

Gender Dynamix Speaks Out Against Xingwana's Bigotry

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Gender Dynamix is deeply concerned about the policing of bodies by the State. A very large part of our work is centred on examining the practices of the Department of Health (DoH) and the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and their unethical activities towards Transgender people. We are now faced with the question whether this is becoming a government trend.

Has the Department of Arts and Culture now joined hands with the DoH and the DHA in their discriminatory practices towards gender variant bodies? Minister Xingwana's recent behaviour regarding the work of gender activist artist Zanele Muholi adds to the gravity of what seems to be a growing conservative trend in state departments.

"Immoral, offensive and going against nation-building," said Lulu Xingwana, the Minister of Arts and Culture about Muholi's work. "Immoral and offensive" speaks to the old "art vs. porn" debate, as well as to peoples' personal opinions. The point of advocacy art is not aesthetics. It is to educate, to stimulate debate, to object to it if you wish, and to give people a platform from which to voice opinions. When Xingwana publically gives an opinion, she's doing it on behalf of us all. She is a government minister and so in condemning it outright in essence, she claims that of the entire nation echoes her opinion. It most certainly doesn't, as recent reactions in the City Press, the Times etc. clearly show.

"Nation building," according to our very fine constitution, includes lesbians, transgender, gender non-conforming people, and so on - and it certainly includes artists. The constitution even has room for reactionary and conservative opinions like Xingwana's - but not as our national representative of arts and culture in this country and worldwide.

Zanele Muholi is the kind of artist you would never have experienced in the bad old days of apartheid. She's black, she's a lesbian, and she has very clear messages for her community - for us. Her photography tells truths many people don't enjoy - that there are black lesbians and gender variant people in South Africa. Her work also tells us that we are allowing the ongoing rape of black lesbians in order to "cure" them and all too often, their murders. Zanele Muholi is a symbol of the inclusiveness of the constitution.

Xingwana has publicly and officially expressed her personal negative feelings about gender variant peoples' bodies and how they should interact. The figures in Muholi's work are clearly not engaged in sexual activity. We interpret it as the minister's policing of bodies and the behaviour of those bodies.

There are disturbing parallels between this and the way the Department of Health discriminates against gender variant bodies, noting that discrimination is taking place in the form of exclusion / gate keeping for treatment at most government hospitals. At the Department of Home Affairs there is a clear trend where the Department is not implementing the Amendment of Act 49 of 2003. Act 49 explicitly allows trans and intersex people to amend their documentation without requiring genital surgery. This law was amended partly because of the lack of access to, and gate keeping at State Hospitals.

Gender Dynamix would like to see government officials and especially Xingwana embrace our diversity, and make a concerted effort to sensitise themselves to gender variance, to educate themselves about art activism, and to acknowledge that gender variant people too are part of the rainbow nation that we are building!

In addition, Gender Dynamix demands public acknowledgement by the Government Ministers concerned, of the vulnerability of our constituency, and of the ongoing prejudices lesbians, gays, transgender and intersex people, artists and many other marginalised groups are facing on a daily basis.

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