

NIPPED AND TUCKED

Botox, nose-jobs and tummy-tucks go ethnic as more Black women pursue eternal youth, writes **CRAIG JACOBS**.

Khanyi Mbau has problems... but it has nothing to do with her addled love life or her waning career (she hasn't had a worthwhile role on the box, or a sustained relationship in almost five years). At the age of just 25, Khanyi is more worried about the bags under her eyes and how her thighs look when she wears shorts.

"I have big holes under my eyes.

It makes me look like I don't sleep," explains the perpetual party girl. "And there's this gap between my legs. It makes me look like I have a wedge when I wear shorts."

In June, she decided to do something about her problem. Reclining on the surgeon's table she endured Botox, chemical peels and tissue fillers as part of an intense series of anti-ageing and

skin rejuvenation. Added to this is the laser lipolysis (a less invasive form of liposuction that uses lasers to liquefy fatty deposits) to reduce her hips by 20 centimetres, and the inside of her thighs by 10 centimetres on either side... just so she can hike her shorts up in summer.

"Botox is better when you start early," she says, alluding to her age. "I believe that prevention is better than cure. I am doing this now so that when I am 50 years old I won't have aged as much."

Khanyi, who in the past has gone under the knife for breast augmentation among other procedures, isn't the first Black local celebrity to go under the knife in her quest for eternal beauty. And it's little wonder when one takes into consideration how popular *Dr 90210* is

with South African viewers. Since it first aired on DStv's E! Entertainment channel, official station ratings places it at some 27 000 viewers. And because *Dr 90210* is female-skewed, DStv says an estimated 90 percent of the viewership is women.

But can watching a reality show on the subject really convince viewers to go to such extremes to maintain their beauty?

Clinical psychologist Asiphe Ndlela seems to think so. She who was quoted in a *Sowetan* article as saying that the growing trend may be linked to images of body-beautiful celebrities and people's desire to be like them.

SLICING THROUGH THE FAT

The burgeoning success of the Melrose Aesthetic Centre, where Khanyi had her procedures done, is evidence of the growing need for the body-beautiful. The centre has been around for almost 10 years and boasts an impressive clientele of the country's top businesswomen and A-listers. "We've seen a sharp climb in the number of Black women taking advantage of procedures long-thought to be only beneficial to White women," say the centre's Hardus Bester.

An estimated 40 percent of their clients are Black. "We noticed a surge two and a half years ago." This, he suggests, is thanks to the exposure from celebrities like Tselane Tambo, who's revealed her detox and wellness programme (which saw her shrink from a size 40 to a size 32) in great detail in to the public.

The Melrose Aesthetic Centre also boasts two internationally trained doctors, Dr Gordon Cohen and Dr Mark Opperman (the former conducted procedures on Tselane and Khanyi) as well as an aesthetic laser specialist.

Bester says that there really isn't a difference between the requests of Black or White women. "Women of all ethnicities have more or less the same requests: the removal of lines and wrinkles, improving skin tone and texture, treatment of pigmentation and acne as well as weight loss and body contouring."

Doctor Peter Scott, the national secretary of the International Society of Aesthetic Surgery and executive member of the Association of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons of Southern Africa says that in South Africa local women

want to retain their ethnic identity.

"Like White women, they are interested in liposuction on their tummies and thighs. However, they say 'don't take the Zulu out of my bottom'," he explains.

Bester does point out that certain types of laser treatment can't be performed on dark skin, but other than that, he says, there are very few side effects to any of the centre's treatments.

Jason Sive of First Health Finance, which gives loans for medical and cosmetic surgery, told *City Press* that loan applications by Black clients went from five percent in 2008 to 12 percent last year – 90 percent of them came from Joburg and Cape Town.

Black women applying to First Health Finance are, on average, 36 years old and earn incomes of between R10 000 and R65 000 a month.

Nthabi*, 42, a recruitment executive, says the pressure to look good made her take plunge. She discreetly sought out

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recommendations from friends who she knew had undergone similar procedures before deciding on a popular surgeon based in Rosebank, Johannesburg, where she had a facelift and then followed up with Botox.

"My clients often compliment me on the condition of my skin," she says. "But I can't help smiling that bit more when someone says, 'Oh you have good genes', because I'm thinking 'Yes, and a little bit of help.'"

Discretion is also important to Liz, 40, who is married to a top businessman. The couple own homes in Westcliff, in Johannesburg as well as in London, and

travel frequently – making it easy for her to book an appointment with a surgeon on London's Harley Street.

Bester says more women are being open about the procedures they have undergone. "It's common at a dinner party these days for someone to say, 'I've had Botox, have you?'"

Haydee Antezana, an internationally certified image consultant and author of *You're On Stage! Image, Etiquette, Branding and Style*, shares Bester's sentiments. She says that some of the reasons Black women are opting for plastic surgery include: "If you can afford it, why not?" While overseas image consultants work closely with plastic surgeons, Antezana will suggest a surgeon (in the same way she would a good dietician or hairdresser) only if a client enquires.

And yet, when compared to our US counterparts, we are just a drop in the vast ocean of cosmetic surgery.

CUT TO THE AMERICANS

While the nip-tuck trend is only now beginning to gain momentum here at home, a cursory glance at websites such as celebrityplasticsurgery.com lists the numerous African American singers and actresses whose visages have visibly changed over the course of their careers: from Beyoncé to Alicia Keys and Vivica A Fox to Halle Berry.

Fox, in particular, seems most determined about altering her looks. Starting in 2006, her surgery shopping-spree includes numerous collagen injections to puff up her lips, eyebrow lifts, and cheek, eyebrow and breast implants.

The *Independence Day* and *Soul Food* star, who turned 47 in July, once told US magazine, *Upscale*, that it "doesn't affect me what people say" about her surgery obsession. "I'm in the entertainment business and people like to see you look good. If there are steps I have to take to look good, I'm going to do it. When I look in the mirror I still see Vivica and that's all that matters to me. If I still look the same as I did 20 years ago, then something must be working."

But Fox's surgery seems like child's play compared to that of foul-mouthed rapper Lil' Kim, who seems to be taking up Michael Jackson's title as the most surgically enhanced Black American >

artist. Experts posit that the once perky artist has had her brow lifted, her nose chiselled down, her cheeks puffed up and her breasts ballooned.

In fact, Kim's need to remodel herself into a preternaturally shocked Chinese doll has rattled her fans so much that celebrity site *Young Black And Fabulous* have called for an intervention – stating in an email: “Kim needs help! This could be the start of her intervention. We honestly believe she's being brainwashed.”

So who's responsible for brainwashing South Africa's plastic surgery addicts?

UN-SUTTLE QUEST FOR YOUTH

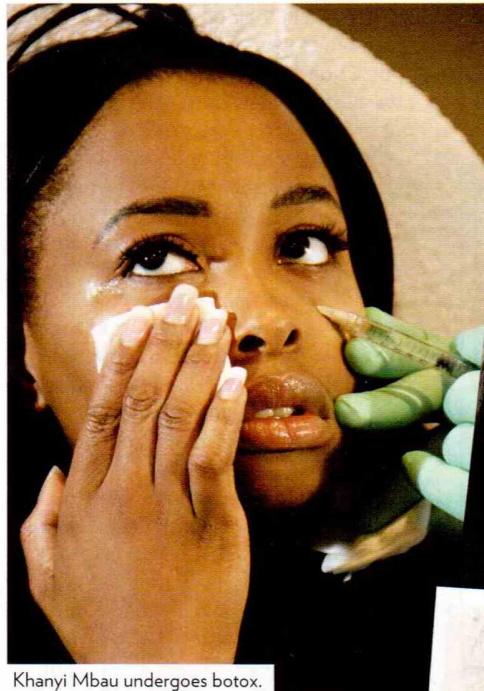
Felicia Mabuza-Suttle is often touted as the first Black star to have had surgery, while former *Generations* and *The Wild* star Connie Fergusson has publicly stated her procedures, which saw her nose reduced, were due to medical reasons.

Then there's Uyanda Mbuli, who told a local newspaper that she had a nose-job in 2003, and kwaito artist Mshoza who has had a nose and breast job (the latter causing her great pain and odd-sized breasts – forcing her US surgeon to rectify the mistake at no extra cost).

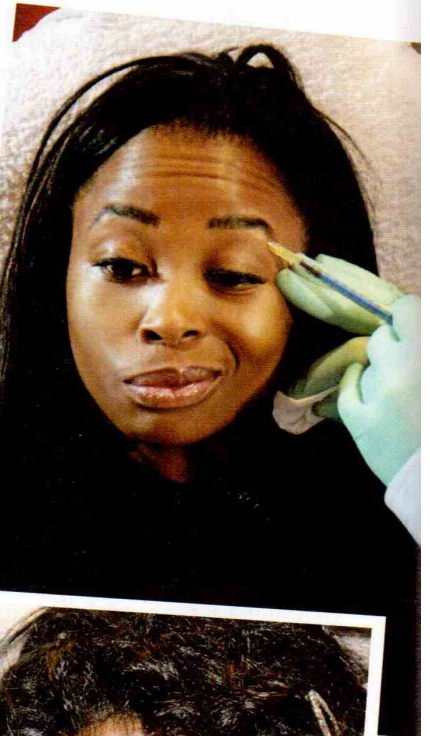
“I love Botox,” says talk show host Noleen Maholwana Sangqu, 44, who kept a diary of her first experiences with Botox, tissue fillers and skin peels. She has said, “Some people would say that you should grow older gracefully. Count me in on that one. But growing older doesn't mean one cannot try new things which, ultimately make you feel good.”

All those celebrities willing to go under the knife have made plastic surgery more acceptable and commonplace among the general population. According to figures released by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons in 2002, Black women accounted for 16 percent of plastic surgery patients, and by 2006 that figure stood at 23 percent. White women, though, still form the bulk of the market for cosmetic procedures, and experts point out that when Black women succumb to cosmetic enhancements, they are not necessarily seeking to look like their lighter skinned counterparts.

Ricardo Rodriguez, a Baltimore-based surgeon, quoted in a Washington Post article about the rise in ethnic plastic surgery, says when it comes to body shape



Khanyi Mbau undergoes botox.



The preternaturally shocked Chinese doll, Lil' Kim.

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White women favour a thinner silhouette while Hispanic and African American women want to be curvier.

Although local celebrities like Uyanda Mbuli and Connie Fergusson have had their noses contoured, Dr Scott says this is a rarity among his Black patients, who make up about 10 percent of his practice. “They don't want to look like Michael Jackson; we've had very few requests for rhinoplasty.”

But not all aesthetic specialists share Scott's experience. In fact, some claim that the old adage “Black don't crack” no longer rings true for most patients, and

procedures such as face-lifts, Botox and tissue fillers are on the up-and-up among the Black population.

Antezana says: “My philosophy's is that if you don't feel good inside, you won't look fantastic on the outside.”

Antezana's philosophy seems to resonate with Khanyi who, when asked why she needed Botox fired back: “Black people might not have needed it 20 years ago. But we live in air-conditioned apartments and drink champagne every day. So the new Black does crack, baby! And that's why we have to do what we can to make sure we look our best.” **TL**