup>30</sup> The scene on the market on the Grand Parade was described as “a very lively and interesting one” that “may be accounted almost peculiar to Cape Town.”<sup>31</sup> Also, the market in Caledon Square was recommended for visiting, “if only to study the costumes of the malay women, many of whom are the owners of the stalls.”<sup>32</sup> Already before the flower sellers emerged as a sight in the tourist itineraries, markets and their vendors had been turned into exotic destinations.

Later, many guidebooks directed visitors to admire the Cape flora both in nature on the mountains and at the market in Adderley Street.<sup>33</sup> In *The Cape of Good Hope*, a handbook published in 1909, the flower market in Adderley Street was described as one of the sites where “the choicest mountain products may be seen in abundance.”<sup>34</sup> The 1940 published brochure *Cape Town and the Cape Peninsula* went as far as to emphasise that “[p]erhaps no single display gives such a good idea of the wealth of the Cape flora as the famous market in Adderley Street.”<sup>35</sup>

As the flower market of Adderley Street appeared on the travellers’ map, postcards emerged with photographs and, to a lesser extent, paintings of flower sellers. On early composite postcards, flower vendors featured prominently along with the other iconic images which Cape Town’s tourist gaze came to be made of. This is astonishing, as these cards did not depict other groups of people. Composite postcards represent a

<sup>27</sup> Pnina Fenster (ed), *DayNight Guide Cape Town: The Insider’s Guide to the Mother City* (Parklands: DayNight Publications, 1995), 41.

<sup>28</sup> Cape Argus office, *Guide to the Cape Colony* (Cape Town: Saul Solomon and Co 1879), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Cape Argus office, *Guide to the Cape Colony*, 15.

<sup>30</sup> *The Cape Town Guide: (Illustrated) Containing Information of Every Character for Visitors and Residents Including Guide to all Points of Interest in and around Cape Town, Description of Buildings, Suburbs &c. &c. (Cape Town: Dennis Edwards & Co., 1894)*, 82.

<sup>31</sup> Cape Argus office, *Guide to the Cape Colony*, 35.

<sup>32</sup> *The Guide to Cape Town (Illustrated): With Information Concerning Kimberley and Johannesburg* (Cape Town: The Argus Printing and Publishing Company, 1890), 91f.

<sup>33</sup> For example in Cape Argus (ed.), *Guide to the Cape Colony*, 7-11, 33.

<sup>34</sup> Josiah Robert Finch, *The Cape of Good Hope: Being the Official Handbook of the City of Cape Town* (Cape Town: Sid. P. Cowen, 1909), 127.

<sup>35</sup> Cape Peninsula Publicity Association (ed), *Cape Town and the Cape Peninsula: A Holiday Guide*, Brochure (Cape Town, 1940).

place through a selection of images of symbolic sites, seen from particular viewpoints. The following postcard is an example of a typical composite postcard of Cape Town (see *Figure 3*).



Figure 3 Composite postcard *Cape Town* (SANL, PHA, CT. Composites).

The card combined photographs of flower sellers in Adderley Street, governmental buildings, Table Mountain and a mail ship. Since at least the 1910s, such cards included photographs of governmental buildings like the Houses of Parliament and the City Hall, the buildings of the University of Cape Town, the South African Museum and the South African Library. Also, pictures of mail ships were frequently included, providing a visual reference to the colonial character of Cape Town. Later, the mail ships were replaced by cruise liners, without changing the underlying message much. No composite card of Cape Town would be complete without Table Mountain photographed from the dominant viewpoint of the sea.

Postcards showed flower sellers both in groups and alone, as portraits. Seen in the context of the postcard industry, it is not surprising that the genre emerged in Cape Town at the same time as postcards with images of flower sellers were produced in Europe as well. According to Christraud M. Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb, internationally produced postcards often followed prescribed and conventional themes and therefore, “it is not surprising that many cards contain stereotypical imagery, reconstructing and repeating similar visual tropes across the globe.”<sup>36</sup> As the next postcard, a composite dated by the National Library to 1995, shows, more sites were

<sup>36</sup> Christraud M. Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb, ‘Introduction: Views on Postcards’ in Christraud M. Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb (eds), *Delivering Views: Distant Cultures in Early Postcards* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 4.

added to the imaging of Cape over the 20th century, but the key icons and perspectives remained astonishingly stable (see *Figure 4*).

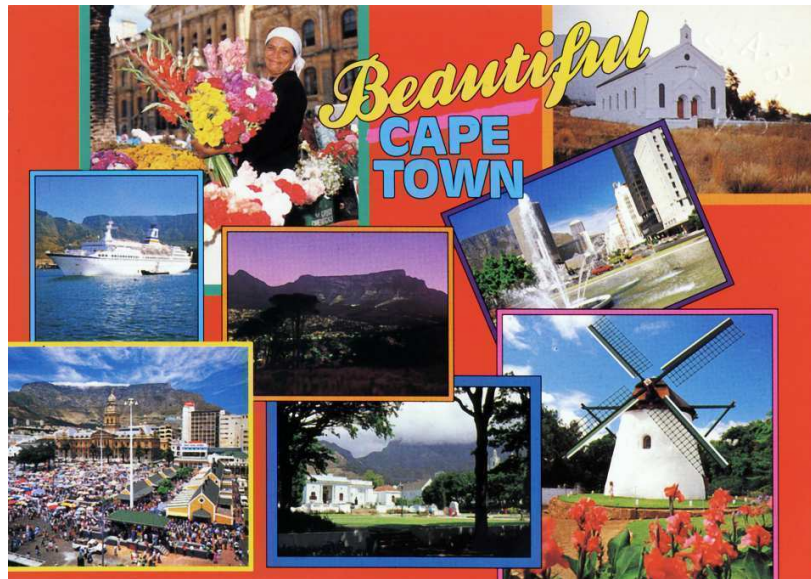


Figure 4 Postcard *Beautiful Cape Town* (SANL, PHA, CT. Composites).

In textual productions, the flower sellers of Adderley Street were often described as sights, images and even memories. For example, in a brochure from 1940, the flower sellers were called “a sight no traveller is likely to forget.”<sup>37</sup> Green stated in the *Tavern of the Seas* that the flower sellers in Adderley Street had “become part of Cape Town, like the gondoliers of Venice and the Zulu rickshaw men of Durban” and that they were “among the memories a tourist is bound to carry away with him.”<sup>38</sup> Often, illustrations accompanied the writings in books and newspapers, but in most cases, the textual references were powerful enough to invoke an image, without actually using visualisation.

One of the recurring tropes was that the flower sellers added colour to the city. For example in a guidebook of 1927, the flower vendors were said to make “a blaze of strong colour against the grey and blue-white walls” and thus provide “[o]ne of the most colourful sights of Cape Town.”<sup>39</sup> The subject of the colours of the flower market was also taken up in 1906 by the sender of a black and white postcard with a street scene in

<sup>37</sup> Cape Peninsula Publicity Association (ed), *Cape Town and the Cape Peninsula: A Holiday Guide*, Brochure (Cape Town, 1940).

<sup>38</sup> Green, *Tavern of the Seas*, 76.

<sup>39</sup> Cecil Lewis and Gertrude Elizabeth Edwards, *Cape Town: Treasures of the Mother-City of South Africa* (Cape Town: The Specialty Press of S.A. Ltd, 1927), 14. *Where to Find What You Want in and around Cape Town: A Concise Guide to the Requirements of Visitors* (Cape Town: K.C. Publications, 1958), 1.



Adderley Street (see *Figure 5*). On the card it was written that the picture would give ... a rather good idea of the flower sellers on Saturday morning, only you don't get the colors. There are more sellers, too, but they stand just as the picture shows in a line from the Post Office corner, and in front of the Standard Bank, and with the flower and the sellers' dress make a pretty picture.



*Figure 5* Postcard *Flower Sellers Adderley St. Cape Town* (SANL, PHA, CT. Flower Sellers).

The same photograph as on the previous postcard was also published as a coloured Photochrom version, indeed emphasising the colours of both the flowers and the dresses of the vendors described by the sender of the black and white postcard (see *Figure 6*).



*Figure 6* Postcard *Flower-sellers. Adderley St. Capetown* (SANL, PHA, CT. Flower Sellers).

Since the 1970s, a change seems to have occurred in the description of the 'Cape Town flower sellers', as the focus shifted away from the sight of the flower sellers to their character and behaviour. As the handbook *Seven Days in Cape Town* put it, the "flower-sellers and street vendors ... add both colour and life" to the inner city.<sup>40</sup> The flower market in Adderley Street thus was no longer a destination for a merely visual experience, but also an aural one. Typical for the presentation of colonised people in tourist guidebooks, the flower sellers were described as displaying a rough, exotic culture. The argument can be made that tourism turned the flower market into a space of expectations of performances of coloured culture. Emphasis was thereby given to language. The *Guide to Cape Town and the Western Cape*, published in 1976, for example described the flower sellers as "tremendous characters" with "a banter of their own."<sup>41</sup> Similarly, *The Cape Town Family Guide* described the flower sellers as having "a language of their own."<sup>42</sup>

In *Weekends in and around Cape Town*, the flower market was recommended not only because of its flowers, but also for experiencing "an atmosphere of raucous good humour."<sup>43</sup> Also the 1995 *DayNight Guide Cape Town* wrote that at the Adderley Street market, "rough charm and friendliness are usually part of the deal" and that interacting with the flower sellers was an "opportunity to overhear the kind of colourful street lingo you wouldn't repeat to your mother."<sup>44</sup> The caption of a snapshot of the flower market in *Seven Days in Cape Town* said that "[t]he lively chatter of flower-sellers on Adderley Street is surpassed only by the vibrant colour of their bouquets."<sup>45</sup> In the 2003 *Don't Tell Cape Town*, a handbook aimed at visitors and locals alike, the flower sellers were listed under the rubric "Heritage: history, culture, identity."<sup>46</sup> The "spirit of camaraderie" and the "colourful banter between vendors and buyers" were

<sup>40</sup> Sean Fraser, *Seven Days in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Struik Publishers (1998) 2006), 18.

<sup>41</sup> John Muir, *Guide to Cape Town and the Western Cape* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1976), 25. A similar description is also given in Tourist Information Publications (ed), *Simon's Illustrated Guide to Cape Town, South Africa's Holiday Paradise* (Cape Town: Derek Butcher & Co, 1983), 1.

<sup>42</sup> Jill Ritchie, *The Cape Town Family Guide* (Diep River: Chameleon Press, 1989), 13.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Joye, Jill Johnson and Ashley Joyce, *Weekends in and around Cape Town* (Cape Town: Struik Timmins Publishers, 1991), 10f. Similarly, in the book *Cape Town on Foot* from 2001, the flower sellers were characterised as "spirited and enthusiastic." Ursula Stevens, *Cape Town on Foot: A Walk through Town and History* (Paarden Eiland: Wanderlust Books, 2001), 13. In *Cape Town Uncovered*, published in 2005, the flower sellers were described as "characterful" and "always ready for a witty exchange. Warren-Brown, Fakier and Miller, *Cape Town Uncovered*, 31f. In the 2009 *Key to Cape Town*, the flower sellers in Trafalgar Place were described as "a lively bunch" and "colourful characters." Coetzer and Reinders, *Key to Cape Town*, 38.

<sup>44</sup> Fenster, *DayNight Guide Cape Town*, 65.

<sup>45</sup> Fraser, *Seven Days in Cape Town*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> Ozinsky and Wouldidge, *Don't Tell Cape Town*, 175.

declared as being part of the heritage of Cape Town.<sup>47</sup> There are indeed similarities in how the flower market was represented and how tourism turned townships into living museums. In both representations of flower selling and township life, particular notions of culture in Cape Town were put on display for the tourist gaze.

References to the ways the flower sellers spoke were a recurrent topic in tourist literature and in newspaper articles. In attesting that the flower sellers spoke a language of their own, their otherness was emphasised and it was implied that their habits were inferior to middle-class, white manners. These judgements were often made implicit, but sometimes also expressed in public, as for example in a letter published in the *Cape Times* in 1965 where an anonymous customer complained that

[i]f one dares to criticise all one gets is a volley of abuse. When one walks around the flower market in town to see which would be the most suitable to buy loudsneers and derision are often the result. The public should be protected from this.<sup>48</sup>

The perception of the language of the “other” as incomprehensible has been a recurrent theme in discourses of othering. Also, the 21st century derogatory term “makwerekwere” that is used to describe non-South African African immigrants refers especially to language, as “makwerekwere is a term for babblers or barbarians.”<sup>49</sup>

#### *'Flower girl' and 'nature's masterpiece'*

While the information about the beginning of the flower markets remains vague, the genealogy of the images and imaginings of the discursive figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' can partly be traced back to the figure of the 'flower girl' that prominently featured in textual and visual productions about European cities in the 19th century. According to Jack Goody, already in Antiquity, the figure of the young female flower seller was defined in a particular way. In literature of Ptolemaic Egypt, Greece and Rome of the late republic, flower sellers were described as

objects of delight, partly because they were selected for their looks, partly because of the attraction of their wares, and partly because of the nature of their commerce, which brought them into direct relations with their clients.<sup>50</sup>

According to Goody, the figure of the 'flower girl' in Europe was intensely embedded in myth and symbolism. Images and imaginings of flower sellers were often intertwined

<sup>47</sup> Ozinsky and Woulidge, *Don't Tell Cape Town*, 191.

<sup>48</sup> 'Stung', 'Stung by flower sellers', *The Cape Argus*, 7.1.1965.

<sup>49</sup> Owen Sichone, 'Xenophobia', in Nick Shepherd and Steven Robins (eds), *New South African Keywords* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2008), 259.

<sup>50</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 58f.



with representations of sexuality. Flower selling was thereby associated with prostitution and the wearing and selling of flowers were regarded as symbols for sex and the sale of sex.<sup>51</sup>

More generally, Western art for a long time equated flowers with female sexuality. The bond between the female body and floral blossom was constructed as erotic, as references were made to Freudian symbols for the female genitalia or to flowers as moral signs of love and fertility.<sup>52</sup> The notion of the “deflowering” of a virgin was compared to the plucking of a flower and said to lead to her “blossoming forth” as a woman.<sup>53</sup>

When floriculture made a comeback at the time of the Renaissance after church-induced restraint during the Middle Ages, flower markets emerged in the cities of the Netherlands, England and France. While the Netherlands developed the first and most extreme forms of flower markets, standards in taste and fashion were set in Paris.<sup>54</sup> In the representation of flower vendors, a class hierarchy was established that ranged from the itinerant hawker to the seller with a stall and to the florist shop at the top.<sup>55</sup> According to Goody, the typical flower seller was described as “lower class but not necessarily marginal [as] selling luxury goods had always been a ladder of mobility for women.”<sup>56</sup> It was assumed that flower sellers were poor but attractive girls who received much attention from high-status male customers. Like other female vendors, the ‘flower girls’ were regarded as “dating material” for men, especially for younger ones.<sup>57</sup>

In her study about working women and visual culture in Britain, Kristina Huneault wrote that the image of the ‘flower girl’ first appeared within the ‘London cries’, a series of 18th century prints of street characters of London.<sup>58</sup> The ‘London cries’ characterised the city’s hawkers according to the calls with which they advertised their goods. Beside the flower sellers, vendors of fruit, milk and matches, knife grinders and other professional categories were part of the series. According to Huneault, ‘flower girls’ were the most frequent type of urban working women represented in images from

<sup>51</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 62.

<sup>52</sup> Huneault, *Difficult Subjects*, 78.

<sup>53</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 215f.

<sup>55</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 215f.

<sup>56</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 222.

<sup>57</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 222f.

<sup>58</sup> Huneault, *Difficult Subjects*, 64.

the 1870s onwards.<sup>59</sup> Huneault suggested that the 'flower girl' emerged in British painting and fiction of the 19th century less as a historical personage than as a discursive category.<sup>60</sup> The female flower vendor thereby was used as "a blank page upon which artists could exercise full creative vision and authority."<sup>61</sup> Typically, the 'flower girls' were portrayed as poor, but appealing.<sup>62</sup> Jules Bastien-Lepage's oil painting *Flower-seller in London* from 1882 is typical for this genre (see *Figure 7*).



Figure 7 Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Flower-seller in London*, oil painting. 1882, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/freeparking/504178595/#/> (accessed 20.12.2010).



Figure 8 John Thomson, *Covent Garden Flower Women*, c 1877 (Image courtesy of the Museum of London).

Stories about 'flower girls' were narrated in Western-European slum novels, sentimental romances and moralising plays. According to Goody, "the prototypical flower girl" was Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* of 1912.<sup>63</sup> In Shaw's play, Henry Higgins, a professor of phonetics, bets that he can educate the Cockney flower seller Eliza Doolittle to speak English as perfectly that she could pass as a duchess.<sup>64</sup> Based on Shaw's play the musical *My Fair Lady* was written by

<sup>59</sup> Huneault, *Difficult subjects*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Huneault, *Difficult Subjects*, 70.

<sup>61</sup> Huneault, *Difficult Subjects*, 70.

<sup>62</sup> Huneault, *Difficult Subjects*, 64-66.

<sup>63</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 224.

<sup>64</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion: A Romance in Five Acts* (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, (1912) 1967).

Frederick Loewe and Alan Jay Lerner that became a Broadway success in 1956.<sup>65</sup> In 1964, *My Fair Lady* was adapted as a film with Audrey Hepburn as Eliza Doolittle and Rex Harrison as Henry Higgins.<sup>66</sup>

The trope of transformation typically dominated the 'flower girl' stories, telling a plot in which the female flower seller was saved by philanthropy, religious faith, good luck or, often, a good middle-class man. The figure of the 'flower girl' also featured prominently in films, where her role most often was the one of the poor girl falling in love, or being loved by, a man of higher status.<sup>67</sup> Also on screen, the tropes of flowers and sex, and flower sellers and female sex workers, were closely intertwined. The Hollywood-fabricated 'pretty woman'-stories followed the plot set out by the 'flower girl'-narratives with astonishingly little variation, the main difference being that the female characters rescued by the gentleman-characters here were offering sex without the symbolic detour to flowers.<sup>68</sup>

Kristina Huneault's study of working women and visual culture focused on British paintings and fiction of the era 1880-1914.<sup>69</sup> But painters and writers were not the only producers of representations of 'flower girls'. From at least the 1870s onwards, photographers too were interested in the subject of the female flower vendors in the streets of London. One of the well-known photographs of London flower sellers, entitled *Covent Garden Flower Women*, was taken by John Thomson around 1877 (see *Figure 8*).<sup>70</sup> The picture was included in the book *Street Life in London* that presented a journalistic survey of the life of the cities' workers.<sup>71</sup> Similar photographs were also reproduced on postcards of London, sometimes with direct reference in the titles and captions to the genre of the 'London cries'.

Images that resembled the ones of flower sellers in London were also produced of flower sellers in Cape Town, both by painters and photographers. Several postcards

<sup>65</sup> Frederick Loewe (music) and Alan Jay Lerner (lyrics, book), *My Fair Lady* (musical first performed at the Mark Hellinger Theatre New York, 1956).

<sup>66</sup> George Cukor (director), *My Fair Lady*, (USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1964).

<sup>67</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 224. For example: George Pearson (director), *Squibs Wins the Calcutta Sweep* (UK: Welsh-Pearson, 1922). Charlie Chaplin, *City Lights* (USA: Charles Chaplin Productions, 1931). Herbert Wilcox (director), *Good Night Vienna* (UK: Herbert Wilcox Productions, 1932). Karl Boese (director), *Love and Kisses, Veronica* (Hungary: Deutsche Universum Film AG, 1936). Mario Zampi (director), *Ho Scelto L'Amore* (France, Italy: Film Costellazione Produzione, 1954).

<sup>68</sup> See for example Garry Marshall (director), *Pretty Woman*, (Touchstone Pictures, 1990).

<sup>69</sup> Huneault, *Difficult Subjects*.

<sup>70</sup> [http://www.museumoflondonimages.com/image\\_details.php?image\\_id=192984&wherefrom=keywordresults](http://www.museumoflondonimages.com/image_details.php?image_id=192984&wherefrom=keywordresults) (accessed 26.12.2010).

<sup>71</sup> [http://www.museumoflondonimages.com/image\\_details.php?image\\_id=192984&wherefrom=keywordresults](http://www.museumoflondonimages.com/image_details.php?image_id=192984&wherefrom=keywordresults) (accessed 26.12.2010).



and photographs in the collection of the National Library of South Africa and the Western Cape Archives Repository can be associated with the 'flower girl' genre. For example, the following postcard contains a photograph of a young woman with two baskets filled with fynbos flowers, bearing one on her head and the other one in her hand (see *Figure 9*).



Figure 9 Postcard *Cape Flower Girl* (SANL, PHA, CT. Flower Sellers).



Figure 10 Postcard *The Cape Peninsula Nature's Masterpiece* (SANL, PHA, CT. Flower Sellers).

Not only the image itself, but also the caption on the postcard, *Cape Flower Girl*, followed the conventions of the 'London cries'-series. Also, similar to the photograph of the *Covent Garden Flower Women*, the picture could have belonged to a series of ethnographically styled photographs of types of working people in the streets of Cape Town. Unfortunately, no information about the woman on the postcard, the photographer, the producer or the way the card travelled before it was integrated into the postcard collection of the National Library were available. This lack of documentation is typical for postcard collections. As Christraud Geary and Virginia-Lee Webb wrote, studying postcards containing photographs that were taken in Africa is challenging, as these cards are mostly kept outside the continent, in public and private

collections in Europe and America.<sup>72</sup> The depicted photographs were often made by European or American photographers, and the cards travelled “in a circular fashion”, being printed in Europe, brought back to the colonies where the picture had been taken and sold to travellers who again sent them back to Europe.<sup>73</sup> Information about the people included in the production and especially about the people represented on the postcards did not travel as smoothly as the cards themselves.

Similarly to the *Cape Flower Girl*, another postcard of the National Library collection shows an image that was first launched as a poster by the Cape Peninsula Publicity Association (see *Figure 10*). The drawing is titled *Cape Peninsula Nature's Masterpiece* and shows the silhouette of a woman bearing a basket of freshly picked flowers on her head, and a bunch of arum lilies in her arm. Her head is turned in direction of the city, following the perspective on Table Mountain that dominated images on postcards ever since their production was taken up. The graphic composition leaves it up to the spectator to decide whether it is the landscape, the flowers or the woman that is referred to as 'nature's masterpiece'. This ambiguity is typical for the practice of closely associating flowers and female sexuality.

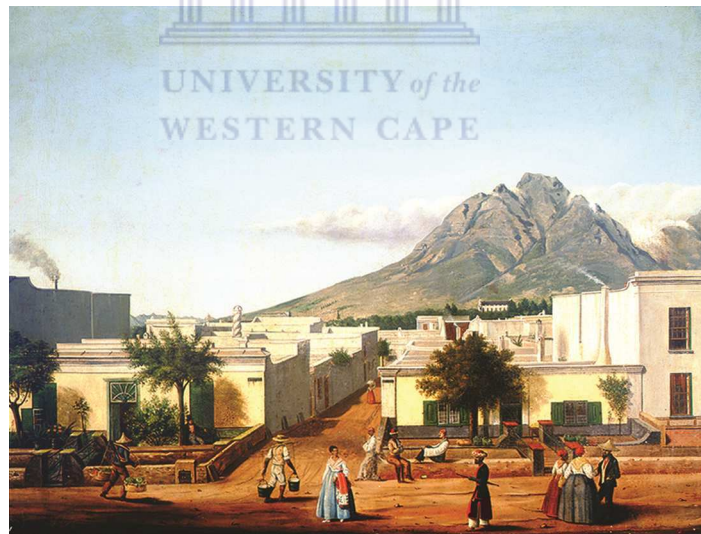


Figure 11 W.H.F. L. Langschmitdt, *Long Street, Cape Town*, c 1845, oil on canvas (William Fehr CD115).

Strikingly, the paintings and photographs of flower sellers resemble images of washerwoman that were a popular subject in earlier visual productions of Cape Town. In a painting of a mid-19th century street scene at the corner of Long and Bloem Street by W.H.F. Langschmitdt, a woman carrying a basket on her head was painted in the

<sup>72</sup> Geary and Webb, 'Introduction', 1.

<sup>73</sup> Geary and Webb, 'Introduction', 2.

background (see *Figure 11*).<sup>74</sup> Worden, Heyningen and Bickford-Smith identified her as washerwoman and state that the washerwoman was an “archetypal Cape Town figure.”<sup>75</sup>

Images that resembled the discursive genre of the ‘flower girl’ were not only produced for postcards and in tourism, but also by painters. Vladimir Tretchikoff, famous for his paintings and prints of exoticised people, produced two images of flower sellers in Cape Town in 1950. *The Flower Seller Woman* (see *Figure 12*) is a portrait of a woman behind a zinc bath filled with indigenous flowers of the Cape, *The Flower Seller Girl* (see *Figure 13*) shows a young girl holding, or offering, a bunch of flowers in direction of the spectator. Tretchikoff produced a range of images of characteristic Cape Town workers that had titles like *Cape Fisherman*, *Crayfish Seller* or *Herb Seller*.<sup>76</sup> Also here, the definition of typical characters resembles the genre of the ‘London cries’.



Figure 12 Vladimir Tretchikoff, *The Flower Seller Woman*, 1950, <http://www.vladimirtretchikoff.com/gallery.htm>, (accessed 19.12.2010).



Figure 13 Vladimir Tretchikoff, *The Flower Seller Girl*, 1950, <http://www.vladimirtretchikoff.com/gallery.htm>, (accessed 19.12.2010).

In more recent visual productions, flower sellers were no longer predominantly depicted as young girls, but often as middle aged women. These images resembled more Tretchikoff’s *Flower Seller Woman* than the *Flower Seller Girl*. For example, in the photograph that appeared on the front page of the *Cape Argus* to mark the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Adderley Street flower market in October 2010, the focus was also set on the older flower sellers.<sup>77</sup> Sulaila Hendricks, a flower seller in Rondebosch, said that amateur artists who came to the flower market to paint preferred

<sup>74</sup> Painting by W.H.F. Langschmidt, William Fehr CD115.

<sup>75</sup> Worden, Van Heyningen, Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town: The Making of a City*, 167.

<sup>76</sup> <http://shop.vladimirtretchikoff.com> (accessed 2.12.2010).

<sup>77</sup> The reporter, ‘Mums and roses’, *Cape Argus*, 27.10.2010, front page.



drawing the elderly ladies.<sup>78</sup> Maybe the 'Cape Town flower sellers' have by 2010 been inserted into a visual urban nostalgia for which elderly women are more suitable than younger ones. As will be discussed in the next chapter, flowers were in the 21st century still associated with sexuality, but also with nostalgia for past times that were better than the chaos and unpredictability experienced in the present.

### *Fair Trade-flower selling in the 21st century*

The images and imaginings of flower sellers as poor but dignified women have continued to exist and are part of the highly globalised flower industry of today. While flowers have increasingly been genetically modified, industrially grown and shipped around the globe, the genre-specific ideas have been firmly in place in European flower selling until today. Flowers have increasingly been imported from South America and East Africa and been sold in retail shops that had little in common with the outdoor flower markets or florists boutiques of the past.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless the figure of the 'flower girl' or 'flower woman' was included in the flower trade through the use of photographic images. For example, in 2010, the Swiss retailer Migros used price tags for its East African roses with a portrait photograph of an African woman with a bunch of roses (see *Figure 14*).



*Figure 14* Price tag for roses grown in East Africa (Migros, 2010).

In a brochure, the fair trade trust Max Havelaar that labels the Migros roses combined similar images and testimonials about the positive impact of the flower trade

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Sulaila Hendricks, Rondebosch, 19.9.2010.

<sup>79</sup> Amy Stewart, *Flower Confidential* (Chapel Hill: Alconquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2007), 173-270.

on the flower sellers impoverished communities.<sup>80</sup> Following on the older discourse that associated flower buying and philanthropy, the fair trade-flower selling was advertised to customers as an opportunity to “directly invest in the development of disadvantaged regions in the South.”<sup>81</sup>

### *The 'C.T. Flower Sellers' in the Archive*

As already explained in chapter two, the genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was produced through various sites simultaneously. Beside tourism, nature conservation and urban planning, the genre was produced through practices of collecting and archiving in the National Library of South Africa. According to Foucault, the archive is not merely an institution, but a “law of what can be said.”<sup>82</sup> Since the “archival turn” of the 1980s, historians shifted from approaching the “archive-as-source” to studying the “archive-as-subject.”<sup>83</sup> With Carlo Ginzburg's publication of *The Cheese and the Worms* in 1982 and Natalie Zemon Davis' *Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* in 1982, historians broke away from treating the archive as a repository of facts.<sup>84</sup> While Ginzburg and Davis did ethnographies in the archive, later scholars made a point for “ethnographies of the archive.”<sup>85</sup> Taking a critical stance on the archives, scholars of colonialism began to read them “against their grain”, approach “upper-classes sources upside down” and focus on “[u]n-state-d” histories.<sup>86</sup> These authors aimed at recasting the colonised as agents who made choices of their own.<sup>87</sup> Ann Laura Stoler warned that the reading of colonial archives strictly “against the grain” led to shortcomings in the understanding of the workings of power. By relying too heavily on what was already known, the possibility of increasing insights into colonial complexities was prematurely

<sup>80</sup> Max Havelaar-Stiftung, 'Blumen: Produkteinformation der Max Havelaar-Stiftung (Schweiz)', Oktober 2008 (own translation).

<sup>81</sup> Max Havelaar-Stiftung, 'Blumen: Produkteinformation der Max Havelaar-Stiftung (Schweiz) (own translation).

<sup>82</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, quoted in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris and Graeme Ried, 'Introduction', in Carolyn Hamilton et al (eds), *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 7-17.

<sup>83</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 44.

<sup>84</sup> Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 45.

<sup>85</sup> Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 45.

<sup>86</sup> Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 47.

<sup>87</sup> Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 47.

closed down.<sup>88</sup> Stoler therefore argued that archives should not only be read “against the grain” but that one should “explore the grain with care and read along it first.”<sup>89</sup>

In the collection practices of the National Library of South Africa, the flower sellers were made into a category of their own. The National Library applied the keyword ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ as a category in the filing card index for material related to Cape Town, the photographic collection and the postcard collection. Through defining keywords and references, the index determined how people used the archive and which narratives could be encountered, and thus reproduced. What, then, was the position of the flower sellers in the logic of the index catalogue? A drawer titled ‘Cape Town Co-F’ contains paper cards that refer to particular documents in the collection. The cards are divided into categories by bigger blue cards with titles such as ‘C.T. Constantia’, ‘CAPE TOWN. District Six’ or ‘Cape Town. Fire Brigade’. It is on one of these cards that the archival life of the flower sellers as ‘C.T. Flower sellers’ began. Despite the catalogues now being available digitally, the filing card index can still be studied in the National Library, in a corner next to the entrance to the main room. The following photograph shows the compartment of the ‘C.T. Flower sellers’ (see *Figure 15*).



*Figure 15* Index card “C.T. Flower sellers” in the National Library of South Africa (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

The compartment titled ‘C.T. Flower sellers’ consists of 21 handwritten and machine-typed cards, each containing a varying degree of details. For example, cards bear references like:

<sup>88</sup> Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 50.

<sup>89</sup> Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 50.

Cape Town, Flower Sellers, 1910: drawing, Cape Times Annual 1910, p. 25

Cape Town. Flower Sellers. 1921: photo in front of GPO, Cape of Good Hope: Cape Town official handbook (J.R. Finch), 3rd ed 1921, between p88-89. A 968/711 T/Cap

Cape Town. Flower Sellers. 1926. Poem by N.H.D. Spicer, SA Woman's Mag July 1926, p 51. P3289

The majority of the cards refer to documents produced between 1910 and 1936.

References were made to texts, but also to photographs and drawings published in print media, memoirs and tourist guidebooks. Only three cards lead to later documents, namely to the memoirs of George Manuel that were published in 1977 and to *Cape Times* articles of 1991 and 1992. The organising logic of the archive sets the flower sellers in relation to other categories of the collection. Thereby, a particular narrative was constructed that connected flower selling to notions of coloured or 'Malay' culture. On a card titled 'CAPE TOWN. Coloured community', researchers were instructed to "see also" the categories of 'Coloured suburbs, e.g. ATHLONE, MITCHELL'S PLAIN', 'CAPE TOWN. Coon carnival', 'MALAYS' and 'CAPE TOWN. Flower sellers'.

A librarian of the South African National Library suggested that the cards referring to documents concerned with the flower sellers came into existence due to frequent requests by users of the library for material about the flower sellers, as the flower sellers were "an institution in Cape Town."<sup>90</sup> Librarians would look up the requested documents and add a card to the index files when they found something new. Since the newspaper archives became available online and the catalogue of the National Library was digitised, the librarians no longer practiced index filing.

A different logic than in the collecting practices of the National Library was applied in the newspaper clipping files of the *Cape Argus* that are now also held by the National Library. In this collection, the flower sellers did not constitute a particular category, but the articles relating to them and their activities were included in the clipping files titled 'Flora'. The 'Flora' clipping files thus brought together articles about botany, horticulture and floristry, but also such concerned with issues around flower selling, infrastructure of the market, trade regulations and the impacts of the Group Areas Act on the life and business of the flower sellers.

<sup>90</sup> Conversation with Najwa Hendrickse, 6.9.2010.

*The sight of the market as an argument*

The importance of the flower market as a sight and a destination was frequently invoked as an argument in debates about a variety of issues. Flower sellers and parties not directly involved with the trade tried to draw from the images and imaginings of flower selling for their respective purposes. Also, the image of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was deployed in urban planning debates. Already in the discussion about the protection of the wild flowers in parliament 1908, Mr. Baxter argued in support of the flower sellers that "he rather thought it was a feature of Cape Town life which added colour to the place," and that the trade should therefore be allowed "within legitimate bounds."<sup>91</sup> Also when the flower market in Adderley Street was put at risk by the Group Areas Act and later urban planning interventions, the iconic status of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was brought into the debates.

The attractiveness of flower selling was also used as an argument in support of matters not directly related to the trade. When the Constantia Fruit Growers' Association suggested the establishment of a central market for agricultural products on the Parade, the Durban market was mentioned as an example for the sightliness of markets in general.<sup>92</sup> In a letter to the town clerk from 1913, the Association referred to famous markets abroad, saying that

[t]he market at the Halles Centrales in Paris, and the Sydney markets, are of a type which could be copied with advantage. We are of the opinion that such a market would be of an immense attraction in itself, and in the months of January, February, and March, would be one of the sights of the world regarding the varieties and class of fruit.<sup>93</sup>

While the main purpose of the proposed market was the selling of fruit and vegetables, the flower sellers were mentioned as a contribution to the beauty of the place. The Western Province Agricultural Society for example argued that the flower market could be placed at the new market to "make a sight for the people to go to", arguing that also in Paris, "[o]ne of the finest sights ... was the fruit and flower market."<sup>94</sup>

The condition of the infrastructure of the flower market was debated at numerous moments in the past. The memorandums and newspaper articles about the debates within the municipality give the impression that many people and departments

<sup>91</sup> House of Assembly, 'Wild flowers' protection act amendment bill', 229f.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from the Cape Peninsula Publicity Association to the town clerk, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/2/20 B64/2 (Vol 2), 1162.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from the Constantia Fruit Growers' Association to the town clerk, 12.11.1913, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/2/20 B64/2 (Vol 2), 10263.

<sup>94</sup> The reporter, 'Site for new Post Office: Claims of fruit market urged', *The Cape Times*, 17.1.1917.



were involved in them, but that it was unclear under whose responsibility the flower selling actually fell.<sup>95</sup> Beside city planners, members of the public and business sector made suggestions about the physical infrastructure of the flower markets. For example, in 1932, the Mortimer-Sands Publicity Corporation asked for permission to supply the flower sellers in Adderley Street and Trafalgar Place with new stands on which advertisement could be placed. The company argued that the market currently did not look as attractive as it could. According to the Publicity Corporation, the flower sellers' stands consisted

of a heterogeneous assortment of boxes, tins, basins and baths in varying stages of dilapidation, vide photographs supplied, decidedly disfiguring the appearance of these thoroughfares.<sup>96</sup>

To strengthen the argument, two photographs were added to the letter that did, for once, not render the flower market into a picturesque sight, but attempted to emphasise the shabbiness of the wooden boxes and tin pots.<sup>97</sup> Attached to the letter was further a drawing of the suggested neat and standardised stalls. The application was denied by the city's Improvements and Parks Committee. One of the arguments made by councillor E.G. Nyman in this debate was that

he felt much of the attraction of the flower sellers in Adderley Street was due to the primitive stands used at present.<sup>98</sup>

Not only the look of the flower market, but also the appearance of the flower sellers was publicly discussed. A resident of Cape Town, H. Jasper-Smith, wrote a letter to the chairman of the Improvements and Parks Committee saying that he was concerned with "the untidy and shabby way in which the Flower Sellers in Adderley Street [were] dressed."<sup>99</sup> He suggested

that an effort should be made to get these people dressed in some kind of uniform. That women only sell the flowers in Adderley Street, and that they be dressed in plain blue or pink dresses, with Dutch Bonnets or Kappies. Further I suggest that narrow stands should be used, which will give some kind of order and uniformity.

<sup>95</sup> For example, in 1932, the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the municipality discussed suggestions made by the Traffic Control Committee about the construction of stalls and shelters for the flower sellers, and the restriction of the trading activities from 8 a.m to 7 p.m.<sup>95</sup> The Finance and General Purposes Committee referred the matter to the Streets and Drainage Committee which found itself unable to follow up the proposed solutions. Letter from town clerk to finance and general purposes committee, 19.5.1932, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/2/1/1/520 136/32.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from the Mortimer-Sands Publicity Corporation to the town clerk of Cape Town, 10.10.1932, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT, 4/1/5/102, B443/5.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from the Mortimer-Sands Publicity Corporation to the town clerk of Cape Town, 10.10.1932.

<sup>98</sup> Extract from minutes of meeting of the Improvements and Parks Committee held on the 11.10.1932, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT, 4/1/5/102, B443/5.

<sup>99</sup> Letter from H. Jasper-Smith to chairman of the Improvements and Parks Committee, 14.9.1934. Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/5/3110 B1475/5, 44/10.

The men folk should be confined to Trafalgar Place, and prepare the flowers for those selling in the street. The flower selling could be made very attractive, but, at present, it is becoming an eyesore, instead of a delightful scene!<sup>100</sup>

In the early 1950s, the construction of stalls at Trafalgar Place was again debated and city departments and other interest groups made suggestions. Barbara M. Grieve, the honorary secretary of the National Council of Women of South Africa, wrote to the City Engineer in 1952 to inquire about the plans for the construction of shelters for the flower sellers.<sup>101</sup> The Cape Town Branch of the Council had lobbied for the construction of shelters for years, especially in relation to particular occasions like the Tercentenary Celebrations.<sup>102</sup> Private persons also entered the debates about the material infrastructure of the market. For example, A.J. Meyers explained in a letter published in the *Cape Argus* that he had suggested to the municipality to build shelters in Trafalgar Place, as

in all other respects the flower market was a credit to Cape Town but the varied assortment of packing cases, beer and mineral drink boxes on which the flower sellers placed their zinc baths of flowers spoilt an otherwise very fine market.<sup>103</sup>

#### *The 'Cape Town flower sellers' as an argument*

The flower market in Adderley Street was put at risk at several moments in the second half of the 20th century. The first major threat was the Group Areas Act, the second was constituted through a debate about vagrancy in the 1970s. Beside these obvious interventions, more subtle challenges came with changes in consumer habits and developments in the flower industry. Announcements of possible eviction were followed by debates in the public, especially in newspapers, in which the figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was frequently invoked in favour of the market. The following examples from debates demonstrate how the genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was used as an argument and thus became a crucial resource for the parties interested in the upkeep of the flower selling.

In 1965, central Cape Town was proclaimed a white Group Area and P.W. Botha, then minister of internal affairs, announced in parliament that

<sup>100</sup> Letter from H. Jasper-Smith to Chairman of the Improvements and Parks Committee, 14.9.1934.

<sup>101</sup> Letter from Barbara M. Grieve to city engineer, 25.2.1952, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/2/1/4/47 52/6.

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Ruth E.C. Carter to town clerk, 28.11.1951. Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/2/1/4/47 52/6.

<sup>103</sup> A.J. Meyers, 'Beer boxes for the flowers', *The Cape Argus*, 18.11.1964.

the Coloured flower sellers would eventually have to move from the flower market in Adderley Street.<sup>104</sup>

In an article published in the *Cape Argus* in June 1965, the consequences of this enactment were critically reported about. Through writing about the practices around flower selling, the author took up broader issues of everyday life under apartheid. The way in which foreign visitors would interpret the eviction of the flower market was brought into consideration. As was typical for the botanical complex in general, the look at the flower market through the eyes of foreign visitor was applied as a vehicle to make South Africans experience themselves according to a particular agenda. The author of the article stated that

the point is that the Coloured people in Adderley Street sell their flowers mainly to White people. There will not be much of a living for flower sellers carrying on their business in Bonteheuwel, in a starry-eyed attempt to serve their own people. The removal of the flower market, a Cape Town institution, will also help to emphasise the effects of apartheid for visitors to South Africa. The flower market is famous and part of its fame is derived from the efforts of the State Information Service and the South African Tourist Corporation. In future people coming ashore from ships or arriving in Cape Town from other provinces will ask where the flower sellers of Adderley Street are. They will then be told that they have been removed by legislation to sell flowers to their own people in their own areas, although those people cannot afford to buy them; for it is hard to imagine White Eliza Doolittles taking over from the Coloured people. That will be the consequence of carrying ideas to their logical conclusions, regardless of human beings who come a poor second when an ideology reigns.<sup>105</sup>

The flower sellers continued trading in white-classified parts of Cape Town despite the Group Areas Act. But the contestation of space continued also in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1978, vagrants were regarded as a serious problem for keeping Trafalgar Place clean and the closure of the flower market was again discussed in the media.<sup>106</sup> Complaints were made that the market had

become a heaven for layabouts and drunks, who break up the benches for firewood, sleep there and leave the place filthy.<sup>107</sup>

According to the *Cape Argus*, "Cape Town citizens were horrified at the thought of the Adderley Street flower sellers ever moving from Trafalgar Place."<sup>108</sup> Flower sellers

<sup>104</sup> The reporter, 'No flowers, by order', *The Cape Argus*, 22.6.1965.

<sup>105</sup> The reporter, 'No flowers, by order'.

<sup>106</sup> Keri Swift, 'Blooming Trouble', *The Cape Argus*, 23.6.1978. The reporter, 'Flower sellers to get Council support', *The Cape Argus*, 23.6.1978.

<sup>107</sup> Swift, 'Blooming Trouble'.

<sup>108</sup> Swift, 'Blooming Trouble'.

explained the situation with the lack of police presence at the flower market which enabled vagrants to misuse the space, and the public who did not like to see them “kicking the bergies out” as it “looks ugly, fighting on the street.”<sup>109</sup> Members of the police on the other side partly blamed the flower sellers for the situation, as they employed the vagrants to run errands for them.<sup>110</sup>

In another article in the *Cape Times*, an experienced flower seller was quoted to have said that vagrants had slept at the market for a long time, but that a problem only emerged in the recent years.<sup>111</sup> In the newspaper articles that were published in midst of the vagrant debates, it was emphasised that the flower market in Adderley Street was a famous sight and tourist destination. City councillor Tom Walters argued against the eviction that the market was “an integral part of Cape Town.”<sup>112</sup> Similarly, an article in the *Cape Times* argued that

[t]he flower sellers and their market place in Adderley Street are as much part of Cape Town as fresh snoek, the south-easter and the noon gun.<sup>113</sup>

It is striking that the newspaper articles only quoted female flower sellers, and often introduced them by name, age and by stating that they had been flower sellers for many years. The genre of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ had indeed constituted a powerful argument and a resource, as the market continued to exist until today. Tradition and history were also referred to as arguments when the flower sellers felt threatened by developments of the city and the economy in the year 2010.<sup>114</sup> When the flower market was interrupted by construction work in Adderley Street, florist Lisa Malcomes wrote a letter in defence of the flower sellers to the *Cape Towner* that invoked the function of the flower market as a sight as an argument. Malcomes expressed her discontent with the way the city treated the flower sellers, writing that

[f]or decades [the flower sellers] have brought colour and life to the city. There are very few tourist brochures of Cape Town without a picture of our vibrant flower sellers – they’ve played a large part in the marketing of Cape Town.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Swift, ‘Blooming Trouble’.

<sup>110</sup> Swift, ‘Blooming Trouble’.

<sup>111</sup> The reporter, ‘Will the flower sellers get boot?’, *The Cape Argus*, 24.6.1978.

<sup>112</sup> The reporter, ‘Flower sellers to get Council support’.

<sup>113</sup> The reporter, ‘Vagrants a threat to flower sellers’, *The Cape Argus*, 21.6.1978.

<sup>114</sup> Interviews with flower sellers in Adderley Street, Cape Town, 2010.

<sup>115</sup> Monique Duval, ‘Blooming angry: building disrupts flower trade’, *The CapeTowner*, 2.9.2010, 1-3.

*The Adderley Street market flower sellers and the 'Cape Town flower sellers'*

When I studied the photographs I had taken during my research at the flower market in Adderley Street, I was astonished that many of them strongly resembled the typical images of the genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' (see for example *Figures 16-18*). These photographs showed women sitting among flowers, often holding a bunch of flowers in their hands. Three or four women appeared particularly often in the pictures. Without being aware of it, I had mostly taken images of the women whose images appeared most frequently in newspapers, guidebooks and other visual productions. Other flower sellers who were less photographed referred to them as "the famous ones."<sup>116</sup> Most likely, my photographic practice was influenced by the tourist gaze on the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. But the women and men working at the flower market also co-authored my photographs. Some liked being photographed and posed in front of the camera in an experienced way. As they felt at ease, it was pleasant to take pictures with them and it was not difficult to make photographs that came out nicely. Sometimes, the flower sellers also gave specific instructions about the composition of the pictures, as if they too had appropriated the tourist gaze. I was even asked to edit a photograph so that it would be black and white, as to resemble the old photographs of the flower market.



Figure 16 Amiena Williams (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

<sup>116</sup> Interviews at the Adderley Street flower market, Cape Town, October, November, December 2010.





Figure 17 Diela Gamildien (Photograph Melanie Boehi).



Figure 18 Cecilia Williams (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

While some flower sellers were photographed often, others had their pictures less frequently taken. They remained largely invisible in books and newspapers. Some people working at the market literally didn't fit into the picture of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. Most apparent, men were generally not photographed often, despite being present at the flower market every day, either selling flowers themselves or assisting stall-owners. Other flower sellers who were not prominent in the visual productions didn't like being photographed, or were simply more shy.

As I got to know the women and men working at the flower market better, more pictures emerged that resembled less of the stereotype of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. Some photographs were made spontaneously and depict business as usual at the market. *Figure 19* for example shows flower seller Soraya Naidoo chatting with acquaintances in Adderley Street, with the construction site for the new bicycle lane in the background. Often, exact instructions were given about what a picture should look like. For example, a husband or children should be included in the photograph. *Figure 20* shows flower seller Diela Gamildien with her husband Fahmy, at her stall in Adderley Street. *Figure 21* shows their son, Riedwaan Gamildien, together with his friend Jafet whose parents own a stall in front of the OK Bazaar building. The two boys

enjoyed themselves listening to music in the bakkie parked in front of the flower market in Adderley Street on a Saturday afternoon, and being part of a photo shoot was fun.



Figure 19 Soraya Naidoo (Photograph Melanie Boehi).



Figure 20 Diela and Fahmy Gamildien (Photograph Melanie Boehi).



Figure 21 Riedwaan Gamildien and Jafet (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

Many photographs depict the flower sellers at work with flowers, not just posing with the finished arrangements. The following photograph shows Ilhaam Benjamin selecting and arranging flowers at her stall for a customer (see *Figure 22*).





Figure 22 Ilhaam Benjamin (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

Sometimes, I was called to quickly photograph flower arrangements before customers collected them, so that the picture could be used in a portfolio for future commissions (see *Figure 23*).



Figure 23 Cecilia Williams with one of her flower arrangements (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

It also happened that flower sellers who were not often photographed suggested that a photograph be taken that portrayed them within the conventional genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers', as was the case with *Figure 24*. Sharon Growers, who usually sells flowers in Hout Bay and helps out her relatives at the Adderley Street market occasionally, suggested she sit "in the middle of the flowers with a king protea" like they do in the "real pictures". Unlike Adderley Street, the place where she usually sells flowers in Hout Bay is not part of the typical 'Cape Town flower sellers' images.



Figure 24 Sharon Growers (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

Other photographs that don't readily fit into the conventions of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' are those of men and of people who don't own a stall of their own, but help out at the market as assistants. *Figure 25* shows Shaun, one of the male assistants of the flower sellers, carrying buckets of flowers from the market at Trafalgar Place to the Adderley Hotel for a function on Heritage Day 2010.



Figure 25 Shaun (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

As this chapter showed, the figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' came into existence as a discursive category through textual and visual productions as well as through practices of collecting and archiving. Thereby, the figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was characterised with specific gendered, racialised and class-specific features and was presented as an essential element of Cape Town. The genre of the

'Cape Town flower sellers' was not just imposed, though. As the photographic practices of people working in flower selling showed, the flower sellers were actively co-authoring photographs taken at the market. This was done with much creativity and a sophisticated sense of irony, for example when people suggested posing like in the "real pictures" of the flower sellers, exactly being aware of how to arrange a photograph to become part of the visual economy of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. Also, the images and imaginings were strategically used by people who made a living through flower selling in Cape Town. The next chapter is concerned with how the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was used as a resource by both flower sellers and others. It suggests that the performance of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was part of the curriculum of flower selling in Cape Town.





## Chapter Three

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### The ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ and the flower selling curriculum

“Here you learn everything, my love.”

Diela Gamildien, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.<sup>1</sup>

People involved in flower selling in Cape Town and the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ are not the same. Also, not everybody who appeared to belong to the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ sold flowers. While the figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ was highly visible and well-known, surprisingly little was known about what was going on with and beyond the images. As discussed in Chapter Two, only relatively little attention was paid to the history of the flower sellers and markets of Cape Town. Mostly, flower selling was referred to as a tradition, not as an activity with a history of its own. The flower sellers were thereby perceived as passive, as if they had been conducting their trade motionless in an economy serving white Capetonians for decades or even centuries. It is not widely known that flower selling was threatened when the Group Areas Act was implemented and that the city considered closing the market at Trafalgar Place to solve problems with vagrancy in the 1970s. Also, the flower industry itself changed fundamentally.<sup>2</sup> Today, the flower business is highly globalised, flowers are transported around the world and the competition between flower sellers, florists and, especially, retailer shops is fierce. Contrary to the idea of clinging passively to a trade of the olden days, the flower sellers have had to negotiate their position as traders, their access to space and their social networks all the time. The flower markets have not just been there, but they have actively been made possible by the people involved in flower selling.

Until today, the municipality of Cape Town seems to know little about the activities happening at the flower market, and not to care much about this lack of knowledge. While the city does not hesitate to use images of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ widely in advertisement, its understanding for the flower sellers is limited when it comes to everyday issues. For example, on Valentine’s Day 2010, the city facilitated the closing down of Adderley Street to all traffic for a film shoot without notifying the

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Diela Gamildien, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *Flower Confidential*, 3-11.

flower sellers.<sup>3</sup> Prepared for one of their busiest days of the year, the flower sellers were cordoned off from their customers and had to cope with financial loss. Ilhaam Benjamin, one of the Adderley Street flower sellers, concluded that Valentine's Day 2010 was a "very sad day" for them and that "[t]he city just wants to make money and they don't think about us."<sup>4</sup> A few months later, the city disturbed the business of the flower sellers again when construction work for a bicycle lane in Adderley Street covered the market with dust and noise for weeks and cars were hindered from stopping. Again, the municipality had not consulted the flower sellers about the interruption.<sup>5</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, the figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' emerged out of particular assumptions about gender, race and class that were typical for a colonial and male-dominated distribution of power. Despite the hierarchical ordering that came with the genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers', people were not simply victimised by the images and imaginings of them. Men and women involved in the flower selling established ways of using the discursive figure to their advantage. The performance of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' can be understood as one of the strategies applied to make business with flowers possible. Also people not directly involved in flower selling found ways of using the 'Cape Town flower sellers' as a resource through which access to space, opportunities and connections could be negotiated. In personal use, images mediated by the tourist gaze were looked at differently and could gain meanings and values unimagined by their producers.

Markets are spaces where things happen all the time, often informally and unpredictably. "You meet all kind of different people", Sulaila Hendricks said about the flower market in Rondebosch where she traded.<sup>6</sup> Working in the proximity of the Newlands Stadium and the Baxter Theatre, she explained that she and her colleagues regularly met people famous in sports and performing arts and befriended some of them. But they also knew the local residents, some of them over decades since they were babies, and were familiar with other shopkeepers and the street people of the area.<sup>7</sup> People meet, exchange goods and share knowledge at market spaces. Continuously, possibilities are opened up and closed down. The flower markets are regulated by the city to a certain degree, but much is organised informally by the people using the

<sup>3</sup> Thandanani Mhlanga, 'No bed of roses for flower sellers', *The Cape Argus*, 15.2.2010, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Mhlanga, 'No bed of roses for flower sellers'.

<sup>5</sup> Interviews with flower sellers, Cape Town, October and November 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Sulaila Hendricks, Rondebosch, 23.09.2010.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Sulaila Hendricks, Rondebosch, 23.09.2010.

spaces. Markets are spaces of business, but also of family and social life. If we want to understand better what people do in Cape Town, it is activities like those taking place at the flower markets that can be insightful to study.

As discussed in the introduction, recent literature suggested to approach cities as spaces that are constantly in the making.<sup>8</sup> As AbdouMaliq Simone wrote, the infrastructure of cities consists not only of their material, technological or legal entities, but also of their inhabitants and their interactions. People make life in cities possible through developing ways of acting as resources for each other.<sup>9</sup> Also an important shift away from conventional political economy, Simone suggested to understand power less as consolidated in ownership than in the “capacity to generate advantageous relationships with a multiplicity of production forces and strategic flows.”<sup>10</sup>

The magazine *Chimurenga* suggested in its 15th issue to follow up the question of the curriculum.<sup>11</sup> What, the editors asked,

could the curriculum be – if it was designed by the people who dropped out of school so that they could breathe?<sup>12</sup>

Through the notion of the curriculum, *Chimurenga* referred to the subtle ways of learning about the knowledge and skills that are relevant in life. Considering that, as *Chimurenga* put it, “the curriculum is everything”, this chapter then asks how the discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ was related to the curriculum of flower selling and other occupations in the streets of Cape Town. How does one learn about the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ and what to do, or not to do with them? This chapter thus tries to study how the figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ circulated through various systems of knowledge and how people lived with and used it.

### *Performing the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’*

Here, the characteristics of the discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ are reconsidered in terms of how they related to the activities at the flower markets. As described in Chapter Two, the discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ was predominantly described as female, coloured and poor. Through the discourses of tourism, nature conservation and city planning, the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ were put

<sup>8</sup> See: Simone, *City Life from Jakarta to Dakar*. Simone, *For the City Yet to Come*. Pieterse, *City Futures*. Edjabe and Pieterse (eds), *African Cities Reader*.

<sup>9</sup> Simone, ‘People as Infrastructure’, 68.

<sup>10</sup> Simone, ‘Urban Social Fields in Africa’, 84.

<sup>11</sup> *Chimurenga*, ‘The Curriculum is Everything’.

<sup>12</sup> *Chimurenga online*, <http://www.chimurenga.co.za/printissue-15.html> (accessed 6.12.2010).

on display within the botanical complex of the city. When people were included in a display, they were made into objects of the ethnographic gaze. This is, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett wrote, problematic, as it made “people become signs of themselves.”<sup>13</sup> Harry Garuba discussed how the double function of guide and object of display impacted upon the former political prisoners who worked as tour guides in the Robben Island Museum.<sup>14</sup> According to Garuba, the life histories told by the tour guides focused on a particular dominant story. Similar to how the museum discourse affected the narratives of the Robben Island guides, the genre of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ also had an impact upon the flower sellers in Cape Town. Thereby, the discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ mediated the behaviour of flower sellers, customers and city administrators alike. For example, it was suggested in 1971 that an application for a permit to sell flowers at the Adderley Street market of a sailor whose health did not allow him to go to sea anymore should be accepted, as the man was classified as “Malay” and already “all the other flower-stands were occupied by Malays.”<sup>15</sup> So, could be asked, did one have to perform being “Malay” to be awarded a permit, or did the permit render one “Malay”? And how did the customer respond to the performed or expected “Malayness”?

The association of flower sellers with femininity goes back a long time, as was mentioned in the previous chapter. Today, flower sellers are not exclusively, but predominantly women. There are men who do work at the flower markets as well, but mostly in the background. While the women interact with the customers, men prepare flowers behind the stalls, transport them from the farms or the airport to the markets and take care of family and housework at home. According to Garonesa Benjamin, women were better flower sellers than men. She said that a customer who was approached by a man and a woman simultaneously would rather buy from the woman than the man. “They don’t want to buy by the men”, she explained. “It’s a woman’s job.”<sup>16</sup> The division of labour at the flower markets might indeed be a crucial business strategy.

<sup>13</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 55.

<sup>14</sup> Harry Garuba, ‘A Second Life: Museums, Mimesis, and the Narrative of the Tour Guides of Robben Island’, in Noëleen Murray, Nick Shepherd and Martin Hall (eds), *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-Apartheid City* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), 129-144.

<sup>15</sup> Recommendation by J.G. Blaauw, Regional Representative, Department of Community Development, from 24.6.1971 for the application of Isaac Kleinsmit for a permit to sell flowers at Trafalgar Place. Western Cape Archives Repository, Groepsgebiede/Group Areas. Ansoek om Permit. Kaapstad. Trafalgar, CDC, 282, 32/1/4584/135.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Garonesa Benjamin, Cape Town, 23.10.2010.

Some flower sellers said that they were aware that customers expected them to be poor. While there might not be big money in flower selling, it enabled many families nonetheless to make a decent living. While elegant dresses, make-up and jewellery were enjoyed in leisure time, flower sellers generally dressed modestly in a way that almost constitutes a style of its own. Tellingly, one flower seller remembered how a customer looked at her, irritated when he saw that she owned a cell phone at a time when these had only just appeared in South Africa and not many people owned one.

Flower sellers in prominent market spaces know about the importance of their stalls in the visual economy of the city and some are well aware of the performance aspect of their work. The flower sellers in Adderley Street who were often frequented by tourists are especially aware of their status as a tourist attraction of Cape Town.<sup>17</sup> Garonessa Spanningburg, one of the flower sellers in Adderley Street, also thought that some customers preferred buying flowers from them to purchasing them at Woolworths or other shops because they knew that the flower sellers were “the heritage people.”<sup>18</sup>

Some tour guides included the performance of the flower sellers directly in their narratives. For example, one guide regularly brought groups to flower seller Diela Gamildien and introduced her as the “banana box girl”.<sup>19</sup> According to Diela Gamildien,

the tourists come here to look for the banana box girl. It's me. Those days it was very hard for my parents to attend clinics and stuff like that. He [the tour guide] will stand by me and then I have to tell where was I born and they are all standing around me where he already explained to them and they just want to hear how I express myself. Then it goes like ‘Yes, mother make pffff, I fall box.’<sup>20</sup> Things like that, man. They like it the way I explain it to them.<sup>20</sup>

Asked how she felt about being put on display, Diela Gamildien said that she was a good actor, explaining that she would greet French tourists with a “*Bonjour*”, German tourists with a “*Guten Tag*” and if somebody asked her to cry to make something look serious, she could even produce “*real krokodil trane*.”<sup>21</sup> Diela Gamildien said that she enjoyed the interaction with the tourists, even though they did not contribute significantly to their income.<sup>22</sup> She regarded it as a part of the flower sellers’ work to

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Garonessa Spanningburg, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Garonessa Spanningburg, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Diela Gamildien, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Diela Gamildien, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Diela Gamildien, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Diela Gamildien, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.



welcome tourists and show them the indigenous flowers in an environment where, compared to the botanical gardens, “they laugh a little bit.”<sup>23</sup>

Tourists and tour guides are not the only ones interested in the performance of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’. Sometimes, the flower sellers were commissioned as ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ for film shoots or functions. Sandra Solomons, one of the flower sellers in Adderley Street, was once employed to act in a film. She played the role of a flower seller, selling a bunch of proteas to one of the film’s main protagonists at her stall in Adderley Street.<sup>24</sup> At the beginning of 2010, a group of ten flower sellers was employed by a film company to act as flower sellers in an Australian production. Dressed in historic costumes, they posed at their stalls at Trafalgar Place which had been turned into a film shooting location for a Sunday. Flower sellers were also commissioned to perform at functions, almost as backdrops for particular events. On Heritage Day 2010, the Adderley Hotel commissioned Ian Williams to stand in the entrance area of the hotel and sell flowers. The hotel hosted its annual ‘Heritage Ball’ for which guests dressed up in heritage costumes, from quaint old-Dutch garments to chic Afro-pop shirts.

As the municipality regulated the terms of trading and the access to space for business conducted on its streets, the maintenance of an identity that distinguished the flower sellers from other traders was essential for the flower sellers, as their activities fell under separate regulations. This became especially important since the Cape Town municipality increased the control of the street trading activities.<sup>25</sup> According to flower seller Sulaila Hendricks, it was problematic that street vendors generally had a bad reputation. According to her, people often thought that

the Nigerians and also some coloureds ... got stalls and sell cigarettes and all kind of small things ... but do other business as well.<sup>26</sup>

The “other business” justified measures that made trading more difficult. It was therefore a vital strategy to distinguish oneself from other traders and the well-established figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ became an important resource. Through the performance of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’, a distinction could be established between flower sellers and other groups of traders. The association with

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Diela Gamildien, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Sandra Solomons, Cape Town, 22.10.2010.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Sulaila Hendricks, Rondebosch, 19.9.2010.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Sulaila Hendricks, Rondebosch, 19.9.2010.

tourism further strengthened the importance of the flower sellers, as Cape Town regarded tourism as an important sector for the development of the city.

#### *Accessing space at flower markets*

In the existing writing about flower selling in Cape Town, it is generally emphasised that it is an occupation that runs in families, predominantly matrilineally. The conventional narrative implies that over generations, flower stalls have been given from grandmothers to mothers, and from mothers to daughters and sometimes also daughters-in-law. Flower selling in Cape Town has indeed to a large extent been a family affair. The flower market in Adderley Street is dominated by one family, with two or three other families also owning stalls. Flower selling in other parts of town is also in the hands of particular families. The flower stalls in Gardens are run by one family, and another family sells most flowers outside the cemeteries. Most families involved in the flower selling initially came from Constantia, many from Strawberry Lane.<sup>27</sup>

Does one then have to belong to a flower seller family in order to sell flowers? “Nobody can come in here and sell flowers”, explained Joan Solomons, a flower seller in Adderley Street.<sup>28</sup> To own a stall at the market, one has to inherit it from a family who had been in the trade for generations.<sup>29</sup> Galiema Francis, a flower seller who worked at the Maitland cemetery, said that business was better in town than at the graveyards, but that one could not just go to town and put up a stall there, as the Adderley Street flower sellers had been “there all the time.”<sup>30</sup> If somebody wanted to start a new stall, this had to happen at a place where nobody had been trading before. Sometimes, space was contested. On holidays for example, flower sellers from all over the city used to flock to the cemeteries, hoping to get a share of the business that special occasions brought and thereby made the work of the local flower sellers difficult.<sup>31</sup>

Many of today's flower sellers not only belonged to families who had been in the trade for at least three generations, but also began working at the market at a young age. They started assisting their parents as children or teenagers, coming to the flower

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Rondebosch 22.09.2010. Interview with Rufia Lombard, Valhalla Park, 7.10.2010.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Joan Solomons, Cape Town, 23.09.2010.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Joan Solomons, Cape Town, 23.09.2010. Interview with Glenda Booman, Cape Town, 26.09.2010.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Galiema Francis, Maitland. 2.10.2010.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Galiema Francis, Maitland, 2.10.2010.

market after school, on weekends and during vacations.<sup>32</sup> Knowledge about flowers and flower selling was passed on between generations.<sup>33</sup> Joan Solomons, who started helping her mother and grandmother at the flower market in Adderley Street at the age of 14, explained that the work with flowers was primarily learning by doing:

You just see what they are doing and you just do it after them. You didn't go to a school to do that. We teach ourselves.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the importance of family traditions, not everybody involved in flower selling is descended from a family of flower sellers. Other routes could also lead to the market and sometimes, family relationships were actively constructed. For example, Garonesa Benjamin, who grew up in District Six, came to the flower market in 1946 as a teenager and assisted elderly flower sellers.<sup>35</sup> Even though none of her parents worked at the flower market, she could establish her own stall after having learned about the trading from assisting other flower sellers. Later, her children followed her and continued to trade at her stall. People without mentors willing to share their floristry knowledge explained that one had "to steal with one's eyes" from the experienced flower sellers.<sup>36</sup> Just as people entered the market without family connections, also not everybody related to a flower seller family could own his or her own stall, as the number of stalls allowed by the city was limited. Some remained assistants at the market. Also, some flower sellers left the market at some point and took up other occupations, and later came back as employees of other stall owners.

Homeless people are another group of people with ties to the flower markets that go back at least to the 1970s, probably even longer. Street people used the market in Adderley Street as shelter at night. Among them, the flower market was known as one of the few safe places to sleep at. Some of the people who come to the market looking for shelter started working for the flower sellers.<sup>37</sup> Sulaila Hendricks said that they had known the street people of the area around the Rondebosch market for a long time. According to her, the flower sellers knew

how to handle them. If they ask for a piece of bread, we give them.  
And we give them love, you see, we don't chase them away ... There is nothing we can do about that, because that's their style of life ...

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Glenda Booman, Cape Town, 26.09.2010, Interview with Diela Gamildien, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Joan Solomons, 23.09.2010. Interview with Naomi Ward, Rondebosch, 22.09.2010. Interview with Sandra Solomons. Cape Town, 22.10.2010.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Joan Solomons, Cape Town, 23.09.2010.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Garonesa Benjamin, Cape Town, 23.10.2010.

<sup>36</sup> Interviews at the Adderley Street flower market, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Joan Solomons, Cape Town, 23.09.2010.

Today, you can't be nasty, we must love one another. Because life is so."<sup>38</sup>

### *Appropriating city space through flower selling*

Access to trading space in Cape Town's streets is regulated through municipal laws and by-laws. Until 2010, the flower sellers in Adderley Street had an agreement with the city whereby they paid a monthly fee for water. Only the vendors of indigenous flowers needed a special permit for trading. As explained earlier, much of daily life was organised informally and personal relationships determined the positions one could obtain at the market. While the municipality often showed ignorance towards the flower sellers and made decisions without consulting them, the flower sellers themselves felt personally in charge of and entitled to their market spaces. Whether the municipality or property owning companies agreed or not, the flower sellers regarded themselves as the just owners of their space. This is especially remarkable as the flower markets in Adderley Street and areas like Rondebosch were zoned as white areas during apartheid, and later as high-value property areas in which small businesses were marginalised.

Many flower sellers have worked at the same markets for several decades and experienced the segregated developments of the urban environment intensively. Many flower sellers said that the city was better in the past and that it was "going down" since the transformation to the post-apartheid government.<sup>39</sup> The decline in business was often explained as a consequence of the change of government in 1994 that, in the perception of many flower sellers, led to an increase in crime and a general falling apart of the functioning city life. Tough economic times, changes in consumer behaviour and the fact that one could buy flowers with credit cards at the shops too were seen as impacting upon the business of the flower sellers.

Some flower sellers also felt threatened by the municipality. Regarding the city, they are outspoken about their determination to claim the space they feel entitled to. For example, Garonessa Spanningburg, one of the flower sellers in Adderley Street, said that

the feeling is not there anymore. The city is going down. They want us to go down. But we are still alive here, they can do nothing about us because we will fight from death. You see, this is our property and we will remain here.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Sulaila Hendricks, Rondebosch, 19.9.2010.

<sup>39</sup> For example: Interview with Garonessa Spanningburg, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Garonessa Spanningburg, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

The idea that Trafalgar Place was officially given to the flower sellers was common at the Adderley Street market. A story that was frequently told was that the “man whose statue stands on the flower market” gave the space to the flower sellers.

The flower sellers at Trafalgar Place also regarded themselves as being in control of what can happen in their space. While the police might fail to implement law and order in other areas, the flower sellers felt in charge of their space. Diela Gamildien explained that they knew all the pickpockets of the inner city and that

[t]hey will never rob a foreigner or any person here in this market.  
They will rather wait till they are outside.<sup>41</sup>

If a street kid tried nonetheless to pilfer something, the flower sellers were not reluctant to give the culprit a thrashing. While the flower market is under control by one set of rules during the day, different politics rule at night, with other people controlling and using the space. While a flower seller guards the stalls in the front and sells flowers all night long, people sleep behind the stalls and addicts come to the space to consume drugs. When a new day starts, night life again gives way to the flower selling, and the rougher life disappears behind the beauty of flowers.

The market in Adderley Street is the oldest and most established one, but flower sellers in other parts of the city also felt similarly entitled and attached to their spaces. Naomi Ward for example has sold flowers in the suburb of Rondebosch for over forty years.<sup>42</sup> During these four decades, she travelled to Rondebosch on six days a week from Parkwood, where she lived in a council flat ever after her family had been evicted from Constantia under the Group Areas Act. Naomi Ward is a well known personality in Rondebosch. When she can't come to the market, people miss her, and as she gets older, people would express their worry when they saw her again, being fearful that one day she might not come back at all. Without her, “Rondebosch wouldn't be the same” residents say.<sup>43</sup> Naomi Ward explained that while she is well-known in Rondebosch, few people knew her in the area where she lived in Parkwood:

When I go out in the morning, it is dark. When I come back, it is dark. Because now the people never see me. Then they tell me I didn't know you stay here. Because I'm not often at home ... Rondebosch is my place. If I don't go, than you don't feel right, because you are not in Rondebosch ... Because here [in Parkwood] you must just look at four walls. Here in Rondebosch you see a lot

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Diela Gamildien, Cape Town, 29.11.2010.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 26.09.2010.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 26.09.2010.



that's going on. I'm so used to Rondebosch ... as long as I can go, I will go. As long as I can go.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Rondebosch having been classified as a white area and remaining a middle- and upper-class suburb, Naomi Ward felt at home there. Apart from the formal apartheid, she established a sense of attachment for the area.

Unlike Naomi Ward, most of her customers have never familiarised themselves with the spaces of which the flower seller's perception and experience of Cape Town came to be made. While they readily name her as one of the most important characters of the suburb, few know where she comes from or have ever set foot in Parkwood. Naomi Ward said that customers frequently inquired where she lived and then often commented that Parkwood seemed to be far away. She thought that residents of Rondebosch would mostly go to the inner city, but not frequent areas in the Cape Flats, as they assumed that it was "all over ... the same" in places like Lavender Hill, Bonteheuwel and Parkwood, that "there people [would] always [be] fighting."<sup>45</sup> The image and imaginings of the residential areas in the Cape Flats as inaccessible and hopelessly crime-ridden has until today been as firmly established alongside and in contrast to the genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. Naomi Ward and the other flower sellers have nonetheless moved between areas that were geographically and imaginatively separated widely apart from each other for a long time and established ways of dealing with the contradictions that hindered so many other people from interacting with each other.

#### *Making a history of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'*

Flower sellers were actively involved in the making of the histories of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. Similar to the performance of the 'Cape Town flower sellers', the production of history was also a strategy to make life possible. Most recently, when rumours made the rounds in October 2010 that the flower market might be brought to an end as the city renegotiated leases of public space, the history emerged that the market space had been given to the flower sellers by "the man whose statue stands on Trafalgar Place."<sup>46</sup> Both the claim of formalised ownership and the importance of the marble fountain that stood neglected at the end of Trafalgar Place were newly emphasised. Flower sellers referred to the fountain as the statue or even the tombstone of the man

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 26.09.2010.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 26.09.2010.

<sup>46</sup> Interviews with flower sellers of Adderley Street, Trafalgar Place, October 2010.

who gave the space to their ancestor. Asked about the benefactor's identity, most flower sellers denied knowing details about him. A range of names and occupations circulated. It was said that he had been a politician or even mayor of Cape Town, until at some point the name of the former archdeacon Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot came up. The fountain was indeed established in his honour.

The story told by flower sellers went that Lightfoot had fought a court case for the flower sellers 150 years ago. Lightfoot won the case and Trafalgar Place was officially handed over to the flower sellers. Asked where this information came from, the answers remained vague. Somebody told somebody, people working for the city council said so, and it was written so in books in the library and documents in the archive. Nobody had seen these books or documents though, as they were said to be difficult to access. But the belief in the existence of documents was enough to make a powerful claim. The lack of formalised proof did not prevent the flower sellers from organising a celebration of their 150th anniversary. The date for the birthday celebration was set on the 26 October 2010, old-fashioned costumes were borrowed, flowers were given away to passers-by and the media were informed. Journalists from TV, radio and newspapers came and reported about the festivities. The *Cape Argus* featured a large photograph on its front page, showing the older generation of the flower sellers among bunches of flowers, informing in the caption that the women celebrated "a piece of Cape Town's history ... which marked 150 years since the flower trade began at Trafalgar Place in Adderley Street."<sup>47</sup>

It is indeed possible that Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot fought for the flower sellers 150 years ago. Lightfoot arrived in Cape Town in 1858 and took up work in the parish of St. Paul's Church in Bree Street where he conducted mission work among the working class population.<sup>48</sup> Lightfoot was well known for his philanthropic work for the poor citizens of Cape Town.<sup>49</sup> He was associated with Trafalgar Place through a legend that said that the wind blew him over there once and he fell at the site in October 1903, not long before his death.<sup>50</sup> While no sources were found in this research that referred to any direct involvement of Lightfoot in issues concerning the flower selling, it is likely that flower orders for church-decorations or mission work had brought the archdeacon in contact with flower vendors, as his church lay in the vicinity of the market. As

<sup>47</sup> The reporter, 'Mums and roses'.

<sup>48</sup> Lawrence G. Green, 'They Nicknamed Him 'South Easter'', *The Cape Argus*, 16.9.1950, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Green, 'They Nicknamed Him 'South Easter'.

<sup>50</sup> Green, 'They Nicknamed Him 'South Easter'', The reporter, 'Protection for city monument', *The Cape Times*, 8.11.1954.

Huneault wrote, mission societies in London were particularly concerned with working among the 'flower girls', motivated by the conventional ideas of the 19th century about female flower sellers.<sup>51</sup> It could be that similar ideas were influential also in Cape Town, probably even based on personal experiences that church folk brought with them from England.

If not during life, then certainly after his death in 1904 did Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot and the flower sellers come together, as the planning of a memorial for the archdeacon was discussed. It was suggested that the construction of shelters for the flower sellers would be an adequate form of a memorial for the archdeacon, most likely because this would mirror his commitment to the humble population of Cape Town.<sup>52</sup> The idea was declined though, with the argument that the shelters would be too expensive. Instead, it was decided that a drinking fountain should be erected. A marble fountain was then imported from Italy and erected in Trafalgar Place. From the moment of its establishment, the memorial was disputed. Some considered it to be a disruption to traffic, others argued that the windy position and exposure to the social environment of Trafalgar Place were a threat to the marble fountain.

The flower sellers were brought into the debates about the Lightfoot memorial in two ways. First, the flower sellers were mentioned as the party who should benefit from the water most. The fountain was said to have been "originally intended ... to provide refreshment for the flower sellers."<sup>53</sup> Also Lawrence G. Green wrote in an article in the *Cape Argus* in 1950 that he was "sure many of the flower-sellers think of him when they fill their baths at the Lightfoot Memorial."<sup>54</sup> Second, the flower sellers were mentioned as accelerating the dilapidation of the memorial through their use of the fountain. They were accused of "refreshing flowers and even washing themselves in the basins" that were planned for drinking purposes only.<sup>55</sup> Complaints were frequently made that the memorial was in bad shape and in need of repair. The situation got so bad that the *Cape Argus* described the fountain in 1950 as the "[p]ossibly the worst-kept

<sup>51</sup> Huneault, *Difficult Subjects*, 74f.

<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Lightfoot Memorial Fund, 18.1.1905, Lightfoot Memorial Fund Special Committee, Minutes, 1904-1907, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 1/5/22/1/1.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from H.J. Webb to Rev. A.J.S. Lewis, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/2/88 G45/2.

<sup>54</sup> Lawrence G. Green, 'They Nicknamed Him 'South Easter'', *The Cape Argus*, 16.9.1950, 8.

<sup>55</sup> J.R. McKillop to J.R. Finch, 15.2.1919, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/2/88 G45/2. Letter from town clerk to subscriber, 8.2.1924, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/2/88 G45/2.

memorial” of the whole city.<sup>56</sup> The reporter wrote that

[f]lanked by municipal refuse-carriers and the tin baths of the flower-sellers in Trafalgar Place, the monument stands dilapidated and unkempt, the steps cracked and broken away. The structure is chipped and corroded, and in the troughs that must once have held water were the remains of a charcoal fire, decayed vegetable matter, part of a crawfish and a layer of mud.<sup>57</sup>

According to the reporter, unlike the memorial for the archdeacon, the memorials for colonial figures and events on the Grand Parade and in the Company Gardens were “well-kept.”<sup>58</sup>

Since at least the early 1930s, the possibility of removing the Lightfoot memorial to a more suitable place than Trafalgar Place was discussed. The arguments went, broadly spoken, along two lines. On the one hand, it was argued that the memorial should stand at a place where it would be less threatened by the weather and people who misused it.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, it was argued that the memorial should be in a “coloured” area, so as to be closer to the people the archdeacon dedicated his life to. In 1932, H.J. Webb suggested in a letter to Rev. A.J.S. Lewis to remove the memorial to Trafalgar Park, as this park “is a very popular one of the Coloured Community who live in the vicinity.”<sup>60</sup> Besides Trafalgar Park in Woodstock, Athlone was mentioned as a possible new location for the memorial as there too “the Malay and Coloured communities predominate.”<sup>61</sup> De Waal Park was also brought into the debate, as well as the ground of the St. Georges Cathedral. The church did not wish the memorial to be moved to its grounds, though.<sup>62</sup>

In the 1950s, the debate about the dilapidated memorial was taken up anew, and was the subject of correspondence between the town clerk and several departments. “As you are aware,” wrote the town clerk office to the city engineer in 1951,

Archdeacon Lightfoot was held in the highest esteem by the Coloured community and the poor of Cape Town, amongst whom and for whom he worked wholeheartedly, and this fact might be

<sup>56</sup> The reporter, ‘300-year-old monument is in danger’, *The Cape Argus*, 6.11.1950.

<sup>57</sup> The reporter, ‘300-year-old monument is in danger’.

<sup>58</sup> The reporter, ‘300-year-old monument is in danger’.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from town clerk office to Rev. J.P.H. Brooke, 16.11.1936, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/11/476 G23/15.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from H.J. Webb to Rev. A.J.S. Lewis, 19.6.1932, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/2/88 G45/2.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from H.J. Webb to town clerk, 24.7.1936, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/11/476 G23/15.

<sup>62</sup> The suggestion was made by the city engineer on 28.8.1936, and by the Director of Parks and Gardens, V. V.d. Houten on 9.9.1936, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/11/476 G23/15.

borne in mind in considering the question of the future site for the memorial.<sup>63</sup>

Again, the debates about the condition and maintenance of the memorial, it was emphasised that Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot was remembered as “a champion of the Coloured people.”<sup>64</sup> The possibilities of removing the memorial were continuously discussed throughout the 1950s, but no measures were taken apart from the construction of a fence around the fountain in 1954.<sup>65</sup>

Today, the fountain appears to be in bad shape, and the baths seem not to have been filled with fresh water for a long time (see *Figure 26*). Nothing refers to the fountain being a memorial for Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot. According to the flower sellers, a plaque that referred to the archdeacon has been stolen by strollers and most likely sold to a scrap yard a long time ago.<sup>66</sup>



*Figure 26* The Archdeacon Thomas Fothergill Lightfoot Memorial at Trafalgar Place in front of the Adderley Street flower market (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

It is striking how, in a single space, both the history and memory of the flower sellers and of a man who was known for having dedicated his life to improving the conditions of the poor of the city were ignored by the municipality. The construction and naming of heritage sites is a form of history production. Through memorials and statues, the municipality actively constructed a historical narrative in its public space. Through

<sup>63</sup> Letter from town clerk office to city engineer, 10.5.1951, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/2/88 G45/2.

<sup>64</sup> The reporter, '£362 to repair Lightfoot memorial', *The Cape Argus*, 10.4.1951.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from town clerk office to city engineer, 29.9.1954, Western Cape Archives Repository, 3/CT 4/1/11/476 G23/15. Memorandum in re Fencing, Lightfoot Memorial, Trafalgar Place, Cape town, 18.12.1954, 3/CT 4/1/11/476 G23/15.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Sandra Solomons. Cape Town, 22.10.2010.



maintenance or the lack of it, the city continues to reproduce this narrative. Unlike the Lightfoot memorial at Trafalgar Place, the memorials in honour of colonial and apartheid figures and events that also stand in the inner city have been well looked after. Both the flower market and the memorial of the archdeacon demonstrate how the city of Cape Town produces history selectively and still excludes formerly colonised people. The city fails to see that the flower sellers and people alike them had an urban life and were active participants in the making of the city. Today, the city's public history telling continues to exclude the histories of people who were oppressed by colonialism and apartheid and are still marginalised in the post-apartheid era. It is indeed striking that both the memorial and the flower market have a long history of being threatened with eviction out of the inner city and that both, however, remained at Trafalgar Place.

*'Cape Town flower sellers', flower sellers and photography*

The flower sellers are most likely among the most often photographed inhabitants of Cape Town. Both professional and amateur photographers, especially tourists, use to take pictures at the flower markets. The Adderley Street flower market thereby has attracted more attention than other places, but also other flower sellers said that they were frequently photographed. Some flower sellers regarded being photographed as part of their profession. Joan Solomons, a flower seller in Adderley Street, said that they were

so used to it, we don't even take notice anymore. They can just take photos if they want.<sup>67</sup>

Sometimes, photographers asked for permission, informed the flower sellers what the pictures were intended to be used for and sent them copies of the final products. But it has also happened frequently that photographers neither asked them for permission to take nor to publish a picture. Naomi Ward for example was surprised when a customer told her that she saw her photograph on a cake tin sold in London.<sup>68</sup> While this tin might have become part of the home-life of many an English household, she did not even know about its existence. Naomi Ward did not worry though, as she generally liked interacting with photographers. Over the years, she has built up a collection of photographs, newspaper articles and magazines in which pictures of her or her family

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Joan Solomons, Cape Town, 23.09.2010.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Rondebosch, 22.09.2010.

appeared.<sup>69</sup> Naomi Ward herself never owned a camera and explained that she liked taking photographs, as it reminded her of her youth, explaining that

when we were young and lived in Strawberry Lane, then we walk up to the bus stop there and we all sit because this shop was there. And there was a guy who took pictures. Now we would take our pictures. That's why I like people taking pictures, because we were used to. That was in Strawberry Lane. There was a lot of pictures taken.<sup>70</sup>

Other flower sellers were less pleased about the way photographers went about their business at the markets. Glenda Booman for example said that she was upset when she saw that a photograph of hers was used in an advertisement on a sightseeing-bus driving around in Cape Town.<sup>71</sup> She was never asked for permission, and of course not compensated.

As described in Chapter Two, many photographs were made according to the conventions of the genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. They depicted flower sellers in a particular gendered, racialised and class-specific way. These pictures were part of a visual economy in which people were rendered as marginal through a particularly mediated gaze. But photographed individuals were nonetheless not necessarily victimised by the images and imaginings that circulated about them. Photographs were not simply powerful objects in themselves, but were also given a variety of meanings through their everyday use. As Elizabeth Edwards wrote, photographs were not only visual histories, but as performed objects, involved visuality, orality, sound and embodied memory.<sup>72</sup> According to Edwards

[p]hotographs allow people to articulate histories in interactive social ways which would not have emerged in that particular figuration if photographs had not existed.<sup>73</sup>

Photographs made for publications or by tourists also came to be integrated into flower sellers' family albums, postcards were framed and newspaper articles laminated to prolong their endurance. Once pictures were appropriated and cared for, they gained new meanings and values. They were no longer depictions of the 'Cape Town flower sellers', but of individual women, men and children whose life partly took place at the flower markets. They became devices of memory and integrated into story telling. At the Adderley Street market, the family of flower seller Garonessa Spanningburg is well-

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 26.09.2010.

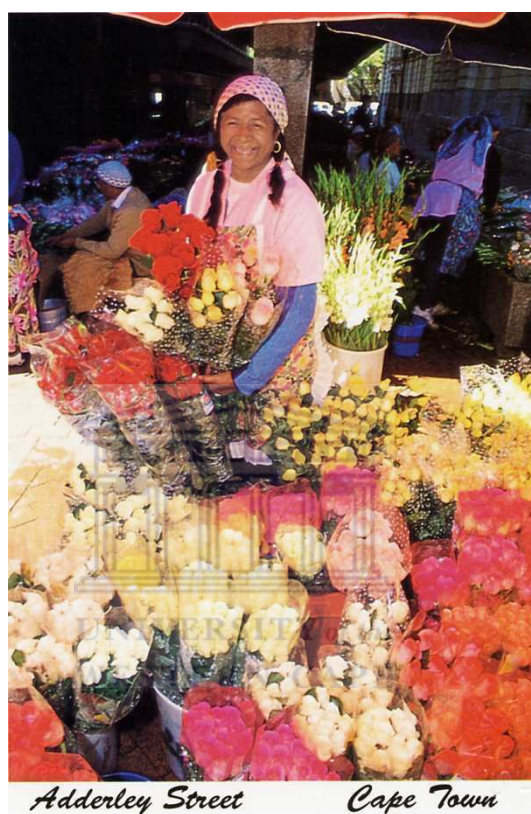
<sup>70</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Rondebosch, 22.09.2010.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Glenda Booman, Cape Town, 26.09.2010.

<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, 'Photographs, Orality and History', in Elizabeth Edwards and Kaushik Bhaumik (eds), *Visual Sense: A Cultural Reader* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2008), 241f.

<sup>73</sup> Edwards, 'Photographs, Orality and History', 244.

known for their collection of photographs. Already her mother was an eager collector of pictures and the family possesses photographs that were made over several decades. The following postcard took up a place of honour in the family home (see *Figure 27*). It has been displayed in a frame ever since the postcard was produced and her picture carried greetings and wishes from Cape Town to the homes of travellers' acquaintances in faraway places.



*Figure 27* Postcard Adderley Street Cape Town (SANL, PHA, CT. Flower Sellers).

### *Selling Beaded Flowers*

The figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' is not only used as a resource by people involved in the selling of cut flowers, but also by others. In Cape Town, striking similarities exist between the selling of cut flowers and the selling of flowers made of beads and wire. Not only do these craft flowers resemble real flowers, but also the performance around them reminds one closely of the cut flower selling. According to Jimmy Shiduma, a producer and trader of craft made of beads and wire, beaded craft has been made and sold in Cape Town since at least 2000, mostly by men from Zimbabwe.<sup>74</sup> According to Shiduma, craft made of wire emerged first in Zimbabwe,

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Jimmy Shiduma, Claremont, 6.10.2010.

particularly around the tourist market in Avondale. Later, Zimbabwean immigrants introduced the craft to Johannesburg where they also started incorporating beads. Initially, the most common motif was animals.

Most traders of beaded craft are Zimbabwean men. There was no established monopoly, but competition was played out through creativity and the ability to respond quickly to changes in demand.<sup>75</sup> As anyone could copy a model once it was on the market, success in business with curios made of beads and wire depended on one's ability continuously to come up with original ideas. According to Jimmy Shiduma, beaded flowers emerged in Cape Town in 2005 and, until today, have not been made or sold elsewhere in Southern Africa.<sup>76</sup> Shiduma started producing beaded flowers after a customer commissioned him to make lilies. He realised that flowers were particularly popular in Cape Town and continued to produce more flowers, especially indigenous ones. The normal lilies were followed by arum lilies, proteas and pincushions.<sup>77</sup> As the customers responded well to flowers, others also began to produce them.

Beaded flowers were sold in tourist shops and at curio markets, and by street traders who walked around in the inner city and, most prominently, who worked at traffic lights at intersections leading to shopping malls and the Kirstenbosch botanical garden (see *Figure 28*).



*Figure 28* Beaded flower seller, Paradise Road, Claremont (Photograph Melanie Bochi).

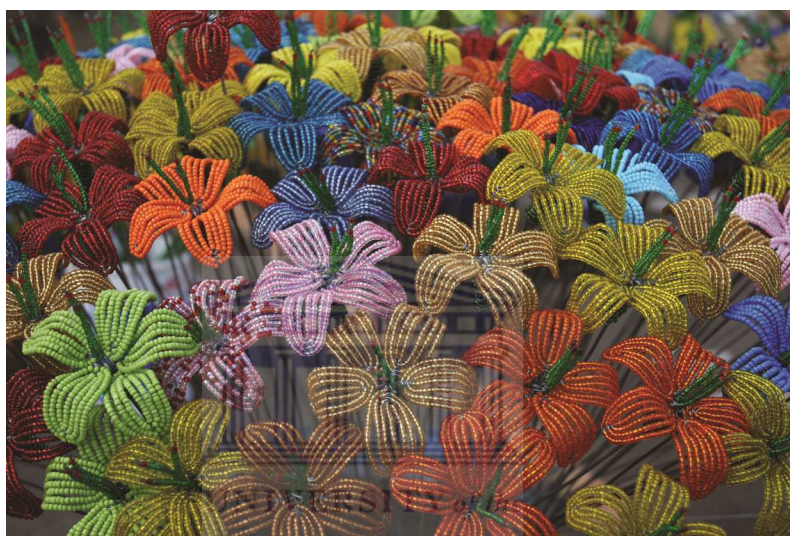
<sup>75</sup> Interview with Jimmy Shiduma, Claremont, 6.10.2010. Interview with Richard Tityiwe, Rondebosch, 4.10.2010.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Jimmy Shiduma, Claremont, 6.10.2010.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Jimmy Shiduma, Claremont, 6.10.2010. Interview with Richard Tityiwe, Rondebosch, 4.10.2010.



The visual appearance and the performance of the selling of beaded flowers resembled the cut flower trade strikingly. For example, men with bunches of beaded flowers would approach couples sitting in restaurants, suggesting that men should buy flowers for their female company. Jimmy Shiduma said that it was a flower seller who first told him about the advantages of working at a traffic light and that he worked together with the flower seller for some time. Beaded flowers are also presented in similar ways as cut flowers. In shops, they are usually arranged in vases and street sellers insist on always displaying them in a bunch: the more, the better (see *Figure 29*).



*Figure 29* Lilies made of beads and wire made by Lovemore Makondo at his stall in Silwood Road in Rondebosch (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

Also the images and imaginings of sellers of beaded crafts on the part of customers resembled the ideas about the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. Like the flower sellers, the craft traders were imagined as rather poor and marginalised rather than as successful entrepreneurs. According to Richard Tityiwe, owner of a company producing and selling beaded craft, people were sometimes doubtful about whether one could make a living from selling craft at traffic lights, suspecting that the craft was used as a cover up for trading with illegal goods.<sup>78</sup>

Contrary to being marginal, the position at traffic lights is a strategic decision. "In an hour, you can talk to probably a hundred people", explained Jimmy Shiduma.<sup>79</sup> Important for substantial income were customers who would commission larger amounts of items, for example as corporate gifts. Meeting new potential customers thus was an essential part of the work of the craft traders. Similar to the advantages of

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Richard Tityiwe, Rondebosch, 4.10.2010.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Jimmy Shiduma, Claremont, 6.10.2010.



working at a flower market rather than in a florist shop, the work in a public space did not only enable many contacts, but the trading at traffic lights also did not incur expenses for rent, insurance, advertisement or employees. Also similar to the flower markets, the selling at the traffic lights was regulated through informal settings that were increasingly tolerated and partly formalised by the municipality. According to Jimmy Shiduma, the craft sellers negotiated formal arrangements with the municipality about access to traffic lights after an initial era of 'cat and mouse' scenarios with the police. According to Jimmy Shiduma, the city acknowledged their work and the residents of the areas in which they traded appreciated their presence. He also thought that their presence made people feel safer in their cars, as it diminished the chance of a crime happening. Similar to the flower sellers, the vendors of curio were also regularly approached by tourists who wanted to photograph them. According to Jimmy Shiduma, most of the sellers agreed when asked for permission to be photographed. "If somebody takes a picture of you selling," he explained, "then it's like a way of marketing yourself."<sup>80</sup>

Entrepreneurs of cut flowers and craft flowers developed creative and sophisticated strategies of using the images and imaginings of customers and city administrators to secure access to space, opportunities and networks. Through deploying the 'Cape Town flower sellers', the botanical complex of Cape Town described in Chapter One could be expanded and contested. Through invoking the images and imaginings of the 'Cape Town flower sellers', people opened up access to space, opportunities and networks they were excluded from in the past. People could do things with and within the botanical complex that they were, according to the conventions, not supposed to do.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Jimmy Shiduma, Claremont, 6.10.2010.

## Chapter Four

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### Cape Town in the language of flowers

“Once you had flowers in your house, you did not feel poor anymore.”  
Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 26.09.2010.<sup>1</sup>

Why focus on flowers in a study of city life in Cape Town? There are two main reasons that make flowers a subject worth paying attention to for learning about city life in Cape Town, and most likely as well in other cities where flowers are used in cultural practices. The first reason is that flowers allow one to bring a multisensory approach into the discipline of history. More apparent than other objects, flowers are experienced in a multisensory way. The colours and forms of flowers attract our eyes and the smells our noses. Flowers are used to decorate human bodies, their essence is used in perfumes and some flowers are eaten. As Michael Pollan elaborated in *The Botany of Desire*, “floraennui” is rare among human beings.<sup>2</sup> According to Pollan, it is “possible but not very likely” that a person shows indifference to flowers.

Flowers evoke responses from the whole body and thus question academic methodologies that focus narrowly on particular senses, as has especially been the case with visibility. So far, many historical studies have come short in taking all senses into consideration. Also, it has often been assumed wrongly that human experience occurs through five senses that are detached from each other and can thus be studied separately. Furthermore, historians have not paid much attention to exploring forms of expression that go beyond textuality and visibility for presenting their narratives. While visual history has been given some attention, there are few attempts to bring in smell, taste and touch in historical narrations. Focusing on multisensory narratives is worthwhile, as expressions outside the conventional forms of writing, (oral) storytelling and imaging can be approached. One does not need writing skills or access to a camera to produce historical narratives. It is possible to remain silent and nonetheless author history.

Flowers are one of many vehicles through which history can be felt and expressed. This is not an attempt or another endeavour to give voice to the voiceless, nor is it suggested that people involved in flower selling are not capable of producing

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 26.09.2010.

<sup>2</sup> Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*, 64.

written, oral or visual history. The chapter only suggests to broaden our approaches both to historical methodologies and forms of historical expression.

The second reason why flowers are an interesting subject in a study of city life is derived from the widespread cultural practices of attaching symbolic meanings to flowers. Journeying through the secret life of plants in 1979, Stevie Wonder sang an advisory to lovers to send their love “with a dozen roses”, to “make sure that she knows it with a flower from your heart.”<sup>3</sup> The rose is probably the most widespread instance of floral symbolism, at least in Western culture. According to Amy Stewart, the red rose has been a symbol for love and passion since Greek mythology.<sup>4</sup> In Christianity, the white rose came to stand for purity, innocence and faith. The white rose was also the symbol of the opposition against the Nazi regime in Germany. The rose might be the most prominent example of floral symbolism, especially through Hollywood-mediated perceptions of love and advertisement of the flower industry. But the rose is not the only flower bearing meanings. Many other flowers were incorporated in symbolic practices as well. The meanings associated with flowers were of course not unique, but varied over space and time. Jack Goody gave an impressive overview of the uses of flowers in his comprehensive book *The Culture of Flowers*.<sup>5</sup> Studying the symbolic use of flowers can open up questions about how people live and make sense of their environments. Flowers were powerfully used as symbols in mythology, religion and practices of the everyday for a long time.

### *Flowers as histories*

Flowers can themselves be studied as bearers of histories. Their materiality can be regarded as an archive of past aesthetic agendas and ideas about beauty. According to Michael Pollan, apart from a few exceptions,

the beauty of flowers has been taken for granted by people for as long as people have been leaving records of what they considered beautiful.<sup>6</sup>

Pollan and Anna Pavord, both authors who have written about flowers extensively, assumed that the relationship between flowers and people worked in two ways.

<sup>3</sup> Stevie Wonder, ‘Send One Your Love’, on *Stevie Wonder's Journey Through The Secret Life Of Plants* (Tamla Records, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Stewart, *Flower Confidential*, 46.

<sup>5</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*.

<sup>6</sup> Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*, 65.

According to them, people used flowers, but flowers also used people.<sup>7</sup> Their explanation is a biological one. They suggested that with their colour, texture and scent, flowers attract pollinators that enable their reproduction. Primary targets are insects and humming birds, but human beings feel attracted to flowers just the same, and facilitate their reproduction through cultural practices. Flowers therefore developed in ways that met people's expectations about beauty. Pollan stated dramatically that the path to world domination for a flower leads "through humanity's ever-shifting ideals of beauty."<sup>8</sup> The materiality of flowers therefore can be read as a history of human perceptions of beauty.

Not only flowers, but also flower markets and gardens can be studied as archives of history. Their contents refer to political and economic developments as well as to cultural practices of the societies that cultivated them. Through travel, trade and territorial expansion, plants were introduced to places far away from their origins. Some flowers thereby had exceptional careers. One of the most outstanding flowers in this regards is surely the tulip. The tulip was introduced to Europe along Turkish-Dutch trade routes in the 16th century and caused first wealth and then ruin for Dutch speculators in the 17th century in the events that became known as 'tulip mania'.<sup>9</sup>

Flowers are not only bearers of history themselves, but they can also be incorporated into historical narratives. Some practices of using flowers can be described as history telling. Taking flowers seriously as histories does not give voice to the voiceless, but acknowledges that there already is a multiplicity of voices and genres of history out there that academics have so far not taken much notice of. Beyond the academy, fine arts or established floristry, people have been doing things with flowers in attempts of making sense of the present they find themselves living in. These floral histories are powerful interventions in existing narratives. They also intervene with the settings of the botanical complex, as they redefine people's position in relation to the flora. If we are interested in questions about life in the city in Cape Town, looking at, smelling, touching, tasting and listening to flowers and what people do with them can be a fruitful endeavour. There is indeed much power in flowers.

<sup>7</sup> Anna Pavord, 'Introduction, 11. Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*, 61-110.

<sup>8</sup> Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*, 77-79.

<sup>9</sup> Stewart, *Flower Confidential*, 107-109.

*The language of flowers*

The 18th and 19th century were particularly important for the symbolic use of flowers as it was then that ideas about the existence of a language of flowers of oriental origin emerged in Western Europe.<sup>10</sup> It was imagined that messages could be communicated through flowers as meanings were attached to particular species. At the beginnings of the imagined tradition of the language of flowers stood the Turkey letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and other travellers to the East in the 18th century.<sup>11</sup> In her letters, Lady Montagu described the language of flowers as “a manner of communicating by means of objects” that was especially practiced between secret lovers.<sup>12</sup> In Paris, books concerned with the language of flowers appeared first in the early decades of the 19th century, at a time when botanical discoveries attracted much attention and the market for exotic flowers that reached Europe from the East expanded rapidly.<sup>13</sup>

The book *Le Langage des Fleurs* that was published in Paris in 1819 under the pseudonym Charlotte de Latour, composed by a Mme Louise Cortambert, was particularly influential for the ideas about a language of flowers.<sup>14</sup> This book consisted of descriptions of flowers, their names, meanings and selected anecdotes. The final pages contained a list of flowers and their meanings that were arranged in the style of a dictionary. According to Goody, the language described by Charlotte de Latour was

a language in a ... specific sense, a method of writing a letter using these partially hidden meanings or by offering a bouquet of flowers in which they were incorporated.<sup>15</sup>

*Le Langage des Fleurs* appeared in several editions and was translated into English and German. It was reprinted numerous times, and other authors compiled related versions.<sup>16</sup> Books concerned with the language of flowers continue to be published to this day.<sup>17</sup> In England and France, some more recent publications on the

<sup>10</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 240.

<sup>11</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 233.

<sup>12</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 233.

<sup>13</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 234.

<sup>14</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 234-237. Important publications concerned with the language of flowers were: Charlotte de Latour, *Le Langage des Fleurs* (Paris: Audot, 1819). B. Delachénay, *Abécédaire de Flore, ou Langage des Fleurs, Méthode nouvelle de figurer avec les Fleurs les Lettres, les Syllabes, et les Mots, suivie de quelques Observations sur les Emblems et les Devises, et de la signification emblématique d'un grand nombre des fleurs* (Paris, 1811). Madame de Genlis, *La Botanique Historique et Littéraire* (Paris: Maradan, 1810). Madame Victoire Maugirard, *Les Fleurs, Rêve Allégorique* (Buisson, 1811). C. L. Mollevaut, *Les Fleurs: Poème en Quatre Chants* (Paris, 1818). Emmeline Raymond, *L'Esprit des Fleurs, Symbolisme, Science* (Paris, 1884).

<sup>15</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 237.

<sup>16</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 239.

<sup>17</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 247.



subject emerged in the genre of a nostalgic search for olden days or in the style of etiquette manuals.<sup>18</sup> These books contained instructions for giving flowers as gifts for events like birth, marriage, Christmas, or Valentine's Day.<sup>19</sup> According to Goody, these recent publications distinguished themselves from the exemplars of the 19th century as they no longer described the language of flowers as "discovered", but as "traditional."<sup>20</sup>

Goody did not write about the language of flowers in Africa, and he did not assume that particular varieties of it existed on the African continent. He only traced how the idea of the language of flowers circulated in Europe, was first translated from French into other European languages, and later also taken up in the United States. In the United States, books belonging to the genre of the language of flowers were published since 1827.<sup>21</sup> According to Goody, some adaptations were made in these publications, comparable to the processes at work in the production of American English dictionaries. These involved a deliberate distinction from British standards as part of the building of a new nation.<sup>22</sup> Most of the publications concerned with the language of flowers published in the United States consisted of European plants and English poetry that were presented in the genre set out in *Le Langage des Fleurs*.<sup>23</sup> Goody explained this proximity with the fact that mainly English publishers catered for the American market and that the American audience was much Europe-orientated.<sup>24</sup> But starting with the publication of Dorothea Lynde Dix's *The Garland of Flora* in 1829, an Americanisation of the tradition of the language of flowers began to develop.<sup>25</sup>

In South Africa, no dictionary-like publications of a national language of flowers seem to have been produced. Nonetheless, the idea about the existence of a language of flowers did exist and a South African version seems to have emerged, even though not as pronounced as the American one. Newspaper articles referred to the existence of a language of flowers in Cape Town that drew from the European model, but was adapted to the local context, as indigenous South African plants were included. Indigenous plants had come to stand as symbols for a particular white identity in Cape Town since the late 19th century. Prominently, the Mountain Club of South Africa that was established in Cape Town in 1891 and whose urban middle class members domesticated

<sup>18</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 248.

<sup>19</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 249.

<sup>20</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 250.

<sup>21</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 254f.

<sup>22</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 254.

<sup>23</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 254.

<sup>24</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 254.

<sup>25</sup> Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 255.

Table Mountain for their recreational activities chose an indigenous orchid, the *Disa uniflora*, as its emblem.<sup>26</sup> The genealogy of fynbos plants as a symbol for South Africanness goes back to the time after Union in 1910. According to Saul Dubow, this choice marked the emerging confluence of Cape loyalism and a broader stream of South Africanism.<sup>27</sup>

A telling example for the practice of a language of flowers in South Africa is an article about naming flowers written by F.M. White that was published in *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa* in 1926.<sup>28</sup> White explained that

‘[t]he kind of name ... attached to a plant depends upon the kind of people who have given the name and made use of it.’<sup>29</sup>

According to White, names like ‘moeder-kapje’ or ‘pijpies’ were the result of children’s play and names like ‘sterretjes’ or ‘Kafir-crane flowers’ were inspired by the “fancies of older people.” ‘Waa-boom’, ‘stinkwood’ and ‘sneezewood’ were named by working men concerned with the quality of the wood. Names like ‘arums’ and ‘Cape violets’ were “given by immigrants to South Africa from some resemblance, real or fancied, to the flowers of their former home.” The Latin and Greek flower names were explained as belonging to scholars. White also mentioned the existence of “[n]ames given earlier by Hottentot or Bantu races” that were “not much known to Europeans.”<sup>30</sup>

White’s comments on the naming practices implied that ideas about different languages of flowers existed parallel to each other. The distinctions according to age group, occupation and race were described as penetrable to varying degrees, implying that some of these groups could understand each other, while others had no common language. Most poignantly this was demonstrated in the example that White gave of a story told to her by a “missionary from Natal or Zululand”. This missionary recounted that once,

when she had taken her girls for a picnic, they brought her some fifteen different kinds of grass, with a distinctive Zulu name for each kind; and the only English name she could tell them in return was ‘grass’.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Van Sittert, ‘Making of the Cape Floral Kingdom’, 118.

<sup>27</sup> Saul Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility, and White South Africa* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 184.

<sup>28</sup> F.M. White, ‘What’s in a name? A few thoughts on the scientific names of South African plants’, *The Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, Part XII, 1926, 15.

<sup>29</sup> White, ‘What’s in a name?’, 15.

<sup>30</sup> White, ‘What’s in a name?’, 15.

<sup>31</sup> White, ‘What’s in a name?’, 15.

Regarding symbolic meanings, the protea is likely the most outstanding flower in South Africa. The *Protea cynaroides*, also known as ‘giant protea’ or ‘king protea’ is the official national flower of South Africa. The name and image of the protea is widely used as a symbol for a particular South Africanness and for South African quality. Companies, hotels and shops have been named after the plant. Also, its image has been incorporated into numerous public, corporate and sporting logos. The protea is the main sporting emblem of national teams representing South Africa. The Department of Arts and Cultures displays the image of a protea on its online list of national symbols and the University of the Western Cape features a protea in its logo as well as the private security company ‘Protea Coin Group’, only to mention a few examples (see *Figures 30-32*).



*Figure 30* Giant or King Protea (*Protea cynaroides*) in the Department of Arts and Cultures list of national symbols, <http://www.dac.gov.za/aboutDAC/nationalSymbols.htm#Flower> (accessed 27.12.2010).



*Figure 31* Logo of the University of the Western Cape, <http://www.uwc.ac.za/skins/uwcskin/images/header.jpg> (accessed 27.12.2010).



*Figure 32* Logo of the Protea Coin Group, <http://www.proteacoin.co.za> (accessed 27.12.2010).

Flowers also continued to be a vehicle for fostering national belonging among South Africans, even though the meaning of being South African has changed fundamentally since the Mountain Club chose the *disa uniflora* as its logo. In a roundtable talk about social cohesion broadcasted on SABC 2 on 26 December 2010, a member of the Department of Arts and Culture emphasised the importance of increasing awareness for South African national symbols and mentioned the flag and the national flower as examples. The elitist Mountain Club, the apartheid government and the post-apartheid government might ideologically not have much in common, but all institutions deployed indigenous flowers as vehicles for propagating their agendas.

Kirstenbosch, described by its former director Robert Harold Compton in 1965 as “garden for a nation”, has until today remained a suitable site for studying the nation in the garden.<sup>32</sup> In 2010, a signboard in the botanical garden prominently pointed out the “King Protea” as a destination of its own (see *Figure 33*).



*Figure 33* ‘This way to see the King Protea’, signboard at Kirstenbosch (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

According to many flower sellers, South Africans referred to indigenous flowers less as national symbols than symbols of death, as fynbos was regarded as proper decoration for graves (see *Figure 34*).



*Figure 34* Fynbos grave decoration at Maitland Cemetery (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

<sup>32</sup> Robert Harold Compton, *Kirstenbosch: Garden for a nation* (Cape Town: Tafelberg-Uitgewers, 1965).



The graves in Cape Town's cemeteries are indeed mostly decorated with fynbos flowers and with artificial flowers that are arranged in plastic bottles (see *Figure 35*). According to flower seller Joan Solomons, South Africans only bought indigenous flowers for funerals and grave decorations.<sup>33</sup> Only tourists bought them for other purposes. According to Galiema Francis, a flower seller outside Maitland cemetery, fynbos flowers had the advantage of lasting longer than cut flowers and therefore didn't have to be replaced too often.<sup>34</sup> The same is true for artificial flowers. The arrangement in plastic bottles further ensures that the decoration is not blown away by the strong wind.



Figure 35 Artificial flower grave decoration at Maitland Cemetery (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

### *Flower memories and nostalgia*

In *Native Nostalgia*, one of the most insightful books about what it means to live in South Africa today, Jacob Dlamini has written a whole chapter about rats. Dlamini detests rats, and he is by far not alone. The inhabitants of Katlehong and many other townships in the country are confronted with a rat population that increasingly gets out of control, or is at least imagined as doing so. According to Dlamini,

[i]n the rat ... all the fears, anxieties, hysteria and uncertainty come together that make living in South Africa today such a nerve-racking experience.<sup>35</sup>

Dlamini wondered whether the dread he feels when he sees a rat

is not perhaps an aversion to a side of South African history that has always been there but is often talked about only in terms of political

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Joan Solomons, 23.09.2010.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Galiema Francis, Maitland, 2.10.2010.

<sup>35</sup> Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*, 70.



economy. My sense of dread is real enough. But it comes only when I see the rats, not when I think in abstract terms of the origins of South Africa's economy. That is why, I think, it is so important to start writing histories of urban South Africa that more consciously foregrounds the senses. To do that would be one way of confronting the legacy of apartheid.<sup>36</sup>

What the rats are for Jacob Dlamini, flowers can be for others. The notion of a particular flower can trigger narratives about life in contemporary South Africa and reflections upon social, political and economic developments that would not have been brought to the point if only thought of in abstract terms. As the interviews and many conversations held in the research process of this thesis showed, questions about flowers, their appearance and scents led to reflections about life in the city that would most likely not have taken place if the initial question had been something like "So how is life in Cape Town today compared to the past?". This is why Dlamini's call for foregrounding the senses in studies that try to confront the legacy of apartheid is indeed very important.

Talking about flowers of the past and practices around them brings up a wide range of memories, among others of childhood and life in Constantia, forced removals and life in the Cape Flats, different forms of intergenerational exchange and about everyday life under apartheid. According to the majority of the flower sellers, many things were better in the past than today. There was more business, the markets were more alive, flowers were cheaper and also more beautiful. Talking about flowers is often a nostalgic endeavour as it includes a longing for past times. C. Nadia Seremetakis discussed how the nostalgia for the *rodhákino*, a peach species that disappeared as Greece became increasingly integrated into the European Economic Community, was shaped by individuals' historicising of their sensory experiences and their painful longing for the past.<sup>37</sup>

People who lived in Constantia before they were forcibly removed in the 1960s remembered their gardens with flowers, vegetables and fruit trees fondly. Flowers were important in Constantia. They were "the bread and butter", an essential source of income, for many people.<sup>38</sup> Before Constantia became the gentrified residential neighbourhood it is today, it was a farming area, with agricultural workers living in Strawberry Lane and its vicinity. According to Moses Jaftha, the residents of

<sup>36</sup> Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*, 75.

<sup>37</sup> Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 1-4.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Moses Jaftha, Constantia, 8.10.2010.

Strawberry Lane began to grow flowers as they had access to vacant lands which they could work on.<sup>39</sup>

Flowers were also part of the everyday life of people living in Constantia. Flower seller Naomi Ward who grew up and lived in Strawberry Lane until the forced removals remembered the look and smell of the flowers in Constantia fondly.<sup>40</sup> She recounted that the people in Strawberry Lane were poor, but they cared for their families, the community and their homes. Houses were kept in good order. Once the stoves and floors were scrubbed clean, people would decorate their living rooms with flowers. If one did not own a glass vase, tins were used, sometimes decorated with the crinkle paper that was used for Christmas decorations. These vases were then filled with flowers from the garden or arum lilies from the riverbed. According to Naomi Ward,

[o]nce you had flowers in your house, you did not feel poor anymore ... Now you are not poor anymore. Because your house looked nice with the flowers, man. You can put it anywhere, the flowers. Ja, that's what we did, man. ... If you haven't got any flowers it's a dull, your place. But once you put the flowers in, it's so happy ... Because look, even if you live in a shanty, you can clean up and put your flowers in. It's a big difference. There is light in here, in the house. Sometimes the rich people they got everything but not a flower in the house. Not a flower in the house! But here we've got nothing but we put our flower in. Our flowers must be there.<sup>41</sup>

Many flower sellers said that the flowers had changed fundamentally over time. They remembered the flowers of the past as being of higher quality than the present ones. "In the olden days, the flowers last much better", one flower seller, Glenda Booman, said, explaining that the fertilisers used today spoil the flowers.<sup>42</sup> Many flower sellers emphasised that flowers had lost their scent.<sup>43</sup> "There is no smell anymore in the flowers", one of them, Garonesa Benjamin, explained.<sup>44</sup> According to her, this happened "due to all the stuff they use ... everything has modernised."<sup>45</sup> Also flower farmer Moses Jaftha confirmed the drastic changes of the flowers' smell. Sweet peas for example had a very strong smell in the past, but today only a feeble "standard smell" was left.<sup>46</sup> According to Jaftha, flowers smelled better in the past because they were grown naturally. The flower farmers in Strawberry Lane used old stocks of species and

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Moses Jaftha, Constantia, 8.10.2010.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 26.09.2010.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 26.09.2010.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Glenda Booman, Cape Town, 26.9.2010.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Glenda Booman, Cape Town, 26.9.2010. Rufia Lombard, Valhalla Park, 7.10.2010.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Garonesa Benjamin, 23.10.2010.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Glenda Booman, Cape Town, 26.9.2010.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Moses Jaftha, Constantia, 8.10.2010.

worked with compost and not industrial fertilisers, as most flower farmers do today. Moses Jaftha remembered that the flowers smelled so strongly that the buses taking the flower sellers to town smelled of them:

It was so nice, in those days, everybody had to travel by bus, if you go to town, or if you go to Rondebosch, they had to go by bus. And when it comes to this time of the year [spring], getting into that bus, you can smell, you're in the bus of Constantia. Because everybody is taking the flowers to town, so the whole, you know, the bus smells like flowers!<sup>47</sup>

The trade-off between the visual and the olfactory quality of flowers grown today is a particularly apparent one. Moses Jaftha explained it with the example of the roses available in the Cape Town area today, saying that one could

get Cape roses which smell. You get beautiful, the most beautiful roses coming from Zimbabwe, and those roses don't smell. But they are beautiful ... now that's what's going to happen.<sup>48</sup>

In her book about the flower industry, Amy Stewart quoted Bob Otsuka, the general manager of the San Francisco Flower Mart, explaining that the flower industry today was

[s]electing for color and size, and most of all for durability. You make some trade-offs when you do that. One of the things these flowers lose is scent.<sup>49</sup>

As the flower industry focuses on “shelf life, shipping characteristics, color and shape”, the scent was lost.<sup>50</sup> Reflecting upon the practices of genetic modification, Stewart imagined things as fantastic as a chocolate-scented rose and a lily smelling like Calvin-Klein cologne.<sup>51</sup>

Not only the durability, look and scent of flowers changed dramatically, but also the available range of species. The markets today no longer offer the same flowers as in the past, and seasonal changes became less influential. Flower sellers referred to species like poppies, ranunculus, sweat peas, freesias, snap dragons or godesias as ‘small flowers’, ‘local flowers’ or ‘Cape Town flowers’.<sup>52</sup> These flowers were grown in the area, on farms in Constantia, Philippi and Stellenbosch and had been sold by flower sellers for a long time. Lilies and other flowers grown in greenhouses around Johannesburg and roses grown on big flower farms in East Africa entered the market in

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Moses Jaftha, Constantia, 8.10.2010.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Moses Jaftha, Constantia, 8.10.2010.

<sup>49</sup> Stewart, *Flower Confidential*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Stewart, *Flower Confidential*, 53.

<sup>51</sup> Stewart, *Flower Confidential*, 53f.

<sup>52</sup> Interviews with flower sellers, Cape Town, October-December 2010. Interview with Naomi Ward, Rondebosch, 22.09.2010.

Cape Town more recently.<sup>53</sup> Flowers imported from Johannesburg or further away were sometimes referred to as ‘fancy flowers’, a term coined rather negatively. Naomi Ward said that unlike the Cape Town flowers, the Johannesburg flowers did not have much seasonal. Here, she said,

we have season. If it’s poppy time, freesias time, like that, when it’s over, it’s over.<sup>54</sup>

Flower seller Sulaila Hendricks said the vendors at the markets held a wider variety of ‘small flowers’ than the shops, and people looking for these flowers would prefer the markets to the shops.<sup>55</sup> Garonesa Benjamin suggested that the imported flowers had a fundamental impact on the flower selling, emphasising that “since the Jo’burg flowers is in, the people don’t look at Cape Town flowers” anymore.<sup>56</sup> Several flower sellers explained that the younger generation of customers bought imported flowers, while mostly older people still bought the local ones.<sup>57</sup>

The general decline of business was partly explained with the arrival of imported flowers, as these were more expensive, both for traders and customers.<sup>58</sup> Flower sellers remembered that in the past, flowers were less of a luxury good than today. “That time the flowers was cheap. You can buy a lot from your little money”, Sandra Solomons said.<sup>59</sup> They would also say that in the past, almost everybody could afford flowers. Sandra Solomons remembered that when she began working at the market in the 1980s, flowers were wrapped in “that white paper and brown paper ... not this fancy stuff.”<sup>60</sup> By “fancy stuff”, she referred to the plastic sheets that were used to wrap flowers in. Naomi Ward also said that some customers disliked the plastic material and would ask whether she could not wrap their flowers in old newspaper, as was the habit in the past.<sup>61</sup>

Asked when things changed and how these changes came about, answers remained mostly sketchy. “Long time ago”, “when the whites were still in government” or, more bluntly, “before the blacks took over” were common answers. For many, the end of apartheid stood as a synonym for the end of good times. The African National

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Joan Solomons, 23.09.2010.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Rondebosch, 22.09.2010.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Sulaila Hendricks, Rondebosch, 23.09.2010.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Garonesa Benjamin, 23.10.2010.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Joan Solomons, 23.09.2010. Interview with Garonesa Benjamin, 23.10.2010. Interview with Naomi Ward, Rondebosch, 22.09.2010.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 22.09.2010.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Sandra Solomons, Cape Town, 22.10.2010.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Sandra Solomons, Cape Town, 22.10.2010.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 22.09.2010.

Congress (ANC) was seen as the cause of developments gone wrong, despite the oppositional Democratic Alliance (DA) and not the ANC holding the mayor's office in Cape Town for most of the time during the last decade.<sup>62</sup> It would be simplistic to dismiss the judgements of flower sellers about the flowers and the market in the past as a clinging to the apartheid era of people that were classified coloured by the apartheid government. Both the subjects of nostalgia and South Africa of the past and the present are more complicated. Asking what it means for black South Africans to remember life under apartheid with fondness, Jacob Dlamini writes that

[t]o be nostalgic for a life lived under apartheid is not to yearn for the depravity visited on South Africa ... It is to yearn, instead, for order in an uncertain world.<sup>63</sup>

The histories told by the flower sellers also point to inadequacies in the practices of historians within the universities, museums and in the wider heritage sector. While many attempts were made to think Cape Town as a non-racial or post-racial space, people live in worlds that are perceived differently to how they are invoked in these writings and exhibitions. While the District Six museum emphasises being a non-racial institution, former residents of forcibly removed areas continue to live with racialised categories, especially in working-class areas that the museum may be out of touch with. If people like some of the flower sellers interviewed here say that their living conditions have worsened since "the blacks are in power", this should be taken seriously. It would be too simplistic to judge this as a mere expression of clinging to lost privileges. This is not to deny that severe forms of racism are still at work, nor that these forms of everyday racism should be tolerated or treated as acceptable. But to increase understanding of what is going on in the city, these are issues that must be studied more carefully.

There are many stories told in South Africa today that resemble Jacob Dlamini's rat story. One such story is about poppies, the bright orange flowers that were grown and sold in the Cape Town area for a long time and were referred to as a typical 'Cape Town flower' (see *Figure 36*). According to several flower sellers, poppies were more popular in the past than at present. Naomi Ward explained that many elderly customers who lived in Rondebosch had the habit of buying two or three bunches of poppies every week when they were in season.<sup>64</sup> As with other 'local flowers', the demand for poppies

<sup>62</sup> Since 2000, the ANC only held the post of the mayor of Cape Town between October 2002 and March 2006. In the other years, the mayor belonged to the DA.

<sup>63</sup> Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia*, 14f.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Rondebosch, 22.09.2010.



declined when imported flowers gained popularity. But changes of fashions and the new preferences of younger customers were not the only explanations given for the decline of poppies. According to a flower seller at the Adderley Street market,

[p]eople don't like poppies anymore because they just remember them of drugs.<sup>65</sup>

Belonging to the same plant family as the infamous *Papaver somniferum* out of which opium is made, poppies triggered sad memories of sons and daughters lost to drug addiction and crime that affected people's lives severely, the flower seller explained.



Figure 36 Poppies at the Adderley Street Flower Market (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

In the history of poppies at the Adderley Street flower market, beauty and ugliness come close. The story sheds light on the co-existence of the picturesquely imagined 'Cape Town flower sellers' and the issues the women and men working at the flower market are confronted with in their work space, their neighbourhoods and sometimes also family life. The story also highlights the other side of the flower market in Adderley Street, not the market of colourful displays and happy chatting, but the space that is used as a refuge to consume drugs at night.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with a flower seller, Cape Town, 18.09.2010.

### *Flowers and violence*

In stories told about flowers, the strong responses they evoke as “sensible objects” and the power they embody as metaphors are striking. Many artists have worked with flowers and thereby included both their sensory and symbolic qualities. Particularly interesting are a number of Colombian artists who produced works concerned with violence that draw from botany (such as the work of José Alejandro Restrepo, Antonio Caro and Miguel Angel Rojas) and flowers (as in the work of María Fernanda Cardoso, Juan Manuel Echavarría and Juan Fernando Herrán). Botany was at the core of colonialism in Colombia. European expeditions, missionaries and colonial functionaries participated in botany since their arrival in South America. Through botany, Europeans ordered the world they found themselves in through a scientific classification that enabled them to gain an understanding of their unfamiliar situation.

Colombia was confronted with civil war since the 1950s, and since the 1970s increasingly with drug related violence. The above mentioned artists referred in their works to botany and flowers to explore both the history and the present of violence in Colombia. According to critic José Roca, artists using flowers and botany insightfully made

connections between the classification of natural resources in the colonies, in itself paving the way for the capitalist exploitation of the land, and the ‘scientific’ establishment of social inequalities as one of the roots of the country’s current situation.<sup>66</sup>

Roca argued that these artworks had the potential to “reinforce the associations between image, feeling and meaning” in an audience that was otherwise “anesthetized” by the daily glut of crude images shown on television and in newspapers.<sup>67</sup> If death has become aesthetic, Roca asked,

what better symbol for it than a flower, the image of which is associated with beauty in all cultures, and sometimes with funerary rites as well? ... When dealing with acts of barbarity, only the most aesthetic image seems to be capable of recovering, by opposition, a critical sense.<sup>68</sup>

The artist Juan Manuel Echavarría used metaphors of flowers in his work *Corte de Florero* (*Flower Vase Cut*). *Corte de Florero* refers to a practice of mutilation that was prevalent during the ‘violencia’, the period of war between liberals and

<sup>66</sup> José Roca, ‘Necrological Flora: Images for a political geography of plants’, *Columna de Arena*, 50, 21.5.2003. <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/columna/col50/e-flora-necrologica.htm> (accessed 2012.2010).

<sup>67</sup> Roca, ‘Necrological Flora’.

<sup>68</sup> Roca, ‘Necrological Flora’.

conservatives in the 1940s and 1950s. During the ‘violencia’ mutilations of bodies were practiced in which parts of the corpse were rearranged into figures that were given names.<sup>69</sup> In one particular figure, head, arms and legs were cut and the limbs arranged into the torso as if it was a flower vase. This mutilation was known as ‘corte de florero’ (‘flower vase cut’).<sup>70</sup>

Juan Manuel Echavarría’s work *Corte de Florero* consists of 33 photographs of human bones that were arranged in ways that imitate the style of the representation of flowers in notebooks and publications of botanical expeditions. Echavarría gave each flower representation a Latin name that imitated the practices of botanical naming of flowers, but referred to the violence beyond the flowers. The following images of the series are named *Dionaea Severa* and *Passiflora Sanguinea* (see Figures 37 and 38). *Dionaea* is the genus to which the carnivorous venus flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*) belongs to, *Severa* refers to the Latin word for severe. *Passiflora* is the genus of the passion flowers or passion vines, *Sanguinea* refers the Latin word for bloody.



Figure 37 Juan Manuel Echavarría, *Dionaea Severa*, from the series *Corte de Florero*, 1997, [http://www.jmechavarria.com/gallery\\_florero.html](http://www.jmechavarria.com/gallery_florero.html) (accessed 27.12.2010).

Figure 38 Juan Manuel Echavarría, *Passiflora Sanguinea*, from the series *Corte de Florero*, 1997, [http://www.jmechavarria.com/gallery\\_florero.html](http://www.jmechavarria.com/gallery_florero.html) (accessed 27.12.2010).

<sup>69</sup> Calvin Reid, Interview with Juan Manuel Echavarría, in *Bomb*, 70, Winter 2000, <http://bombsite.com/issues/70/articles/2276> (accessed 8.3.2010).

<sup>70</sup> Reid, Interview with Juan Manuel Echavarría.

Like the bone-flower that is flower and not-flower, invokes simultaneous recognition and disturbance. Echavarría explained that his

purpose was to create something so beautiful that people would be attracted to it. The spectator would come near it, look at it, and then when he or she realizes that it is not a flower as it seemed, but actually a flower made of human bones – something must click in the head, or in the heart, I hope.<sup>71</sup>

Ana Tiscornia pointed out that “flowers in general symbolize passive principles” and that Echavarría’s work evoked “[t]he tension between the active principle of violence and the passive one of flowers” while involving “the spectator in his or her own passivity.”<sup>72</sup> This reflexivity also appeared out of the analysis of “the frequent use of botanical plates as decoration, as well as the no less frequent use of art.”<sup>73</sup>



Figure 39 Andrew Putter, *Hottentots Holland. Flora Capensis I* (2008), <http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporaryexhibitions/putter/flora1.htm> (accessed 22.12.2010).

Juan Manuel Echavarría chose flowers to create a narrative of the violence in Colombia. In Cape Town, artist Andrew Putter has deployed flowers in a narrative that included violence, and the possibility of alternatives to violence. What, Putter asked, “if

<sup>71</sup> Reid, Interview with Juan Manuel Echavarría.

<sup>72</sup> Tiscornia, ‘Juan Manuel Echavarría’.

<sup>73</sup> Tiscornia, ‘Juan Manuel Echavarría’.

the ‘Hottentots’ and the Hollanders had liked each other?’” What kind of hybrid culture could have emerged if things had developed differently, if not one had become colonised, and the other coloniser? These are the questions underlying Andrew Putter’s work *Hottentots Holland: Flora Capensis* (see Figure 39).

*Hottentots Holland: Flora Capensis* consists of a series of photographs of flowers, rocks and shells that were original to the land the Khoekhoe inhabited when the Dutch arrived at the Cape. The natural objects were arranged in the style of Dutch flower paintings of the 17th century. According to Putter, *Hottentots Holland: Flora Capensis* “explores the historical possibility of a novel, hybrid culture that might have emerged from a different kind of relationship between the Khoekhoe and the Dutch.”<sup>74</sup> Putter suggested that the known atrocities didn’t have to be “the only possible historical relation between the Khoekhoe and the Dutch” and “alternative stories of connection and hope that might exist in the archives of the period.”<sup>75</sup> The images of *Hottentots Holland: Flora Capensis* are a kind of a fantastic utopian make-believe, as Andrew Putter invites the spectators to imagine that they could have stood in a Khoekhoe home, or that the Dutch could have learned about flower aesthetics from the Khoekhoe.

Putter’s choice to use the genre of the flower still life painting to represent the Dutch and to use plants, stones and shells to represent the Khoekhoe is not unproblematic, as it invokes the idea of the Khoekhoe as an extinct people whose voice can only be recovered through material objects. Nonetheless the work is very powerful, as it suggests the imagination not only of a different history and a different narrative, but also of a new language. *Hottentots Holland: Flora Capensis* can indeed be looked at as an expression in a new language of flowers that speaks from and to the senses, thereby eloquently transcending the boundaries set by mere textual and visual productions.

### *Moses Jaftha’s garden*

One of the most fascinating places to study flower history and experience history through flowers in Cape Town is Moses Jaftha’s flower farm in Brounger Road in Constantia. The farm stands out in the highly gentrified area of Constantia. Moses Jaftha grows species that have been grown in the area for a long time and that are nowadays difficult to find, as bigger commercial farmers don’t grow them anymore.

<sup>74</sup> Andrew Putter, ‘Hottentots Holland: Flora Capensis’, <http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/putter/floracapensis.htm> (accessed 20.12.2010).

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Putter, ‘Hottentots Holland: Flora Capensis’



According to Moses Jaftha, already his great-grandmother, Susan Williams, was growing flowers in Strawberry Lane.<sup>76</sup> Since his ancestors were farming flowers in the 18th and 19th century, he was “just continuing.” What would not come as a surprise in other agricultural regions is exceptional for an area like Constantia. Under the Group Areas Act, Constantia was declared a white area, coloured residents were evicted and their houses and gardens were destroyed. Strawberry Lane, the road where many of the forcibly removed residents lived, has changed so fundamentally that former residents have difficulties in recognising it.<sup>77</sup> As Moses Jaftha explained, he could take a visitor

down to Strawberry Lane, but what will you see? ... There is only one thing that I can show you there. There's, you go down Kreupelbosch Way, right in the end, you will notice there is a huge Palm tree, and that's the only remembrance I can, otherwise I can show you nothing.<sup>78</sup>

According to Moses Jaftha, residents in Strawberry Lane had access to space to maintain gardens with flowers, vegetables and fruit trees and to keep chickens and pigs. Farming was done organically. Before the forced removals were implemented and the houses and gardens torn down by bulldozers, Strawberry Lane had been full of fig trees, plum trees, apple trees and pear trees. Beside flowers, carrots, beetroot, cabbage and other vegetables grew in the soil. After Moses Jaftha's family was evicted from Constantia, he managed to continue growing flowers in Constantia as he had an agreement with a landowner who didn't farm himself. In the mid-1980s, he began farming on the land where he is now. The land was classified as a green belt and therefore the construction of houses on it was prohibited.

Moses Jaftha has been growing the same Dalia bulbs for over 40 years. He has also grown the same stock of sweet peas over more than three decades. He still works with compost and horse and chicken manure. The only difference is that he is no longer allowed to keep a pig that would work the compost perfectly. A law forbids pigs on ground close to restaurants, and it happens that his farm land borders to a restaurant. There are vast differences between the flowers Moses Jaftha grows and the ones grown in profit-maximising big farms. His flowers still have a strong smell. When old species are not planted anymore, they are lost. Therefore, Moses Jaftha is concerned with cultivating old species and making sure that the smells don't get lost. He is also concerned with bringing back fruit trees to Constantia. Before the forced removals,

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Moses Jaftha, Constantia, 8.10.2010.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Naomi Ward, Parkwood, 26.09.2010.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Moses Jaftha, Constantia, 8.10.2010.

eleven sorts of fig trees grew and bore fruits in Constantia. Today, there are only two sorts left. Moses Jaftha is searching for the other types, “the old ones, the ones I grew up with” and wants to re-plant them on his farm before they disappear irretrievably.<sup>79</sup>

As in other areas of forced removals in Cape Town, and the whole of South Africa, people have not been given land back in Constantia. When land claim applications could be made in 1998, many people only got to know about it too late and in consequence were excluded from the process. Moses Jaftha’s application was rejected with the explanation that his application was made too late. “How can you farm still in Constantia and still be rejected?” he asked, wondering how one could be denied being part of the land that one had worked for decades. While he was not given land back, he made sure that the farming on the land in Brounger Road will continue. His son joined the work on the farm recently and will make sure that the old fruit trees and flowers will also grow in the future and that Constantia won’t lose the smells and colours of its past completely.

Moses Jaftha’s work on his farm can be seen as a work against forgetting, against being written out of the history of a forced removal area and against being excluded completely out of the landscape of Constantia. Moses Jaftha’s work aims at keeping the smells and the colours of Constantia before the forced removals, of cultivating devices of memory and flowers that in themselves are an archive of how people used to live in Constantia. His farm is also an entry-point to Constantia for people whose memories are disconnected from what Constantia has become since the forced removals. In the garden of the farm of Moses Jaftha, they remember smells and sounds. “A lot of people that used to stay in Constantia ... come here and they sit here. I’ve seen people crying.”<sup>80</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Moses Jaftha, Constantia, 8.10.2010.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Moses Jaftha, Constantia, 8.10.2010.

## Conclusion

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This thesis studied the genealogy of images and imaginings of flower selling in Cape Town and how people used them. It was suggested that a discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ emerged in the late 19th century in the fields of tourism, nature conservation and urban planning. This figure was partly based on the genre of the ‘flower girl’ that emerged in European fiction, painting and photography in the 19th century, but was also adapted to the local context of Cape Town. In visual, textual and oral histories, the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ were described in specific gendered, racialised and class-specific terms. Predominantly, the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ were characterised as female, coloured and poor. Often, the discursive figure came to represent and personify the city and inhabitants of Cape Town. To this day, the iconic images of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ have not ceased to be popular and frequently reproduced, although the context and circumstances in which they circulate have changed much, as Cape Town has undergone changes from a colonial to an apartheid and finally a post-apartheid city. The images and imaginings of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ have remained surprisingly stable since they first emerged in the late 19th century.

The discursive figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ prominently featured in what can be termed the botanical complex of Cape Town that was described in the first chapter of this thesis. The botanical complex was a set of institutions through which governmental power was exercised through defining people’s relationship to the flora. The botanical complex consisted of institutions like the botanical gardens, scientific institutes, horticultural societies, nature conservation, flower tourism and the media that were concerned with displaying flowers and people’s practices around flowers. The disciplinary flower power that was invoked in the botanical complex put people in specific relationships to the flora, and thus installed a hierarchical ordering in society. When the first legislation concerned with the protection of wild flowers were implemented in the beginning of the 20th century, it was firmly defined who was supposed to do what with flowers. White middle-class citizens, especially men, were imagined to have floricultural capital that enabled them to experience the beauty of flowers and use them rationally. They were therefore supposed to be the protectors of flowers in Cape Town. Upper-class white women were seen as a threat to the flora, as their craving for luxury made them act irresponsibly. But the biggest threat was

imagined as coming from coloured flower sellers, who were described within the genre of the 'Cape Town flower sellers'. The flower sellers were imagined as having predominantly an economic interest in flowers, not a wider aesthetic one. Their use of the flora was described as unsustainable and irrational. 'African' people were excluded from these debates. Most likely, it was assumed that they did not have any floricultural capital or aesthetic perceptions of flowers at all. By the middle of the 20th century, the botanical complex and the repressive governmental apparatus had become closely interlinked, as botanists, nature conservationists and the police worked closely together in the control of people who were working with flowers.

The practice of exercising governmental power through the botanical complex has not ceased to exist. To this day, the municipality of Cape Town implements orders based on putting people in relationship with flora. It is still assumed that the inhabitants of Cape Town possess varying aesthetic capabilities in regard to the flora that make some people a threat to and others protectors of nature. The events of Hangberg in September 2010, where the city argued for the eviction of residents of the informal settlement as they were said to constitute a threat to a nature reserve, can be understood in this context. The calls to put "people before fynbos" in Hangberg resembled the argument made in the debates about the wild flower protection legislation made in 1905 that these were directed more against people than actually in favour of the flowers.

As typical for people marginalised by the forces in power, especially for women, colonised people and the poor, the 'Cape Town flower sellers' have to this day been described as having tradition, but not history. While the discursive figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was a very visible one, not much was known about the activities that took place beyond the image. Instead of always having been there, the flower sellers also had to actively make their position possible. This was especially the case when the flower markets were put at risk by the Group Areas Act, urban planning interventions and changes in the flower industry. The images and imaginings of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' thereby constituted a crucial resource that was invoked in strategies of securing access to space, resources and opportunities. It can be said that the figure of the 'Cape Town flower sellers' was part of the curriculum of flower selling in Cape Town, as the performance and use of the genre as argument were vital strategies for making life and business in the flower trade possible.

The flower sellers of Cape Town and the 'Cape Town flower sellers' are not the same. Contrary to the ideas about the 'Cape Town flower sellers', there were always

women and men working at the flower markets and many of them were not poor, but successful enough to make a decent living with flower selling. Contrary to being marginalised by the stereotypes that emerged in the tourist gaze and in colonial systems of knowledge, people used the images and imaginings of flower selling in creative ways. People understood the economy of stereotypes well and developed ways of using these to their advantage. Apart from flower sellers, other people have also used the spaces of the flower markets. Street people have for a long time assisted flower sellers and sometimes also found secure shelter at the flower markets. At night, the spaces of the flower markets change as other people use them for other purposes.

The images and imaginings of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ were not only used at the flower markets. The ‘Cape Town flower sellers’ were also used to open up access to space, resources and opportunities by people who did not sell cut flowers. Men who sold flowers and other craft made of beads and wire deployed the figure of the ‘Cape Town flower sellers’. Their activities can also be seen as a critical intervention in the botanical complex of Cape Town, as people then were doing things with flowers that they were not supposed to be doing. While ‘African’ people were excluded from being an active part in the botanical complex, the mostly Zimbabwean men producing and trading craft not only sold indigenous flowers, at least symbolically, but also amended the flowers. Beaded flowers don’t wilt and some of the objects that the flower industry has spent many resources on, like producing a blue rose or a black tulip, are already available at traffic lights and craft stalls (see *Figure 40*).

This thesis has emphasised that flowers are a subject worthwhile paying attention to in studies of city life. Flowers can themselves be studied as bearers of history and they are deployed as devices of memory and vehicles of historical narratives. Taking flowers seriously enables a multisensory approach to the discipline of history and also opens up forms of narrative that include the senses more broadly. This can be very powerful, as the works by artists like Juan Manuel Echavarría or Andrew Putter show. Echavarría, Putter and other artists used flowers in ways that allowed them to express meanings and narratives in ways more tellingly than most conventional writing or visualising were capable of.

Furthermore, people have produced narratives about the city in Cape Town with and through flowers beyond the domains of the universities, museums or fine arts. Stories have been told about old flowers and changes in floricultural perceptions that address issues of what it means to live in South Africa today, with the legacies of the



past and the prospects of the future very insightfully. It would indeed be difficult to come up with these stories through asking abstract questions. One of the most fascinating initiatives that was studied in this thesis is Moses Jaftha's garden on his flower farm in Constantia. Despite having been forcibly removed from Constantia, Moses Jaftha managed to continue farming flowers on land in Constantia and does so to this day. He still farms organically and cultivates old species that people had been growing in Constantia for many decades. Unlike the species grown by big commercial agriculturalists, Moses Jaftha's flowers and fruits still have the strong smell and taste of the past. His garden can be regarded as a form of history production and an intervention in the current historical narratives. Through consciously cultivating old flowers and trees and making sure that their smells and tastes won't disappear, Moses Jaftha intervenes against being excluded from the history of an increasingly gentrified forced removal area. It is through initiatives like this garden that we can learn much about the history and life at present in the city of Cape Town.



*Figure 40* Beads and wire strelitzia made by Lovemore Makondo, Silwood Road, Rondebosch (Photograph Melanie Boehi).

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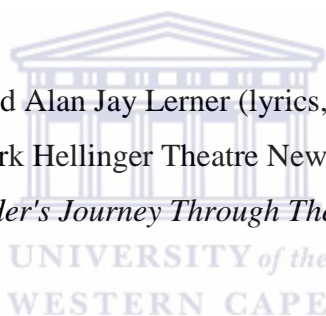
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