“The same but not quite”: Respect-ability, creative agencies and self-expression in black middle-class Soweto homes

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I explore notions of South African black middle-class respectability, focusing on the use of crocheted doilies by two homemakers in Naledi Extension 2, Soweto, Johannesburg – my mother, Geneva Maphangwa and Mam’ Ramuhulu. I explore their use of crocheted doilies as a means of decorating their homes, upholding status, and presenting themselves and their families as respectable. I regard crocheted doilies as metaphoric connectors, linking maternal generations, as well as signifiers of respectability. I also highlight how my mother’s and Mam’ Ramuhulu’s preoccupation with maintaining good status, cleanliness and order is linked to a form of respectability that is embedded with notions of good moral standing.

In examining the roles that Victorian lace and its contemporary derivative, crocheted doilies, play in colonial and post-colonial contexts, I identify the Victorian era as the possible origin of using crocheted doilies to cover surfaces. I unpack how the Victorian impulse to decorate every available surface could be a forerunner of way in which doilies are used in my mother’s and Mam’ Ramuhulu’s homes. Homi K Bhabha’s (1994) notions of desire, the displacing gaze and mimicry, are applied and used as connective devices throughout the article.

Keywords: Soweto; homemakers; crocheted doilies; respectability; cultural hybridity; domestic worker.

I am a black, middle-class woman who was born in the last decade of apartheid. I am a lecturer, a painter, a wife and a mother. My relationship with crocheted doilies is owing to my lived experience – I grew up in Naledi Extension 2, a suburb in Soweto, Johannesburg – in a home where crocheted doilies and ornate objects were accepted as a "normalised" or "given" practice of interior decorating.[1] Doilies were, and still are, placed under specific ornaments, covering surfaces of furniture in some rooms. Visiting my grandmother in Meadowlands Zone 5[2] was not any different, except that I seem to remember my grandmother's house as being more opulent. A tiny set of porcelain shoes sat on two small circular doilies on the window sill, which was too high for me to reach, so I spent most of my time daydreaming that one day I would be tall enough to reach them and slip my feet into them. Needless to say, when the time came my feet were too big.

Rozsika Parker (1996:11) states that the practice and presence of embroidery promotes particular states of mind and self-experience, pointing to the historical conception of embroidery and homemaking as "feminine". She continues that, in the nineteenth century, embroidery and femininity were fused; the link between them was considered to be "natural". For Parker (1996:11), embroidery signifies femininity – 'docility, obedience, love of home, and a life without work – it showed the embroiderer to be a deserving, worthy wife and mother'. I suggest that this link between femininity and homemaking can also be applied to my mother, Geneva Maphangwa, and Mam' Ramuhulu,[3] particularly in relation to the activity of crocheting.[4]

Lou Cabeen (cited by Livingstone & Ploof 2007:197) states that embroidered tablecloths, runners, and crocheted doilies 'linger' in our mothers' or grandmothers' homes, and describes them as 'objects of forgotten utility'. By this Cabeen suggests that the above-mentioned objects are ordinary, everyday items that are often considered as "unimportant" and consequently overlooked. In my own home, I use modern versions such as contemporary table runners as "replacements" for doilies. I explore my role as a woman and mother, as well as how this role has shifted when compared with my mother's role when she raised me. For me, doilies have a strong, yet soft presence; they no longer represent respectability, but as part of a new liberated generation, for me the doily speaks of nostalgia. I see doilies as carrying memories of home, the past, and a certain level of femininity that is arguably no longer relevant in contemporary homes.

Domestic service

The development of townships in South Africa grew as a result of the industrial boom which impacted on the housing needs of people moving from the rural areas into the

1. I am aware that the use of doilies is not limited to my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu. The use of doilies is common to many contemporary South African black households, as well as in the households of homemakers from other races.

2. Meadowlands is one of the oldest sub-locations in Soweto, Johannesburg. It became home to the residents of Sophiatown, who were forcibly removed and relocated there in 1955. My mother recalls that she was five-years-old when her family was moved, and that the move took place in November, as they spent Christmas in Meadowlands (Maphangwa 2017; An overview of Soweto 2017).

3. Mam' Ramuhulu is a retired *MaGogo* (grandmother) who has lived in Naledi Extension 2 with her family from 1978 to the present. Mam' Ramuhulu (2008) used to work in "white kitchens" in the 1970s as a "tea girl". Once she retired, she sewed curtains, and sold chips and sweets for income. She no longer manages these activities owing to fatigue and old age.

4. In my painting practice, I draw on notions of femininity, respectability and cultural hybridity, and attempt to evoke these notions through the representation of doilies and other objects by painterly means. I regard doilies as metaphoric connectors; for me they signify a transitional space of female community or familiarity between my mother, her mother, and myself, as well as other homemakers such as Mam' Ramuhulu. I have developed a personal and intimate relationship with crocheted doilies. Through the application of paint with brushes or a palette knife, I "weave" or "crochet" the different visual references together. Through my paintings, I acknowledge the work that was made by my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu; instead of crocheting doilies, I paint them in an attempt to raise their importance through their association with the "traditional" context of oil painting on canvas (historically a valued medium of "high art").

city.[5] Many black women from 1885 into the mid-twentieth century took up positions as domestic workers. Domestic service was one of the few "respectable" occupations open to women like my grandmother (Giles 2004:66). Black women would become domestic workers if they were not able to register for nursing or teaching, which were considered to be the only recognised professions that could raise the status of black women (Berger 1992:27). Currently, black women, who have limited education – South African, and those from its neighbouring countries such as Lesotho and Zimbabwe – continue to work as domestic workers. Karen Hansen (1992:5) states that domestic service played a crucial role in the cultural ordering of African history. In apartheid South Africa, domestic service was, and remains, a sensitive practice and topic because of the 'interaction of race and class' that it necessitates (Goodhew 2000:244). Marion Arnold (1996:90) echoes Hansen's statement, maintaining that 'servitude is part of the South African history of human relations. Servitude is a condition of bondage generating control over labour, and it exists because race, gender and class establish unequal relationships of power between people'.[6] Thus, contends Cherryl Walker (cited by Arnold 1996:94; see also Giles 2004:78), while black women viewed themselves as different from their white employers, they were willing to learn and imitate the ways of their employers who were in positions of power and imposed authority over them. Jean and John Comaroff (cited by Hansen 1992:38-46) elucidate that the work of domestic service became the 'mirror image of the other', whereby behaviours were reflected, and that the home was the place which was used to instil 'Western family ideology'. Some black women emulated 'white ways'; others appropriated them partially, and others rejected them completely (Comaroff & Comaroff cited by Hansen 1992:45). Domestic service grants a "girl"[7] permission to emulate perceived "white ways" of expressing gentility.

In the South African system of domestic service and the available living spaces, despite the domestic servant's intimate presence in their employer's home, the gap between black and white women was experienced physically and materially. Often, domestic workers were housed in small rooms attached to the back of the employer's home, and spent most of their life inhabiting the space of their employers, and caring for their employer's children, rather than being with their own families. My grandmother lived with her mother's "madam" from the age of nine, and was taught by her to do the domestic chores. When she was old enough she learned how to crochet. Later, as a homemaker in Meadowlands, my grandmother adopted, and, as I suggest later in my discussion, adapted her madam's tradition of laying crocheted doilies on surfaces under ornaments. Her adoption of this practice was probably because she had absorbed the significance of doilies from her upbringing in the social milieu of an Afrikaans-speaking, white middle-class woman. This sensibility or tradition was passed down to my mother, who similarly adorned her home with crocheted doilies and decorative objects.

5. Black-only areas such as the South Western township (Soweto) were laid out in 1930 (History of Johannesburg 2009; South African History online 2017). Soweto was created when the South African government began to implement legislated separation between the then-racially defined categories of "Blacks" and "Whites" under the Urban Areas Act in 1923 (South African History online 2017). Blacks were relocated to zones separated from white suburbs by a cordon sanitaire (sanitary corridor). This might be a river, a railway track, an industrial area or a highway.

6. As Arnold (1996:91) states, 'domestic service has not been the exclusive domain of the black women'. However, for the purposes of this discussion, I focus on black women as domestic servants.

7. "Girl" was a derogatory and infantilising term used to describe an adult female black domestic worker.

My father, sister and I knew that the objects placed in her glass-fronted room divider[8] were my mother's most prized possessions – ornaments, vases, glassware, cutlery, and framed phographs. They were on display for all to see, but for none to use. The only time I remember us being able to use these highly-valued glasses and cutlery was during my sister's engagement party, which was eight years ago. Before then, throughout my childhood we knew that on a set day, usually a Saturday morning when my mother was off-duty from work, the room divider would be opened and all the glasses, vases and ornaments would be removed, to be washed, dried, and carefully put back neatly placed on top of pink or white crocheted doilies. My father, sister and I could only imagine the satisfaction, gratification and pride that my mother felt after this cleansing ritual. In a similar way to how Homi K Bhabha (cited by Sanders 2006:17) speaks of hybridity as a process wherein "things" are 'repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition', it appears that my grandmother's understanding of the significance of a doily for enhancing the status of an object had been passed on to my mother, despite the fact that she was never a domestic worker.[9]

Respectability

The notion of respectability can be traced to the Victorian era, where it applied mainly to the white middle class (Lemmer 2008:27-89). Catherine Lemmer (2008:27) states that:

> Respectability was a code of behaviour influenced by Christian values, [it] governed every aspect of the lives of the Victorians. The centre of this refined behaviour was common to both men and women, yet in every nuance, close attention to gender definitions was essential to gentility.

According to Woodruff Smith (cited by Burns 2008:3), the term "respectability" entered the English language in the late eighteenth century as an extension of the adjective "respectable". Respectability, which initially referred to status, came to be associated with notions of moral character. Smith (2008:3) states that 'by the nineteenth century, [in] Britain, the Netherlands and the United States white men and women had begun to contextualise a new culture of respectability that implied good character and moral standing regardless of social status'. He adds that, 'respectability provided a distinction to which anyone could legitimately aspire – both in his or her own estimation and in that of other people' (Smith cited by Burns 2008:3).

8. Originally a room divider was a cabinet that separates a single room into two spaces, such as a kitchen/TV area and a bedroom. It was, and still is, a popular feature in Soweto homes. Because my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu have houses with separate kitchens, a sitting room, three bedrooms, a bathroom and toilet, they position the divider against the wall as a wall unit, although they still call it a "room divider". My mother currently uses it as a display cabinet.

9. Unlike my grandmother, my mother worked as a clinical nurse at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto.

David Goodhew (2000:241) posits that respectability is difficult to define; 'what writers mean by respectability varies, but the concept does contain a fixed core'. He (2000:266) elaborates that respectability is not always ascribed to language or race, but that it is associated with orderliness, cleanliness and comfort. In his research on working-class respectability in South Africa from 1930-1955, Goodhew contends that the 'black population of the townships would adhere to a deep sense of respectability premised on a commitment to religion, education, law and order as a means of resisting white domination' (Goodhew 2000:266). If viewed from a different perspective, respectability might be seen as colluding with a "desire for whiteness", which may be unpacked through the lens of Bhabha's (1994) concept of colonial desire. Bhabha (1994:63) hypothesises that desire emerges within or throughout the 'process of identification'. He gives an account of the relationship between the colonialist Self and colonised Other, in which a 'visible exchange of looks' takes place (Bhabha 1994:63). In this exchange, differences or divisions in identity emerge. The historically designated "inferior" black, colonised man (or woman) desires to be like his historically designated "superior" white coloniser.

Whilst taking Goodhew's statement into account, I am interested in how my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu embrace the notion of respectability as a way of life and form of self-expression, rather than using it as a means of opposing white domination, or as a manifestation of a desire for whiteness. Bhabha's (1994:122) theory of mimicry is applicable here; he posits that colonial mimicry is a sign of 'double articulation' or the double-edged sword through which 'the desire for a reformed, recognisable "Other", as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite like the Other' is realised. He states that for mimicry to be effective, there should always be a space where difference is perceived and discovered (Bhabha 1994:122-123). If Bhabha's theory is applied to my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu's use of crocheted doilies, it might be said that their practice is 'the same but not quite' as the Victorian tradition upon which it is based (Bhabha 1994:122).

While the notion of respectability was generally applied to the Victorian white middle class (Lemmer 2008:27-89), it is crucial to note that, contrary to the way in which they have been represented, many black people aspired to be seen, and represented themselves, as respectable. This not only meant conveying the visual narratives of respectability: dignity, pride, confidence, self-assurance, elegance and social standing, but also portraying a form of self-discipline, embodying a sense of moral rigour, refinement, manners, values and personal codes of conduct.

For example, according to Paisley Harris (2003:213), during the progressive era[10] between 1880 and 1920 in the United States (US):

10. The progressive era was an era of social and political change intended to create progress toward a better society. During this era, women received the right to vote (The progressive era online 2017).

> African American women were particularly likely to use respectability and to be judged by it. Moreover, African American women symbolized, even embodied, this concept. Respectability became an issue at the juncture of public and private. It thus became increasingly important as both black and white women entered public spaces.[11]

Another visual manifestation of black respectability at the turn of the twentieth century can be found in the photographs on the *Black Chronicles II* exhibition (2014, Rivington Place, London), which showcased over 200 photographs of black Victorians living in the United Kingdom (Autograph ABP 2017). Alongside numerous portraits of unidentified sitters, the exhibition included original prints of known personalities, including a series of 30 portraits depicting members of "The African Choir".[12] According to Sean O'Hagan (2014:[sp]), the portraits are notable 'both for the style and assurance of the sitters – some of the women look as though they could be modelling for Vogue – and for the way they challenge the received narrative of the history of black people in Britain'. Bhabha's (1994:122) theory of mimicry as sign or symbol of "double articulation" or being "almost the same but not quite" is also applicable here; I suggest that O'Hagan's acute description of the portraits highlights how black Victorians desired to be seen as respectable, but on their own terms. For example: the women are wearing dresses with high necks and long sleeves like those favoured by the Victorian middle classes. As such, the exhibition offered "different ways" of viewing the black subject in Victorian Britain, and added 'to an ongoing process of redressing persistent 'absence' within the historical record' (Autograph ABP 2017:[sp]).

Likewise, in South Africa, black respectability in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century is articulated through the artist, Santu Mofokeng's artwork entitled *Black Photo Album/ Look at Me 1890-1950* (1997) (Figure 1). Mofokeng created the archive of 35 images from photographic copies of old photographs, covering the period 1890 to 1950, which he obtained from black families (Williamson 2002:[sp]). According to Sue Williamson (2002:[sp]),

> State sponsored publications, like the tourist brochure entitled *Native Life in South Africa* (1936) seemed intent on portraying black people as resistant to change, perpetually locked into old rural tribal cultures. Mofokeng wished to recover a different reality, showing the sophistication and richness of black family life, thus setting up an archive of inestimable value to the country.

Figure 1 shows the family of Bishop Jacobus G Xaba posing against a backdrop in a photographic studio. They are all poised and well dressed. Bishop Xaba is standing on the far right hand side, dressed in a three-piece Victorian suit, with his cross pendant clearly visible under his half coat. Standing on the chair next to him is one of his children, who is wearing a matching outfit, while another child stands next to his/her mother.

11. Representations of African American respectability can be found in the *American Negro in Paris* exhibition, held in 1900 at the Paris exposition. Curator, WEB DuBois invited black photographers to produce images that challenged the blatantly racist and stereotypical representations of black people of the time. DuBois's exhibit ran counter to the de-humanising and exoticising displays of popular culture, by visualising black people as an inextricable part of society. In the images the African American community is represented as a group of spiritually, socially, and economically diverse individuals. While not disregarding racial concerns, black photographers were primarily interested in locating and reproducing the beauty and fragility of their communities, portraying their lived experiences of everyday life in ways that convey a sense of dignity, pride and respect (Willis 2003:52).

12. The choir toured Britain between 1891 and 1893. The photographs constitute 'perhaps the most comprehensive series of images rendering the black subject in Victorian Britain, these extraordinary portraits on glass plate negatives by the London Stereoscopic Company have been deeply buried in the Hulton Archive, unopened for over 120 years … Their presence bears direct witness to Britain's colonial and imperial history and the expansion of Empire' (Autograph ABP 2017).

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Santu Mofokeng, *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950*, 1997. Bishop Jacobus G Xaba and his family, Bloemfontein, Orange River Colony, c. 1890s. Silver bromide print. Photographer unknown. Copyright Santu Mofokeng / Courtesy of Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

The mother/wife wears a simple but sophisticated Victorian two-piece outfit with minimal trimmings teamed with a high neck lace blouse and gloves. It seems as if the Bishop might have wanted this photograph to be taken to depict his importance as a Bishop in his community, as well as to "show off" his family's status as a "respectable" family. The black and white photograph is compelling as the family look outward towards the camera lens, and consequently at the viewer with a sense of confidence. Thus the observer becomes the observed, a process that Bhabha (1994127) calls the displacing gaze, which 'reverses "in part" the colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the coloniser's presence'. Similarly, Okwui Enwezor (1997:25) postulates that the colonised man 'wants to write his own history, to retrieve his own body from the distortive proclivities of white representation'.

Applying both Bhabha's and Enwezor's theories to a reading of Mofokeng's work, it can be said that because the sitters arranged for photographers to take photographs of them, they were taking ownership of their identities. By commissioning studio portraits of themselves and their families dressed in colonial clothing – an activity commonly undertaken by white people – the sitters adopted their colonisers' dress, as well as the social practice of having themselves photographed as a signifier of respectability. One might read a sense of "genuineness" in these photographs, as they show 'how these people imagined themselves. We see these images in the terms determined by the subjects themselves, for they have made them their own' (David Krut Projects 2004). In other words, although the displacing gaze sets up an interesting and tense dichotomy between "observer and observed", it must be noted that although the observed appropriates some of the observer's tradition of studio portrait photography, the observed never fully becomes like the observer. He becomes "the same but not quite" as his (white) observer, as he re-appropriates the tradition to renegotiate or validate his own identity.

In the following section, I apply Bhabha's theory on mimicry in unpacking how "difference" plays a significant role in how respectability is constructed and how black Victorian and South African identities – including my mother's and Mam' Ramuhulu's – are re-articulated, renegotiated and validated.

Victorian and Sowetan households: "The same but not quite"

In the Victorian household, the separation between servants and family, employee and employer, was defined through a spatial organisation and social rituals that kept them apart (Giles 2004:67). In order to run a "respectable" household and secure the happiness,

comfort and well-being of her family, the upper-class Victorian woman was expected to ensure that her servants performed their duties intelligently and thoroughly (Giles 2004:67-88). Griselda Pollock (1996:6-7) points out that in the nineteenth century, as a result of major social and gendered divisions in Victorian English society, bourgeois women were confined to the "inside", private, domestic sphere: men were associated with the public sphere, women with the private. Judy Giles (2004:90) furthermore suggests that women have 'traditional links with and obligations to domesticity … be it as wives, mothers, or domestic servants'. While I am aware that in a feminist and post-feminist context this statement is a contested one,[13] I consider my mother's and Mam' Ramuhulu's positions to be similar to that of the Victorian bourgeois women who, confined to their homes, decorated them in order to raise the tone of the interiors; to create a safe haven and a place where they can dream, desire and fantasise as part of an attempt to experience domestic liberation.

One can draw comparisons between the Victorian ideal of women as the moral housekeepers of society and black women such as my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu. For my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu, the domestic space is a place that is warm and comfortable; a place in which they are free to be creative; a space where they can express themselves (Maphangwa 2008; Ramuhulu 2008). This is in contrast to those contemporary women who might regard the domestic space as a source of entrapment, rather than liberation. The home can be read as the expression the self. In decorating their homes with artefacts such as ornaments, knick-knacks, tea sets, and crocheted doilies in particular, my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu assert a form of creative agency and self-expression. In my view, doilies have become representations through which specific areas of my mother's and Mam' Ramuhulu's lives are articulated. Metaphorically, doilies have become "threads" of self-discovery and translation, which contribute to their status of respectability.

Crocheted doilies are made by looping thread with a hooked needle to form a design. The maker starts with no physical surface as a foundation and the work is done entirely by hand. The thread is looped, pulled through a loop and knotted. Like lace, making crocheted doilies requires a fair amount of practice for perfection to be attained (Jones 1951:26-27). The lace maker creates a piece by copying a design from another lace maker or according to her own pattern, depending on her level of skill and imagination (Montupet & Schoeller 1990:16). Similarly, my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu create crocheted doilies by copying existing designs, or creating new ones.[14] My mother uses pattern books and looked at existing designs as a reference for making her doilies.

Material objects are significant in that they mediate meanings between women from different environments, and are embedded with the functions that are ascribed to them. The tradition of laying crocheted doilies underneath objects to elevate them, to enhance

13. A key point of Western feminism emphasises that women's lives are larger than their traditional restrictions in the realm of the private and personal (Broude & Garrard 1994:20). Women have the desire and demand the right to be represented as part of "the outside", the public sphere – as citizens, as consumers who are active within the public domain, to make contributions in society and participate in public affairs and employment (Giles 2004:91).

14. Most black female homemakers make crocheted doilies for themselves, although some buy them.

the domestic space, or to protect the surface on which ornaments were placed in a post-colonial environment references the practices of Victorian homemaking, as well as the copious decoration ubiquitous in the Victorian era. Speculatively, in both the Victorian era and apartheid South Africa, this emphasis on decoration formed a contrast to the unwelcoming outside surrounding the perimeters of the houses. For example, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, the Victorians burnt a large amount of coal, thereby creating soot, which darkened the outsides of the houses (Filbee 1980:138-139; Victorian Style/Britain 2008). The need of a woman living in the Victorian era to decorate her interior so that it might serve as an escape from outside, may be compared with the Sowetan women of the 1970s to 1980s during apartheid, who might have attempted to counter the inhospitable external conditions of the time with interior warmth and comfort, creating a safe haven. Post-apartheid, my mother states: 'the interior of my home cannot be as plain and boring as outside, that is why I make the effort to enhance my home inside' (Maphangwa 2008). For my mother, home provides a sense of stability amidst the rush and chaos of life outside the house. She decorates her home because it is the sphere in which she can do so freely, seeing it as a personal contribution to her own well-being and the well-being of her family – a space in which she can exercise her creative agency. Furthermore, she states: 'I decorate my home as a mother because no one else will do it, it is my responsibility to create a good, warm and presentable home … crocheted doilies make my house beautiful, visually it becomes more interesting and is neat' (Maphangwa 2008). She explains that she uses doilies under her ornaments to draw attention to the latter, because these are of value to her (Maphangwa 2008). My mother spends time at least once or twice a month shining her brass ornaments with Brasso[15] and, as mentioned earlier, on some weekends she cleans the glasses, vases and ornaments in her room divider. For her, having crocheted doilies in her home makes her feel dignified:

> When my family, friends and neighbours come to visit me and see that I have crocheted doilies in my sitting and dining room and other places in the house, the main area being my sitting room area, they get a message about the kind of woman I am; I love myself, I love beautiful things (Maphangwa 2008).

The use of doilies as a decorative choice made by women such as my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu might have its roots in the Victorian era. Victorian interiors were elaborate and opulent. Rooms were embellished with intricate patterns and heavily patterned wallpaper; surfaces were covered with fringed cloths and possessions were adorned with detail and decoration. Items such as 'chenille and embroidery covered everything in sight, including the mantel shelf … even the legs of the tables and piano were covered' (Filbee 1980:138). The Victorians were fond of lace and surrounded themselves with it;[16] gracious

15. Brasso is a retail product used for polishing brass.

16. Costly handmade laces were replicated with machine-made laces which were more readily available at a reasonable price (Cusick 1993:6).

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Large doilies used as antimacassars. Maphangwa residence Naledi Extension 2, Soweto, Johannesburg, 2008. Photograph by author.

rooms were enhanced by antique furniture together with 'treasured pieces of lace' (Cusick 1993:6). Despite the different conditions and climate, colonial women created interiors that mimicked styles in Britain, seen as the imperial centre of good taste.

The Victorian impulse to decorate every available surface might be considered as a forerunner of the use of doilies in my mother's and Mam' Ramuhulu's homes. An example of this can been seen in the tendency for Victorian women to use the lace pieces that they produced to cover some surfaces for display in their homes. Antimacassars were used to prevent the macassar oil used by their husbands on their hair from ruining the upholstered furniture (Cabeen 2007:140). My mother similarly uses large crocheted doilies as antimacassars because of the greasy oil from the hair moisturisers used by members of her household (Figure 2). In Mam' Ramuhulu's home, at first glance, doilies may be seen as ordinary objects, which draw attention to particular decorative choices that she has made (Figure 3). However, upon closer analysis, it becomes evident that doilies are placed under almost all of the objects in her room divider. Mam' Ramuhulu learnt the practice of making and using doilies through observing and initially mimicking her employer. She recalls that in the 1970s, her employer would make crocheted doilies, tablecloths, and antimacassars at work during her lunch breaks (Ramuhulu 2008). Here, Bhabha's (1994:127) notion of the displacing gaze can be applied as it is within the

FIGURE Nº 3

Mam' Ramuhulu's dining room. Naledi Extension 2, Soweto, Johannesburg, 1987. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Mam' Ramuhulu.

domestic space where difference is perceived, where mimicry begins to take place and the pursuit of becoming almost the same through the gaze, routine and repetition arises. Mam' Ramuhulu emulated what she saw as the 'white way' of making and using doilies. She states 'I used to watch her make doilies from a distance whenever I got the chance; I was very interested in what she was making and how she made them' (Ramuhulu 2008). Mam' Ramuhulu adds that she eventually asked her employer to teach her how to crochet and make doilies. The practice of making doilies became a regular routine that occupied her when she had time:

> After I got used to crocheting, I started buying crocheting books, and would use the patterns in the books to create different kinds of patterns. I used to make a new doily with a new pattern every week, I even started creating my own patterns, soon after that I began making crocheted baby sets and toilet sets. I became a specialist, and got a good income from selling these (Ramuhulu 2008).

It can thus be deduced that, to use Bhabha's (1994:122) words, Mam' Ramuhulu emulated her white employer's activities in a way that was "the same but not quite".

Grant McCracken (1988:104-117) postulates that "things" or objects have the potential to evoke power when connected to, or associated with, humans. He states that they are bridges to hopes and ideals which humans have 'to cultivate' what is otherwise beyond their reach. The value and importance assigned to crocheted doilies arises within the domestic sphere where 'femininity is performed, where versions of femininity are legitimated and negotiated' (Andrews & Talbot 2000:1). My mother and Mam' Ramuhulu use crocheted doilies to distinguish themselves from other homemakers, and, within the home, to distinguish certain objects from other objects. In other words, their use of doilies as forms of creative agency can be read in two ways. Firstly, they use doilies to highlight the objects that are placed upon them. In so doing, the objects on the doilies are raised to an elevated position; they are given status as features to be admired. Secondly, doilies call attention to my mother's and Mam' Ramuhulu's skills and attempts to concretise their aspirations to be respectable representatives of the black South African middle class living in Naledi Extension 2.

Jean Baudrillard (1996:73) states that 'objects answer to other kinds of demands such as memory, nostalgia or escapism which are characterised by sentiment'. My mother and Mam' Ramuhulu experience a sense of domestic freedom or liberation through the satisfaction of making and ownership and through the display of their crocheted doilies. The value of a crocheted doily is not only constructed according to its physicality, but also in close relation to emotions and the realm of fantasy. Notions of aspiration and desire, based on emotions and fantasy, also relate to the consumption of physical objects, through which the value of objects increases and decreases in relation to how they are exchanged. For them, handmade, labour-intensive, expensive objects which are passed down from generation to generation tend to have more significance and bear greater value than those which are mass-produced. Inherited objects, in particular instances, represent personal relationships and are often regarded as being highly valuable because of the memories they evoke of loved ones, even though they might not be valuable in monetary terms. Doilies also answer to such demands in instances where they have been passed down or inherited, or given as a gift, or as noted previously, they may support and serve to elevate other objects that carry sentimental associations. As Igor Kopytoff (cited by Appadurai 1986:78) highlights, objects that have 'personal sentimental value' for their collector become venerated. I suggest that this is especially so for the crocheted doilies of my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu, and that they have personal sentimental value, particularly if inherited.

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